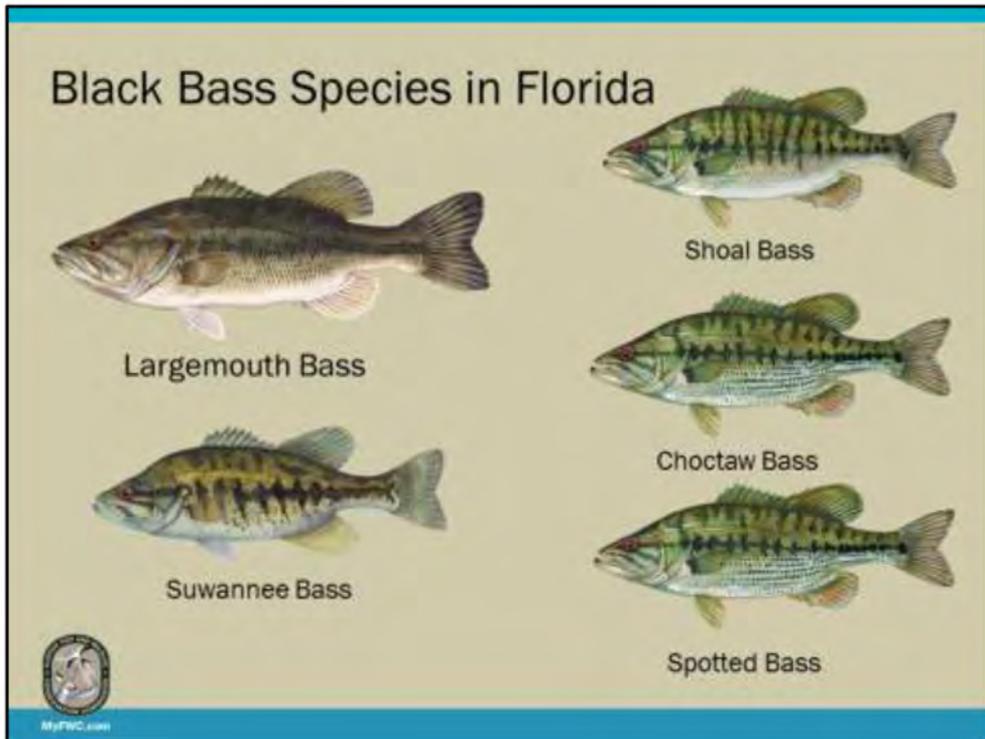




 Proposed Black Bass Regulation Changes  
Draft Rules  
February 10, 2016  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management

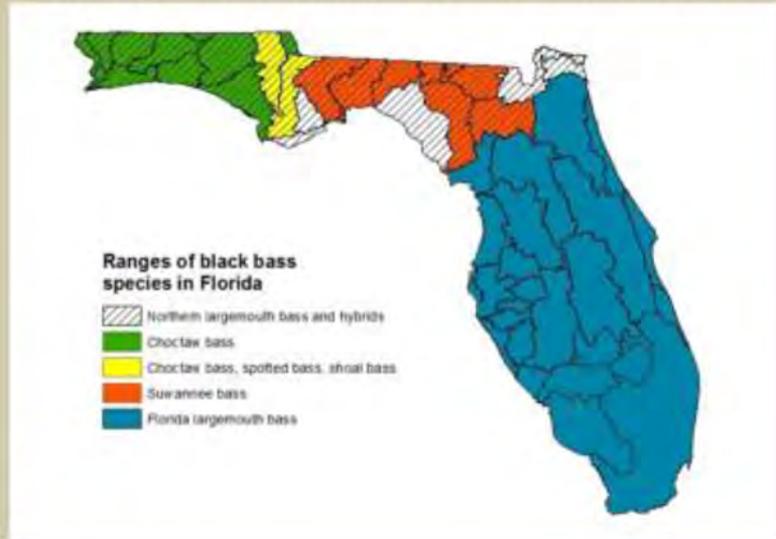
Over the past two years staff has reviewed fisheries data and scientific literature, conducted public workshops and internet/email surveys to develop proposed changes to Florida's Black Bass Regulations. Based on these efforts, staff recommends significant changes to how harvest should be managed for five black bass species throughout the state. Draft rule changes were presented at the June 2015 Commission meeting, staff was approved to continue to educate stakeholders and partners and return in February 2016 for final approval.

Presentation prepared by: Tom Champeau, January 4, 2016



Florida has five separate species of black bass. The best known is the genetically unique Florida Largemouth Bass, which is native to the peninsula. In the northern and western part of the state, the largemouth bass exhibits a distinctly mixed genetic heritage; often referred to as “intergrades” due to populations having genes from both the Florida largemouth and the northern largemouth bass. The Suwannee, shoal, and spotted bass also occur but in much more limited geographic ranges. Newly-described is the Choctaw bass which looks very much like a spotted bass to all but a trained eye.

## Ranges of Black Bass Species in Florida



While largemouth bass are found all over the state, south of the Suwannee River exists a genetically-distinct species known as Florida Largemouth Bass. North of the Suwannee, four separate species of black bass occur in Panhandle rivers. These populations are limited geographically and special conservation programs are underway to protect their populations and genetic integrity.

## Current Black Bass Regulation Zones

### Three geographic zones

- 12 inch and 14 inch minimum lengths
  - Suwannee River divided north/south
  - Five fish daily limit with only one bass over 22 inches
- South Florida: five fish with only 1 bass allowed over 14"



MyFWC.com

Current black bass regulation zones.

## Specialized Largemouth Bass Regulations

- Evaluated special regulations from 1981 – present
  - Large minimum size limits, slot limits, catch-and-release
  - Led to increased complexity with 58 areas with special regulations
- Greater understanding of how harvest affects fish populations
- Size-selective harvest
  - Protecting smaller, abundant sizes can cause stunting
  - Harvest of older, larger bass can shift size structure and decrease abundance of quality size and trophy bass



Florida has been a leader in the nation researching for better ways to manage harvest. Work done at Tenoroc Fish Management Area, lakes Jackson, Okeechobee, Istokpoga, Walk-in-Water, Starke, and many others has enriched our knowledge and informed managers. Integrating social science with biological research allows us to develop regulations that are justified biologically, while accommodating angler opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. Commission direction and public opinion favor the simplest approach possible to protect and enhance bass fisheries.

## Largemouth Bass Regulations

Daily Bag Limit: Five (5) fish daily aggregate black bass bag limit (no change)

Length Limit: Only one (1) per day may be 16 inches or longer in total length



Summary of proposed statewide regulation for largemouth bass. Staff recommends no change to the daily possession limit, elimination of the minimum size limits and geographic zones, and the establishment of a 16 inch limit, where only one bass longer than 16 inches may be possessed per angler per day.

## Benefits of Proposed Regulation

- One statewide regulation for largemouth bass
- Reduce 58 special regulation areas to 16
- Aligns with angler desires
- Improves population size structure
- Allows harvest of smaller, abundant bass
  - Lower concentrations of mercury in smaller bass
  - Meet expanding "locavore" movement
- Reduces harvest of quality sized bass
  - Manage for abundance of larger fish
  - Increase recruitment to trophy size
  - Better predator/prey ecological balance

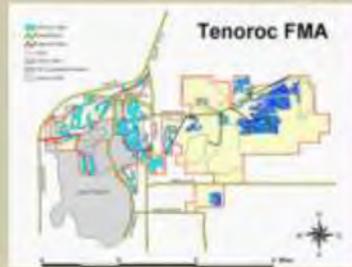


Besides simplifying bass regulations (one geographic zone instead of three and special regulations drop from 58 to 16), meeting angler desires, and managing harvest to protect more quality sized bass, the proposed regulation makes it more desirable for anglers to harvest smaller bass. Encouraging the harvest of smaller bass may help thin populations, resulting in improved growth rates and ecological balance in many lakes and rivers.

Not only are small bass in abundance, but small bass typically contain lower amounts of mercury than occurs in the flesh of most larger freshwater and marine fish species. The locavore movement is expanding to the taking of wild fish and game for social and health reasons. The proposed regulation may encourage people to fish more and take home this sustainable resource to eat and enjoy. (See K. G. Tidball, M. M. Tidbass, and P. Curtis. Extending the locavore movement to wild fish and game: questions and implications. 2014. Accessed on-line: <https://www.agronomy.org/publications/nse/pdfs/42/1/185>)

## Special Regulations

- Joe Budd Pond
- Orlando Urban Lakes (4)
- Wildcat
- Stick Marsh
- Kenansville
- Jackson (Osceola Co.)
- Tenoroc lakes
- Mosaic lakes
- Caloosa
- Border Waters with Alabama and Georgia:
  - Consistent with Alabama Regs: Perdido River & Jackson (Walton Co.)
  - Consistent with Georgia Regs: Lake Seminole & St. Mary's River



42 lakes with special regulations for largemouth bass will change to the proposed statewide regulations (72% fewer lakes managed under different regulations). Four of these waters (2 each in Georgia and Alabama) are border waters where most of the waterbody lies outside of Florida. We have discussed our options with GA and AL with anglers and recommend that the best option is for Florida to adopt GA/AL regulations. Special regulations (mostly catch-and-release) will remain on 12 lakes and the primary factor for this recommendation is strong angler opinion to keep existing special regulations.

## Wildlife Management Area Fishing Regulations – No Changes

- Northwest Region
  - Eglin AFB WMA
  - Econfina Creek WMA
  
- Northeast Region
  - Tiger Bay WMA
  - Lake George WMA
  - Seminole Forest WMA
  
- Southwest Region
  - Hilochee WMA



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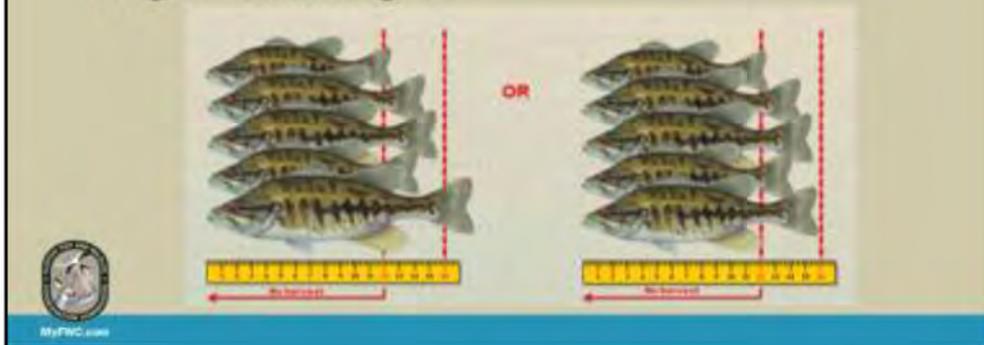
[www.floridawildlifemgmt.com](http://www.floridawildlifemgmt.com)

Some fishing regulations are contained in rules pertaining to Wildlife Management Areas. These smaller lakes and ponds on some of our WMA's offer unique fishing experiences. All of these will remain unchanged, largely due to angler preference for catch-and-release.

## Panhandle River Species: Suwannee Bass, Shoal Bass, Choctaw Bass, and Spotted Bass

Daily bag limit: All species included in five (5) fish daily aggregate black bass bag limit (no change)

Length limit: Twelve (12) inch minimum size limit (no change), only one (1) per day may be 16 inches or longer in total length



Species of black bass other than largemouth include Suwannee, shoal, Choctaw, and spotted. These species do not grow as big as largemouth and population sizes tend to be small in the waters where they exist. Protection of these smaller fish is warranted and strongly favored by local anglers.



The shoal bass state record was broken three times this past year. A five mile run in the Chipola River contains prime habitat for shoal bass and supports the most robust population. The concept of a catch-and-release zone in this run was widely supported by local anglers.

This map shows the upstream and downstream extents of the recommended Shoal Bass Conservation Zone in the Chipola River. Public support is high for this approach. FWC boat ramps provide the boundary markers and staff will erect display boards to advise anglers of this regulation.

Note: Harvest of largemouth bass within this Conservation Zone is allowed.

## Ongoing Outreach Efforts Since June 2015

- Draft rule language finalized
- Staff developed an outreach plan to communicate changes
  - Internal communications
  - External communications
- Additional input from anglers reflects continued support
  - Addressing tournament concerns
    - Simplifying tournament exemption process
    - Allowing for temporary possession



Prior to June 2015, staff conducted 25 stakeholder meetings and distributed a survey to understand angler's opinions and desires. Over 8,700 responses were received from these efforts with 70+ percent of respondents supporting the simplified regulations. At the June 2015 Commission meeting, staff was directed to continue outreach efforts to address any concerns and educate stakeholders on the proposed changes. While a few additional survey responses have been received, the majority of the outreach effort has been focused on face to face communications with both internal and external stakeholders. Input continues to reflect support the simplified regulations. Concerns over impacts to tournaments is being addressed by simplifying the tournament exemption process, by allowing for the temporary possession of black bass, and allowing anglers to schedule multiple tournaments up to a year in advance.

**Daily Bag Limit:**

- All species included in 5 fish daily aggregate black bass bag limit (no change)

**Largemouth Bass:**

- Only one (1) per day may be 16 inches or longer in total length
- Two new special regulations on Alabama border lakes
- 42 areas change from special to new statewide regulation

**Suwannee Bass, Shoal Bass, Choctaw Bass, and Spotted Bass:**

- 12 inch minimum size limit (no change), only one (1) per day may be 16 inches or longer in total length
- **Shoal Bass Conservation Zone:**
- Catch-and-release section of the Chipola River

**Effective date: July 1, 2016**



Summary of all the statewide regulations if changes are made as proposed. Existing special regulations will remain at 14 areas and two new special regulations are proposed to provide consistency with Alabama and Georgia regulations.

If Commission approves, Staff will develop a Notice of Proposed Rule, continue to work with stakeholders, and return for a final hearing at the February 2016 meeting.

Proposed rules to be amended: 68A-20.005 and 68A-23.005

The proposed rule amendment would also add Choctaw bass to the list of Freshwater game fish defined in 68A-1.004 (32)(a)

Rule language provided as attachment.

## Requested Commission Action

### Staff Recommendation:

- Approve the proposed amendment for 68A-1.004, adding Choctaw bass to the list of Freshwater game fish
- Adopt 68A-20.005 and 68A-23.005 as final rules effective July 1, 2016



If Commissioners approve, the amendment to add Choctaw Bass to the list of Freshwater game fish, 68A-1.004 will be noticed and filed without further hearing unless requested.

If Commissioners approve the final rule change proposal, staff will publish final rules with an effective date of July 1, 2016.

The following slides are background information and will not be presented.



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## Public Support for Largemouth Bass Rules

- 71% support, 22% oppose, 7% neutral
  - Why opposed?
    - Statewide catch-and-release
    - Tournaments will be impacted- Temporary possession allowed by tournament exemption program
    - Small bass need protection
    - Current rules are effective
  - Face-to-face interactions increased support
    - Helped define outreach and education plan
    - Refine tournament exemption program



Angler support to the proposal has been high with 71% in favor. When our biologists had opportunities to engage with anglers during meetings and workshops, often their concerns were addressed and support was over 80%. Tournament anglers thought the regulation would restrict the opportunities to hold events where fish are released after the weigh in. When told about our on-line bass tournament exemption program, these concerns were often alleviated. The opinions and beliefs of anglers helped formulate our outreach and education campaign that will commence if the Commission approves the regulation change. We are also using input from tournament anglers to refine and improve our on-line self-issuance program for permits that allow tournament participants temporary possession of bass outside established size limits until after weigh-in. This program also provides valuable data about bass fisheries and enables staff to communicate with tournament directors regarding best management practices for tournaments to increase fish survival and help reduce social conflicts with non-tournament anglers using boat launch areas during tournaments.

## Public Support for Panhandle Bass Rules

- 12 inch minimum with 1 over 16 inches
  - 72% support, 7% oppose, 21% neutral
- Catch-and-release zone on Chipola River
  - 82% support, 15% oppose, 3% neutral



Responses from anglers in the Panhandle area who fish rivers with the four other species of black bass indicate strong support for the proposed regulations. Both the limited harvest of bass over 16 inches and the catch-and-release zone for shoal bass on the Chipola River was supported by over 80% of anglers.

Region	Change to New Statewide Regulation	No Change	New Special Regulation
Northwest	Piney Z Lake Jackson (Leon County) Lake Talquin	Lake Seminole Joe Budd	Perdido River (AL regs) Lake Jackson (Walton Co., AL Regs)
NorthCentral	Lochloosa and Orange Lake St. Augustine Rd Baymeadows Oceanway Hannah Park Pope Dual Bethesda Huguenot Pond Crystal Springs Ronnie Vanzant Park Suwannee Lake Montgomery Lake Watertown Lang Lake	St. Mary's River	
Northeast	Secret Lake Lake Kerr	Turkey Lake Lake Underhill Shadow Bay Park Hal Scott Lake Wildcat Lake Stick Marsh Lake Keenansville Jackson (Osceola Co.)	

Lakes with special regulations drop from 58 to 16 largely to due public input and special biological considerations.

Region	Change to New Statewide Regulation	No Change	New Special Regulation
Southwest	Istokpoga Saddle Creek FMA Webb Lake Walsingham Park Lake Hardee County Park (2,3,4) Weohyakapka Gadsden Park Pond Web Marl Pits 1, 2, 3 Hardee County Park Derby Lake (Tenoroc) Freedom Lake Park Dover District Park Lake Steven J. Wortham Park Lake Al Lopez Park Lake Walsingham Park Lake Bobby Hicks Park Pond Largo Nature Preserve	Tenoroc (all other) Mosaic	
South Region	Okechee Plantation Heritage Tropical Lake Trafford Lake Okechobee	Caloosa	

# WMA Special Regulations

- **Northwest Region**
  - Eglin AFB WMA
    - Duck Pond and Indigo Pond
    - 1/4" 24" MLL
  - Econfina Creek WMA
    - Fitzhugh Carter Area
    - Catch and Release
- **Northeast Region**
  - Tiger Bay WMA
    - Rattlesnake Pond and adjoining canals
    - Catch and Release
  - Lake George WMA
    - Jenkins Pond
    - Catch and Release
  - Seminole Forest WMA
    - Bear Pond
    - Catch and Release
- **Southwest Region**
  - Hilochee WMA
    - Peat Lake, Little Peat Lake, Stock Lake, Hidden Lake, Turtle Pond, and Osprey Unit
    - Catch and Release



All of these will remain unchanged, largely due to preference of stakeholders.