

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

**From:** Tom Champeau, Director, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management

**Date:** February 10, 2016

**Subject:** Black Bass Regulation Changes – Final Hearing

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**Purpose:**

The purpose of this item is to request the Commission's adoption of the proposed draft rules that were presented at the June 2015 Commission Meeting.

**Summary:**

In 2011, the Commission approved the Black Bass Management Plan (BBMP) with the goal of improving black bass populations, providing new and improved angling opportunities, promote Florida's bass fisheries more effectively, and affirm Florida as the Bass Fishing Capital of the World. The BBMP required a comprehensive review of statewide and special bass regulations and this rule change proposal is an outcome of that review.

The draft rules that were initially presented at the June 2015 Commission meeting were the result of a two year study to assess angler attitudes and opinions, analyze biological data, and test various options by computer modeling. The proposed final rules would:

- Maintain a Daily Bag Limit for all black bass at 5 fish daily aggregate limit
- Eliminate the current three management zones approach for largemouth and replace with one statewide regulation:
- Establish no minimum size limit on largemouth bass with only one (1) per day 16 inches or longer in total length
- Establish size limits on Suwannee Bass, Shoal Bass, Choctaw Bass, and Spotted Bass as 12 inch minimum size limit, only one (1) per day may be 16 inches or longer in total length.
- Remove 42 special regulation areas (which would then be managed under the statewide rules), add two new special regulations on Alabama border waters
- Add a Shoal Bass Conservation Zone: Catch-and-release section of the Chipola River

The Commission approved staff to continue to communicate and educate stakeholders on the proposed change and return at the February 2016 meeting for a final hearing. Public support is evidenced by 72% of the respondents providing positive feedback. The opposition that was received fell into three main categories: (1) desire for total catch-and-release, (2) concern that current regulations are adequate, and (3) concern that new rules will interfere with bass tournaments. Staff is working to address these concerns by increasing communication/outreach efforts and identifying improvements to the on-line permit system.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Adopt the proposed rules as advertised with an effective date of July 1, 2016.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter**

Tom Champeau, Director, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management