

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: June 23, 2016
Subject: Staff Report – Bay Scallops: Red Tide Impacts in St. Joseph Bay

Purpose:

Staff will present an overview of bay scallop research and monitoring data from St. Joseph Bay that suggest the local scallop population was severely impacted by the prolonged red tide bloom that occurred in the region from September through December of 2015. Staff will also present public feedback collected from a series of public meetings held in Port St. Joe, along with a recommendation for how to proceed with management of bay scallops in Gulf County for the 2016 recreational harvest season.

Summary:

The results of ongoing research and monitoring conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) indicate bay scallops in Gulf County likely suffered severe negative impacts from the 2015 red tide event in the area. The red tide coincided with peak scallop spawning and settlement periods and the results of the surveys conducted since that time suggest St. Joseph Bay scallops are likely experiencing a recruitment failure. As a result, there may be very few scallops present in the Bay this year to be available for harvest or to spawn next year's recruitment class. Short term management action, coupled with active restoration of the population may be needed to speed local recovery and minimize the long-term social and economic impacts of a potential temporary population collapse.

FWRI conducts monthly surveys of juvenile scallop settlement at various locations along the Gulf coast of Florida. Peak settlement typically occurs between November and the following January each year, followed by a secondary, smaller peak April – May each year. Monthly surveys in St. Joseph Bay have not detected any recruitment in the Bay since October 2015. An annual survey of the adult population numbers is scheduled for early June. These data, along with any updates to the juvenile settlement data will be presented and discussed, along with an overview of plans to conduct active restoration of the population in St. Joseph Bay.

Staff has been working closely with Gulf County to gather public input on the issue and determine the best possible management options available to minimize the negative impacts of this event. Staff conducted a public meeting in Port St. Joe during April to inform the public about the research results and answer any questions they may have. This meeting was followed by traditional public workshops on the issue during May and June. Staff will summarize the feedback received during these meetings and recommend a course of action for the 2016 Gulf County bay scallop season.

Staff Recommendation:

The staff recommendation is pending completion of workshops scheduled for May and June and research scheduled for early June.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Gil McRae, Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute