



Red Drum Stakeholder Engagement

Review and Discussion

April 13, 2016

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This presentation provides an overview of the innovative methods being used to engage red drum anglers and gather feedback on the status of the red drum fishery in the Northwest and Northeast management zones and an update on the progress of the engagement effort.

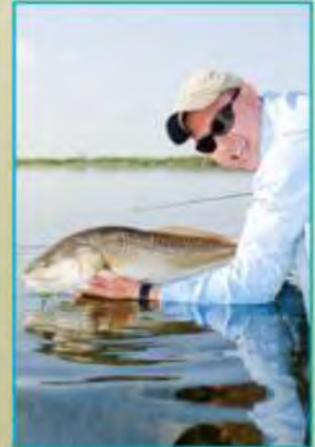
This engagement effort is ongoing. This presentation is feedback received as of April 1, 2016.

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Background

- 2015 red drum stock assessment results indicate all management zones are
 - Not overfished
 - Not experiencing overfishing
 - Exceeding 40% escapement management goal
- Stakeholders from various parts of the state have expressed concerns about red drum
- Feb. 2016 - Commission directed staff to proceed with stakeholder engagement on the status of red drum in the Northwest and Northeast management zones



Based on the results of the 2015 Florida red drum stock assessment, which included data through 2013, Florida's red drum stock is healthy. Biomass estimates and fishing mortality estimates indicate that red drum are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring in any of the state's four red drum management zones. Additionally, all management zones are currently exceeding the Commission's management goal of 40% escapement.

While the results of the 2015 stock assessment are very positive, there was a marked decline in the escapement rate in the Northeast zone over the last three years of the assessment, with escapement in 2013 still exceeding, but approaching, the 40% management goal. Staff have also heard concerns about the status of red drum from stakeholders in various locations around the state. Concerns expressed include: declines in local populations, declines in the average size of red drum and difficulty catching fish in the upper portion of the slot limit, there has been a shift to participation in inshore fisheries due to closures of offshore species, and an increase in fishing pressure associated with an increasing number of red drum tournaments in some areas of the state.

In response to these stakeholder concerns, the Commission directed staff to begin a stakeholder engagement effort at the February Commission meeting. This engagement effort was intended to provide a more thorough picture of state angler feedback on the status of red drum in the Northwest and Northeast management zones.

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

- Focused on the Northwest and Northeast management zones
- Go to the angler
 - Fishing club meetings
 - Boat shows
 - Tackle shops
 - Dockside angler intercepts
- Initiate discussions via an “FWC Red Drum Forum” Facebook page
- Statewide online survey



At the direction of the Commission, the stakeholder engagement plan focuses primarily on the Northwest and Northeast red drum management zones. Staff are using this opportunity to employ innovative methods of stakeholder outreach that involve staff going to the angler instead of asking anglers to come to us. Staff are attending fishing club meetings, boat shows, and tackle shop events, as well as visiting popular boat launches in order to gather feedback from anglers.

Another way that staff are reaching out to stakeholders is by using social media, which has been requested by anglers. The “FWC Red Drum Forum” Facebook page was created as a place where anglers can go to discuss what they are seeing on the water in different areas and discuss their opinions of the current bag limit. Anglers that would like to discuss their thoughts in person can also find out where staff will be for in-person comment opportunities through the Facebook page.

Finally, staff prepared an online survey to gather information about angler observations and opinions statewide as well as to gather feedback from anglers in the northern management zones who may not be able to attend one of the in-person feedback opportunities.

Progress of Engagement Effort

- Anglers have been receptive to engagement effort
- As of April 1, staff have attended
 - 2 boat shows
 - 8 fishing club meetings
 - 3 tackle/outdoor shop events
 - 6 dockside angler intercepts
- >1,100 in-person angler contacts
- ~6,500 survey responses



Engagement efforts are ongoing and will continue after the April 2016 Commission meeting



Anglers have been receptive to staff's engagement efforts and thankful for the chance to provide feedback on the status of red drum in their specific area. As of April 1, 2016, staff have gathered feedback at two boat shows, eight fishing club meetings, three events at tackle/outdoor shops, and talked to anglers through angler intercepts at six different locations. In total, staff have had in-person contact with more than 1,100 red drum anglers through this engagement project. Staff have also provided informational materials to approximately 20 tackle shops in the target regions so anglers unable to attend in-person feedback events have an opportunity to see the information presented and provide their input through the online survey.

Anglers have also been very excited about sharing their experiences and thoughts through the statewide online survey and as of April 1, approximately 6,500 survey responses have been received.

Staff plans to continue this engagement effort after the April Commission meeting and return with a final report at the June Commission meeting.

Northwest Zone Feedback to Date

Panhandle – both survey and in-person comments mixed

- In-person interactions with guides indicate that they are seeing fewer redfish on the water in the area from West Bay near Panama City to Apalachicola Bay
- Outside of that area, survey and in-person feedback report red drum fishing is good

Big Bend – survey and in-person feedback

indicate fishery is doing very well

- Seeing and catching many red drum
- More large and small red drum



While this is anticipated to be an ongoing stakeholder engagement effort, some general trends have emerged from the online survey and discussions with anglers so far.

Stakeholder feedback has been somewhat variable both between regions and among anglers in the same region. Although the Northwest management zone includes both the Panhandle and Big Bend, these regions are split in this presentation. For the purpose of this presentation, the Panhandle is defined by Escambia County through Ochlockonee Bay in Wakulla County (light blue on the map) and the Big Bend is Apalachee Bay through Pasco County (dark blue on the map). This delineation coincides with both differences in red drum habitat and angler feedback on the status of red drum.

Many anglers and guides in the Panhandle, particularly those from Panama City in Bay County through Apalachicola in Franklin County (identified on the map with stars), report seeing declines both in red drum populations and size of fish over the past 2-3 years. There are also anglers outside of this area in the Panhandle that report red drum in their area are doing well and there has not been a decline. Some anglers that have not seen a decline stated that they would still support the bag limit being reduced to one fish, despite the fishery doing well, while others are opposed to a reduction.

In general, Big Bend anglers feel that their red drum fishery is strong. Most anglers that staff talked to from the Big Bend report both seeing and catching many red drum and that they are encountering large fish, both in the slot and above the slot. The online survey results from this area support what staff has heard at in-person events with most respondents stating that they are encountering more red drum of all sizes in recent years.

Northeast Zone Feedback to Date

Anglers report the fishery is doing well

- Survey
 - Seeing more red drum in the past couple of years
 - Majority report the fishery is better now than in the recent past
- In person
 - Some anglers report having the best red drum fishing year they could remember
 - Some requests for a bag limit increase
 - Some requests for allowance to harvest one fish above the slot



Anglers in the Northeast management zone, which includes Nassau through Flagler counties, were generally surprised to hear that the stock assessment showed a potential decline in their area because they feel the red drum fishery is currently very strong. This is supported by the online survey results for this management zone which indicated that anglers report more red drum and a better fishery now than in the recent past. Some anglers at fishing club meetings in this region reported that the fishery is better than they can ever remember it being and advocated for an increase in the bag limit. There were also some requests for a change in the regulation to allow for harvest of a large, over-the-slot fish in this region.

Stakeholder Engagement Effort Continues

- More complete coverage of some areas
 - Big Bend
 - Panhandle – far eastern and western locations
 - Northeast
- Additional dockside interviews
- Continue statewide online survey
- Fully process and evaluate the data and feedback received



The stakeholder engagement project is still ongoing. Staff would like to spend additional time talking to Big Bend anglers, specifically those in the southern portion of the Big Bend area, such as Citrus through Pasco counties. There are currently two fishing club presentations scheduled for April in that region that were not able to accommodate staff at their March meetings. Staff would also like to get more in-person feedback from anglers in the far western locations and far eastern locations of the Panhandle, such as Pensacola and Carabelle. Although staff have been able to attend multiple events in the Northeast region, additional in-person contacts in Flagler and Nassau counties would add to the understanding of that region as a whole.

Dockside angler intercepts are a great tool used to reach out to anglers that are actively using the resource. While some dockside angler intercepts have been completed, inclement weather has delayed the progress of this portion of the stakeholder engagement plan. Staff will continue to engage anglers at popular boat launches in the target regions as the weather allows. The statewide online survey will remain open through May 31, 2016.

After feedback gathering is complete, staff will be able to fully process both the data received from the survey and the feedback gathered through in-person interactions. While the feedback in this presentation is a synopsis of feedback received through April 1, 2016, pending approval from the Commission, staff will continue to gather feedback after the April Commission meeting.

Staff Recommendation

- Continue angler engagement in the Northwest and Northeast red drum management zones
- Return in June 2016 with final results and staff's management recommendation



Staff recommend continuing the current stakeholder engagement project in the Northwest and Northeast red drum management zones to get a more complete understanding of angler experiences and desires for this fishery and returning with the results of the project and a draft rule to address potential management changes at the June 2016 Commission meeting in Apalachicola.