State law supports regulating vessel speeds when hazardous water levels or currents exist. The law also clarifies that restriction of vessel speed is allowed when the designated flood stage is reached.

Three (3) public meetings have been held in the local area to date on this proposal with total attendance of approximately 137 persons. During the meetings, significant public support was voiced for the proposed changes.
Examples of flooding

Restricting boat speeds during high water events is appropriate in certain situations to ensure safe navigation and address public safety concerns associated with floodwaters entering houses. Local governments are authorized by statute to enact these restrictions under certain specified conditions. The several local governments sharing boundaries along this river system rely on the Commission to create appropriate restrictions to protect the public along the waterway.
Proposed Rule Amendments

- Zones 1-3 not affected
- Reduce the size of the restricted areas in Zone 4 to remove two (2) remote stretches of the lower Suwannee River
- Divide the Santa Fe River into four (4) new independent flood zones (enumerated as Zones 5-8 in the rule)
- Reference current USGS river stage gauges
- Incorporate changes to federal gauge datum
- Update Maps
- Rule only in effect during flood events

• The proposed rule amendments would remove flood zone restrictions on two (2) remote stretches of the lower Suwannee River within Zone 4, divide the Santa Fe River into four (4) independent flood zones, incorporate federally adopted gauge datum, resolve an incorrect reference to mean sea level in the current rule and update maps for consistency and to reflect changes in the restricted areas.

• The proposed changes address the need to regulate only where deemed necessary to provide for adequate public safety.

• The original proposal included raising the level at which the regulations trigger in the lower portion of the Santa Fe River from 17’ to 18’. There was significant public opposition from waterfront property owners to this part of the proposal at the public meetings so staff determined it was not necessary to move forward with that part of the proposal at this time.

USGS refers to the United States Geological Survey
• The rule amendment proposes deregulating approximately 10 miles of remote, uninhabited stretches of the Suwannee River from the boating restricted area which activates during high water events.

• The affected section of the river is Zone 4, which extends from C.R. 340 downstream to Fowlers Bluff. There are no other proposed changes to Zone 4.

• Zones 1-3 will not be affected by this proposal.
• Zone 4 extends from the C.R. 340 Bridge to Fowler’s Bluff Boat Ramp, which is approximately 40 miles

• The flood zone is triggered when the water level reaches 9’ (NGDV 29) or 8.35’ (NAVD 88) or higher as indicated on the Wilcox gauge.

• FWC was asked to revisit the regulations by officers who patrol the area to consider opening sections of the river to no regulation during flood events. Staff determined that the decrease in the zone was warranted due to the absence of maritime infrastructure and the ability of the public to navigate during a flood event without an adverse affect on public safety.

• These two areas would open approximately 10 miles
• This first unregulated section of the river is 300' southwest of the New Clay Landing Boat Ramp to 6,000' north of the Camp Azalea Boat Ramp.

• This will open approximately 4 miles.
• This second unregulated section of the river is 1,300' south of Yellow Jacket Landing to 2,000' northeast of Fowler’s Bluff.

• This will open approximately 6 miles.
• FWC was asked to revisit the regulations within the Santa Fe River by a private citizen. In consultation with the Suwannee River Water Management District and based on the hydrology of the river, there were many high water events where only segments of the river would see significant rises in water levels, however, the current rule restricts the entire 36-mile river whenever a single water level gauge is at or above 17’. This results in an unnecessary restriction being placed on boaters who are required to travel at idle speed anywhere on the river. The river would more appropriately be divided into four zones, with each zone activating and deactivating independently using separate gauges.

• The proposed rule amendment would also revise the boating restricted area within the Santa Fe River which activates during high water events. Instead of the current 36-mile zone from River Rise to its confluence with the Suwannee River, the Santa Fe River would be divided into 4 zones. Each zone would activate and deactivate independently, which would more accurately reflect the public safety needs during various high water events occurring within the basin.
• Zone 5 extends from the River Rise to U.S. 27 Bridge

• The flood zone is triggered when the water level reaches 35' (NGVD 29) or 34.20' (NAVD 88) or higher as indicated on the High Springs gauge.

• This creates an independent flood zone that will be regulated at an appropriate level which ensures public safety needs are met.
• Zone 6 extends from the U.S. 27 Bridge to ½ mile upstream of S.R. 47 Bridge.

• The flood zone is triggered when the water level reaches 24’ (NGVD 29) 23.25’ (NAVD 88) or higher as indicated on the Fort White gauge.

• This creates an independent flood zone that will be regulated at an appropriate level which ensures public safety needs are met.
• Zone 7 extends from ½ mile upstream of S.R. 47 Bridge to an unnamed island, located approximately 1 ½ miles downstream of Wilson Spring Run.

• The flood zone is triggered when the water level reaches 19.5’ (NGVD 29) or 18.75’ (NAVD 88) or higher as indicated on the Three Rivers Estates gauge.

• This creates an independent flood zone that will be regulated at an appropriate level which ensures public safety needs are met.
• Zone 8 extends from the unnamed island, located approximately 1 ½ miles downstream of Wilson Spring Run, to the confluence of the Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers, including the Ichetucknee River upstream to the U.S. 27 Bridge.

• The proposal would change the flood zone to be triggered when the water level reaches 17' (NGVD 29) or 16.25' (NAVD 88) or higher as indicated on the Three Rivers Estates gauge.

• This creates an independent flood zone that will be regulated at an appropriate level which ensures public safety needs are met.
The revisions would also incorporate federally adopted gauge datum and resolve an incorrect reference to mean sea level in the current rule.
Stakeholders attending the public meetings predominantly favor the proposed changes.

If approved, staff will publish the Notice and inform the stakeholders of the action. If a final public hearing is requested, one would be set for the November, 2015 Commission meeting. If no hearing is requested, staff will file the rule for adoption.