

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Date: September 2, 2015

Subject: Draft Rule: Marine Fisheries – East Coast Shrimp Bed

Purpose:

Staff is seeking approval to publish a rule amendment to make minor modifications to the food shrimp harvest regulations in northeast Florida, by expanding the area that is open to commercial harvest off the St. Johns River during the months of April and May.

Summary:

State waters of the East Coast Shrimp Bed (Nassau, Duval, Clay, Putman, St. Johns, Flagler, Volusia, Seminole, Brevard, Indian River, and St. Lucie Counties) are closed to the commercial harvest of food shrimp during April and May. This seasonal closure was implemented at the request of the shrimp industry, because shrimp in inshore and near-coastal waters tend to be smaller than offshore waters during these months. The two-month closure allows shrimp to grow to a more marketable size before they are harvested.

The boundary of state waters (the 3-nautical mile line) curves away from shore off the mouth of the St. Johns River (see attached picture). The curvature of this line is referred to by shrimpers in the region as the “bubble.” In 1995, at the request of the shrimp industry, an exception to the April-May shrimping closure was made for a portion of this “bubble” because shrimp in this area were believed to be large enough to harvest and it was easier for the shrimp fleet (which fishes in adjacent federal waters during this time) to operate if they could trawl through the “bubble” instead of having to go around it. The western boundary of this area of state waters open to shrimping is currently delineated by 81°20'00”W Longitude and was chosen because it was easily defined according to navigational charts. However, advances in navigational aids make it unnecessary to define fishing boundaries along pre-established longitudinal and latitudinal lines and the industry reports that much of the open area of the “bubble” is too rocky for them to drag their trawls. The industry has requested they be allowed to shrimp throughout the entire “bubble” during the two-month closure so that they can trawl continuously across the area and still avoid the rocky bottom. This change would require moving the western boundary of the open area (fishable portion) approximately one mile westward and would make it simpler and more practical for the shrimp fishery to operate without negatively impacting the shrimp resource.

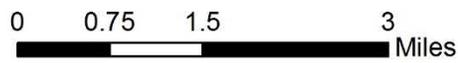
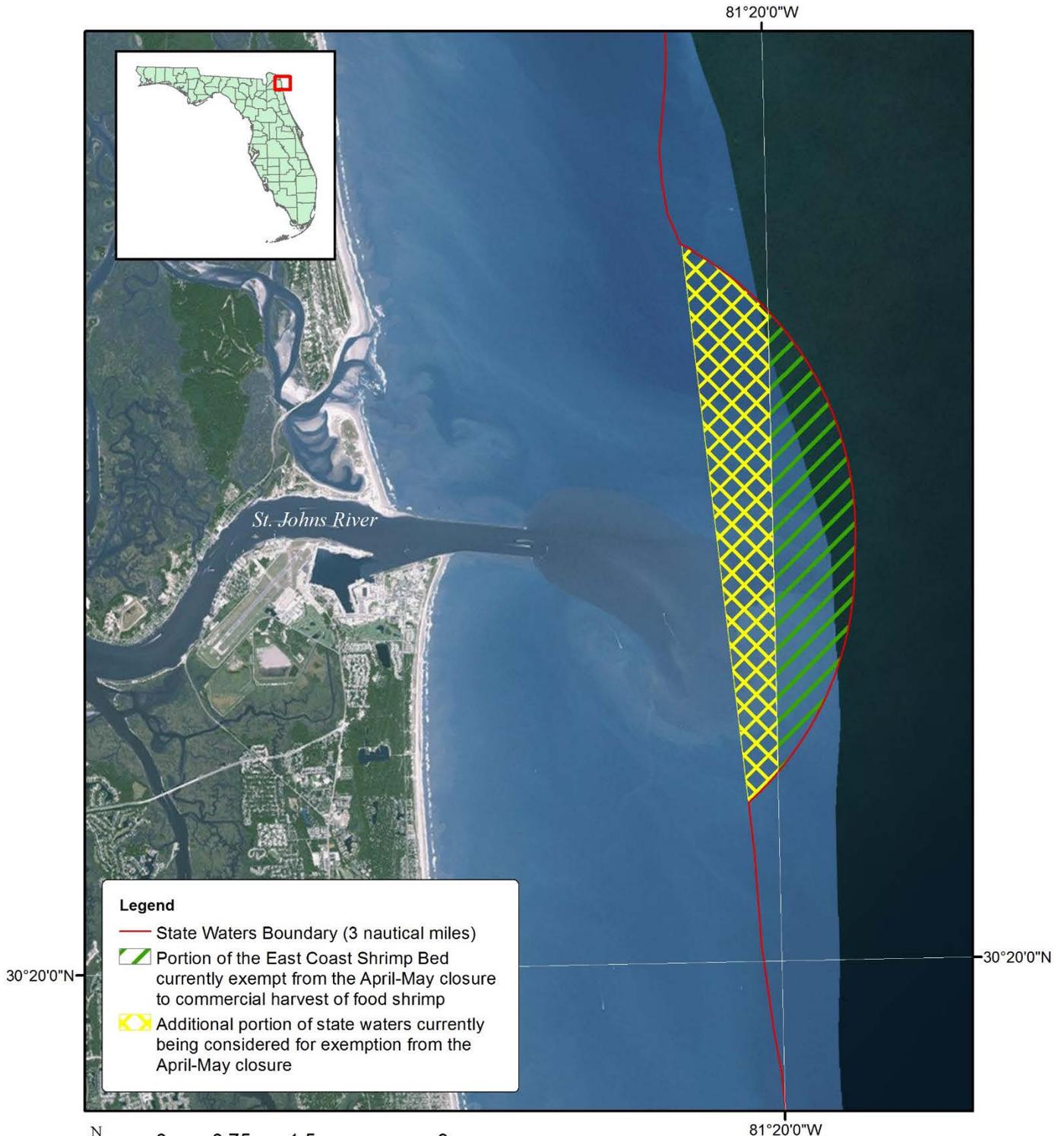
Staff Recommendation:

- Staff recommends moving the western boundary line of the area within the East Coast Shrimp Bed that is open to fishing in April and May approximately one mile to the west; exact GPS coordinates for the proposed line will be provided with the final briefing materials.
- Staff will also request Commission approval to advertise the proposed rule amendment and file for adoption as soon as possible, without further public hearing unless one is requested by the public.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management (This item is currently scheduled to be heard as part of the consent agenda)

Florida East Coast Shrimp Bed - Seasonal Food Production Closure: Exempted Area



Service Layer Credits: Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community