Spotted Seatrout, *Cynoscion nebulosus* (Cuvier, 1830)

**Life History**

Spotted Seatrout are distributed throughout Florida’s bays and coastal waters. Studies indicate that Spotted Seatrout from various areas of Florida become more genetically isolated from one another as their geographic separation increases (Ramsey and Wakeman 1987, Gold *et al.* 1999). Recent results (e.g. Seyoum *et al.* 2014; 2018) from a re-analysis of genetic structure in Florida show the presence of three genetic stocks: 1) a western Gulf stock from South Padre Island, TX to Fort Walton, FL; 2) a Florida Gulf stock from Apalachicola Bay, FL to Biscayne Bay, FL; and 3) an Atlantic stock from Sebastian Inlet, FL to Morehead, NC. Each area may have localized groups of fish that do not intermix regularly with other groups and thus may only be affected by local fishing pressure. Growth is sex- and area-specific with male growth slower. Maximum ages reached in Florida are 9 years for males and 8 years for females. Spotted Seatrout first spawn between 0 and 2 years old and 11.8–15.7 inches total length (TL). Spawning occurs within estuaries and in nearshore waters during spring, summer, and fall. The diet of juvenile seatrout (<1.2 inches SL) includes amphipods, mysids, and carideans (Hettler 1989). Larger juveniles and adults feed primarily on shrimp and fish such as Bay Anchovy, Gulf Menhaden, shad, mullet, Sheepshead Minnow, Gulf Toadfish, pipefish, Pinfish, Pigfish, Silver Jenny, Atlantic Croaker, and Spotted Seatrout (Hettler 1989; McMichael and Peters 1989).

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<th>2017 Spotted Seatrout Landings by Sector</th>
<th>Total Annual Landings (lbs.) by Coast (1982-2017)</th>
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<td><img src="image1" alt="Map 1" /></td>
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Fishers landed 7,741,707 pounds in 2017 which were 3.6% higher than the previous 5-year average (2012-2016). Coastwide, 74% of these were from the Gulf and 26% were from the Atlantic. Recreational landings constituted 99.7% of the total landings.
Standardized Commercial Catch Rates: Atlantic coast commercial catch rates varied in an upward trend through 2011 then decreased markedly through 2017. Gulf coast commercial landings rates varied widely between 1992 - 2010. Rates then declined in trend through 2017. Dark grey figure lines represent first and third quartiles while the light grey lines represent the 2.5% – 97.5% quantiles.

Standardized Recreational Total Catch Rates: Total catch rates for recreational anglers on the Atlantic coast have fluctuated with an overall increasing trend. On the Gulf, total catch rates varied highly without trend with notable highs in 2011-2012 and lows in 2001 and 2014. Dark grey figure lines represent first and third quartiles while the light grey lines represent the 2.5% – 97.5% quantiles.
Fish Health: Increased prevalence of gross external abnormalities on Spotted Seatrout ≥75 mm was noted on both coasts in 2009. No abnormalities were observed on either coast in 2017.
Stock Status
Current Condition: The Northwest and Northeast regions did not exceed the Commission’s 35% tSPR_{current} management target.

Management History: Spotted seatrout is managed for both commercial and recreational fishing in Florida. Management in Florida by the Commission began for Spotted Seatrout in the late 1980s when the fishery was declining. At the Nov. 2011 Commission meeting, the FWC made several changes to the management of Spotted Seatrout, including the designation of four management zones (Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest). Spotted Seatrout are open recreationally for harvest year-round and have a minimum size slot limit between 15 – 20 inches total length with an allowance of one over 20 inches total length. The Southeast and Southwest regions have a 4 fish per harvester daily limit while the Northwest has a 5 fish per harvester daily limit and the Northeast has a 6 fish per harvester daily limit.

The management objective for Spotted Seatrout by Florida is to maintain the transitional spawning potential ratio (tSPR) at or above 35%. Stock assessments conducted in 2003 and 2006 showed the Spotted Seatrout population was relatively stable through 2005. The 2010 stock assessment showed that the Northeast, Southeast and Southwest zones were exceeding the 35% SPR management goal, however, the Northwest region was hovering right at 35%. The most recent stock assessment (Addis et al. 2018), which used data through 2015, estimated that only the Southeast and Southwest regions were recently exceeding the Commission’s management target.