

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jon Fury, Director, Freshwater Fisheries Management
Date: May 1, 2019
Subject: Overview of Freshwater Fisheries Management – Review and Discussion

Purpose:

Provide an overview of the status of Florida’s freshwater fisheries highlighting management successes, challenges, and future projects.

Summary:

Florida offers a wide diversity of freshwater experiences – our lakes, rivers and springs provide unique opportunities for fishing, boating, hunting, and wildlife viewing. The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management (DFFM) works to ensure that Florida’s freshwater resources continue to support thriving fisheries, provide healthy habitats for the multitude of freshwater dependent species, and meet the needs of current and future generations. Through an adaptive management approach, DFFM coordinates both internally and externally with partners and stakeholders to develop plans and implement projects that are designed to restore and conserve these freshwater resources.

Florida has over 1 million freshwater anglers who typically spend more than 25 million days fishing annually. Fishing related industries in Florida also support 14,000 jobs and have an estimated economic impact of \$1.7 billion. Florida is well known as a premier bass fishing destination, but anglers also target black crappie, multiple bream species, several catfish species, striped bass, white bass, sunshine bass, and also exotic species.

Historically, fisheries management was focused on meeting the biological needs of fish and conducting habitat restoration projects. Over the past several years, DFFM has worked diligently to expand this role to include building stakeholder relationships, increasing public involvement, and working with industry to promote our fisheries to accomplish conservation. As managers of the Public Trust these relationships are critical, we have to know who the “public” is, what their expectations are, listen to their concerns, and understand how they are impacted by our management.

DFFM promotes Florida’s well-earned title of “Fishing Capital of the World” and monitors freshwater fish populations and anglers’ use of the resource. The majority of the freshwater fishing effort is targeted on the Florida Largemouth Bass. Several lakes throughout the peninsula are producing high numbers of trophy-sized largemouth bass. Largemouth bass tournaments are of economic importance to local communities, and many recent tournaments are having extremely high winning weights. For example, it took 45.2 lbs. (5 fish total) to win a recent tournament on Orange Lake, which is an average of 9 lbs. per bass. DFFM’s TrophyCatch program has already approved nine fish that weighed over 13 lbs. DFFM engages anglers and other stakeholders to develop management actions for lakes, rivers and Fish Management Areas, providing anglers with the best fishing anywhere and expanding the economic impact of Florida’s freshwater fisheries.

The TrophyCatch conservation and marketing program has become an important private-public partnership which uses citizen science to provide valuable information that contributes to the management of Florida’s trophy bass fisheries. Special projects such as the high school fishing program and fishing

and boating camps encourage responsible fishing practices and help bolster future generations' understanding of and personal investment in the conservation of fish and wildlife resources.

DFFM's approach to managing Florida's fisheries attempts to strike a balance between the ecological needs of the system and stakeholder desires or values. Many times, the steps from start to finish are not known; however, with constant monitoring and adjustment, progress occurs, and objectives are achieved.

Staff Recommendation:

This presentation is for informational purposes. Commissioner input is welcomed.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jon Fury, Director, Freshwater Fisheries Management