

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: October 2, 2019
Subject: Spotted Seatrout – Draft Rule

Purpose:

Obtain approval for draft rule amendments that will modify regulations for the spotted seatrout (seatrout) fishery.

Summary:

Spotted seatrout is one of Florida's most popular inshore fisheries. The fishery is dominated by the recreational sector, but also supports a small commercial fishery throughout the state. Seatrout do not move much between estuaries, making them susceptible to localized declines, but also responsive to a regionally-specific management approach. Additionally, seatrout are dependent on aquatic vegetation during specific life stages and susceptible to environmental events like habitat loss and harmful algal blooms.

Seatrout are currently managed in four zones (see map in Attachment 1). The status of the seatrout population within each zone is assessed using a measure of population health known as Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR), which measures the effect of fishing on the reproductive capacity of the population. A recent stock assessment completed by FWRI suggests that seatrout is not meeting the Commission's management target of 35% SPR in several of the zones. Additionally, SPR does not capture effects of environmental impacts and seatrout abundance. Angler feedback also suggests seatrout stocks in several parts of the state have declined.

Based on the stock assessment, stakeholder feedback, and localized fishery concerns, staff propose the following draft rules intended to increase the SPR in zones not currently achieving the management target and to provide high-quality seatrout fisheries throughout the state:

- Update management zones (see map in Attachment 2).
- Recreational: Adjust slot limit to 15-19", allow 1 over-slot seatrout per vessel within the bag limit, prohibit captain/crew from keeping a bag limit on a for-hire trip, re-establish winter closures in Western Panhandle (Feb.) and Central East zone (Nov. – Dec.), and reduce bag limits statewide (details below).
 - Western Panhandle: 5 to 3 fish
 - Big Bend: 5 to 4 fish
 - South Florida: 4 to 3 fish
 - Northeast: 6 to 5 fish
 - Central East: 4 to 2 fish
- Commercial: Reduce limits to 50 seatrout per harvester and 100 seatrout per vessel.

If approved, staff will return for a final public hearing at the December 2019 Commission meeting.

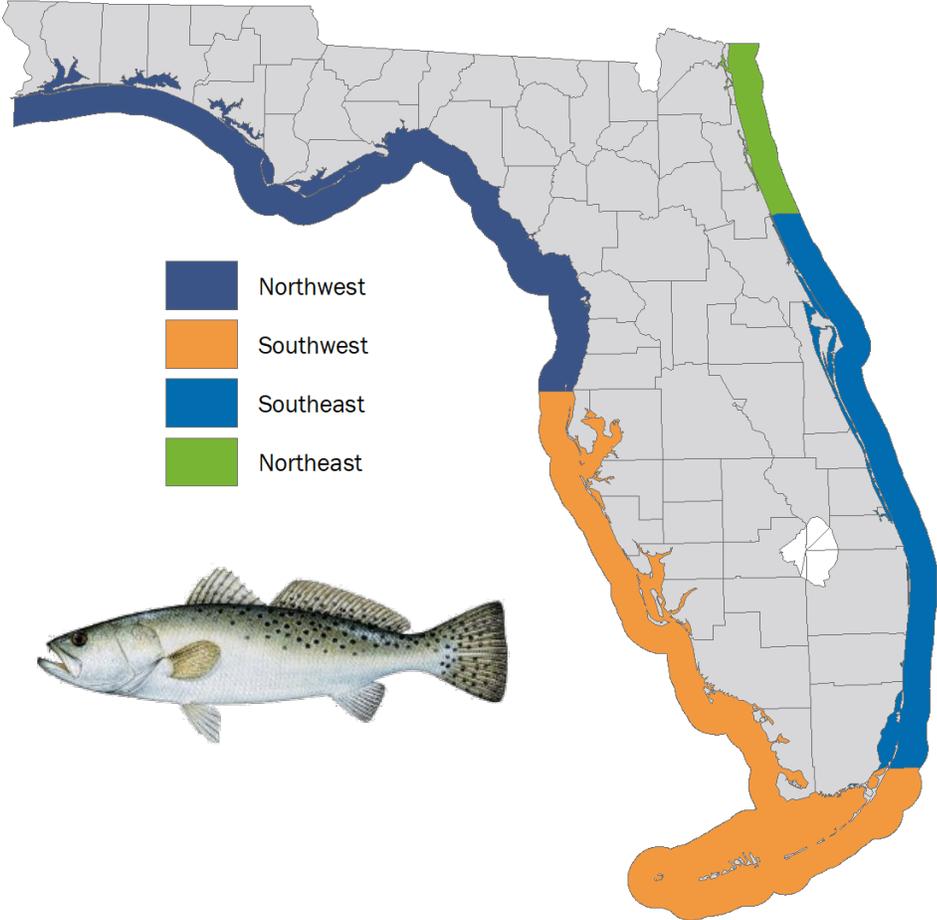
Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed draft rules.

Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Attachment 1 – Map of Current Seatrout Management Zones



Attachment 2 – Map of Proposed Seatrout Management Zones

