

Shoal Bass Conservation



Draft Rule
October 3, 2019



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Report date: October 3, 2019

Black Bass Species in Florida



Largemouth Bass



Suwannee Bass



Shoal Bass



Choctaw Bass



Spotted Bass



Florida has five separate species of black bass. The best known is the genetically unique Florida Largemouth Bass, which is native to the peninsula. The Suwannee, shoal, and spotted bass also occur but in much more limited geographic ranges. Newly-described is the Choctaw bass which looks very much like a spotted bass to all but a trained eye.

Shoal Bass Range

- **Native to the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint**
- **Chipola River - only known reproducing population in Florida**



The shoal bass is native to the Apalachicola–Chattahoochee–Flint river basin which occurs in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. In Florida, the only known reproducing population of shoal bass is found in the Chipola River.

Chipola River Shoal Bass

- **Chipola River shoal bass are one of the most genetically pure shoal bass populations in existence**



The Chipola River is a tributary of the Apalachicola River, and is about 93-miles long. The Chipola River has one of the most genetically pure shoal bass populations in existence.

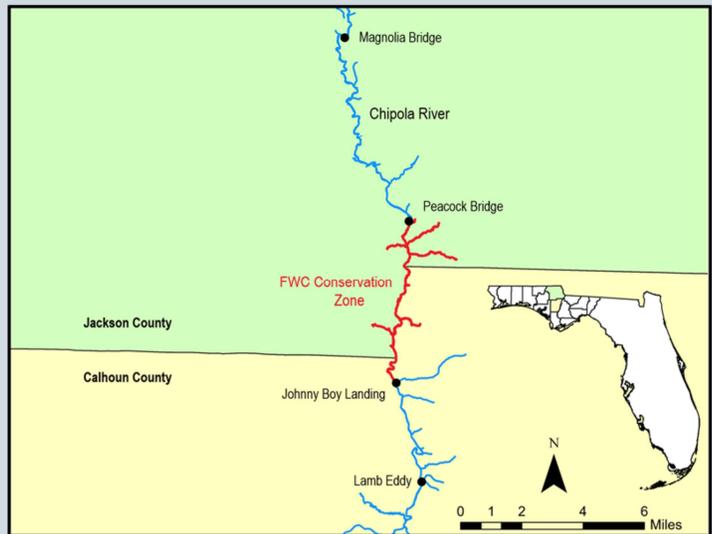
Chipola River Shoal Bass



Even though shoal bass are essentially limited to the Chipola and its tributaries, they are a very popular fish with anglers. Adult shoal bass are typically 12 – 18 inches in length.

Current Regulation - Shoal Bass

- 5 Fish Bag Limit
- 12 inch minimum length
- 1 may be over 16 inches
- Conservation Zone – catch and release



In 2016, a conservation zone was established on the Chipola River in the area where the remaining shoal habitat that is critical to shoal bass spawning occurs, and established the fishery as catch and release only within the 6.5-mile zone.

Chipola River Shoal Bass

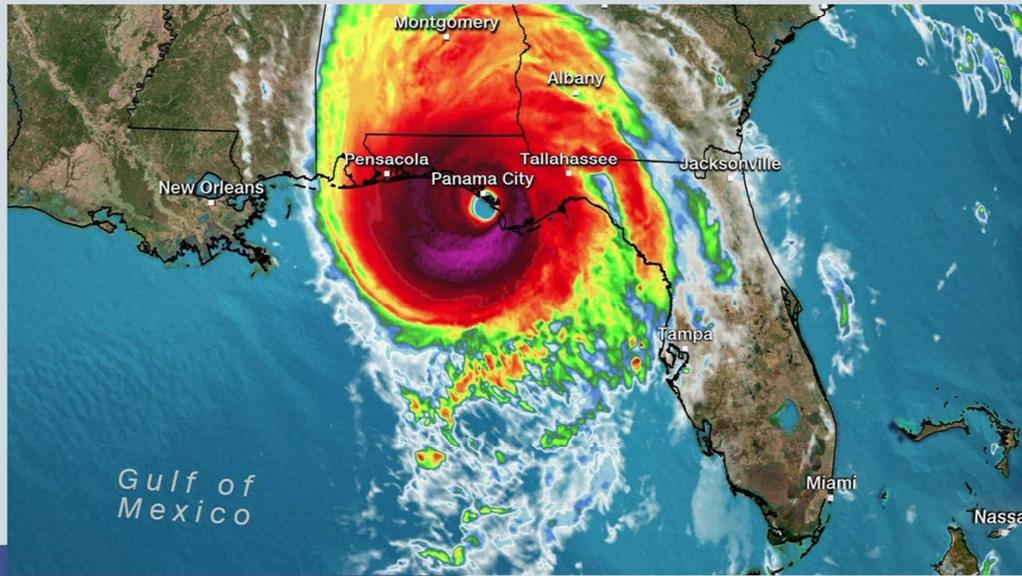


5.95 lbs.



The current state record was just caught in November 2017. This fish was 22.4-inches and weighed 5.95 lbs.

Hurricane Michael



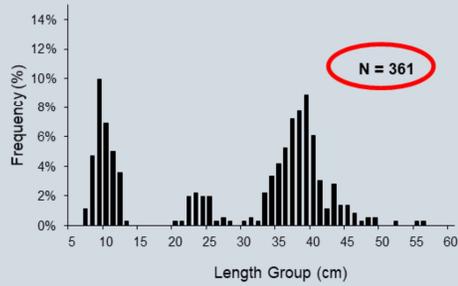
Hurricane Michael made landfall as a Category 5 Hurricane in the Florida Panhandle region a year ago October 10th, with maximum sustained winds of 161 mph.



You can see the widespread damage of trees downed or stripped bare, and where the river is still overflowing its banks. We had a number of fish kills reported for about a 2-week period after the storm.

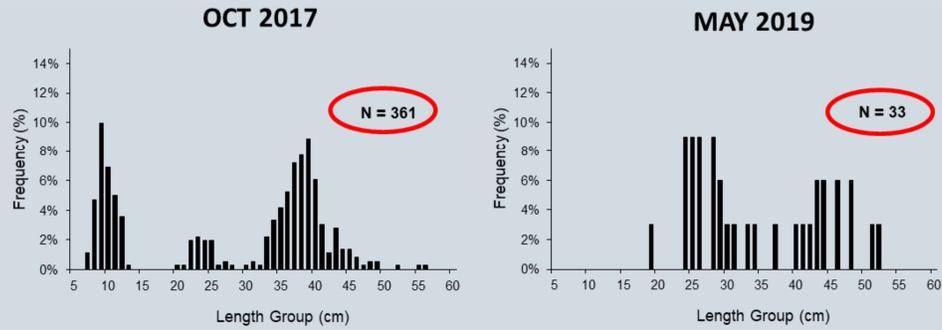
Shoal Bass Assessment

OCT 2017



Electrofishing samples taken a year before the hurricane resulted in 361 shoal bass collected.

Shoal Bass Assessment



- 91% decrease in catch since 2017 (similar distance and effort)



Compared to only 33 shoal bass in May of this year. This was a 91% decrease in catch.

Management Actions Since Post-Hurricane Assessment

- Issued an Executive Order on June 5, 2019 to suspend harvest and possession of Shoal Bass in the Chipola River and its tributaries



We issued an Executive Order to suspend the harvest and possession of shoal bass in the Chipola River and its tributaries.

Management Actions Since Post-Hurricane Assessment

- Collected and transported brood fish to hatchery for potential restocking



We collected adult shoal bass and took them to the Blackwater Hatchery as brood fish for potential restocking efforts.

Staff Recommendation

Amend F.A.C. Rule 68A-23.005(7)(e) by replacing the current possession limits and restrictions with a prohibition on harvest or possession of Shoal Bass on the Chipola River and its tributaries.

Note: Staff are requesting approval and permission to publish and file the rule for adoption without further hearing unless requested.



Staff are proposing a rule change that all shoal bass caught in the Chipola river and its tributaries must be immediately released. Staff are proposing the rule to be effective as soon as possible.

The following slides are considered backup material and are not anticipated to be part of the actual presentation to the Commission



Proposed Draft Rule

68A-23.005 (7)(e)

- e) Chipola River: No person shall harvest or possess Shoal Bass on the Chipola River and its tributaries. ~~kill or possess any Shoal Bass in the section between Peacock Bridge (Peacock Bridge Road; County Road 278, Jackson County) and Johnny Boy Landing (Johnny Boy Landing Road, Calhoun County). Anglers in the process of certifying a possible state record Shoal Bass (within 0.25 ounces of the existing state record Shoal Bass) may temporarily possess in live condition one candidate Shoal Bass in this section of the river until the fish is certified by FWC staff or an authorized representative.~~

