

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: December 12, 2019
Subject: Final Rule – Spotted Seatrout

Purpose:

Obtain final approval for rule amendments that will modify regulations found in 68B-37, Florida Administrative Code (FAC), for the spotted seatrout (seatrout) fishery.

Why:

A recent stock assessment completed by FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) suggests that seatrout is not meeting the Commission's management target. Angler feedback also suggests seatrout stocks in several parts of the state have declined.

Top Points:

- 1) Spotted seatrout is one of Florida's most popular inshore fisheries, with harvest dominated by the recreational fishery.
- 2) Seatrout life history makes it particularly susceptible to environmental events like habitat loss and harmful algal blooms.
- 3) The results of the recent stock assessment suggest management changes may be needed to ensure a continued, high-quality fishery that meets FWC's management targets throughout the state.

Affected Parties:

Recreational anglers, for-hire guides, and commercial harvesters that target seatrout in Florida.

Summary:

Seatrout are currently managed in four zones (map in Attachment 1). The status of the seatrout population within each zone is assessed using Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR), a measure of population health that measures the effect of fishing on the reproductive capacity of the population. SPR does not capture potential effects of environmental changes on seatrout abundance. 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. Angler feedback also suggests seatrout stocks in several parts of the state have declined.

Based on the stock assessment, localized fishery concerns, and stakeholder feedback, staff propose the following final rules amendments, including updates since the approved draft rule, to increase the SPR in zones not currently achieving the management target, reverse the downward trend in SPR statewide, and provide high-quality seatrout fisheries throughout the state:

- Update management zones (see map in Attachment 2).
- Recreational: Adjust the slot limit to 15-19", allow harvest of no more than 1 over-slot seatrout per vessel daily, prohibit captain/crew from harvesting on a for-hire trip, re-establish winter closures in Western Panhandle (February) and Central East zone (November – December), and reduce bag limits for most zones (details below).
 - Western Panhandle: 5 to 3 fish
 - Big Bend: No change (5 fish)
 - South Florida: 4 to 3 fish
 - Northeast: 6 to 5 fish
 - Central East: 4 to 2 fish
- Commercial: Reduce daily harvest limits to 50 seatrout per harvester, with a max of 100 per vessel and remove an unnecessary dealer reporting form.

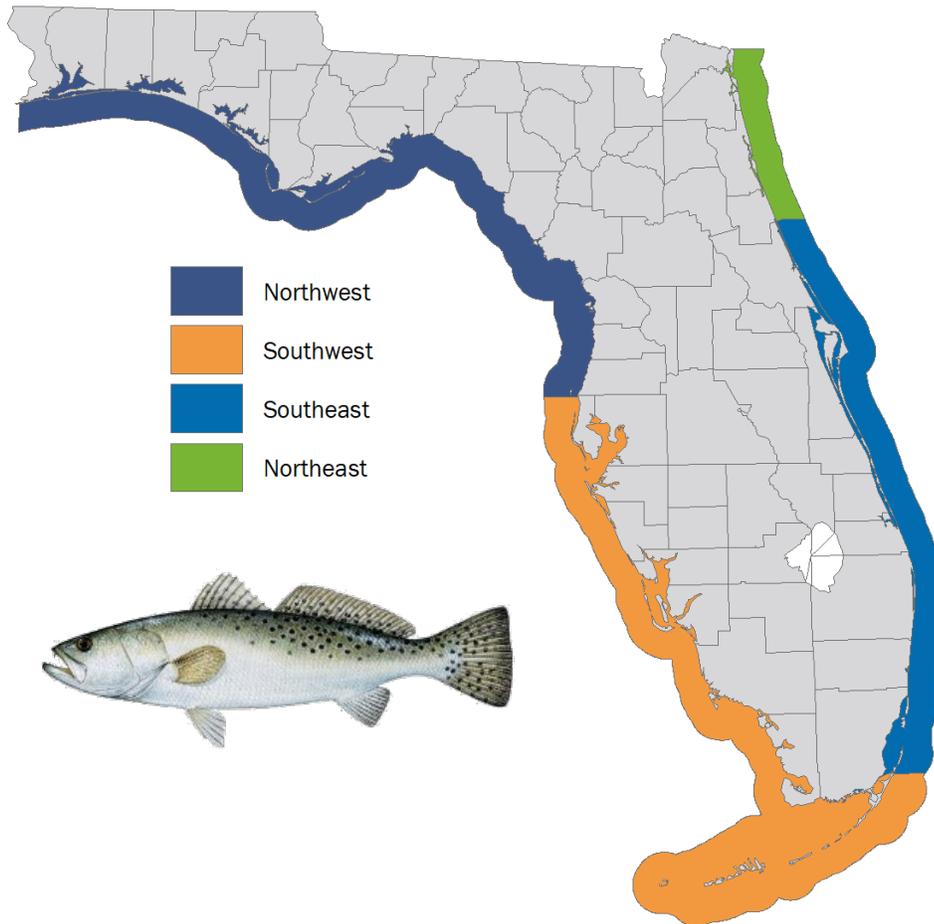
Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed final rules, including publication of the necessary Notice of Change, to be effective February 1, 2020.

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

