

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management

**Date:** February 19, 2020

**Subject:** Draft Rule – Gulf County (St. Joseph Bay) Bay Scallops (Consent Agenda)

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**Purpose:**

Obtain approval for draft rules to modify bay scallop season dates for Gulf County (including St. Joseph Bay) in 68B-18, Florida Administrative Code (FAC).

**Why:**

In May 2019, the Commission approved a series of final rules modifying scallop regulations throughout the harvest area and directed staff to return for further consideration of the long-term Gulf County season.

**Top Points:**

- 1) Scalloping is a popular, family-friendly activity throughout the Big Bend and eastern Panhandle and an important economic driver for many coastal communities.
- 2) St. Joseph Bay experienced a prolonged red tide in 2015 that negatively impacted scallop populations and has experienced several other environmental impacts since then.
- 3) St. Joseph Bay scallops continue to show signs of recovery.
- 4) Overwhelming support received for maintaining a mid-August through mid- or late-September season, similar to recent years' seasons.

**Affected Parties:**

Recreational scallop harvesters in St. Joseph Bay and communities and businesses that rely on this activity.

**Summary:**

From 2017-2019, FWC took an adaptive approach by managing the scallop fishery in order to balance community and stakeholder desires with the sustainability of scallop populations. In May 2019, the Commission approved a series of final rules that modified scallop regulations throughout the allowable harvest area, including the implementation of a July 1 – September 24 season date for most of the harvest area. To allow flexibility to continue evaluating restoration efforts and environmental impacts in St. Joseph Bay, the Commission directed staff to return for further consideration of long-term Gulf County season dates.

Staff has continued gathering input on future season dates for Gulf County and held a public workshop in November 2019. Based on feedback received from the community and supporting requests from local government, the 2020 Gulf County scallop season was set by Executive Order to open on August 16 and continue through September 24. Staff propose incorporating the August 16 through September 24 season for Gulf County into rule, beginning with the 2021 season. Staff also recommends the proposed changes be advertised and filed for adoption without further hearing, unless requested by a member of the public.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Approval of the proposed draft rules as presented.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Krista Shipley, Division of Marine Fisheries Management