

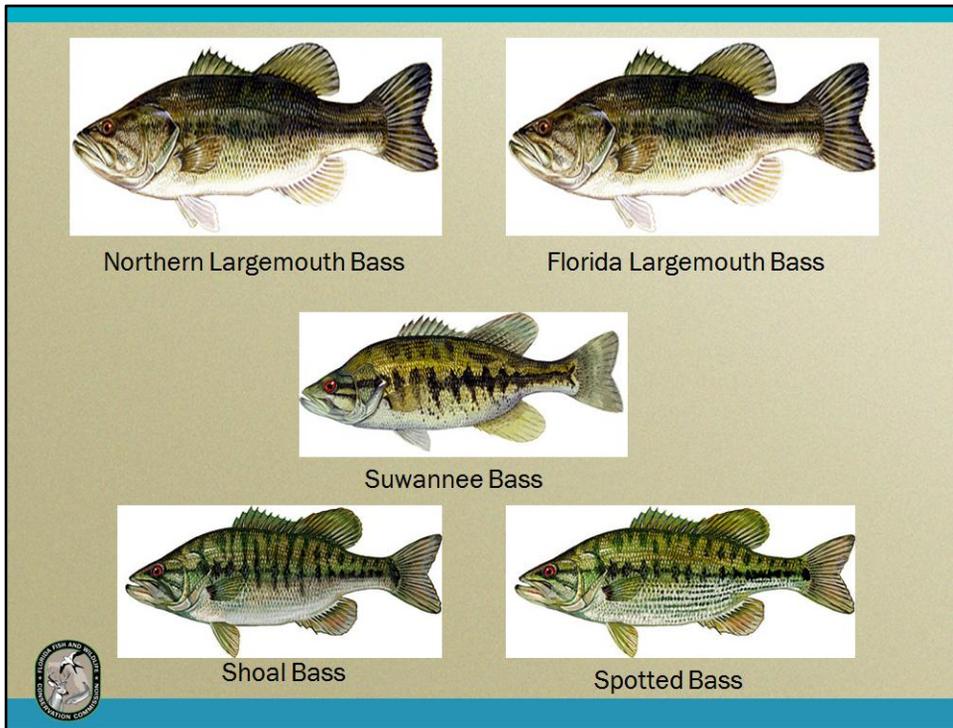


“Conserving the Bass Fishing Capital of the World”
Black Bass Management Plan
2010 – 2030
Status Report: June 24, 2010



Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management

At the December Commission meeting in Clewiston, a proposal for development of a Black Bass Management Plan was approved. Staff began work in January and this presentation will update Commissioners on progress to date.



While the largemouth bass is the official Florida freshwater fish, a total of five bass species occur in the state. Northern largemouth bass, Suwannee bass, shoal bass, and spotted bass occur in the panhandle and north Florida; and Florida largemouth bass occur throughout the peninsula. Florida bass and Suwannee bass are unique to the state. While northern and Florida bass look the same, we must manage these fisheries to conserve their distinctive genetic differences.



These maps depict the ranges for the five species that occur in Florida. This is an important thing to consider in our management plan. Protecting unique genetic strains and preventing hybridization is an important need.

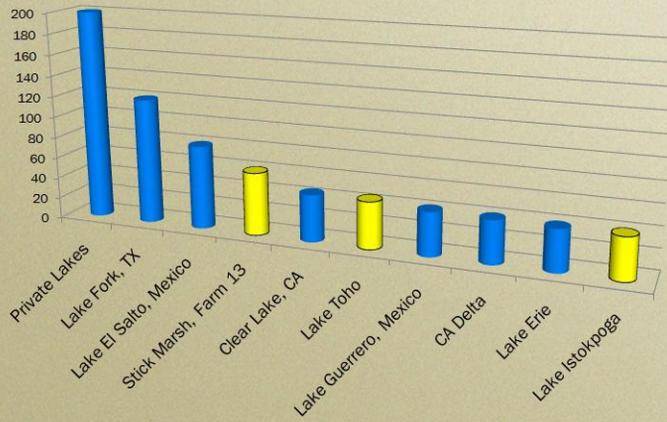
Bass fishing = Economic Engine for Florida

- Fishing Capital of the World
- 850,000 freshwater licenses sold each year
- 14 million days pursuing bass
- Generates \$1.25 billion per year
- Kissimmee Chain = \$12 - 20 million
- Media interest in trophy bass (over 10 pounds) is intense and affects our reputation throughout the nation and world



Bass fishing accounts for most effort of all freshwater fisheries. The economic and social impact of bass fishing is huge, generating \$1.25 billion state revenue. Sustaining the resource requires research and management, habitat protection, and documentation of fisheries value. One of the primary fisheries is the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. While the plan will address all bass fisheries, placing an emphasis on trophy bass that exceed 10 pounds is necessary to attract public and media interest.

Bassmasters Lunker Club entries since 1998



J. McCormick-Bassmaster, March 2010
Bass Anglers Sportsman Society

Florida accounts for the most (27%) of all entries to Bassmasters Lunker Club. Three of our managed fisheries rank near the top. Note that private lakes generate most lunker bass entries. This may reflect the value of strict regulation of effort and harvest in producing trophy bass. We will apply this approach in developing Special Opportunities on selected waters.

Enhancing Florida's reputation for producing trophy bass (over 10 pounds)

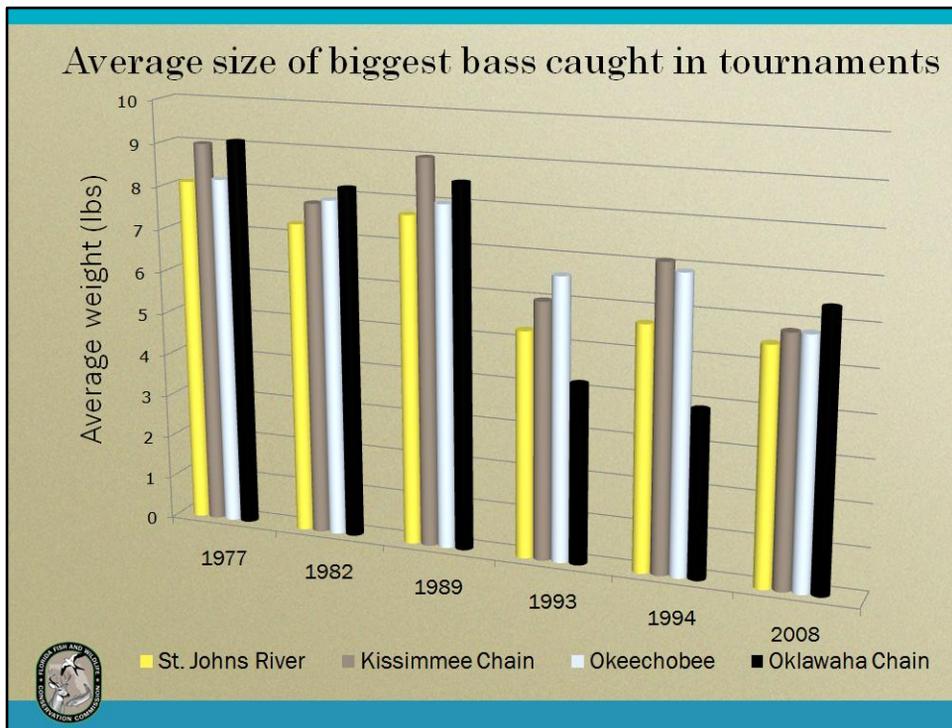
- Strong social value
- Economic draw
- Media interest
- Public participation
- Engage stakeholders
- Build partnerships
- Promote our fisheries



Webb Lake Fish Management Area



While catching a trophy bass is the lifetime goal of anglers, we will manage for quality fisheries. However, generating the needed interest requires us to document and promote catches of trophy fish. Anglers desire a wide range of fishing experiences. This plan will emphasize gaining a better understanding of angler preferences and behaviors in order to tailor management projects that will produce fishing opportunities they desire. Trophy bass will provide the market power to gain wide support for our entire management approach.



While bass are found almost everywhere, sustainable populations of bass in densities and sizes desired by anglers cannot be taken for granted. Despite our high ranking based on Bassmasters Lunker Club, Florida's reputation has declined and many media sources promote other state's fisheries as superior to ours. We must objectively evaluate our data to determine if our fisheries have indeed declined. This slide shows a drop in the size of the "Big Bass" recorded from organized tournaments in some of our best fisheries.

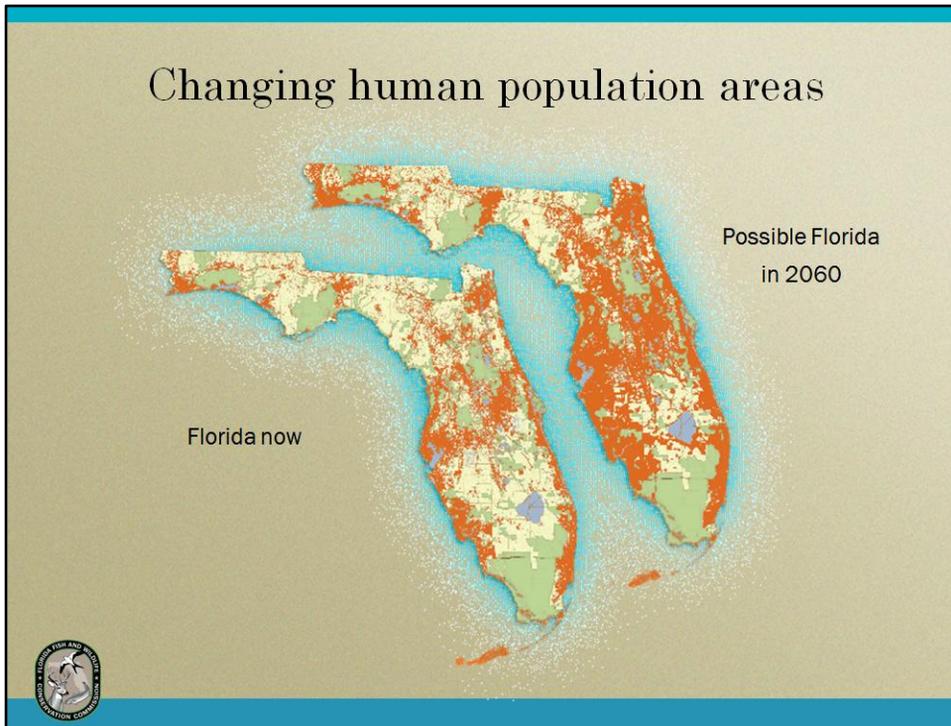
Issues facing our bass fisheries

- Genetic conservation
- Over harvest of larger bass
- Public access to lakes and rivers
- Management of invasive plants
- Non-native aquatic species
- Loss of habitat
- Water pollution
- Water level stabilization
- Water supply demands
- Climate change



Healthy bass populations must have good water quality, abundant aquatic plant habitat, and angling mortality rates that allow for survival to larger size groups. Considering it takes six to ten years to produce a ten pound bass, these impacts can add up and possibly reduce the abundance of larger fish.

Changing human population areas



We must take a long term approach to succeed in this effort. Declines to lake and river ecological integrity will only continue unless we effectively engage and influence the process as Florida continues to grow.

Why a Plan?

- Conserve species with limited geographic ranges
- Protect unique genetic strains
- Define habitat requirements
- Review effectiveness of regulations
- Produce and sustain high quality fisheries
- Create special opportunities to catch trophy bass (over 10 pounds)
- Promote the value of our fisheries



The plan will conserve bass species, protect our unique genetic strains, define habitat requirements for healthy bass populations, review our regulatory approach, and develop management projects to produce high quality and trophy fisheries. High quality fisheries have good densities of bass of sizes desired by anglers.

Management objectives

- Improve fishing for all bass species
- Long-term sustainability
- Increase and document trophy bass catches
- Black Bass Capital of the World



The plan will be a working document that will drive applied research, adaptive management, public involvement, partnership development, and effective marketing. This is an effort to reach out and connect with our anglers and fishing-related businesses as well as to become more relevant to non-traditional stakeholders.

Six months progress

- Integrated teams working on plan elements
- Collecting and evaluating public input
- Dozens of events attended
- Six months of initial internet surveys
- Regulation evaluations underway
- Plan outline complete
- Bass Mgt Assistance Group formed and met June 15



We have over 30 FWC staff representing DFFM, HSC, FWRI, OED, and LE working on data collection, plan development, and stakeholder coordination. A group of stakeholders representing academia, industry, media, organized bass anglers, tournaments, and fishing guides has been formed and met June 15. Staff have attended dozens of events to discuss the plan with anglers and encourage them to participate in our on-line survey.

Preliminary public input

4051 surveys (94% FL)
37 other states
94% male
17% under 35
4% over 65
68% fished 20+ years in FL
\$84 trip cost average
\$1,650 annually



We have engaged with thousands of anglers about the plan and 4051 have responded to our invitation to take an on-line survey. Residents from 37 other states participated. Most bass anglers are white males and the level of participation by anglers under 35 is encouraging.

Angler preferences

- 69% prefer bass fishing
- 50% prefer big bass
- 49% prefer numbers
- 32% prefer one 10 lb
- 53% prefer three 3 lb
- 13% harvest oriented
- 20% bass club member
- 25% fished tournaments



Angler attitudes, opinions, preferences, and behaviors are critical data to use in developing the plan. Later surveys will also measure angler expectations after the draft plan is posted on the website. Anglers seem split in their desire to catch a trophy over several quality sized bass, while 13% caught bass mostly to eat. About a quarter of our bass anglers fish competitively.

Angler opinions

	Worse	Same	Better
Abundance of 10 lb bass	54	34	12
Abundance of bass overall	51	27	22

Most feel our current management approach must change and 82% thought a new plan is needed



In addition to evaluating what anglers think of the quality of bass fishing, the survey asked specific questions about pollution, aquatic plant management, public access, and a host of other questions. While many anglers long for the “good ole days”, we must take the strong belief that the quality of Florida bass fishing has declined very seriously.

Angler Responses for Issues that the plan must address

- Aquatic vegetation management
 - Too much/not enough
 - Hydrilla levels in lakes
- Water quality/reduce pollution
- More lake restoration projects
- Increase access
- Angler ethics
- Non-native fish
- Boater conflicts



Anglers were most critical of our aquatic plant management program. However, support for habitat enhancement was strong. Clearly, the plan must address public involvement when we develop our habitat management plans. The public does not understand our objectives when we spray aquatic plants with chemical herbicides. Many anglers recognized that we must coordinate with other agencies to protect lakes and rivers.

Bass Management Assistance Group

- **Chris Horton**, B.A.S.S. Conservation Director
- **Dr. Mike Allen**, University of Florida
- **Shaw Grigsby**, Professional Angler/Ironwood Productions
- **Todd Kersey**, Florida Freshwater Fishing Coalition
- **Jim Hoovan**, President of Lakeland Bassmasters
- **Mark Detweiler**, Big Toho Marina Owner
- **Gary Simpson**, Media/Industry/Professional Angler
- **Mark Jackson**, Central Florida Tourism Development
- **Tommy Thompson**, Florida Outdoor Writers Association
- **Terry Seagraves**, Kissimmee Tourism/Professional Angler
- **Peter Thiveros**, Professional Angler



We are fortunate to have assembled an excellent panel of for our Bass Management Assistance Group representing industry, academia, media, fishing organizations, and professional fisherman. This panel will help us develop the plan and interpret data from the survey.

Timeline for completion

- Draft elements due in September 2010
- Review public comments
- Plan elements finalized in December 2010
- Draft Plan presented to Commission in February 2011
- Plan finalized in March 2010
- Final Plan recommended for Commission approval in May 2011



As the plan elements are developed, drafts will be posted on a dedicated website. Comments will be solicited and evaluated to see how the public views the plan. Adjustments will be made accordingly. The plan will be finalized by mid 2011; however, this will be a living document that will be adapted as we implement programs, receive continuous public, stakeholder, and partner input, and learn new approaches.

The FWC will partner with stakeholders to promote, manage, and sustain Florida's unique and valuable black bass fisheries with special emphasis on high quality fisheries and increasing catches of trophy bass.



Questions??



This is our vision statement for this effort.