



2017 Lionfish Challenge

Review and Discussion

April 20, 2017

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management



FWC Lionfish Initiatives

FWC has been actively engaged in promoting public awareness, harvest, and consumption of lionfish

- Lionfish Removal and Awareness Day (LRAD)
- Removal of regulatory barriers
- Outreach and education
- Reef Rangers
- Diver training and removal excursions
- Tournament sponsorship
- Work with commercial industry
- Collaboration with other states
- Lionfish removal incentives



Lionfish Removal Goals

Tracking harvest

- Tournaments
- Individual recreational
- Commercial

May 2016 – May 2017

- Goal:
 - 25,000 lionfish statewide



164,000 lionfish removed between May and Dec. 2016



2016 Lionfish Programs

Lionfish removal and reward program

- Statewide Lionfish Challenge
- Panhandle Pilot Program

Other activities

- Tournament sponsorships
- Designing new workshops
- Hosting removal excursions



Recap: 2016 Statewide Lionfish Challenge

Goal: Encourage lionfish removal and reward the efforts of successful lionfish hunters statewide

- LRAD (May) 2016 – Sept. 2016
- 50 lionfish = 1 extra lobster/day during mini-season
- Qualification for prizes and raffles
- Crown the Lionfish King/Queen

Results

- 95 participants
- 16,609 lionfish submitted
 - 3,324 harvested by the 2016 Lionfish King



Recap: 2016 Panhandle Pilot Program

Goal: Encourage lionfish removals in the Panhandle

- LRAD (May) 2016 – May 2017
- 100 lionfish = tag for 1 red grouper or cobia over the bag limit from state waters
- 500 lionfish = name an artificial reef

Results (to date)

- 8,975 lionfish submitted
- 51 of 130 available tags have been claimed by harvesters
- 6 teams have qualified to name an artificial reef



What We've Learned So Far

- What we're doing is having an impact
 - Public awareness and total lionfish harvest has greatly increased
 - More people are harvesting and consuming lionfish
 - Control efforts working: fewer lionfish on commonly-visited reefs
 - Divers reporting they have to go to deeper depths to find large numbers of lionfish
- Some incentives have been more effective than others
- Continue to find new ways to motivate people to stay involved in lionfish removals



Focus for 2017

- Tournament sponsorships
- Hosting workshops, removal excursions, and attending events
- “Lionfish: Classroom Invasion”
- “Lionfish Awareness and DEMA Dive-in Day” at the Capitol
- A single, statewide **Lionfish Challenge**
 - Runs LRAD 2017, May 20, through Labor Day, Sept. 4
 - Awards given at the Lionfish Safari on Sept. 10
 - Two participation categories: recreational and commercial



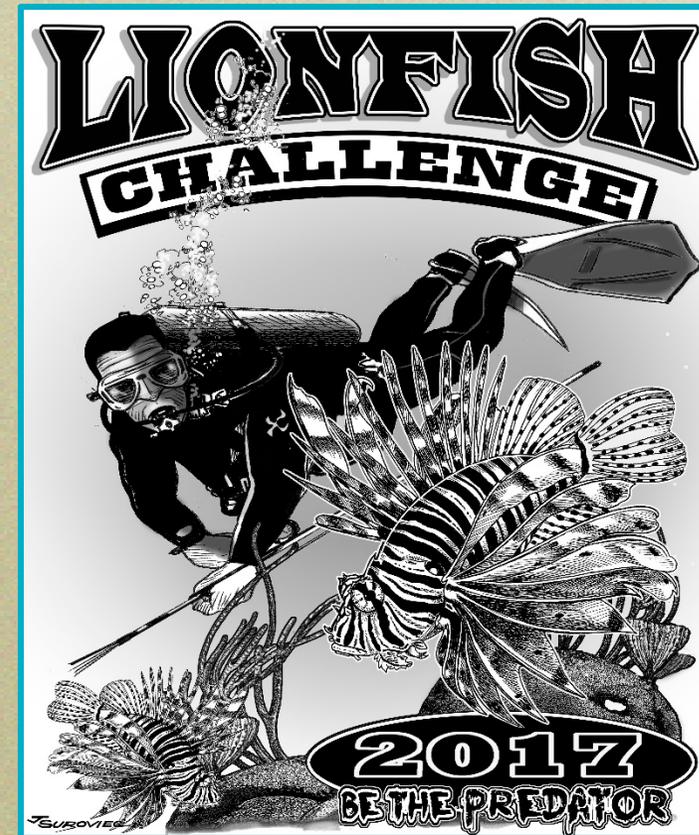
Goal for 2017/2018: remove 50,000 lionfish statewide



Lionfish Challenge: Recreational Category

Goal: Expand on 2016 program, encourage continued involvement in lionfish removals, and reward the ongoing efforts of lionfish harvesters statewide

- Membership in a reward program for anyone who harvests and submits at least 25 lionfish
 - Tiered prizes
 - Entry in the online FWC Lionfish Hall of Fame
- Qualifying lionfish can be submitted beginning on LRAD at
 - FWC-attended tournaments around the state
 - Lionfish checkpoints



Rewards: Recreational Category

- Rewards based on number of lionfish submitted
 - 25 = Additional lobster during mini-season, commemorative coin, T-shirt
 - 75 = FWC Lionfish Control Team neck gaiter and reusable heat pack for stings
 - 150 = FWC Lionfish Control Team tumbler
 - 300 = Neritic pole spear



Lionfish King/Queen

- The recreational harvester who submits the most lionfish during the 2017 Lionfish Challenge

Rewards

- Lionfish King/Queen trophy
- \$500 gift card for dive tank refills
- Feature article in FWC's recreational saltwater regulations publication

2017 Lionfish King/Queen will be crowned on Sept. 10 at the Lionfish Safari in St. Petersburg



Lionfish Challenge: Commercial Category

Goal: To recognize and reward harvesters participating in the commercial lionfish fishery

- Open to SPL holders who sell and submit at least **25 lbs** of lionfish
- Submissions through the commercial trip ticket system
 - Additional recreational lobster during mini-season, commemorative coin, and T-shirt
 - Entry in the online FWC Lionfish Hall of Fame
- The person who checks in the most lionfish (by weight) will be named the Commercial Champion
 - Commercial Champion trophy
 - Feature article in FWC's commercial saltwater regulations publication



*Commercial Champion will be recognized on Sept. 10
at the Lionfish Safari in St. Petersburg*



Staff Recommendation

Encourage the public to continue harvesting lionfish by authorizing an updated Lionfish Challenge for 2017

- Allow a person who submits the qualifying amount of lionfish between LRAD and Labor Day to
 - Gain membership into the 2017 Lionfish Challenge
 - Qualify for a variety of rewards
- Crown the top recreational harvester the Lionfish King/Queen
- Name the top commercial harvester the Commercial Champion

If approved and directed, the lobster-reward portion of the program would be established via Executive Order

