

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: April 20, 2017
Subject: 2017 Lionfish Challenge – Review and Discussion

Purpose:

Staff will provide a summary of the outcomes of the 2016 statewide Lionfish Challenge and Panhandle Pilot Program and also discuss a plan for an updated, statewide lionfish removal incentive program for 2017.

Summary:

The Commission is continually working to find new, innovative ways to address lionfish population control and raise awareness about the lionfish issue. Between May and December 2016, almost 164,000 lionfish were removed from Florida waters. One part of this endeavor in 2016 was a two-part lionfish removal and reward program aimed to introduce new harvesters to lionfish removal as well as focus lionfish removal efforts in the Panhandle where high concentrations of lionfish have been found. Through this program and the 2015 Special Lionfish Removal Opportunity, staff have found some incentives that work well and some that don't work as well. These experiences, along with stakeholder feedback, informed the plan for the 2017 Lionfish Challenge.

The goal of the proposed 2017 Lionfish Challenge is to encourage divers to continue to harvest lionfish throughout the peak harvest season and to recognize harvesters who are contributing to the commercial lionfish market. Staff propose a statewide initiative that runs from Lionfish Removal and Awareness Day (May 20th) through Labor Day (September 4th) with separate categories for recreational and commercial lionfish harvesters. Recreational and commercial harvesters can qualify for the challenge by submitting 25 lionfish (recreational category and marine life harvesters in the commercial category) or 25 pounds of lionfish (commercial category). Upon qualifying, participants will receive a 2017 Lionfish Challenge commemorative coin, a t-shirt, and the ability to harvest an additional lobster over the recreational bag limit per day during the 2017 lobster sport season (mini-season). Recreational harvesters who continue to submit lionfish will be eligible for additional rewards through a tiered system. Those tiered rewards, earned by submitting 75, 150, and 300 lionfish, include items such as an FWC Lionfish Control Team neck gaiter, a commemorative tumbler, and a Neritic pole spear.

The recreational harvester who submits the most lionfish statewide will be named the 2017 Lionfish King/Queen and the commercial harvester that submits the most lionfish (by weight) will be named the 2017 Commercial Champion. The Lionfish King/Queen and the Commercial Champion will be recognized at the Lionfish Safari close-out event on September 10th and will have a featured article in that sector's FWC saltwater regulations publication.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend approving the proposed 2017 Lionfish Challenge as described and authorizing the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to establish the lobster mini-season reward via an Executive Order.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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