

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: December 7, 2017
Subject: Bay Scallops – Draft Rule

Purpose:

Staff will present proposed draft rules to modify bay scallop regulations (68B-18, Florida Administrative Code) in response to feedback received from stakeholders regarding regionally-specific management changes that were implemented on a trial basis for the 2017 season, as well as input received regarding long-term management of the bay scallop fishery, and consideration of an open season in Pasco County.

Summary:

At the June 2016 Commission meeting, the Commission directed staff to explore potential long-term changes to management of the bay scallop fishery. Prior to the 2017 scallop season, staff held a series of meetings with community leaders in Gulf through Pasco counties to gather suggestions on scallop management, focusing on issues that were important to communities. Feedback received primarily focused on changes to season dates. Based on this, the Commission approved regionally-specific changes to the bay scallop season dates on a trial basis for 2017 at the February 2017 Commission meeting. At that time, staff committed to conducting public workshops after the conclusion of the 2017 season to gather feedback on this trial season structure and to explore the possibility of extending the allowable harvest area for scallops into Pasco County.

Staff held a series of five public workshops in October 2017 in Gulf through Pasco counties to gather stakeholder feedback on the 2017 season structure, long-term management desires for bay scallops, and input on the bay scallop fishery in general. Comments received online were also considered.

Stakeholders were generally opposed to long-term changes to bag or vessel limits. The majority of feedback received was focused on season structure and season dates. In general, stakeholders throughout the open scallop harvest area favored the regionally-specific season structure implemented in 2017 and support implementation of a similar structure into the future. In Gulf County, stakeholders supported a shorter than usual season for 2018 to allow the St. Joseph Bay scallop population to continue to rebuild. Strong support was received for implementing a limited trial season in Pasco County. Based on this feedback, staff recommend implementing regionally-specific season dates for the majority of the open scallop harvest area on a long-term basis, and establishing bay scallop regulations for Pasco and Gulf counties for 2018 only by Executive Order. Setting the 2018 harvest seasons for Pasco and Gulf counties via Executive Order will allow the Commission flexibility to re-evaluate any potential changes that might be needed for 2019 and subsequent seasons.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend approving the proposed draft rules to establish the following long-term regionally-specific open seasons:

- Dixie County and a portion of Taylor County (including Dekle Beach, Keaton Beach, and the entire Steinhatchee area): For all state waters south and east of Rock Island near the mouth of the Fenholloway River in Taylor County to the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon # 4 in

northern Levy County (29°15.350' North Latitude), modify the regulations to create an open season that begins on the third Saturday in June and continues through Sept. 10 each year.

- Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties: For all state waters south of the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon # 4 in northern Levy County (29°15.350' North Latitude) to the Hernando – Pasco county line, modify the regulations to create an open season that begins July 10 and continues through Sept. 10 each year.
- For all other areas open to the harvest of bay scallops (including Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, and northwestern Taylor County): For all state waters from the westernmost point of St. Vincent Island in Franklin County to Rock Island near the mouth of the Fenholloway River in Taylor County, modify the regulations to create an open season that begins on July 1 and continues through Sept. 24 each year. *Note: This season would also serve as a placeholder for all of Gulf County (including St. Joseph Bay) until a long-term season can be established for that area. In the immediate future the actual season for Gulf County would be set each year via executive order, as described below.*

Staff also recommend establishing bay scallop regulations in Pasco and Gulf counties for 2018 only by Executive Order, as follows:

- St. Joseph Bay and all of Gulf County: Staff recommend setting the scallop season from the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County to the westernmost point of St. Vincent Island in Franklin County by Executive Order for the immediate future, with a 2018 season that would begin Aug. 17 and continue through Sept. 30, 2018 (45 days). Long-term changes to the open season for this area would be established in the future, once the population is more fully recovered.
- Pasco County: Staff recommend establishing a short 10-day trial season for state waters off Pasco County by Executive Order for 2018 that would begin on July 20 and continue through July 29, 2018.

Staff recommend returning for a final public hearing for the permanent seasons and to implement the proposed Executive Orders at the February 2018 Commission meeting.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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