

MEMORANDUM



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

Purpose:

Staff will present a proposed draft rule to add an additional month the existing spawning season closure for permit (68B-35, Florida Administrative Code) inside the Special Permit Zone (SPZ) in order to provide for further conservation of this highly valued sport fishery.

Summary:

In 2011, the Commission developed a suite of management measures for permit in response to staff and stakeholder concerns about the impacts of fishers targeting spawning aggregations in the Keys and a lack of any management measures for the species in federal waters. In addition to a variety of other changes, the SPZ was established in south Florida, where separate management measures for permit were developed to manage this fishery as a catch and release/trophy fishery, including a spawning season closure in May, June, and July to protect spawning aggregations.

Recently, FWC staff have heard concerns that the spawning season closure for permit inside the SPZ is not providing the level of conservation to permit spawning aggregations as originally intended. Anglers and recreational fishing guides report substantial permit aggregations occurring within the SPZ during April (the month prior to the current closure), and that these aggregations are being heavily targeted. Telemetry data collected in partnership with FWRI also indicates that spawning size permit are visiting known multi-species spawning sites throughout April – July.

In order to provide additional conservation of permit in the SPZ throughout peak spawning months, staff recommend adding the month of April to the existing May – July spawning season closure inside the SPZ.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend approving the proposed draft rule described above and returning for a final public hearing at the February 2018 Commission meeting.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Division of Marine Fisheries Management