



Bay Scallop Management

Draft Rule

February 8, 2017

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

At the June 2016 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Commission meeting, staff presented a report detailing a prolonged red tide event that occurred in late 2015 and its impacts on the bay scallop population in St. Joseph Bay in Gulf County. At that meeting, Commissioners directed staff to come back with an update on St. Joseph Bay and to work with local communities to review statewide management of the bay scallop fishery for potential changes.

This document provides an update on the status of the bay scallop population and restoration efforts in St. Joseph Bay, and summarizes staff's proposal to implement regional changes to bay scallop management for the 2017 harvest season via Executive Order on a trial basis.

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Report date: February 1, 2017

Photo courtesy: Kyle Miller

Background

- Bay scallops support a popular recreational fishery in the Big Bend and eastern Panhandle
 - Family-friendly activity
 - Important economic driver for coastal communities
- Annual crop: lifespan in Florida is approximately 1 year
 - Spawning concentrated in the months following the harvest season (Sept. - Jan.)
- Sensitive to environmental changes
- Recreational season dates have varied since a season was first implemented in 1985



The recreational harvest of bay scallops is a popular family-friendly activity and an important economic driver for coastal communities in the Big Bend and eastern Panhandle regions.

In Florida, bay scallops live for approximately one year and reach a maximum size of about 3.5 inches. Although some spawning activity occurs throughout the year, peak spawning occurs from September through January, with the vast majority of scallops spawning after the recreational harvest season closes.

Scallops are very sensitive to environmental changes. Scallops need clear, salty water to survive and prolonged or extreme changes in water quality can reduce local scallop numbers. Too much rain or runoff can reduce salinity below optimal levels and may cloud the water with sediments, which can clog their gills and cause scallops to die.

Recreational harvest season dates have varied since a season was first implemented in 1985. Generally, the season has opened on or around July 1 and typically closed in late August or in September.

Timeline

- **Fall 2015:** Scallop mortality associated with red tide prompted local management changes for the 2016 St. Joseph Bay scallop season
 - Brought additional attention to stakeholder desires for consideration of long-term changes to scallop management
- **June 2016:** Commission directed staff to review statewide scallop management
- **Nov. 2016:** Pasco County requested FWC consider opening scalloping in their county
- **Dec. 2016 – Jan. 2017:** Staff held a series of informal meetings with community leaders to gather feedback on scallop management
- **Today:** Consideration of possible management changes throughout the scalloping region



In the fall of 2015, a prolonged red tide event occurred off of Gulf County and the western Panhandle. This red tide event was particularly unique for the region; it was both intense and more prolonged than this area typically experiences, running from September through December 2015. Unfortunately, this red tide event also coincided with the peak spawning season and peak juvenile settlement period for bay scallops. Monitoring data collected by FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) indicated that this red tide event negatively impacted both adult scallops and newly settled juveniles in St. Joseph Bay, and prompted the FWC to work with the public to implement local management changes for the 2016 season. This brought additional attention to stakeholder requests to consider long-term changes to management of the scallop fishery in various portions of the open harvest area.

At the June 2016 Commission meeting, Commissioners directed staff to review management of the scallop fishery statewide for potential changes.

At the November 2016 Commission meeting, Pasco County addressed the Commission and requested that FWC consider extending the scallop harvest area to include Pasco County.

During Dec. 2016 and Jan. 2017, staff held a series of meetings with community leaders from the eastern Panhandle and Big Bend to gather feedback on scallop management and suggestions for potential management changes. Today, staff are presenting feedback received during these meetings and proposed management changes for consideration.

Scallop Management and Regulations

Allowable harvest zone

- Established in 1994, modified in 2002
- *Currently:* West bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County through the Hernando-Pasco county line

Season

- Recreational harvest only since 1994
- Open the Saturday before July 1 (or July 1 when it falls on a Saturday) through Sept. 24
 - 2015: Opened June 27
 - 2016: Opened June 25
 - **2017:** Scheduled to open July 1



Prior to 1994, the harvest of bay scallops was allowed throughout the state. In 1994, an allowable scallop harvest zone was created that extended from the Suwannee River (Dixie-Levy county line) to the Alabama state line. The allowable harvest zone was modified in 2002 to close scallop harvest in the western Panhandle, but allow harvest south of the Suwannee River through Hernando County. Thus, since 2002, the allowable harvest zone has included all state waters from the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County to the Hernando-Pasco county line.

Florida's scallop fishery has been open only to recreational harvest since commercial harvest and sale was prohibited in 1994. Currently, the recreational harvest season opens each year on the Saturday before July 1 (or July 1 if it falls on a Saturday) and continues through Sept. 24. This season structure was implemented in late 2014 and was intended to ensure that the season always opened on a weekend to maximize recreational harvest opportunities. Because the season is set to open on a Saturday, the opening date changes each year. In 2015, the season opened on June 27. In 2016, the season opened on June 25. This year, the season is scheduled to open on July 1, resulting in a season that is a week shorter than last year. This season structure currently applies throughout the allowable harvest zone.

Scallop Management and Regulations (continued)

Daily bag limit (per person)

- 2 gallons whole scallops in shell, or
- 1 pint scallop meat

Daily vessel limit

- 10 gallons whole scallops in shell, or
- $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon scallop meat



The daily bag limit for scallops throughout the allowable harvest zone has been 2 gallons of whole scallops (in the shell) or 1 pint of scallop meat (shucked) per person since 1995. In addition, no more than 10 gallons of whole scallops, or $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon of scallop meat may be possessed on any vessel, regardless of the number of harvesters aboard.

2016 Regulation Changes for St. Joseph Bay

- Prolonged red tide event in late 2015 impacted the scallop population in St. Joseph Bay
- Modified regulations implemented for the 2016 season
 - Shortened season: (14 days)
 - Aug. 22 – Sept. 5
 - Reduced daily bag limit
 - 40 scallops per person, or
 - 200 scallops per vessel
- Temporary “No-Entry Area” established in St. Joseph Bay to protect restoration efforts



In response to localized impacts of the prolonged red tide event in late 2015, the Commission implemented modified regulations for the 2016 season in Gulf County, which includes St. Joseph Bay. These regulations were intended to greatly reduce harvest and allow the local population to rebuild while minimizing economic losses to the community. The 2016 scallop regulations for St. Joseph Bay (and all of Gulf County) included a shortened 14 day harvest season running from Aug. 22 through Sept. 5 (the day after Labor Day) and a reduced daily bag limit of 40 scallops per person, or 200 scallops per vessel, whichever was less. In order to protect scallop restoration efforts being carried out in the Bay before, during and after the harvest season, a temporary “No-Entry Area” was also established and marked with FWC buoys.

Status of St. Joseph Bay

2016

- Almost no juvenile scallops detected in St. Joseph Bay during 2015-2016 peak spawning period
- Based on adult scallop abundance surveys, the 2016 St. Joseph Bay population expected to be classified as collapsed and sparse
- FWRI began a scallop restoration project in St. Joseph Bay in June to help speed recovery

Update

- Stakeholders report their scalloping trips were successful during the 2-week 2016 season
- Modest juvenile scallop settlement detected in Dec. 2016, which suggests population has begun to rebound



During the 2015-2016 peak scallop spawning period, almost no juvenile scallops were detected within St. Joseph Bay as part of FWRI's juvenile scallop monitoring program. This indicated that the 2016 scallop population in this area was likely to be low. Subsequent adult scallop abundance surveys conducted in St. Joseph Bay prior to the modified harvest season confirmed these concerns. Based on these surveys, the annual scallop report released in the spring is expected to classify last season's scallop population in St. Joseph Bay as collapsed and sparse. Working with members of the local community, FWRI began a scallop restoration project within St. Joseph Bay in June to help speed recovery of this population.

Nonetheless, there are indications the local population did not fare as badly as anticipated. Participants in the restoration efforts were able to locate enough scallops prior to opening day to cage than were originally planned. Stakeholders also reported that scalloping trips taken in St. Joseph Bay during the shortened 2016 harvest season were successful, and harvesters were able to enjoy multiple days of scalloping activities.

Juvenile scallop monitoring data collected by FWRI after the harvest season showed modest juvenile settlement in Dec. 2016, which suggests that the local population has started to rebound. Additional juvenile settlement was detected in Jan. 2017, but the numbers were lower than those for December.

Update: St. Joseph Bay Restoration Efforts

- Approximately 2,700 adult scallops were collected and placed in cages to protect them from predators and to increase spawning success
 - 70% of caged scallops survived into December
 - Most are believed to have spawned
 - Scallops removed from cages beginning in December and released to local seagrass beds
- In addition, 60 scallops were removed from cages in Nov. 2016 and again in Jan. 2017 and taken to a commercial hatchery
 - Spawning at hatchery confirmed
 - Optimistic about survival to a releasable size
 - Hatchery-spawned scallops will be placed in cages to contribute to the 2017-2018 spawn



Prior to the start of the shortened 2016 scallop season, FWRI staff and members of the local community collected approximately 2,700 adult scallops from within St. Joseph Bay. These scallops were placed inside cages within the bay to protect them from predators and to increase the likelihood of successful spawning. These caged scallops were allowed to remain in cages through at least Dec. 2016 and approximately 70% survived throughout that timeframe. Most of these scallops are believed to have spawned in the Bay. A portion of the surviving scallops were removed from cages starting in December and released into local seagrass beds in hopes that additional spawning activity might occur.

FWRI staff removed 60 caged scallops in Nov. 2016 and again in Jan. 2017, and transported them to a commercial hatchery with hopes of producing additional scallop larvae. Preliminary spawning at the hatchery has been confirmed and staff are optimistic about survival of these hatchery-spawned scallops to a releasable size. Hatchery-spawned scallops that survive will be placed in cages during continued restoration efforts to contribute to the 2017-2018 spawn.

Staff recommend continuing scallop restoration efforts within St. Joseph Bay in 2017 in order to speed recovery of the scallop population in the Bay.

In addition to implementing modified regulations for the 2016 scallop season in St. Joseph Bay, Commissioners also directed staff to review management of the statewide scallop fishery for potential changes. The next few slides discuss the outcomes of those efforts.

Scallop Management Feedback

- Staff held a series of informal meetings with community leaders in Gulf through Pasco counties
- Gathered suggestions and feedback on potential scallop management changes with the focus on
 - Long-term management
 - Socioeconomic factors
 - Issues important to communities
- Discussed potential impacts associated with various possible changes



Photo courtesy: Dawn McKinstry, UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant



To gather feedback and suggestions for potential scallop management changes across the eastern Panhandle and Big Bend regions, staff held a series of informal meetings with community leaders in Gulf through Pasco counties. These meetings focused on long-term management of the scallop fishery, how social and economic factors are impacted by scallop management, and any scallop-related issues that are important to local communities. In addition to listening to feedback from community leaders, staff also discussed considerations and potential impacts that could be associated with a variety of management changes.

Regulatory Considerations

Season modifications

- Potential economic impacts
- Scallops tend to be smaller early in season
- Summer season months are popular with families
 - Greater economic stimulus
 - Greater fishing pressure

Bag limit modifications

- Enforcement challenges and impacts to harvesters associated with a count bag limit



Photo: Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant



As previously mentioned, the recreational scallop fishery is an important economic driver for many coastal communities in the eastern Panhandle and the Big Bend. As a result, modifications to season dates may have potential economic impacts for local communities as well as the local scallop population. In some communities, the greatest economic impact from scalloping occurs towards the beginning of the season, while other communities rely more heavily on scallop-related economic impacts later in the season as the summer tourism season wanes.

Because scallops are a short-lived species and continue to grow throughout the year, scallops tend to be smaller early in the season. This means that a daily bag limit of scallops (e.g., 2 gallons of whole scallops in the shell) in the beginning of the season contains more scallops than a daily bag limit later in the season when scallops are larger.

The summer months tend to be popular with families because children are out of school (generally prior to mid-August). This leads to a greater economic stimulus earlier in the season for some communities, but can also translate to greater fishing pressure at a time when scallops are smaller, resulting in higher harvest rates per person.

Although recreational scallop bag limits have been based on a total volume of scallops since a bag limit was first implemented, a count-based bag limit was implemented at stakeholder requests in 2016 for St. Joseph Bay. This created an opportunity to evaluate the benefits and challenges associated with a count-based bag limit. As a result of the count-based limit for St. Joseph Bay in 2016, FWC Law Enforcement officers found that it took much longer to determine compliance with the bag and vessel limits, especially when the scallops were already shucked, than it took to measure the traditional volume-based limits. Additionally, harvesters provided feedback regarding longer vessel stops that resulted in less time available to fish or recreate.

Scallop Management Feedback



Bag and vessel limits

- Gulf County: mixed opinions about short-term bag limit changes
- Elsewhere: Community leaders generally opposed to long-term changes to limits

Remaining feedback focused on changes to the season structure

Strongly prefer season changes

- Gulf:** Prefer a July 25th start
- Taylor/Dixie:** Prefer a mid-June start

Some interest in season changes

- Franklin:** Willing to consider a 1-2 week delay in start date
- Wakulla:** Prefer a consistent July 1 start date
- Citrus/Levy:** Consider delaying season until after July 4, after the 2017 season
- Hernando:** Requested season start date in mid-June
- Pasco:** Trial season starting 2018 or 2019



This slide summarizes the feedback from community leaders in each county where meetings were held. Feedback received from community leaders varied by location and by management topic.

With respect to changes to bag and vessel limits, community leaders from Gulf County expressed mixed opinions about whether to continue short-term bag limit changes. In other areas, community leaders generally opposed any long-term changes to bag or vessel limits.

The remaining feedback staff received focused on potential changes to season dates. Community leaders from Gulf, Taylor, and Dixie counties strongly supported season changes. Gulf County leaders preferred to delay the start of the season until July 25 each year, and for the season to run at least through Labor Day or through the end of the existing statewide season. Taylor and Dixie county leaders requested to shift the season 2 weeks earlier, starting in mid-June, and running at least through Labor Day or to Sept. 10. In addition, the Taylor County Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution in Jan. 2017 in support of the requested season changes for that county.

Community leaders from the remaining counties also expressed some interest in season changes, but were also okay with existing season dates in order to allow the scallops to grow larger before harvest. In Franklin County, community leaders were willing to consider a 1-2 week delay in the start date. In Wakulla County, leaders preferred a consistent July 1 start date. In Citrus and Levy counties, leaders asked staff to consider delaying the start of the season until after the July 4 holiday for safety reasons, but not for 2017 to avoid impacts to reservations that have already been made for the upcoming season. Hernando County leaders requested an earlier start date in mid-June. Pasco County community leaders requested to extend the allowable harvest area to include Pasco County, but requested to delay a trial season until 2018 or 2019 to allow the county time to make improvements to boating access infrastructure.

Proposed Management Actions



Implement regionally-specific regulations on a trial basis for 2017

- Region-specific season dates
- No changes to bag/vessel limit – consistent statewide

Gulf County: *Delay season start; shorten season by 38 days*

- **Proposed 2017 season:** July 25 through Sept. 10

Taylor and Dixie counties: *Shift season 2 weeks earlier*

- All waters from the Fenholloway River to the Suwannee River
- **Proposed 2017 season:** June 16 through Sept. 10

Remaining portion of open harvest area

- No changes for 2017, but consider moving toward an annual July 1 opening

Pasco County

- No changes for 2017, but consider a trial opening in 2018 or 2019



Based on feedback received from community leaders, staff are proposing to implement regionally-specific regulations for the bay scallop fishery on a trial basis for the 2017 season only, with region-specific season dates. Staff are not proposing changes to existing bag or vessel limits – which would be consistent statewide. Staff propose the following management actions:

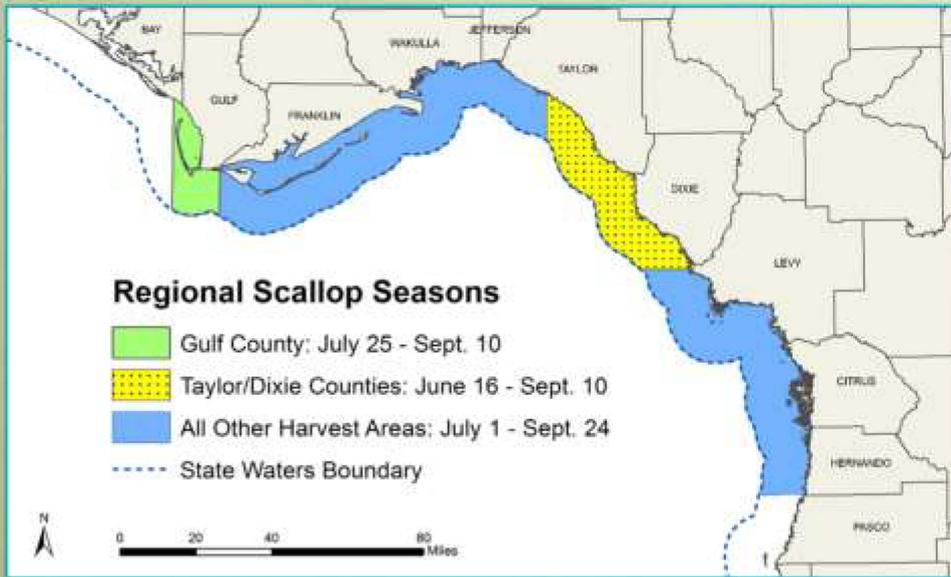
For Gulf County including St. Joseph Bay, staff propose delaying the start of the 2017 season to July 25 and ending on Sept. 10, 2017. This would shorten the season by 38 days (resulting in a 47-day season), and would reduce harvest pressure on the recovering scallop population in that region. This region would include all waters included in last season's modified regulations: from the western tip of St. Vincent Island to the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County.

For a portion of Taylor County and Dixie County, including Dekle Beach, Keaton Beach, and the entire Steinhatchee area, staff propose to shift the season 2 weeks earlier, beginning on June 16, 2017, and ending on Sept. 10, 2017. This region would include all waters from the Fenholloway River in Taylor County south to the Suwannee River.

For the remaining portion of the open harvest area, staff propose that no management changes be made for the 2017 season, but to consider moving toward a July 1 start date for future seasons. The season for these areas would remain July 1 – September 24, 2017

For Pasco County, staff propose that no management changes be made for 2017, but staff would return to the Commission with consideration of a trial opening in 2018 or 2019.

Proposed 2017 Season Structure



This map shows the proposed structure for implementing regionally-specific bay scallop regulations on a trial basis for the 2017 season.

Staff Recommendation

Implement regionally-specific management changes for the bay scallop fishery on a trial basis for the 2017 season



Gulf County (including St. Joseph Bay)

- Modify the 2017 bay scallop harvest season for all waters west of St. Vincent Island to the Mexico Beach Canal to July 25 – Sept. 10

Taylor and Dixie counties

- Modify the 2017 bay scallop harvest season for all waters from the Fenholloway River south to and including the Suwannee River to June 16 – Sept. 10

Staff also recommend continuing scallop restoration efforts within St. Joseph Bay during 2017 and implementing a temporary No-Entry Area to protect caged scallops

If approved and directed, the 2017 season changes and a St. Joseph Bay No-Entry Area would be implemented via Executive Order and staff would return in December with a review of public feedback and a recommendation for future management



Photo courtesy: Tyler James, UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant

Staff recommend implementing regionally-specific management changes for the bay scallop fishery on a trial basis for the 2017 season.

Specifically, staff recommend:

- Modifying the 2017 bay scallop season for Gulf County (all waters west of St. Vincent Island to the Mexico Beach Canal, including St. Joseph Bay) to July 25, 2017, through September 10, 2017.
- Modifying the 2017 bay scallop season for a portion of Taylor County and Dixie County (all waters from the Fenholloway River in Taylor County south to the Suwannee River, including Steinhatchee and Keaton Beach) to June 16, 2017, through September 10, 2017.

Staff also recommend continuing scallop restoration efforts within St. Joseph Bay during 2017 and implementing a temporary No-Entry Area to protect scallop restoration cages via Executive Order once restoration begins.

If approved and directed, the 2017 season changes would be implemented via Executive Order, and staff would return in December with a review of public feedback and a recommendation for future management of the bay scallop fishery, including possible consideration of an open season for Pasco County in 2018.

The following slides are considered
backup material and are not anticipated
to be part of the presentation



General Bay Scallop Biology

- In Florida, life span estimated to be approximately 1 year
- Reach a maximum size of about 3.5 inches
- Several populations in Florida between West Palm Beach and Pensacola
- Most spawning occurs between September and January
 - Release eggs and sperm into the water column
 - Larvae spend two weeks as plankton before attaching to seagrass
- Sensitive to environmental changes
 - Salinity and water quality
 - Changes in habitat



Florida bay scallops live for approximately one year and reach a maximum size of about 3.5 inches.

There are several bay scallop populations in Florida, ranging from the Florida Keys to Pensacola, with occasional occurrences on the Atlantic coast as far north as West Palm Beach. However, they are most abundant in the Big Bend and Panhandle, north and west of the Suwanee River.

Bay scallops have the remarkable ability to develop both female and male organs. Although each scallop produces both eggs and sperm, they are not produced at the same time, which reduces the likelihood of self-fertilization. Peak spawning occurs from September through January, with the vast majority of scallops spawning after the recreational harvest season closes. Scallops are broadcast spawners, meaning they release their eggs and sperm into the surrounding water where fertilization occurs. Because scallop eggs are fertilized externally, adults need to be in close proximity in order to maximize reproductive success. If there are no other scallops nearby, reproduction may fail.

Bay scallops are very sensitive to environmental changes, and prolonged or extreme changes in water quality (salinity and clarity) can reduce scallop densities. Scallops need clear, salty water to survive. Too much rain or runoff drops salinities below their optimal level and clouds the water with sediments, clogging their gills and suffocating the animal.

Scallop Management History

Recreational season

- Season dates have fluctuated since first implemented in 1985
- Generally July 1 through late August or early September
- Modified each year between 2010 and 2014 to open earlier and/or end in late September
 - Earliest open date: June 19
- Current season established in late 2014

Commercial harvest

- Commercial harvest prohibited in 1994



Photo courtesy: Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant



Recreational harvest season dates have fluctuated since a season was first implemented in 1985. Generally, between 1985 and 2009, the season consistently opened on July 1 and typically closed in late August or early September. In 2010, the season was opened on June 19 (12 days early) via Executive Order to relieve potential economic impacts from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In 2011, the season was again modified by Executive Order to open early (on June 25) and end later (on Sept. 25), also in response to economic impacts from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. In 2012, after the scallop fishery had sustained 2 years of extended harvest, the bay scallop rule was amended to close the season each year on Sept. 24. Executive orders were again issued in 2013 and 2014 opening the season the Saturday before July 1 to give communities and harvesters the benefits of a Saturday start to the season. The bay scallop rule was amended again in late 2014 to adopt the current season structure: opening the Saturday before July 1 (or on July 1 if it falls on a Saturday) and closing on Sept. 24.

All commercial harvest and sale of bay scallops has been prohibited since 1994.

Scallop Management History

Allowable harvest area

- Prior to 1994: Statewide
- 1994 – 2001: North of the Suwannee River to the Alabama state line
- 2002 – Present: From the Pasco-Hernando county line through the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County

Bag limits

- 1985 – 1994: 5 gal. whole scallops or $\frac{1}{2}$ gal. meat
- 1995 – Present: 2 gal. whole scallops, or 1 pint meat; vessel limit 10 gal. or $\frac{1}{2}$ gal. meat



Prior to 1994, the harvest of bay scallops was allowed throughout the state. In 1994, harvest was restricted to waters north of the Suwannee River to the Alabama state line. In 2002, the allowable harvest area was modified to extend from the Pasco-Hernando county line through the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in eastern Bay County.

A statewide daily bag limit for bay scallops was first established in 1985, and allowed the harvest of up to 5 gallons of whole scallops in the shell or $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon of scallop meat (shucked) per person. The current daily bag and vessel limits became effective in 1995, which allows the harvest of up to 2 gallons of whole scallops in the shell or 1 pint of scallop meat per person, with a max of 10 gallons of whole scallops or $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon of scallop meat per vessel.

FWRI Bay Scallop Monitoring Program

- Program initiated in 1992
- Monthly juvenile recruitment monitoring
- Annual adult abundance surveys
- Additional research efforts launched in 2016
 - Better estimate of scallop abundance
 - Estimate of fishing effort
 - Genetic research



FWRI's bay scallop research program was initiated in 1992. The program consists of two different types of monitoring: juvenile recruitment monitoring and adult abundance surveys. Recruitment monitoring occurs year-round, with specially designed collectors deployed each month in various locations across Gulf coastal waters.

Adult abundance surveys are conducted annually. These transect surveys are conducted in early June, prior to the harvest season. Using the results of these adult surveys, FWRI can determine the health of a local population and compare the population status among sampling locations and over time.

The results of the previous year's monitoring program are released each spring in the Florida Bay Scallop Annual Report. The annual report for the 2016 season will be released in the coming months.

Management Feedback by County

Gulf County

- Prefer season to open on July 25 and end after Labor Day, or align with end of current statewide season
- Welcome regional management if needed to achieve this season structure long-term
- Mixed opinions about the bag limit
 - Some opposition to continuing the count-based limits
 - Some desire to increase limits relative to 2016
 - Would support reducing the vessel limit if necessary



To gather feedback and suggestions for potential scallop management changes across the eastern Panhandle and Big Bend regions, staff held a series of informal meetings with community leaders in Gulf through Pasco counties. These meetings focused on long-term management of the scallop fishery, how social and economic factors are impacted by scallop management, and any scallop-related issues that are important to local communities.

As part of this process, staff met with community leaders from Gulf County to gather feedback on long-term scallop management. At this meeting, community leaders expressed a strong preference to delay the start of the recreational season in their area until July 25, and to close the season after Labor Day or at the end of the existing statewide season. Because the scallop fishery in Gulf County is primarily contained within St. Joseph Bay, community leaders stated that they would welcome regional management with regulations specific to their region if needed to achieve this season structure.

Feedback regarding potential modifications to bag limits was mixed. Some attendees expressed opposition to continuing a count-based bag limit (as was implemented for the 2016 season), while others expressed a desire to see an increase in the bag limit beyond what was temporarily implemented for the shortened 2016 season. A potential reduction in the vessel limit was supported, but only if necessary based on local scallop population levels.

Management Feedback by County

Franklin and Wakulla counties

- Current season dates okay
 - Franklin representative would support a 1-2 week delay to start
 - Wakulla representative preferred consistent July 1 season opening
 - No changes to bag limits

Taylor and Dixie counties

- Requested to open season in mid-June and close on Sept. 10
- Taylor County BOCC passed a resolution in support of season modifications
- No changes to bag limits; adjust vessel limit, but only if necessary



Community leaders from Franklin and Wakulla counties indicated that they are okay with the current structure of the scallop season; however, a representative from Franklin County stated that they would support a 1 to 2 week delay to the start of the season, and a representative from Wakulla County expressed that they would prefer a consistent July 1 start date each year. No changes to bag or vessel limits were recommended.

Community leaders from Taylor and Dixie counties requested to shift the season 2 weeks earlier to start in mid-June and run at least through Labor Day or to Sept. 10. In addition, the Taylor County Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution in Jan. 2017 in support of these requested season changes. No changes to bag were requested; however, there was some support for adjusting the vessel limit if necessary based on local scallop population levels.

Management Feedback by County

Citrus County

- Consider delaying season until after July 4 for safety reasons, but also okay with current season dates
- Don't delay 2017 season
- No changes to bag limits
- Expressed concern about disposal of shells in the water in certain areas and at boat ramps

Levy County

- Not much of a scallop fishery, but receive some overflow traffic from Citrus County
- No changes requested



Photo: Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant



Community leaders from Citrus County asked staff to consider delaying the start of the season until after the July 4 holiday for safety reasons related to holiday boat traffic, but indicated that they were also okay with current season dates. They requested that if staff were to recommend delaying the start of the season, not to delay the 2017 season because of potential impacts to hotel and charter reservations that had already been made. No changes to bag or vessel limits were recommended. Some community leaders expressed concern about the disposal of scallop shells in the water in certain areas and at boat ramps.

Although there is not much of a scallop fishery in Levy County, the southern portion of the county does receive some overflow traffic from Citrus County when scalloping activity is at its peak. No changes were requested for Levy County.

Management Feedback by County

Hernando County

- Would like season to open early in mid-June, but also okay with existing season dates
- No changes to bag limits

Pasco County (currently closed to scalloping)

- Requested to expand harvest area to include Pasco County
- County is working on improvements to boating access infrastructure
- Would like a trial season starting in 2018 or 2019



Community leaders from Hernando County stated that they would like an earlier start date in mid-June, but indicated that they were also okay with the existing season dates.

In Pasco County, which is currently closed to scalloping, community leaders requested to expand the allowable scallop harvest area to the south to include Pasco County, but requested to delay any trial season until 2018 or 2019 to allow the County time to make improvements to boating access infrastructure.

Staff also offered to host a meeting with community leaders in Jefferson County. But county officials declined the offer based on the fact that the very limited Jefferson County coastline is rural and undeveloped. Therefore the County does not have an economic interest in potential changes to scallop management.

Considerations: Season Modifications

Open season earlier

- Possible economic benefits of earlier/longer season
- Scallops will be smaller early in the season: higher harvest rates and dead discard potential

Open season later

- Delay financial benefits until the summer tourist season wanes
- Scallops will be larger at beginning of season
- Could reduce dead discard of smaller scallops

End season earlier

- Could reduce harvest of mature scallops
- Less economic impact than beginning of season



The next few slides include considerations that have been identified with respect to potential management options.

Modifications to season dates may have potential local economic impacts as well as impacts to the local scallop population. Some communities see the greatest economic benefit from scalloping during the early portion of the season. In these communities, opening the scallop season early may have the potential to bolster local economies. However, because scallops continue to grow throughout the year, scallops tend to be smaller early in the season. This means that a daily bag limit of scallops (e.g., 2 gallons of whole scallops in the shell) at the beginning of the season will contain considerably more scallops than a daily bag limit later in the season when scallops are larger, which translates to higher harvest rates early in the season. In addition, community members have told staff that some smaller scallops harvested early in the season are discarded without being used due to inexperienced scallopers not realizing the amount of work required for the small amount of meat obtained.

Opening the season later can benefit communities where non-scallop related tourism is strong during the earlier months of summer. Delaying scallop season until the summer tourist season begins to wane can provide the most benefit to these communities by extending the local tourism season. Delaying the season will also typically result in larger scallops when the season opens, which may help reduce the dead discard of small scallops.

Because the majority of scallops typically spawn after the harvest season closes, ending the season earlier could potentially reduce harvest of mature scallops. In addition, community members have indicated that scalloping effort begins to decline in early to mid-August when children go back to school. Ending the season earlier when effort declines may have less economic impact than modifications made to the beginning of the season for some communities.

Considerations: Extending Harvest Area to Pasco County

- No scalloping in Pasco County since 1994
- Potential local economic benefits
- Need to review biological data to determine how much harvest the area can support
- Need to determine the regulatory structure:
 - Modified season or limits initially?
 - Experimental/adaptive regulatory approach?
 - Additional outreach and enforcement challenges associated with any regional regulations
- Need to delay implementation to 2018 or 2019 to allow time for updates to boating infrastructure

