

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 8, 2017
Subject: Bay Scallops – Draft Rule (Version 2)

Purpose:

Staff will present feedback received from communities on future bay scallop management and proposed regional management changes for the 2017 bay scallop season. Staff will also present an update on St. Joseph Bay restoration efforts.

Summary:

The Commission directed staff to consider potential long-term changes to scallop management. Staff held a series of informal meetings with community leaders in affected counties to gather suggestions on options for scallop management, focusing on issues that are important to communities. The feedback focused primarily on potential changes to season dates.

Staff propose implementing regional changes during the 2017 bay scallop season as a trial. If modifications to the 2017 season are approved, staff will reconnect with the counties and public after the season to gather feedback on how the season changes were received and to discuss management for future seasons. Implementing these regional changes following the February Commission meeting via an Executive Order (EO) will provide communities with additional time for tourism season planning.

Proposed changes include the following regional seasons:

- Gulf County (including St. Joseph Bay) – Delay season start until late July and close the season two weeks early in order to shorten season by 38 days. Season: July 25 through September 10
- All of Dixie County along with Taylor County from the Fenholloway River to the Dixie County line – Shift season two weeks earlier. Season: June 16 – September 10
- Remaining portion of harvest area – No change recommended for 2017 season. Season: July 1 – September 24

Staff will also update the Commission on the progress of Pasco County's request for the Commission to consider opening their county to scalloping in the future.

An update on 2016 St. Joseph Bay restoration efforts will also be presented along with an update of the current status of scallops in the Bay, pending additional FWRI data collection.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend implementing the proposed regional season changes to the 2017 bay scallop season through Executive Order. Staff also recommend conducting further restoration efforts in St. Joseph Bay by collecting local scallops and caging them in a No-Entry Area within the Bay

prior to the start of the harvest season as was done last year to enhance spawning success in the Bay.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management