

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: April 26, 2018
Subject: Tripletail and Sheepshead – Final Public Hearing

Purpose:

Obtain final approval for a series of rules regarding statewide management changes for tripletail and sheepshead to promote the continued sustainability of these fisheries and address concerns expressed by stakeholders.

Summary:

At the February 2018 Commission meeting, Commissioners approved a series of draft rules for tripletail and sheepshead. Staff now is seeking final approval to these rule changes with a small change to the previously approved recreational bag limit for sheepshead.

Tripletail – In November 2016, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, in coordination with FWC and the other Gulf states, finalized a “Biological Profile for the Tripletail Fishery in the Gulf of Mexico and the Western Central Atlantic.” This publication documented the increasing popularity of the tripletail fishery and the fact that Florida’s minimum size limit for this species is well below the size at maturity. In response to stakeholder requests for proactive management of this fishery, staff recommends increasing the minimum size limit for tripletail to more closely align with the size at maturity as well as extending FWC’s current and proposed tripletail regulations into federal waters.

Sheepshead – In early 2017, FWRI completed an updated stock assessment for sheepshead. Although the assessment indicates that neither the Atlantic or Gulf sheepshead stocks are overfished or experiencing overfishing, stakeholders have expressed concern that the current 15-fish bag limit coupled with the practice of targeting sheepshead during pre-spawn aggregations may be unsustainable. In 2012, the South Atlantic Council removed sheepshead from their management under the expectation that FWC would take over management in federal waters. Taking all of this into account staff proposes implementing more conservative recreational regulations to ensure the continued sustainability of the sheepshead fishery but modifying the previously proposed bag limit from 5 to 10. These rule changes will also extend FWC’s current and proposed sheepshead regulations into federal waters.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approving the following proposed final rules:

Tripletail (68B-49, Florida Administrative Code (FAC))

- Increasing the recreational and commercial minimum size limit from 15 to 18 inches, based on the size at maturity
- Extending FWC’s current and proposed tripletail regulations into federal waters
 - 18-inch minimum size limit (*proposed*), hook-and-line only, two-fish recreational bag limit, 10-fish commercial bag and vessel limits, and two-fish commercial bycatch limit

Sheepshead (68B-59, FAC)

- Reducing the recreational bag limit from 15 to 10 fish per person per day
 - Change from previously approved draft rule of 5 fish per person per day

- Implementing a spawning-season vessel limit of 50 sheepshead per day for recreational harvesters during the peak spawning months of March and April
- Extending FWC's current and proposed sheepshead regulations into federal waters
 - 12-inch minimum size limit, allowable harvest gear (seines, cast net, hook and line, spear/gig), 10-fish recreational bag limit (*proposed*), 50-fish recreational vessel limit in March – April (*proposed*), and 50-pound commercial bycatch limit

If approved, staff will advertise changes to the proposed rules via a Notice of Change. Staff recommends making the rules effective July 1, 2018.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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