

Bay Scallops



Final Public Hearing
February 8, 2018



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 3

This presentation summarizes proposed management changes for the 2018 recreational bay scallop season to be made by Executive Order for all state waters open to scallop harvest. The proposed management actions and presentation have been updated in response to public feedback received since the December 2017 draft rule hearing.

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Unless otherwise noted, images throughout the presentation are by FWC.

Timeline

- **Fall 2015:** Red tide negatively impacted scallops in St. Joseph Bay
- **June 2016:** Commission modified regulations for 2016 St. Joseph Bay scallop season and directed staff to review statewide scallop management
- **Nov. 2016:** Pasco County requested FWC consider season opening
- **Dec. 2016 – Jan. 2017:** Staff held a series of informal meetings with community leaders to gather feedback on scallop management
- **Feb. 2017:** Commission approved regionally-specific changes to 2017 season
- **Oct. 2017:** Public workshops held to gather feedback
- **Dec. 2017:** Commission approved proposed draft rules for most of the harvest area and proposed 2018-only management changes for Gulf and Pasco counties
- **Today:** Discussion of feedback received since December and proposal to modify seasons for 2018 and 2019



In the fall of 2015, a prolonged red tide event occurred off Gulf County and the western Panhandle. This red tide event was more intense and prolonged than this area typically experiences. Unfortunately, this event also coincided with the peak spawning season and juvenile settlement period for bay scallops. Monitoring data collected by FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) indicated that this event negatively impacted both adult scallops and newly settled juveniles in St. Joseph Bay, prompting 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 area open to harvest.

At the June 2016 Commission meeting, Commissioners directed staff to modify 2016 scallop regulations for St. Joseph Bay and review management of the scallop fishery statewide.

At the November 2016 FWC Commission meeting, a Pasco County Commissioner requested FWC consider extending the open harvest area to include Pasco County.

During December 2016 and January 2017, staff held a series of meetings with community leaders from the eastern Panhandle and Big Bend to gather feedback on scallop management. Based on that feedback, the Commission approved regionally-specific changes to season dates on a trial basis for the 2017 season, at the February 2017 meeting.

In October 2017, staff held a series of public workshops throughout the open harvest area and Pasco County to gather stakeholder feedback on the 2017 regionally-specific season structure and stakeholder desires for long-term management of the scallop fishery.

At the December 2017 Commission meeting, Commissioners approved proposed draft rules to create regionally-specific season dates for most of the allowable harvest area and approved draft short-term management changes for the 2018 season in Gulf and Pasco counties.

Today, staff is discussing the feedback received since the draft rule hearing in December, and proposing modifications to staff's previous recommendation that could be implemented for the 2018 and 2019 bay scallop seasons.

Scallop Management

- Allowable harvest zone: Mexico Beach Canal through Hernando – Pasco county line
 - Recreational harvest only
- Season: Saturday before July 1 (or July 1 when it falls on Saturday) through Sept. 24
 - Regionally-specific season dates implemented as a trial in 2017
- Daily bag limit:
 - 2 gallons whole scallops in shell, or
 - 1 pint scallop meat (shucked)
- Daily vessel limit:
 - 10 gallons whole scallops in shell, or
 - ½ gallon scallop meat (shucked)



Prior to 1994, the commercial and recreational harvest of bay scallops was allowed throughout the state. In 1994, management changes were implemented to make the fishery recreational harvest only and to prohibit all harvest in portions of the state in response to fishery declines and concerns that the scallop population could not sustain the high fishing pressure the fishery was exerting. The allowable harvest zone was subsequently modified in 2002 due to further declines in the western panhandle and increasing densities in the Crystal River and Homosassa areas. 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, with only recreational harvest allowed.

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, maximizing recreational harvest opportunities. Because the season is set to open on a Saturday, the opening date changes each year. For example, in 2015, the season opened on June 27. In 2016, the season opened on June 25. The season was scheduled to open on July 1 in 2017, which would have resulted in a season that would have been a week shorter than the year before. However, instead of maintaining the current season structure, which applies throughout the allowable harvest zone, the Commission implemented a regionally-specific season structure on a trial basis in 2017.

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

2017 Staggered Scallop Seasons



Prior to the 2017 bay scallop season, the Commission approved the following regionally-specific scallop season dates on a trial basis for the 2017 season:

Gulf County, including St. Joseph Bay: Included all state waters from the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County through the western-most point of St. Vincent Island in Franklin County. The season in this area was scheduled to begin July 25 and end Sept. 10. However, the season was delayed because of an algae bloom and was ultimately held from Sept. 23 through Oct. 8, 2017.

Fenholloway River to Suwannee River, including a portion of Taylor County and all of Dixie County. (This includes the communities of Dekle Beach, Keaton Beach and Steinhatchee): Included all state waters south and east of Rock Island, near the mouth of the Fenholloway River in Taylor County and north of the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon 4 in Levy County. The 2017 season for this area was June 16 through Sept. 10.

All other areas open to the harvest of bay scallops (including Cedar Key and Crystal River): Included 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 and from the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon 4 in Levy County to the Hernando-Pasco county line. The 2017 open season for these parts of the state was July 1 through Sept. 24.

Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback

- Community leader meetings and public workshops held in 2016 and 2017 to gather feedback on public's long-term management desires for the fishery
 - Input received was used to develop the original proposal
 - Original proposal presented at the December Commission meeting
- Staff solicited and received additional feedback
- **Today:** staff is modifying the recommendation in order to
 - Better meet the short-term needs of the fishery
 - Develop a better understanding of the public's long-term desires



Stakeholder feedback about current and future management of the bay scallop fishery has been critical to staff's development of potential changes to scallop season.

Before and immediately after the 2017 bay scallop season, staff held informal community leader meetings as well as public workshops to gather feedback on long-term management desires for the scallop fishery. This input was used to develop the original proposal that staff presented for Commission consideration and discussion at the December 2017 Commission meeting.

Following the December Commission meeting, staff solicited additional public input via a request for feedback in an FWC press release about the proposed changes and an email to all recreational saltwater fishing license holders. Following these requests for additional feedback, staff received considerable additional input. Based on this new and additional feedback, staff is modifying the recommendations in order to better meet the needs of the fishery as described by stakeholders, and to allow staff to develop a better understanding of the public's long-term desires for this fishery.

The following slides describe the original proposal, recent public feedback, and staff's recommendations for moving forward within each region.

Previously Proposed Short-term Actions

Modify bay scallop regulations in Pasco and Gulf counties by Executive Order for the 2018 season only

St. Joseph Bay and Gulf County: Set scallop season by Executive Order for the upcoming season while the population continues to recover

- *Original proposal for 2018 season: Aug. 17 – Sept. 30, 2018*

Pasco County: Establish 10-day trial season for 2018 only

- *Original proposal for 2018 season: July 20-29, 2018*

Public Feedback: Proposal continues to be broadly supported

Recommended Action: *Proceed with original proposal for 2018 season as discussed in December*



At the draft rule hearing in December, staff proposed short-term modifications to bay scallop regulations for Gulf and Pasco counties to be implemented via Executive Orders for the 2018 season only. Short-term modifications allow the Commission the flexibility to re-evaluate any potential changes needed for 2019 and subsequent seasons. The following short-term management actions were approved for final public hearing at the draft rule hearing:

For St. Joseph Bay and Gulf County, the Commission approved proceeding to final public hearing to set a 45-day season in 2018 to allow for ample harvest opportunities while still allowing the local scallop population to continue to recover. The proposed 2018 season would begin Aug. 17 and end Sept. 30, 2018.

For Pasco County, the Commission approved proceeding to final public hearing to establish a 10-day trial season for 2018 only. The season would begin July 20 and end July 29, 2018, and include waters north of the Pasco – Pinellas County line and all waters of the Anclote River. Staff propose applying the existing statewide bag and vessel limits during this trial season.

Staff's previous recommendations for Gulf and Pasco counties continue to be widely supported. Therefore, staff recommend the Commission proceed as planned by implementing the previously proposed 2018 seasons in Gulf and Pasco counties.

Previously Proposed Long-term Actions

Franklin County through northwestern Taylor County

- *Original proposal:* July 1 through Sept. 24 each year
- **Public Feedback:** Limited feedback from the region



The remaining portion of Taylor County through Dixie County

- *Original proposal:* the 3rd Saturday in June through Sept. 10 each year
- **Public Feedback:** Conflicting feedback regarding tradeoffs between economic benefit of opening early and negative impacts of an early opening on scallop populations



Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties

- *Original proposal:* July 10 through Sept. 10 each year
- **Public Feedback:**
 - Consistent feedback that sufficient notice has not been provided prior to delaying the start of the 2018 season
 - Conflicting feedback related to delaying the season until after July 4th long-term



Based on public feedback received prior to the December 2017 Commission meeting, staff proposed implementation, via long-term rule changes, of a series of regionally-specific season dates for the bay scallop fishery. Since the draft rule hearing, staff has received additional feedback regarding those potential rule changes. Previously proposed long-term actions and feedback received, to date, are as follows:

For Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, and northwestern Taylor County, staff previously proposed a season that would begin on July 1 and end on Sept. 24 each year, which is similar to current rule, but with a consistent start date. Staff continues to receive limited feedback about long-term management desires from this region.

For the remaining portion of Taylor County and all of Dixie County, including Dekle Beach, Keaton Beach, and the entire Steinhatchee area, staff previously proposed shifting the season earlier, beginning on the third Saturday in June each year, and ending on Sept. 10. This proposed season was similar to the 2017 trial season. To date, staff has received conflicting feedback regarding the tradeoffs between the economic benefits of opening the season earlier in June and concerns for scallop populations. Stakeholders who support the proposed season view it as an opportunity to maximize tourism-related income to the region and participation in the fishery. Whereas, those who oppose opening earlier are concerned that scallops early in the season are too small, and opening harvest this time of the year may result in too many scallops being harvested per bag limit or increases in the number of dead discards.

For Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties, including Cedar Key and the Crystal River/Homosassa area, staff previously proposed starting the season after the Independence Day holiday, beginning July 10 and ending on Sept. 10 each year. To date, staff has received consistent feedback that sufficient notice has not been provided prior delaying the start for the 2018 season. Visitors to this area make reservations a year in advance, and delaying the season without sufficient notice would likely result in the loss of reservation deposits and the inability to reschedule. Staff also have received conflicting feedback related to delaying the season until after the holiday on a long-term basis. Stakeholders supportive of the delay are concerned about congestion and safety on the water and believe the Independence Day holiday will continue to draw tourism without scallop season being open. Those opposed are concerned about negative economic impacts and the importance of scalloping opportunities during the July 4th holiday. Many families combine the holiday with scalloping for family vacations.

Updated Proposal for 2018/2019 Season

- Maintain original proposal for Gulf and Pasco counties in 2018
 - Include the Anclote River in the Pasco County allowable harvest area and set the boundary at the Anclote Key Lighthouse
 - Return in late 2018/early 2019 to address the 2019 season
- **CHANGE** Implement regionally-specific season structure in 2018 via Executive Order and continue in 2019, pending no unforeseen changes in fishery
 - **Franklin County through northwestern Taylor County:** July 1 through Sept. 24
 - **Remaining portion of Taylor County through Dixie County:** 3rd Saturday in June (June 16, 2018) through Sept. 10
 - **Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties:** July 1 through Sept. 24
- **CHANGE** Continue to gather feedback and weigh the benefits of the regional season structure



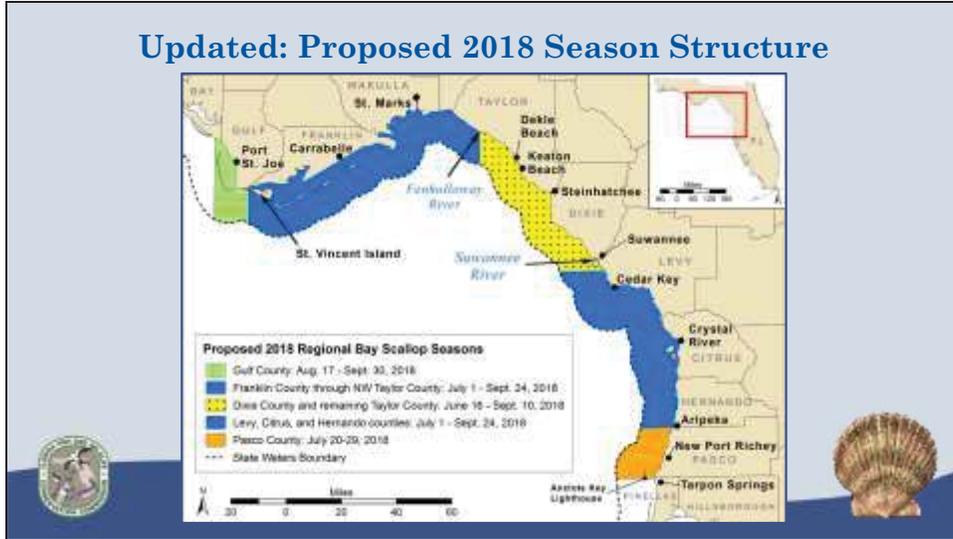
Staff suggests the proposal discussed in December be modified to meet the fisheries needs in the short-term and give staff time to finalize a long-term solution that meets the needs and desires of the communities, fishery participants and the scallop populations.

As stated earlier in the presentation, staff suggest maintaining the previously recommended action for Gulf and Pasco counties in 2018, while also including all waters of the Anclote River in the Pasco County allowable harvest area and setting the southern boundary of that region at the Anclote Key Lighthouse. Staff also suggest updating scallop recommendations for the rest of the regions for the 2018 and 2019 bay scallop season. This includes implementing a regionally-specific season structure, with season dates similar to those of 2017, in 2018 via Executive Order; and continuing this structure into 2019 pending no unforeseen changes in the fishery that need to be addressed.

No changes are being recommended from the previously proposed season structure for Franklin through Dixie counties but they would apply to 2018 and 2019 only. Staff do recommend changing the previously proposed season for Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties to be July 1 through Sept. 24 for 2018 and 2019, in order to address public concerns about existing travel and fishing plans as well as economic concerns about lost business during the Independence Day holiday.

Staff also proposes continuing to gather public input on potential changes to the scallop season long-term. As part of this effort, staff would like to gather additional feedback on the benefits of providing regionally-specific scallop season compared to the potential confusion and complexity that could be avoided with a consistent season across the entire open area.

Updated: Proposed 2018 Season Structure



To review, the new proposed regionally-specific season structure would be:

Gulf County, including St. Joseph Bay: Aug. 17 through Sept. 30, 2018

- Includes all state waters from the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County through the western-most point of St. Vincent Island in Franklin County.

Franklin County through northwestern Taylor County: July 1 through Sept. 24, 2018

- Includes all state waters from the westernmost point of St. Vincent Island in Franklin County to north and west of Rock Island near the mouth of the Fenholloway River in Taylor County.

The remaining portion of Taylor County through all of Dixie County, including the communities of Dekle Beach, Keaton Beach and Steinhatchee: 3rd Saturday in June (June 16) through Sept. 10, 2018

- Includes all state waters east of Rock Island, near the mouth of the Fenholloway River in Taylor County and north of the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon 4 in Levy County.

Levy, Citrus, Hernando counties: July 1 through Sept. 24, 2018

- Includes all state waters south of the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon 4 in Levy County to the Hernando – Pasco county line.

Pasco County (and the Anclote River): July 20 through July 29, 2018

- Includes all state waters south of the Hernando – Pasco county line and north of the Anclote Key Lighthouse, and all waters of the Anclote River.

Staff Recommendation

Establish all 2018 bay scallop seasons by Executive Order

- St. Joseph Bay and Gulf County: Aug. 17 – Sept. 30, 2018
- Franklin County through northwestern Taylor County: July 1 – Sept. 24, 2018
- The remaining portion of Taylor County through Dixie County: June 16 – Sept. 10, 2018
- Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties: July 1 – Sept. 24, 2018
- Pasco County (and the Anclote River): July 20–29, 2018

Direct staff to return in late 2018 or early 2019

- Establish 2019 season for Gulf and Pasco counties
- Continue 2018 season structure into 2019 for remaining portion of open harvest area
- Address long-term management actions to be implemented beginning 2020

If approved and directed, staff would file the necessary Notice of Withdrawal relative to the previously proposed draft rules and continue to gather public input on potential long-term changes



Staff recommend establishing the 2018 bay scallop season for all state waters open to harvest by Executive Order as follows:

- St. Joseph Bay and Gulf County: Aug. 17 – Sept. 30, 2018
- Franklin County through northwestern Taylor County: July 1 – Sept. 24, 2018
- The remaining portion of Taylor County through Dixie County: June 16 – Sept. 10, 2018
- Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties: July 1 – Sept. 24, 2018
- Pasco County (and Anclote River): July 20–29, 2018

Staff also recommend the Commission direct staff to return in late 2018 or early 2019 to establish a 2019 season for Gulf and Pasco counties; to continue the 2018 season structure into 2019 for the remaining portion of the open harvest area, pending no unforeseen changes occur in the fishery; and to address long-term management actions to be implemented beginning in 2020. Establishing the 2020 regulations in early 2019 will allow sufficient notice to participants.

If approved and directed, staff would file the necessary Notice of Withdrawal relative to the previously proposed draft rules and continue gathering public input on potential long-term regulatory changes.

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



Pasco County Proposed Boundaries



Stakeholder Feedback Prior to December

Staff held community leader meetings and public workshops to gather feedback on long-term management desires for the scallop fishery

- **Bag and vessel limits:** stakeholders generally opposed to changes to bag or vessel limits
- **Seasons:** broad support for regionally-specific season structure
 - **Early summer opening:** mixed feedback for opening seasons in June and early July due to scallops being small
 - **Late September season dates:** outside of Gulf County, participants felt there was little benefit to keeping the season open into late September
 - **Gulf County:** strong support for mid-August through September or early October season
 - **Pasco County:** strong support for a limited trial season in 2018



Before and after the 2017 bay scallop season, staff held informal community leader meetings as well as public workshops to gather feedback on long-term management desires for the scallop fishery. Stakeholders were generally opposed to long-term changes to bag or vessel limits, but expressed broad support for continuing with a regionally-specific season structure.

Staff received mixed feedback regarding seasons opening in June and early July. The current bag limit equates to 50-200 scallops, depending on their size. Stakeholders who were opposed to opening early believe that scallops during this time of the year are too small, resulting in higher early-season harvest rates and a higher number of dead discards (due to the amount of scallop meat obtained relative to the effort required to clean small scallops). Conversely, other stakeholders stated that they harvest larger scallops and often return smaller ones to the water alive and did not believe opening earlier would negatively impact scallop populations. Additionally, stakeholders from the Crystal River area spoke in favor of delaying the season until after the July 4th holiday weekend to reduce congestion and improve safety on the water.

Outside of Gulf County, participants felt there was little benefit to keeping the season open into late September. Participation in the fishery wanes as the summer tourism season comes to an end and stakeholders felt the late September season dates provide little economic benefit to their region.

Stakeholders from Gulf County, however, supported delaying their season start until mid-August and extending through September or early October. A delayed season in 2017 resulted in larger, and presumably fewer scallops being harvested from St. Joseph Bay. Additionally, they felt an open scallop season was not needed during the summer, when tourism levels are already high. Instead, extending the season into the fall was more economically beneficial for Gulf County.

Staff received strong support for holding a limited trial season in Pasco County. Suggestions included limiting the number of season days, and/or delaying the season start date until later in the summer in an effort to reduce harvest pressure. A delayed season start would also provide for a smoother transition into a trial season by minimizing the negative impacts associated with the early-season rush.