

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 8, 2018
Subject: Bay Scallops – Final Public Hearing

Purpose:

Obtain final approval for proposed final rules to create regionally-specific open harvest seasons for bay scallops and approval to issue two Executive Orders for establishing harvest seasons in Gulf and Pasco counties for the 2018 season.

Summary:

At its June 2016 meeting, the Commission directed staff to explore potential changes to management of the bay scallop fishery. Prior to the 2017 scallop season, staff held a series of meetings with community leaders in Gulf through Pasco counties to gather suggestions on scallop management, focusing on issues that were important to communities. Feedback received primarily focused on changes to season dates. Based on this input, the Commission approved regionally-specific changes to the bay scallop season dates on a trial basis for 2017 at the February 2017 Commission meeting. Staff has been gathering public feedback on a proposal to continue a similar season structure on a long-term basis.

Staff held a series of five public workshops in October 2017 in Gulf through Pasco counties and gathered stakeholder feedback online about the 2017 season structure, the possibility of extending the allowable harvest area for scallops into Pasco County, long-term management desires for bay scallops, and input on the bay scallop fishery in general.

Based on this feedback, the Commission approved draft rules at the December 2017 Commission meeting that would implement regionally-specific open seasons throughout most of the allowable harvest area for bay scallops on a long-term basis, and approved staff's recommendation to return with executive orders that would establish bay scallop regulations for Pasco and Gulf counties for 2018-only.

Staff is continuing to gather public feedback on the draft season structure presented at the December Commission meeting and will present that information along with the proposed final rules.

Staff Recommendation:

Pending the compilation of additional feedback received since the December Commission meeting, staff recommends approving the proposed final rules to establish the following long-term regionally-specific open seasons:

- Dixie County and a portion of Taylor County (including Dekle Beach, Keaton Beach, and the entire Steinhatchee area): For all state waters south and east of Rock Island near the mouth of the Fenholloway River in Taylor County to the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon # 4 in northern Levy County (29° 15.350' North Latitude), modify the regulations to create an open season that begins on **the third Saturday in June and continues through Sept. 10 each year.**
- Levy, Citrus, and Hernando counties: For all state waters south of the Suwannee River Alligator Pass Daybeacon # 4 in northern Levy County (29° 15.350' North Latitude) to the Hernando – Pasco

county line, modify the regulations to create an open season that **begins July 10 and continues through Sept. 10 each year.**

- For all other areas open to the harvest of bay scallops (including Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, and northwestern Taylor County): For 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, modify the regulations to create an open season that **begins on July 1 and continues through Sept. 24 each year.** *Note: This season would also serve as a placeholder for all of Gulf County (including St. Joseph Bay) until a long-term season can be established for that area. In the immediate future the actual season for Gulf County would be set each year via executive order, as described below.*

Staff also recommends establishing bay scallop regulations in Pasco and Gulf counties for 2018 only by Executive Order, as follows:

- St. Joseph Bay and all of Gulf County: Staff recommend setting the scallop season from the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County to the westernmost point of St. Vincent Island in Franklin County by Executive Order for the immediate future, with a **2018 season that would begin Aug. 17 and continue through Sept. 30, 2018.** Long-term changes to the open season for this area would be established in the future, once the population is more fully recovered.
- Pasco County (and the Anclote River): Staff recommend establishing a 10-day trial season for state waters off Pasco County and all waters of the Anclote River by Executive Order for **2018 that would begin on July 20 and continue through July 29, 2018.**

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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