



This document is a draft rule summarizing the saltwater game fish and sport fish designations for Florida. Staff was directed by the Commission to present a draft rule creating these designations. After discussion with stakeholders, staff recommends components for each of these designations. Saltwater fish in Florida that could potentially fit into these categories will also be discussed. The designations would be placed in a new rule: 68B-2.010 Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) Saltwater Game fish and Sport Fish Designations.

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Report Date: October 22, 2012

## Florida Waters Offer Premier Fishing Opportunities

- Anglers can target a diverse array of fish species
- Many species unique to Florida
- Year-round fishing opportunities
- Florida holds more IGFA world records than any other state or country
- Recreational fishing has a high economic value in Florida
- Protection of Florida's premier recreational fish is a priority



Florida  
**FISHING  
CAPITAL**  
of the **WORLD**



The waters of Florida offer anglers premier, unique fishing opportunities. During one day on the water, anglers can target a diverse array of fish species, many of which are unique to Florida waters. In addition, Florida offers great fishing year-round. Florida also holds more International Game Fish Association (IGFA) world records than any other state or country. Recreational fishing in Florida has a high cultural and economic value due to these unique aspects, and protecting Florida's premier recreational fish is a priority of the Commission.

## Benefits of the Game Fish and Sport Fish Designations

- Designations would highlight and help protect premier recreational fish
  - Signify the importance of these fish
  - Encourage voluntary conservation practices
  - Reduce harvest
- Increased protection may lead to healthier fish populations
- Designations would help Florida market its unique fishing opportunities



The saltwater game fish and sport fish designations would benefit premier recreational fish in Florida. The designations would highlight certain recreational fish in Florida as elite and worthy of additional protection. Staff believes that assigning these premier fish as game fish or sport fish will signify to anglers that the fish is worthy of protection and encourage voluntary conservation practices. For example, anglers may be inspired to release fish they normally would have harvested. Reducing harvest and increasing protection should lead to healthier fish populations.

In addition, these designations would help Florida market its unique fishing opportunities to both residents and visitors to the state. They would show people that Florida offers premier fishing opportunities and that those fish are valued and are being protected for current and future anglers.

# Proposed Game Fish Designation

## Intent

- Elevate the status of Florida's premier recreational fish
- Recognize game fish are also popular food fish
- Allow limited recreational harvest

## Components

- No commercial harvest, possession, or sale
- Hook and line only
- Zero bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels

## Possible Fish

- Snook, red drum, spotted seatrout



The intent of the proposed game fish designation is to elevate the status of Florida's premier recreational fish. At the same time, these fish are also be recognized as popular food fish, so limited recreational harvest would be allowed. For any fish designated as a saltwater game fish, staff proposes prohibiting commercial harvest, possession, and sale; limiting allowed gear to hook and line for targeting and harvesting the fish; and prohibiting the captain and crew operating a for-hire vessel from harvesting any game fish.

Fish that could possibly be designated as game fish include snook, red drum, and spotted seatrout.

# Proposed Sport Fish Designation

## Intent

- Elevate the status of Florida's elite recreational fish
- No commercial or recreational harvest

## Components

- Catch and release only
- No recreational or commercial harvest, possession, or sale
- Hook and line only when targeting

## Possible Fish

- Tarpon, bonefish, permit, billfish



The intent of the proposed sport fish designation is similar to the intent of the game fish designation. However, this designation would be for fish that are considered Florida's most elite sport fish and that should not be harvested commercially or recreationally. For a fish designated as a sport fish, the fishery would be catch and release only (no recreational or commercial harvest, possession, or sale) and hook and line would be the only gear allowed when targeting these sport fish.

Fish that could possibly be designated as sport fish include tarpon, bonefish, permit, and billfish.

## Future Challenges

- Designating species as game fish and sport fish would occur at future meetings
- Several challenges may be faced when choosing fish
  - Address a provision to allow harvest of sport fish for IGFA records
  - Provide for transit language for billfish caught legally in federal waters
  - Consider regional differences in fisheries
  - Value of existing commercial fisheries for some species like spotted seatrout
- *These challenges will be thoroughly explored and discussed*



The proposed draft rule will create the game fish and sport fish designations, but fish species will not be proposed for these designations until future Commission meetings. There are several challenges that may be faced as fish are chosen to be designated as a game fish or a sport fish. Because there would be no harvest allowed for sport fish, each fish would need a provision if the Commission wishes to allow harvest for an IGFA record. Limited harvest of billfish is allowed in federal waters, so a provision for transit through state waters would be necessary. The permit fishery presents challenges because stakeholders value it for different reasons and fish for it differently around the state. Current permit regulations reflect those differences through a regional management strategy. For example, permit is popular as a food fish in some parts of the state, which it is also a popular target for spear fishermen in federal waters statewide. A commercial fishery exists for spotted seatrout around the state. This sector makes up a small portion of the spotted seatrout harvest (around 2%) and this would need to be considered before designating spotted seatrout as a game fish.

Solutions to these challenges will be thoroughly explored as fish are considered for the designations.

## Proposed Draft Rule

### 68B-2.010 Game Fish and Sport Fish Designations

- Convey an intent for the designations
- Create a **game fish** designation that includes
  - Commercial harvest prohibited
  - Purchase and sale prohibited
  - Hook and line only allowed gear
  - Zero bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels
- Create a **sport fish** designation that includes
  - Recreational and commercial harvest prohibited
  - Purchase and sale prohibited
  - Hook and line only when targeting sport fish



The proposed draft rule would create a new subsection, 68B-2.010, F.A.C., (Game Fish and Sport Fish Designations) that states the intent of the designations, which is to conserve premier recreational fish species in Florida and enhance the marketing capacity for Florida's recreational fishing opportunities. The proposed draft rule would create a saltwater game fish designation, the components of which would be no commercial harvest or possession, no sale or purchase, hook and line gear only, and zero bag limit for the captain and crew of for-hire vessels. The proposed draft rule would also create an elite designation of saltwater sport fish, the components of which would be no recreational or commercial harvest or possession, no purchase or sale, and hook and line gear only when targeting these fish.

## Staff Recommendation

### Approve the proposed draft rule creating:



- Game Fish Designation
  - No commercial harvest, possession, or sale
  - Hook and line only
  - Zero bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels
- Sport Fish Designation
  - Catch and release only
  - No recreational or commercial harvest, possession, or sale
  - Hook and line only when targeting sport fish

*Direct staff to return for a Final Public Hearing at the February 2013 meeting in Orlando*



Staff recommends approving the proposed draft rule creating game fish and sport fish designations. The game fish designation would prohibit commercial harvest, possession, and sale; allow hook and line gear only; and prohibit captain and crew of for-hire vessels from harvesting a bag limit. The sport fish designation would make the designated fish catch and release only (prohibiting recreational and commercial harvest, possession, and sale) and make hook and line the only gear allowed for use when targeting sport fish.

If approved and directed, staff recommends returning for a final public hearing at the February 2013 Commission meeting in Orlando.

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



## Game Fish Definitions: Other States

- **Gulf states:**
  - Texas: List of freshwater and saltwater fish; some no sale
  - Louisiana: List of freshwater and saltwater fish; no sale
  - Mississippi: Freshwater fish only; hook and line, trolling, or trotlines allowed; no sale
  - Alabama: List of freshwater fish only; hook and line, trolling, spinner allowed; no sale
- **Atlantic states with game fish definitions:**
  - Georgia: List of freshwater fish only; no spearing; some no sale
  - South Carolina: List of freshwater and saltwater fish; no spearing; no sale
  - North Carolina: Freshwater fish and several saltwater fish found inland; hook and line; no sale



Other states in the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic have lists of fish that are designated as game fish for that state; however, “game fish” means slightly different things in each state. Texas and Louisiana each have a list of game fish that includes both freshwater and saltwater fish and prohibit sale of some these game fish. Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia each have a list of game fish that only includes freshwater species. In these states, gears are limited, and sale is prohibited in Alabama. South Carolina and North Carolina each have a list of game fish that includes both freshwater and saltwater fish. Spearing is not allowed in either state, and in North Carolina, hook and line is the only allowable gear. Sale is prohibited in both states.

Below is a list of the saltwater fish that are listed as game fish in nearby states:

Texas: spotted seatrout, red drum, tarpon, wahoo, tripletail, sailfish, marlin, sharks, snook, swordfish, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel

Louisiana: red drum, sailfish, marlin

South Carolina: spotted seatrout, red drum, tarpon, billfish

North Carolina: spotted seatrout, red drum, flounder (in inland waters)

## Freshwater Game Fish Designation

- Florida has a freshwater game fish designation
  - May only be taken by hook and line
  - No sale allowed
    - Commercial harvest of certain freshwater game fish is allowed in specific areas with specific gear



Florida has no official saltwater game fish or sport fish designation. However, Florida does have a freshwater game fish designation. Freshwater game fish are defined in Rule 68A-1, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), as largemouth, shoal, Suwannee, spotted, shadow, peacock white, striped, white-striped hybrid, and sunshine bass; black and white crappie; and bluegill, redear, redbreast, flier, warmouth, longear, mud, and spotted sunfish. The rules for harvesting freshwater game fish are located in rule 68A-23, F.A.C., and include prohibitions on the harvest of game fish with any gear except hook and line and prohibitions on sale or purchase of game fish. However, certain exceptions allow the commercial harvest of game fish with gear other than hook and line in specific bodies of water. One example of this is Lake Okeechobee, where the commercial harvest of game fish (excluding some bass and crappie) is allowed by persons holding a haul seine permit.

## Fishing Capital of World

Florida has this distinction based on a number of factors

- Amount of coastline, rivers, and lakes
- Diversity of fishing opportunities, fisheries, and habitats
  - Fly fish on flats
  - Billfishing
  - Snapper and grouper fishing on reefs
  - Shoreline fishing
  - Diving for spiny lobster and scallops
  - Bass fishing in lakes
- Year-round fishing opportunities
- More IGFA records than any other state or country



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Florida is known as the “Fishing Capital of the World” because of the diverse fishing opportunities available in the state. For example, saltwater anglers can fly fish in the shallow flats for bonefish and permit, fish inshore for red drum or spotted seatrout, troll for billfish, spend time on natural and artificial reefs fishing for grouper and snapper, shoreline fish, take the family on a trip looking for bay scallops in the grassy flats, and go diving for spiny lobster in South Florida. The diversity of trophy fishes and habitats, great weather, year-round fishing, superb tourism, and fishing industry-related infrastructure are unsurpassed.

Florida has 12,133 square miles of water; 2,276 miles of tidal shoreline; about 12,000 miles of fishable rivers, streams, and canals; and about 7,700 lakes. The FWC manages more than 200 native species of freshwater fish and more than 500 native species of saltwater fish.

Florida holds over 14% (979 records) of all current International Game Fish Association (IGFA) world records (6,776 records), which is more than any other state or country. The second place country, Australia, holds only half as many records as Florida. Compared to other states, Florida holds more than three times the number of records as next highest state, California (309 records).

## Economic Impact of Recreational Fishing

- Saltwater:

- 1,286,000 resident
- 716,000 nonresident
- \$5.7 billion impact
- Supports 54,500 jobs



- Freshwater:

- 1,155,000 resident
- 262,000 nonresident
- \$2.6 billion impact
- Supports 24,800 jobs

Florida has an estimated 1,286,000 resident and 716,000 nonresident saltwater anglers and 1,155,000 resident and 262,000 nonresident freshwater anglers. Saltwater fishing has an estimated \$5.7 billion impact in the state of Florida and supports 54,500 jobs. Freshwater fishing has a \$2.6 billion impact and supports 24,800 jobs.