



Free Fishing Days
Consent Agenda
February 8, 2012
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



Version 1

This document summarizes a proposal to provide four free fishing days in 2012 where a recreational fishing license would not be required. The proposal includes two free freshwater fishing days and two free saltwater fishing days.

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Free Fishing Days

- Via authority under 379.354(15) F.S., the Commission may designate two free freshwater and two free saltwater fishing days a year
- Applies to residents and non-residents
- Applies to recreational fishing only (not commercial)
- All other rules (e.g., seasons, bag and size limits) apply
- Choosing these days now will allow us to publicize the dates and plan events and allow people to plan vacations



Under 379.354(15) Florida Statutes, the FWC has the ability to offer two free freshwater fishing days and two free saltwater fishing days a year. On these days the FWC would waive the fishing license requirement. These free fishing days apply to residents and non residents and only apply to recreational sector. All other rules such as seasons, size limits, and bag limits still apply on these days.

By choosing these days early in 2012 staff will be able to publicize the dates and plan events well in advance and people will have the ability to plan their vacations around these days if they choose. Free fishing days provide an excellent opportunity for parents who don't yet have licenses to take youth fishing, or avid anglers to introduce a friend to fishing without having to purchase a license.

Free Freshwater Days for 2012 and Beyond

68A-5.006 Designation of Free-Freshwater Fishing Weekend Days: License Requirements and Regulation Compliance

- First Saturday in April – For 2012, **April 7**

- Second Saturday in June – For 2012, **June 9**
 - National Fishing and Boating Week

- All other applicable freshwater fishing laws would remain in effect



The Commission currently designates by rule (68A-5.006, F.A.C., *Designation of Free-Freshwater Fishing Weekend; License Requirements and Regulation Compliance*) the two free freshwater fishing days as the first full weekend in April each year. Typically businesses and Commission projects plan some fishing events for that Saturday, but have little supplemental activity on Sunday. This weekend therefore has some history with the community and was initially selected because it occurs during a productive fishing period when the weather tends to be comfortable. For 2012 and beyond, this rule would be modified to waive the license requirement for recreational fishing on that first Saturday in April but move the second free day to the second Saturday in June. This latter day coincides with National Fishing and Boating Week which is set as the first to second Saturday in June each year. Significant national media and events highlight this week, which is promoted by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. In 2011, 38 states had at least one free-fishing day during this annual event. Consequently, for 2012, staff recommends that the two free freshwater fishing days be April 7th and June 9th, 2012. April 7, 2012 is also the Saturday of Easter weekend and could be a big weekend for family outdoor fishing.

All other applicable freshwater fishing laws would remain in effect during these free fishing Saturdays. We would not anticipate changing these dates annually unless there was some specific motivation, so that families and businesses can plan events and activities consistently.

Free Saltwater Days for 2012

Give Executive Director authority to waive the recreational saltwater fishing license requirement

- National Fishing and Boating Week, Gulf red snapper season opens – Saturday, **June 2**
- Labor Day Weekend – Saturday, **September 1**
- All other applicable recreational saltwater fishing laws would remain in effect



In order to adopt free saltwater fishing days for 2012, staff is requesting the Commission to give the Executive Director authority to waive the recreational saltwater fishing license requirement for June 2 and September 1, 2012. June 2, 2012 was chosen because this is the first Saturday of National Fishing and Boating Week and occurs during the first weekend of Gulf red snapper season. September 1, 2012 was chosen because this is the Saturday of Labor Day weekend, which is the last big summer fishing weekend for many families. Bay scallops, lobster and gag grouper will be open on this date. These dates for the free saltwater fishing days would apply for 2012 only.

All other applicable saltwater fishing laws would remain in effect during these free fishing Saturdays.

Staff Recommendation

- **Freshwater** - Approve the proposed rule amendments to waive the license requirement for recreational freshwater fishing on the first Saturday in April and the second Saturday in June

If approved, the rule will be noticed and filed without further hearing unless requested

- **Saltwater** - Give Executive Director authority to waive the license requirement for recreational saltwater fishing on June 2 and September 1, 2012

If approved, the waiver would occur via an Executive Order



Staff recommends approval of a rule modification to waive the license requirement for recreational freshwater fishing on the first Saturday in April and the second Saturday in June. For 2012, the free freshwater fishing days would occur April 7 and June 9. If approved, this rule would be noticed and filed without further public hearing unless requested and would become effective as soon as possible. Staff has evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, F.A.C., and found them to be in compliance.

Staff also recommends that the Commission give the Executive Director the authority to waive the license requirement for recreational saltwater fishing on June 2 and September 1, 2012. If approved, this waiver would occur via an Executive Order.

FWC outreach events as well as local events, national media, and PSAs (Public Service Announcements) will especially help promote the two free fishing dates at the beginning and end of National Fishing and Boating Week. We believe this is a great way to emphasize our core education messages about the importance of conservation, where the funding comes from, our youth outreach programs and the economic benefits of recreational fishing, here in the Fishing Capital of the World.