



## Bay Scallop Season Extension

Draft Rule  
June 28, 2012

**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**  
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This document summarizes a proposed amendment for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) bay scallop rule 68B-18, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). The purpose of this proposed rule amendment is to extend the recreational harvest season for scallops by two weeks.

This document will be updated after the results of an online survey and the spring monitoring survey are completed.

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## Scallop Biology

- Bivalve mollusc with many tiny, blue eyes
- Life span of about 1 year
- Largest size in late summer and fall
- Environmental conditions and harvesting cause fluctuations in local population sizes each year
- Areas with healthy populations have the potential to seed areas with smaller populations



Bay scallops are a bivalve mollusc, meaning they have two shells joined by a hinge. Bay scallops are unique in that they have many tiny, blue eyes that detect movement, which helps them avoid predators. When threatened, a scallop can swim away from the danger by quickly opening and closing their shell. Bay scallops in Florida have a life cycle of about one year, though some may live longer. They reproduce in the fall and grow rapidly from spring into late summer when they attain their largest size. Since bay scallops typically only live for a year, environmental conditions and harvesting cause fluctuations in local population sizes from year to year; these fluctuations can be extreme. For a local population to remain healthy from year to year, a single bay scallop must produce enough offspring to replace itself and those removed by harvest. If enough offspring are not produced, the population needs to be seeded by a neighboring area that has a healthy stock.

## Current Regulations

- No commercial harvest
- Season: July 1 – Sept. 10
- Bag limit: 2 gal whole or 1 pint meat
- Vessel limit: 10 gal whole or ½ gal meat/vessel
- Harvest area: Pasco-Hernando County line, to Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County
- The 2010 season opened 12 days early via Executive Order to help alleviate economic hardship from oil spill
- The 2011 season opened 1 week early and was extended by 15 days via Executive Order to help alleviate continued economic hardship



Bay scallops are managed in Rule 68B-18, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). In 1994, the commercial harvest of bay scallops was prohibited. The current recreational bay scallop regulations have been in place since 2002 and have remained unchanged for almost a decade. The current season is set from July 1 through September 10 and a harvester may collect up to 2 gallons of whole scallops or a pint of meat per day. On a vessel, there may be no more than 10 gallons of whole scallops or a half gallon of meat aboard any time. Harvest of bay scallops is allowed only in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico from the Pasco-Hernando County line to the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County.

In 2010, an Executive Order opened the season 12 days early to help relieve economic hardships due to the oil spill. The season was set as June 19 through September 10. In 2011, via another Executive Order, the season opened a week early on June 25 and was extended until September 25 to continue to alleviate economic pressure from the oil spill. The allowable harvest area and bag limit were not changed by the Executive Orders.

## FWRI Monitoring Program



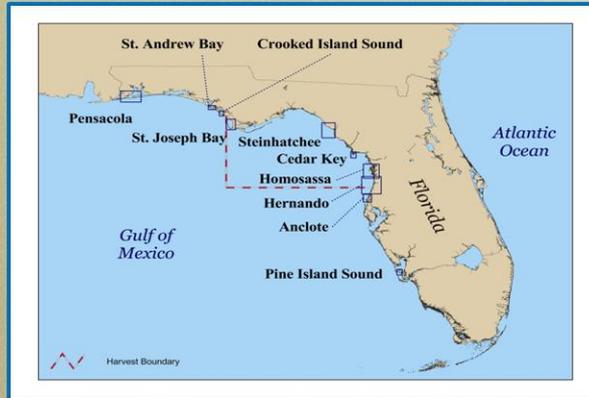
- Population Monitoring
  - 18 years of abundance surveys
  - 15 years of recruitment surveys
  - Restoration efforts in Pine Island Sound, Charlotte Harbor, Sarasota County, Tampa Bay, and St. Andrews Bay
- Population Transect Surveys
  - Occur in spring yearly since 1994
  - Count and measure scallops within a 600 meter squared ( $m^2$ ) area
- FWRI Population Classification
  - $<5$  scallops/ $600 m^2$  = collapsed
  - 5-25 scallops/ $600 m^2$  = transitional
  - $>25$  scallops/ $600 m^2$  = healthy



Bay scallops are monitored annually by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI). Abundance surveys have been conducted for the past 18 years and recruitment surveys have been conducted for the past 15 years. Additionally, there are restoration efforts taking place in Pine Island Sound, Charlotte Harbor, Sarasota County, Tampa Bay, and St. Andrews Bay. Since 1994, FWRI staff have been conducting population transect surveys in the spring, yearly. They count and measure all scallops found within a 600 meter squared area. If an area has less than five scallops per 600 meter squared it is classified as collapsed. An area that has between five and 25 scallops per 600 is classified as transitional, and an area with greater than 25 scallops per 600 meter squared is classified as healthy.

## 2011 Monitoring Results

- Spring survey suggested statewide population is stable
- Fall survey showed declines after extended season, but populations were still at a healthy level ( $>25/600 \text{ m}^2$ )



In 2011, the annual summer survey suggested that the statewide population of bay scallops is stable. An additional fall survey was conducted due to the extended season and it was found that although there were marked declines in populations after the extended season, the populations were still at a healthy level ( $>25/600 \text{ m}^2$ ). Homosassa was the only area to exhibit numbers that were classified as transitional. The 2012 spring survey results will be available by June 22.

## Season Extension

- Population continues to be stable after 2 years of extended seasons
- FWC is proposing to add 2 weeks to the end of the season
- FWC has received requests to extend the season at the end rather than the beginning
- Scallops are bigger at end of summer
- A later season increases business opportunities during a time when other fisheries are closed and numbers of visitors to Florida decreases



For the past two years, the bay scallop season has been extended, yet the populations continue to remain stable. Therefore, the FWC is proposing to add two weeks to the end of the recreational bay scallop season. The FWC has received requests from counties wanting the extension to occur at the end of the season to encourage business into the fall. This will allow for more fishing opportunities when scallops are large and will allow an extended fishing season to benefit businesses during a time when other fisheries are closed and visitors to Florida and fishing effort typically decrease.

# Public Comment and Spring Monitoring Survey



This document will be updated following the completion of an online survey and the spring monitoring survey.

## Proposed Draft Rule



### 68B-18.003 – Statewide Open and Closed Seasons and Areas for Harvesting Bay Scallops

- *Extend the recreational harvest season by 2 weeks making the season July 1 through September 24*



The draft rule would amend 68B-18.003, F.A.C., to extend the bay scallop harvest season by two weeks at the end of the season. The season for the recreational harvest of bay scallops would be set as July 1 through September 24.

## Staff Recommendation

### Approve the proposed rule amendment:

- Extend recreational bay scallop harvest season by 2 weeks at the end of the season
  - Season would be July 1 through Sept. 24
- Make rule effective as soon as possible

\* *Staff will publish a notice that the rule will become final with no further public hearing unless requested*



Staff recommends approving the advertised rule, which extends the bay scallop harvest season by two weeks making the season July 1 through September 24.

Staff also recommends approving the draft rule without further hearing planned prior to adoption, unless requested, as allowed by Section 120.53, F.S. and make rule effective as soon as possible.

Staff has evaluated the rule under the standards of 68-1.004, F.A.C., and found it to be in compliance.