



**Florida Saltwater Game Fish  
and Sport Fish**  
Final Public Hearing  
February 13, 2013



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

Version 2

Update: This document has been updated to include new proposed edits to the rule language with respect to the overall intent of creating the designations, as well as the intent for each specific designation.

This document is a final public hearing summarizing the saltwater game fish and sport fish designations for Florida. Staff received direction at the draft rule hearing in December 2012 to modify the components of each designation and collect public comment on the proposed designations. This document presents the components as modified by the Commission and a summary of public input. The designations would be placed in a new rule: 68B-2.010, Florida Administrative Code (FAC), Saltwater Game Fish and Sport Fish Designations. Prior to the Commission meeting, this presentation will be updated with a summary of public input including survey results.

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## 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 protect premier recreational species
  - Signify the importance of these species
  - Encourage voluntary conservation practices
  - Reduce harvest
- Increased protection may lead to healthier populations
- Designations would help market Florida's unique fishing opportunities



The saltwater game fish and sport fish designations would benefit premier recreational species 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 release fish they otherwise would have harvested. Reducing harvest and increasing protection could lead to healthier fish populations.

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

# Proposed Game Fish Designation

## Intent

- Recognize the importance of recreational fishing for game fish to Florida's economy
- Recognize that retaining game fish for personal consumption is important to Florida's cultural heritage

## Components

- No commercial harvest, possession, or sale



The game fish designation is intended to recognize that recreational fishing for game fish and the businesses and industries that rely upon recreational fishing for game fish contribute significantly to Florida's economy. In addition, this designation is intended to recognize that a recreational angler's ability to retain fish for personal consumption is important to Florida's cultural heritage, so recreational harvest would be allowed. Staff proposes that commercial harvest, commercial possession, and sale be prohibited for any fish designated a game fish.

If the proposed game fish designation is approved and species are up for such designation, all aspects of each fishery, including limited commercial harvest, will be fully reviewed, discussed, and considered before the species is named a game fish.

# Proposed Sport Fish Designation

## Intent

- Recognize that the value of a sport fish as a catch and release species far exceeds its value as a food fish
- Fishing for sport fish is an important part of Florida's cultural heritage

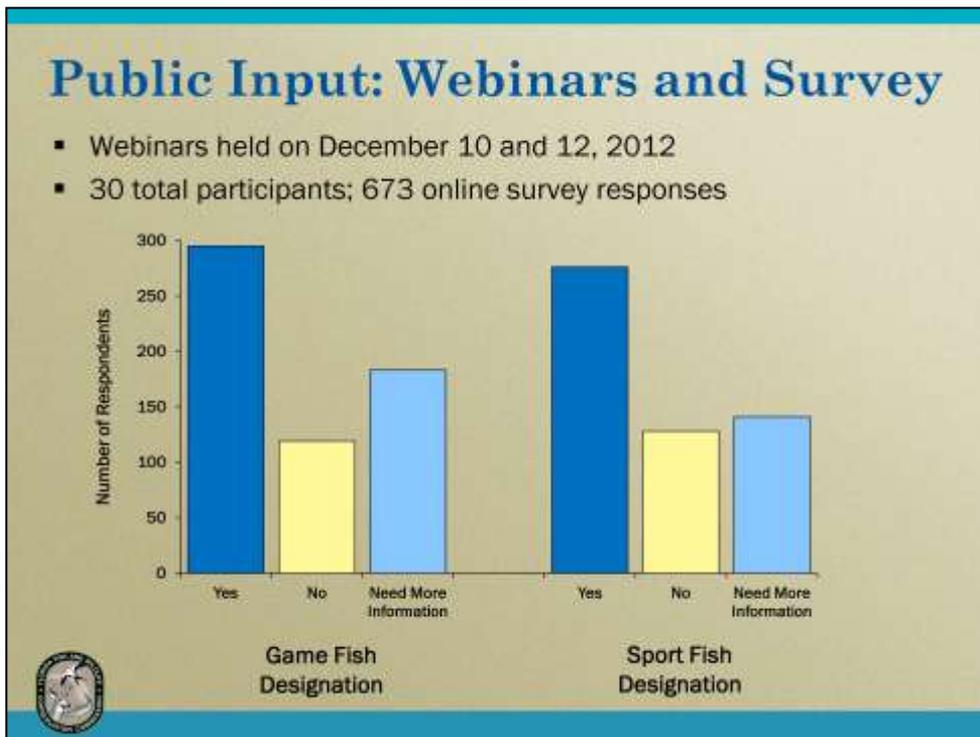
## Components

- Catch and release only
- No recreational or commercial harvest or sale



The sport fish designation is intended to recognize that the economic and fishing value of a sport fish that is caught and released greatly exceeds their value as a food fish. Fishing for sport fish is an important part of Florida's cultural heritage and contributes to Florida having more International Game Fish Association records than any other state or country. For a fish designated as a sport fish, the fishery would be catch and release only (no recreational or commercial harvest, possession, or sale).

If the proposed sport fish designation is approved and species are up for such designation, all aspects of each fishery, including harvest for world records and regional differences, will be fully reviewed, discussed, and considered before the species is named a sport fish.



During the review and discussion of the game fish and sport fish designations at the September 2012 Commission meeting, staff was directed to hold public workshops between the draft rule and final public hearings to collect input on the proposal. Two public workshops were held in the form of a webinar on December 10 and 12, 2012, and a total of 30 stakeholders participated. Stakeholders could participate either through the webinar (on the computer) or by phone only. At the workshops, staff gave a presentation on the designations proposal and answered questions from stakeholders. Official comment was collected via an online survey. The survey asked questions and also provided space for stakeholders to write in their feedback on the proposal. The survey was online through January 31, 2013, and 673 stakeholders responded to it.

The chart shows the number of respondents who answered “yes,” “no,” and “I need more information” to the questions “Would you support the creation of a saltwater game fish designation in order to better preserve and highlight Florida’s premiere recreational fisheries?” and “Would you support the concept of creating a saltwater sport fish designation in order to better preserve and highlight Florida’s elite recreational fisheries?” For the game fish designation, 295 respondents answered “yes,” 119 answered “no,” and 183 said they needed more information. For the sport fish designation, 276 respondents answered “yes,” 128 answered “no,” and 141 said they needed more information.

## Proposed Rule with suggested edits - Overall Intent

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



(1) Intent - The game fish and sport fish designations are intended to highlight the unique and diverse recreational fishing opportunities that exist around the state and contribute to the state's status as the "Fishing Capital of the World." "Game fish" and "sport fish" designations for each species of fish will be established through Commission rule development based on recommendations by Commission staff with consideration of input from stakeholders. The definitions and rule framework for "game fish" and "sport fish" established under this rule subsection do not supplant or supersede rules regarding recreational or commercial harvest of a species so designated except as otherwise specified in species-specific rules of the Commission. ~~increase public awareness of the need for extensive conservation action in order to prevent premier recreational fish from declining and to encourage voluntary conservation practices.~~ Additionally, these designations are intended to ~~increase Florida's ability to market the unique and diverse recreational fishing opportunities that exist around the state.~~



*New language would be adopted via Notice of Change*

The proposed rule would create a new subsection, 68B-2.010, FAC, (Game Fish and Sport Fish Designations) that states the intent of the designations, which is to highlight the unique and diverse recreational fishing opportunities that exist around the state and contribute to the state's status as the "Fishing Capital of the World."

Based on public comments and concerns staff has heard since the December Commission meeting, staff is suggesting edits to the intent language for the designations that was approved at the December Commission meeting and has already been filed. If approved, staff would file the new language via a Notice of Change.

## Proposed Rule with suggested edits - Game Fish

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

(1) The game fish designation is intended to recognize that recreational fishing for game fish and the businesses and industries that rely upon recreational fishing for game fish contribute significantly to Florida's economy. In addition, this designation is intended to recognize that a recreational angler's ability to retain fish for personal consumption is important to Florida's cultural heritage. Therefore, in order to elevate the status of premier recreational fish in Florida, the "game fish" designation includes the following provisions, unless otherwise authorized by the Commission:

- (a) Commercial Harvest Prohibited – A person may not harvest, possess, or land a game fish for commercial purposes.
- (b) Purchase and Sale Prohibited – A person may not purchase or sell a game fish.



*New language would be adopted via Notice of Change*



The proposed rule would create a game fish designation, which is intended to recognize that recreational fishing for game fish and the businesses and industries that rely upon recreational fishing for game fish contribute significantly to Florida's economy. In addition, this designation is intended to recognize that a recreational angler's ability to retain fish for personal consumption is important to Florida's cultural heritage. The proposed rule would state the components of the game fish designation as no commercial harvest and no sale or purchase. The new edits suggested by staff since the December Commission meeting are indicated by the "New" symbol on the slide. If approved, staff would file the new language via a Notice of Change.

## Proposed Rule with suggested edits - Sport fish

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

NEW

(2) The sport fish designation is intended to recognize that the economic and fishing value of a sport fish that is caught and released greatly exceeds their value as a food fish. Fishing for sport fish is an important part of Florida's cultural heritage and contributes to Florida having more International Game Fish Association records than any other state or country. Therefore, in order to elevate the status of premier recreational fish in Florida by making them catch and release only fisheries, the "sport fish" designation includes the following provisions, unless otherwise authorized by the Commission:

- (a) A person may not harvest or unnecessarily destroy a sport fish.
- (b) Commercial Harvest Prohibited – A person may not harvest, possess, or land a sport fish for commercial purposes.
- (c) Purchase and Sale Prohibited – A person may not purchase or sell a sport fish.



*New language would be adopted via Notice of Change*

The proposed rule would create a sport fish designation, which is intended to recognize that the economic and fishing value of a sport fish that is caught and released greatly exceeds their value as a food fish. Fishing for sport fish is an important part of Florida's cultural heritage and contributes to Florida having more International Game Fish Association records than any other state or country. The proposed rule would state the components of the sport fish designation as no recreational or commercial harvest or possession, and no purchase or sale. The new edits suggested by staff since the December Commission meeting are indicated by the "New" symbol on the slide. If approved, staff would file the new language via a Notice of Change.

## Next Steps

- Designating species as game fish and sport fish would occur at future meetings beginning in 2013
- Several challenges may be faced when choosing fish
  - Provision to allow harvest of sport fish for IGFA records
  - Transit language for fish caught legally in federal waters
  - Regional differences in fisheries
  - Value of existing commercial fisheries for some species
- *These challenges will be thoroughly explored and discussed at future meetings*



The proposed rule would create 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 International Game Fish Association (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, but 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.

## Staff Recommendation

Approve the proposed rule and proposed edits creating

- Overall Intent of Designations
- Game Fish Designation
  - Intent
  - No commercial harvest, possession, or sale
- Sport Fish Designation
  - Intent
  - Catch and release only
  - No recreational or commercial harvest, possession, or sale

*If approved, make the rule effective on May 1, 2013*



*Proposed edits would be advertised via Notice of Change*



Staff recommends approving the proposed rule and the proposed edits to rule language creating game fish and sport fish designations. The new subsection would clearly define the intent of the designations. Both the game fish and sport fish designations would include a prohibition on commercial harvest and possession and sale. The sport fish designation would also prohibit recreational harvest and possession, making sport fish species catch and release only.

If approved, staff recommends making the rule effective May 1, 2013. The proposed edits would be advertised via Notice of Change. Staff has evaluated the rule under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found it to be in compliance.

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 (FAC), 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, FAC, 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.

## 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.