

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Date: June 25, 2015

Subject: Special Lionfish Removal and Opportunity

Purpose:

Staff will recommend the Commission consider implementing this special opportunity for the 2015 sport season via an Executive Order. The proposed special opportunity will encourage the diving community to harvest lionfish while diving for other purposes by allowing individuals who harvest at least 10 lionfish to harvest one lobster over the bag limit per person per day during the lobster two-day sport season (mini season).

Summary:

Lionfish are invasive species that reproduce rapidly and represent a potential threat to native wildlife and ecosystems. FWC and numerous partners are continually looking for innovative ways to encourage lionfish harvest. Currently, harvest by divers is the primary means of localized lionfish removal. Encouraging divers to harvest lionfish during the lobster sport season would introduce divers who might not normally consider participating in lionfish removal to do so, and remind people to harvest lionfish whenever they are in the water for other reasons.

Over the last 5 years, the lobster sport season has attracted almost 60 thousand participants per year from all across the state and beyond, including divers from many of the places in the state where lionfish occur. For this reason, the 2015 sport season represents a unique opportunity to take advantage of these numerous divers and motivate them to participate in removal efforts year-round through implementation of this innovative outreach program. The 2015 opportunity would serve as a pilot program and an evaluation of the success of this opportunity would be used in order to consider whether or not to continue the opportunity in future years.

Staff Recommendation:

Create the special removal opportunity as presented via an Executive Order.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management