Big Bend Angler

The Quarterly Journal of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club

Volume 48, Number 3 Summer, 2015

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Volume 48, Number 3 Summer, 2015

Big Bend Angler

The Quarterly Journal of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club Founded 1968

Your GOFC Team

President:	Leroy Holmes
Vice President:	Hal Wilson
Secretary:	Jay Peacock
Treasurer:	Debby Knopf
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GOFC Meetings

When:

4th Tuesday of each month.
Fellowship begins at 7:00 PM,
program begins at 7:30 PM

Where:

U.F. College of Veterinary Medicine's New Lecture Hall

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Events Calendar

Monthly Meetings

Monthly club meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of each month (note that this is ***not*** the last Tuesday in those months having 5 Tuesdays). Fellowship begins at 7:00 p.m., with the meeting program beginning at 7:30. No monthly meetings are held in February, June, August, November or December, being replaced, respectively, by the **Seafood and Awards Banquet**, **Fish Fry**, **Annual Social**, the **Cookout & Auction,** and your own Christmas holiday activities.

Your GOFC Board of Directors meets at 7:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at the Northwest Grill. Interested GOFC members are invited to attend.

Coming Events

The **July 28th monthly meeting** will feature Lloyd Bailey's Scuba & Watersport. Their presentation will be on SCUBA diving and spearfishing. On August 25th our **Annual Social** will be held at the Wahoo Seafood Grill in place of our August Monthly Meeting.

On August 15th, Charlie Courtney will lead club members out of Steinhatchee for our **Annual Scallopfest**. If you have never scalloped before, this is a great way to learn. Socializing will follow at the Sea Hag Marina while Sea Hag's scallop cleaning crew works over your catch (unless you choose to clean them yourself).

The annual **Shrimping Trip** to Green Cove Springs will be held on a Saturday in late August yet to be determined. This is a great way to learn how to catch your own shrimp as well as throw a cast net. Shrimping will be followed by a short boat trip across the river to the Outback Crab Shack for lunch.

Cover

Dale Reed holds up two big dolphin caught off Marathon while Joey Slnes looks on. (Photo by Liz Reed.)

Another Amberjack Size Limit Change

FWC News Release

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission approved changing the minimum size limit for greater amberjack caught in Gulf of Mexico state waters from 30 inches fork length to 34 inches fork length. Fork length is measured from the tip of the lower jaw to the center of the fork in the tail.

This change will make state-water regulations in the Gulf consistent with pending federal regulation changes and will go into effect after federal regulations are approved.

Recent stock assessments have indicated that greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico are overfished, which means there are not enough greater amberjack for the population to remain sustainable. They are also undergoing overfishing, which means more greater amberjack are being removed than is sustainable. Changing the minimum size limit will help ensure more greater amberjack are left in the water and have a chance to reproduce before being harvested.

Triggerfish Size Limit Increase

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved increasing the minimum size limit of gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters from 12 inches fork length to 14 inches fork length. This change makes Atlantic state water regulations consistent with new federal regulations.

The change also makes the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters (from shore to 9 nautical miles) the same as it is in Gulf state waters (from shore to 9 nautical miles). This minimum size limit applies to both recreational and commercial harvest.

President's Message

By Leroy Holmes

Wow, the year is half way done, and we still have a lot more to come. Please make your way to the July Monthly Meeting. We want to give a warm welcome to Lloyd Bailey's Scuba & Watersport. Their presentation will be on SCUBA diving and spearfishing. More and more GOFC members are taking up this sport.

We also have a number of Club activities scheduled for August. First of all, be sure to bring your family to the Social Event at the Wahoo Seafood Grill held on August 25th in place of our August Monthly Meeting. I would like this to be the biggest event of the year.

On Saturday, August 15th, long time GOFC member Charlie Courtney will lead club members out of Steinhatchee for our annual scallopfest. Finally, our annual shrimping trip to Green Cove Springs will be held at a date in August TBA. So far conditions are looking favorable for a strong shrimp run this year.

I'm so glad to be a part of this club, and I'm trying my best to make this a great year.

Gator Domino's is a Proud Sponsor of Doug Johnson's Reeling For Kids Celebrity Fishing Tournament.

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Doug Johnson's Reeling for Kid's Fishing Tournament August,22 2004

"Many of the most highly publicized events of my presidency are not nearly as memorable or significant in my life as fishing with my daddy."

— Jimmy Carter

Fishing Reports & Forecasts

All GOFC Members Are Invited to Submit Reports of Their Latest Fishing Trips

Our fishing report section include reports for the previous 3 months of fishing activity. In addition to our regular contributors, all GOFC members are urged to send us their reports for inclusion in the member reports section of the next quarter's issue of Big Bend Angler. By tracking these reports over the year, readers should gain a stronger understanding of how things change with the seasons and what to do about it, so that you too can catch your share of the big ones.

Scouting for Grouper

By Ed Ellett

Hal Wilson, President Elect of GOFC, invited Ken Knopf and I to go on a "scouting for grouper" trip - i.e. catch and release for any gags caught, yet, locations so noted with July 1 season opening on the horizon.

The grouper fishing was disappointing, yet, the bycatch was rather nice :)

After catching live bait on Seahorse Reef, Ken caught a nice snook when we stopped at Steel Tower on the way out - caught, measured, pictured and promptly released in good health. Ken entered the catch in Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) tournament. Ken hooked a nice cobia, yet, hook twisted into bait and cobia went free.....Several more snook and one more legal cobia were sighted, yet, were not inclined to bite our offering.

Next stop on the way out, the Whistle Buoy - no luck, no fish sightings.

Hal stopped at several past, excellent grouper numbers in 35, 45 and 50 feet. A few rock bass and pink mouth grunts were caught, yet, no grouper of any size or type. On way in a wooden crate was spotted floating on surface. Fifteen to twenty peanut dolphin were hovering around, and, we caught four before school broke up.

Ed's big cobia.

We continued loop toward shore stopping at two additional spots. One yielded a small cobia catch and release by yours truly with two legal ones following, yet, not inclined to bite. Our only legal/out of season gag grouper was caught/released by Hal here. The other spot yielded no sitings or hookups.

To end the day we finished where we started - Whistle Buoy with no luck, and, Steel Tower with myself and Ken catching two, legal, 34" to fork cobia - a nice finish. Ken had another entry for CCA tournament. We tried assisting our gracious Captain with an end of day cobia of his own on number one channel marker, yet, no one was home. Hal had already caught a 28 pounder this year, so, wasn't too disappointed. Ken had caught a 31 pounder earlier this year - his 15 pounder was rather wimpy in comparison, yet, Ken definitely enjoyed the fight. Yours truly, had not caught one this year so I had the biggest smile with my, fine 15 pound fish.

A most enjoyable trip to remember. Weather nice, good company, and fish! If Hal ask you to go scouting, definitely, take him up on the offer, and, be prepared for the bycatch!

"Fishing is like sex; the less you get the more you lie."

— Unknown

Opening Day Snapper

By Ed Ellett

Captain Knopf guided Hal, Justin Magnifico and me to a great trip Monday, opening day of red snapper season. We definitely covered some territory, yet, worthwhile, and, weather was ideal.

After baiting up and an hour and half run we drifted, fishing live bait and/or jigs and caught quick our limit of eight red snapper. The photo shows what would have been the largest of the day — 12-15 pound range estimated, but the local shark got to him first. Hal ended up with a fine snapper head.

I was more fortunate, and the creature in the gray suit did not show up. Mine weighed in at 10+ pounds. Later in the day we had an approximate nine foot hammer head surface right next to boat, so some large creatures were cruising out there.

Fish head soup for tonight!

Justin caught a kingfish, and, I soon followed with another. We thought Ken and

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Reports
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Hal would be in for quick king hookup thereafter, but the kings disappeared. Neither king very large — 9 and 14 pounds.

With a snapper limit in hand, we shifted to some catch and release amberjack action for fun. We each caught several and could have caught more. Great fun watching Ken break out a large topwater popper and entice several surface strikes/hookups.

Great day! Justin caught his first ever red snapper & AJ, and, had an offshore slam (king, red snapper and AJ). I caught my largest red snapper and also had a slam. Hal and Ken were a king short of a slam, but Hal did catch a fine red snapper head!

Marathon Dolphin

By Dale Reed

I spent June 19-24 on Marathon Key. On one day we went dolphin fishing, running some 15 miles out to troll in 700 to 1000 feet of water.

After working the weedlines and fishing under frigate birds with little luck, we finally figured out the day's pattern. For whatever reason, we found dolphin wherever terns were working the surface. Oddly, smaller dolphin were found under groups of 4-15 terns, and the bigger dolphin were found under 2-3 terns.

We first located the dolphin by trolling under the birds. Once the fish were located and the first ones hooked, we switched to casting bucktail jigs or whole ballyhoo on J-hooks. We took care to always leave at least one hooked dolphin in the water to keep the school nearby, boating the fish only after another was hooked.

We ended up with a fine catch of 2 large bulls and 18 smaller keeper-sized dolphin. This is not too shabby considering that we only did a half day trip — we got underway at 2:00 p.m. and were back at the dock by 6:00 p.m.

Everyone wants to be in the picture with the big fish!

The next day I went spearfishing on a friend's boat. We did not use SCUBA gear, but free dived (with snorkling gear) in 30 feet of water. We managed to spear a number of mangrove snapper, two mutton snapper, several hogfish, and a cero mackerel.

A hungry barracuda struck the cero while it was attached to the stringer on my friend's belt. However, the big fish made the mistake of hanging around for a few seconds with the cero in its mouth, which gave my friend just enough time to skewer the 'cuda.

It has been a good year for dolphin. We even caught a number of "peanut" dolphin on a trip to 40 feet out of Crystal River. We enticed them to the boat with chum and hooked them up with bucktail jigs.

Cedar Key Creek Fishing

By Charlie Courtney

In early June I went searching for redfish in the creeks behind Cedar Key with Danny Martin and Paul Davenport in Danny's 18 foot jet powered jon boat.

We mainly worked the edges of an area off Black Point known as Half Moon Bay. I was using a topwater jig and the others used popping corks with shrimp. Danny had the first hookup — a beautiful 28 inch redfish that went back to make baby reds.

Paul soon followed by hooking up something very heavy. The fish made lots of short, but unstoppable runs. Some 20 minutes later he boated a black drum that bottomed out my 30 pound capacity Boga, and another fish was sent back to make more babies.

A few minutes later a large redfish connected with my topwater bait. In typical redfish fashion it knocked the bait 3 feet into the air on its first strike, but it failed to hook up. I then let the bait lie still with only a tiny amount of twitching to make it look like it was stunned. There were two more hits and misses at the unmoving bait before the fish finally hooked up on its fourth attempt. It was an in-the-slot 26.5 incher that weighed 6 pounds exactly on my Boga.

Supposedly a redfish has difficulty taking a topwater bait because its underslung

A nice redfish makes for a nice day.

mouth is in the wrong position to take food from the surface of the water. I am not entirely convinced this is so. I think it is quite possible that the fish is striking the bait, not in an attempt to engulf it, but rather to stun or kill it. That way the redfish can then take its time in approaching the crippled baitfish in such a way that will allow it to get its mouth around the bait.

Regardless of the reason, the take home message here is that a redfish will come at a missed topwater bait time and time again if it has not felt the hook, and the angler has not yanked the bait out of its sight. Therefore, do not jerk the bait away from the fish with a ferocious hook set at that first strike. Instead, be patient and let the

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Fishing Forecast

by Captain Russ Roy

Your fishing report writer is an up-front guy: he hasn't been fishing in about two months. Nevertheless he is able to do a good fishing report by doing what the professional fishing writers do when they haven't been fishing: make it up!

Actually it isn't too hard to do a report for this time of year. Air and water temperatures pretty much dictate what is happening on and in the water. These temperatures are #$&&*)98#!!+* out of here. (Choose your own expletive.)

Offshore trips are possible, gags are open, but it is going to be very tough to spend a long day on the water in the heat, and thunderstorms have been pretty common in the Gulf lately. Going out at midnight and coming in by morning is possible, but you should have radar to check on storms and good lights on the boat. Most of us back off in July and August and wait for September when kings and Spanish are available as well as grouper.

Inshore, water temperatures have driven trout into deeper grass beds and even hardy redfish will be looking for cooler spots. Wade fishing will get you a little cooler but you need a deep cut or trough nearby with some tidal current in it, to do any good.

Is there any good news? Well, sure. Cold beer really tastes good in hot weather, and taking non-fishing family members scalloping is also fun. Oddly enough, you often see both of the above out on the water.

The grass flats around Steinhatchee and Keaton, and those at Crystal River are the best bets for scallops. There is plenty of info about scalloping technique around, so I won't repeat it here. There are a couple of things that are helpful that you don't always see, however, so here they are. The FWC is VERY likely to be present at "choke points" coming into scalloping ports and even non-scalloping ports. (There are usually officers in the Suwannee during scalloping season, looking for people coming in from Pepperfish Keys for example.) Be sure everybody on your boat who needs a fishing license has one with them. Also make sure you have a legal amount of scallops on board and not too much beer inside the Captain.

Cleaning scallops can be a chore. There are various techniques, one even uses a Shop Vac. (The problem here is no one explains how to clean the Shop Vac afterwards.)

If you like fried oysters, there is something else you might try with scallops. Instead of completely cleaning them and winding up with the just the muscle, simply pull off the mantle around the edge of the shell. (The mantle is the part with the blue "eyes".) Scoop out the whole rest of

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Letter to Governor Scott

By Charlie Courtney

In March I sent a letter to Keith Perry, our local representative in Tallahassee, requesting a reduction in the outrageous $2001.50 price of an annual recreational vessel fishing license. Thus far I have only received an acknowledgement of receipt of the letter, and no follow up action has occurred. Therefore, last week I sent the following letter to Goivernor Scott. If you have an interest in this issue, I urge you to write a similar letter to Governor Scott. Perhaps he will be more amenable to reducing this license fee given his penchant for reducing the tax burden on Floridians

Dear Governor Scott:

I am writing in regards to a gross discrepancy in the pricing of saltwater fishing licenses in Florida. I have fished in Florida for my entire working life (I am now retired), I am a past president of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club, and at one time I held a charter captain's license.

The discrepancy that concerns me is in regard to the Annual Recreational Vessel License (http://myfwc.com/license/recreational/saltwater-fishing/vessel-pier-licenses/). This license costs an astonishing $2001.50 per year and allows anyone to fish in saltwater from the licensed boat without having to purchase an individual fishing license. The purpose of this license is to allow friends and family to fish from that boat, and the boat's owner or captain may not charge participants a fee for the fishing trip.

In contrast, a commercial charter operator pays as little as $201.50 for 4 unlicensed anglers (http://myfwc.com/license/saltwater/commercial-fishing/charter/). Higher amounts apply if more unlicensed anglers are to be allowed (for example, $401.50 for 10 or fewer participants, which exceeds the maximum Coast Guard allowed persons capacity for the vast majority of recreational fishing boats). Note that commercial charter operators are taking people fishing on a daily to weekly basis, depending on the weather and the size of their operation. In contrast, most recreational fishermen fish no more than once weekly, and the majority fish once monthly or less often. However, an Annual Recreational Vessel License costs 10 times as much, which almost entirely eliminates the use of this licensing mechanism by recreational fishing boat owners with a resulting loss of revenue to the state. I strongly feel that this level of license fee represents an unreasonable tax that you could reduce with minimal impact on net state revenues.

I strongly feel that pricing the Annual Recreational Vessel License the same as the Charter Boat License will result in more people fishing for the first time on a friend's or relative's boat. This likely will lead to the sale of more individual fishing licenses as these persons discover that they enjoy the sport and buy their own boats. It will also generate more economic activity in coastal communities as more persons purchase bait and tackle, stay in local hotels, and eat at local restaurants.

Take me for an example. At 68 years of age, I am exempt from having to purchase a fishing license. The people I regularly fish with either have licenses or are age-exempt like me. However, I have a number of friends and relatives with only a slight interest in fishing who do not feel justified in purchasing an individual license to fish with me one or two days per year. At a cost of $201.50 I would be happy to purchase an Annual Recreational Vessel License to provide these persons the opportunity to fish with me.

Scott on Page 7

Scott

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I say this even though I do not need a license for myself and it likely would be less expensive, albeit inconvenient and somewhat embarrassing, for me to pay for their individual fishing licenses.

I therefore request that you seek an adjustment to the price of an Annual Recreational Vessel License comparable to that of the Charter Boat License, at least at the 4 and 10 participant levels.

Thank your for your consideration of this issue.

Charles H. Courtney

"If I fished only to capture fish, my fishing trips would have ended long ago."

— Zane Gray

Forecast

Continued from page 6

the scallop and treat it like an oyster you were going to fry. Heat up your oil, bread the scallop, and fry it.

A fried oyster tastes like an oyster and a fried scallop tastes like a scallop — not to get too fancy here with advanced culinary technique. This doubles the size of the "scallop" that you are preparing, another plus. And don't forget the cold beer!

My wife and I spent two weeks in Alaska in June, our first trip. We had bad luck with airplane flights (United) and with the weather in Alaska. I'm glad we went, but I'm not making any plans to go back. Too expensive. I'd rather spend the money right here in Florida on fishing trips.

I didn't fish in Alaska, for we were with our son and his family, including two young grandkids – this brought the total number of anglers to one: me. I was outvoted.

I did not get to fish in Seward, but here is what was biting: silver salmon, rock fish, and miscellaneous other critters. Some of the trips did manage halibut, albeit relatively small ones.

The weather was cold, rainy, and pretty rough, so I didn't mind too much not going fishing. From what I heard from folks around the docks, a better spot to go out of, especially for halibut, is Homer.

"In these sad and ominous days of mad fortune chasing, every patriotic, thoughtful citizen, whether he fishes or not, should lament that we have not among our countrymen more fishermen."

— Grover Cleveland

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Rosie's Place

Grand Cay, Bahamas

By Lou Graf

I just returned from Grand Cay, Bahamas, had a great time, caught a lot of fish and want to encourage everyone to think about going next summer – see the "real" Bahamas and experience great fishing, spearfishing and diving!

First a little history - Walker's Cay, the northern most developed island in the Bahamas, was a world class hotspot for big game offshore fishing. It was the site of several big money blue marlin tournaments every year, the tournaments fished by the mega-money boys with their multi-million dollar sportfishing boats, and professional captains and crews. The marina had almost 200 boat slips and was full most of the time - remember The Walkers Cay Chronicles on TV? All this came to an abrupt end when the marina and hotel were destroyed by a hurricane in 2004 and never rebuilt.

Four miles south of Walker's is the settlement on Grand Cay. Grand Cay is isolated, 50 miles from the next nearest marina with facilities (i.e., dock, fuel, ice, etc.). With a population of less than 350 it is an authentic Bahamian community – the way Bimini was 25 years ago. No streets, no cars only wide sidewalks, and you can forget shopping – not even a tee shirt shop, but there is a liquor store and a marginal grocery store. President Nixon built a house here and presently Peter Pulitzer (grandson of publishing tycoon Joseph Pulitzer) lives on his yacht anchored on the north side of the island.

Rosie's Place (www.rosiesplace.com) , the only marina in the settlement, has 15 boat slips, fuel (gas was $6.00 per gallon), restaurant, 19 rooms and four waterfront villas (2br/2bath w/ kitchen) but before you go, be advised it is "Bahamian" – this is not a Sandals or Atlantis. The rooms are furnished with a random collection of mismatched furniture that looks like it came from the Next-to-New Shop in Chiefland, Florida. While the rooms are not spotlessly clean the beds do have clean sheets and you are provided with fresh towels every day. On the plus side, every room and villa has a freezer just outside the door specifically for your bait and fish, a flat screen TV with cable and Wi-Fi.

The accommodations are not the reason to go to Grand Cay. It is the fishing and diving that are fantastic! With Walker's shut down you don't have 200 boats hammering the surrounding waters, and these days it is ten or less at any given time. Trolling rigged ballyhoo offshore, (300 to 600 feet) we boated several nice wahoo and dolphin in the 15 to 20 pound range. Starting at 6:30 in the evening chumming with cut bait one boat caught six yellowfin tuna - all over 50 pounds (They floated out a small hook in a piece of the chum, much like you would do for yellow tail snapper). Two blue marlin were raised by separate boats on the same day, one on a rigged Spanish mackerel and the other using a high-speed lure. The offshore drop off is dramatic, in places you go from 40 feet to 1,000 feet in less than a mile.

Bottom fishing with dead bait in the 100 to 200 foot range yielded yellowtail snapper, and several different species of grouper – bring your fish ID book. The rock hinds (strawberry grouper) are thick, but while small, are delicious.

At the marina, in the slip next to us, was a Grady White named Island Time which is kept at Sea Hag. I did not catch the owner's name, nice people, but they have been coming to Grand Cay for several years. Spearfishing around one of the several large reefs in the area in about 20 feet of water the Island Time crew brought in a wheel barrel full of fish including three 25 plus pound grouper and a dozen nice hog snapper. In fact, hog snapper were a common site at the cleaning station and, like the bigger grouper brought in, all had been speared (one note of caution – there are a lot of sharks). To legally spear fish you must use a Hawaiian sling and free dive - no tanks. The only exception to this is lionfish – legal to kill them any way you can.

If SCUBA is your thing, just off the reef at Walker's Cay are several dive sites ranging from 45 to 190 feet with visibility to the horizon. You could spend a month and not see it all but there are no facilities to refill tanks.

After you have loaded the boat with fish you can take a dip at any one of several nearby beaches. On Double Breasted Cay (just a mile south) is a beautiful bay with a large sand bar ideal for kids and beach parties.

Getting there is easy, it is a straight 110 nm shot from Stuart, Jupiter or Palm Beach Inlets with good water all the way. Plan your trip from the middle of June to the middle of July and the weather will be in

Rosie's on Page 9

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Rosie's

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your favor - seas running around two feet is the norm. I made the trip in less than three hours going and coming. Once there the fishing grounds, beaches, diving sites and reefs are all nearby. The locals are very friendly and the island is safe – everyone leaves their rods and reels out in the open on their boat. A few folks even left keys in the ignition.

I have been going to the islands since 1978. In the early days, pre-loran, it was a lot more challenging, but today with GPS it is simply a long boat ride. If you took your boat out to the barge and found it you can do this trip. I always recommend four simple rules, follow them and all will go well:

Rule #1 - You must be able, if necessary, to wait out bad weather.

Rule #2 – Always keep enough fuel in your boat to get home.

Rule #3 – Pay for everything in cash – The Bahamas does print its own currency ($1.00 Bahamian = $1.00 US) but the majority of the money in circulation is US dollars. If you wish to use a credit card (all major cards are widely accepted) you will be charged a 6% fee plus whatever foreign exchange fees your card company charges. Also, you are required to pay for your Cruising Permit in US dollars – boats 30 feet and under it is $150.00, over 30 feet $300.00.

Rule #4 - If you think you will need it, take it with you. Don't count on being able to buy it over there.

A helpful aide is Steve Dodge's The Cruising Guide to Abaco Bahamas which is updated annually. It is very complete, includes charts, and covers everything you need to know.

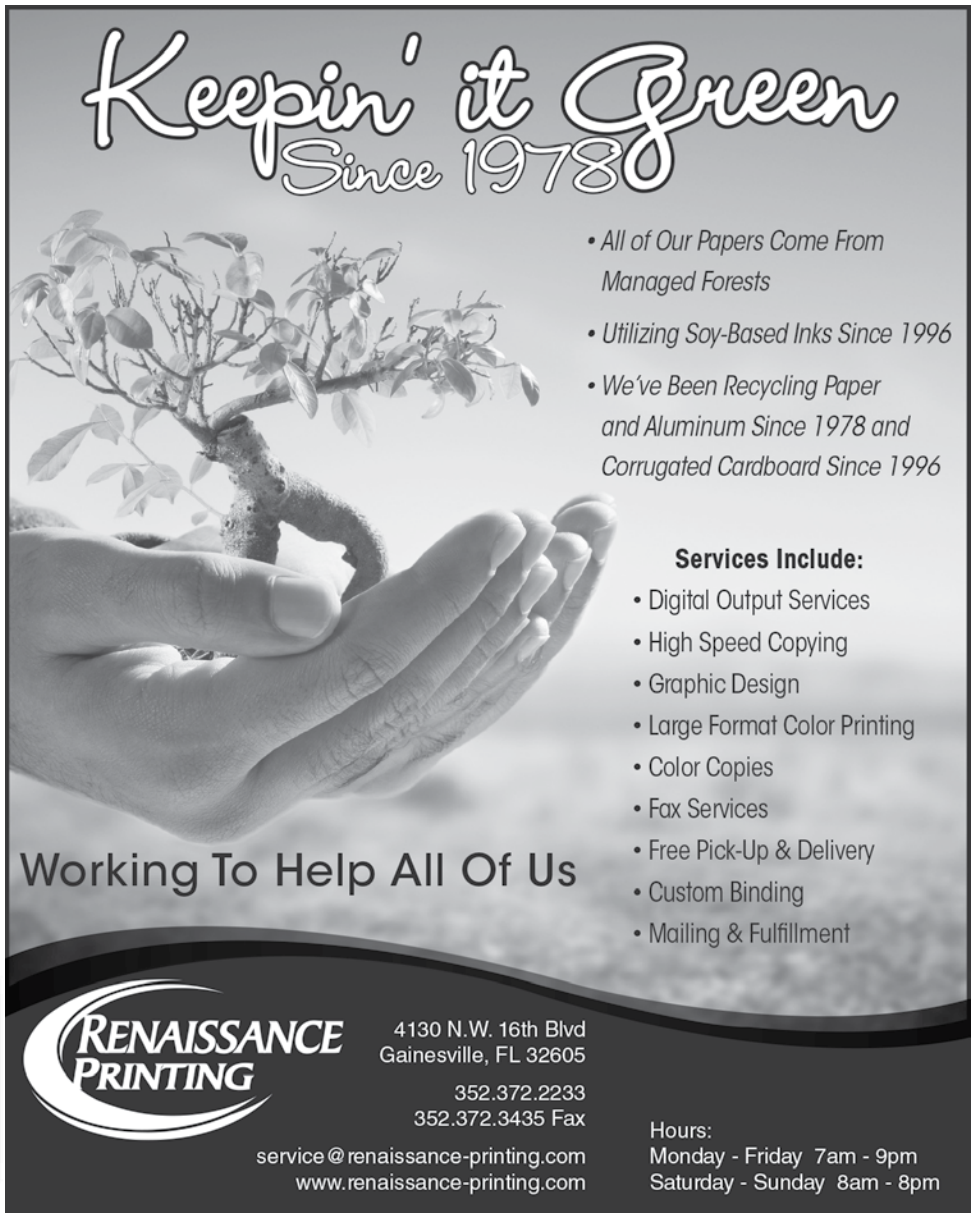
Finally, a heads up for you offshore guys, the White Marlin Open in Ocean City, Maryland, will be held on August 3 – 7. Last year the winning white marlin weighed 78 pounds and earned the angler $1,300,000.00 – without counting the Calcutta, which with 260 boats entered was probably just as big. A 738.5 pound blue marlin earned $500,000.00 and a 38 pound dolphin paid $15,000.00 - Go get'em!

Looking for a new boat? Check out the HydraSports 53 foot Suenos center console – the biggest center console you can buy to date. Powered by quad Seven Marine 557hp outboards, that's 2,228 hp. Seven Marine manufactures a 557 hp outboard based on a Cadillac 6.21 L supercharged V-8. Not enough ponies, good news they have just introduced a bigger better 627 hp motor which would give the HydraSports a cool 2,508 HP.

[Ed. Note: The Hydra-Sports boat building company has been purchased by Plantation Boat Mart and renamed "HYDRASPORTS Custom", bringing financial stability to the long-established, but struggling, company.]

"Fishing is a discipline in the equality of men — for all men are equal before fish."

— Herbert Hoover



Steinhatchee Scallops

By Charlie Courtney

With the annual GOFC scallop trip scheduled for Saturday, August 15, I have begun scouting the Big Bend area for the best spots. I have ruled out Crystal River in favor of Steinhatchee due to a better launch ramp and parking situation, better availability of scallop cleaners, and no reports of *Vibrio vulnificus* infections coming from Steinhatchee (see the story on page 14).

On July 9th, Allen Turner and I braved the crowds during the second week of scallop season to begin our hunt for the succulent bivalves. As per recommendations from the Sea Hag Marina staff, we ran north of the river's mouth to a spot in 3-4 feet of water just north of the Bird Rack.

Conditions for snorkeling were as perfect as I have ever seen — no wind, no waves beyond an occasional ripple, a modest tidal current, and clear 88.5 degree water that felt more like a dip in a bathtub than a swim in the ocean.

A two person limit of scallops awaits cleaning.

After anchoring up, we jumped in and snorkled over several areas near the boat to no avail before locating a concentration of scallops some 100+ feet off the stern. It is likely that we had anchored on a spot that had been picked over earlier in the week.

We then proceeded to collect scallops at a slow, but steady pace — one here, one there, with an occasional double. We discussed whether or not to move to a more productive spot, but we decided that the snorkeling conditions were simply to pleasant to move, and we did not want to finish gathering scallops too soon. We figured that at the current pace we would fill our limits in about 3 hours, which we did. I did, however, end up moving the boat a short distance (~100 yards) after we cleared out all the scallops within safe snorkeling distance of the boat.

The scallop grounds got busy as the morning wore on. By noontime Allen counted over 80 boats within sight, with many more coming out the channel as we returned to port.

The return to the Sea Hag was swift and smooth due to the exceptionally calm seas. We dropped off our catch with Sea Hag's scallop cleaning crew and enjoyed a nice shower in my Lance truck camper, which I had driven over to Steinhatchee for just that purpose. All clean and refreshed, we next enjoyed a lunch at Roy's before retrieving the day's catch.

The scallops were fairly small — approximately 120 to a 2 gallon limit (vs. 85 to a limit late last summer). However, the meats were plenty large, and we ended up with 2.1 pounds of scallop meats from our 4 gallons of whole scallops.

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2015 Taylor County Reef Deployment Update

By Jody Courtney
Vice President,
Taylor County Reef Research Team

The concrete cube deployment to SFMA is on schedule for deployment within 4 to 6 weeks. We will communicate exact dates when we get closer.

We have received preliminary approval from FWC for the scrap metal deployment to Buckeye Reef and will be meeting with the Contractor to start working logistics and a deployment schedule. We will communicate the deployment timeline after meeting with the Contractor.

We also have obtained FWC approval for the Dasher Memorial Reef and will be including it in the deployment going to Buckeye Reef.

Taylor County has supported construction of public artificial reefs since 1965, when the first reef was permitted and constructed west of the mouth of the Steinhatchee River. The reef program remains active today, with the help of a volunteer reef team and many contributors including the University of Florida-IFAS, Taylor County Board of Commissioners, and other local government partners including Dixie and Wakulla Counties. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission has supported reef construction and related monitoring from State (saltwater fishing license revenue) and Federal funds (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sport Fish Restoration Program).

[Editor's note: The GOFC Board has approved a donation of $2,500 to the TCRRT to support their 2015 artificial reef deployments.]

Reports

Continued from page 5

bait lay where it was struck. Do no more than give it just enough of a twitch to generate small ripples, imitating a quivering, stunned baitfish. Mr. Redfish will soon make a return visit!

"They say fish should swim thrice . . . first it should swim in the sea (do you mind me?), then it should swim in butter, and at last, sirrah, it should swim in good claret."

— Jonathan Swift

Men's Ellett Point Standings

20 July 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Morales, Carlos		0.00	3.7	25.00	33.60	25.00	1.00	25.00	5.00	11.47	9.50	10.11	5.10	20.24	4.40	10.00	3.50	24.58	5.20	18.81	3	**173.20**
Clark, Cliff	13.5	17.28	3	20.27		0.00		0.00		0.00	23.50	25.00	3.52	13.97	11.00	25.00	2.20	15.45	3.60	13.02	3	**132.99**
Cooper, Virgil		0.00		0.00	20.35	15.14		0.00		0.00	16.58	17.64	4.62	18.33	4.80	10.91	3.38	23.74	6.91	25.00	6	**116.76**
Wilson, Hal	19.53	25.00		0.00	28.10	20.91		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.26	20.87	7.71	17.52	2.50	17.56	1.67	6.04	6	**113.90**
McElroy, Ross		0.00	1	6.76	22.10	16.44		0.00		0.00		0.00	4.50	17.86	5.50	12.50	2.00	14.04	4.50	16.28	6	**89.88**
Byatt, John		0.00	2.25	15.20		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	6.30	25.00	4.40	10.00	2.69	18.87	3.69	13.35	0	**82.43**
Reed, Dale		0.00	2.19	14.80		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.14	20.40	4.77	10.84	2.55	17.91	3.24	11.72	6	**81.66**
Ellett, Ed		0.00	1	6.76	15.00	11.16		0.00		0.00	14.06	14.96		0.00		0.00	2.25	15.80	1.75	6.33	3	**58.01**
Horn, Phil		0.00		0.00	19.97	14.86		0.00		0.00	7.12	7.57		0.00		0.00	1.70	11.94	5.04	18.23	3	**55.61**
Kiel, Brian		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	10.90	25.00		0.00		0.00	3.38	7.67		0.00	2.00	7.24	0	**39.91**
Mcdavid, Elliott		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.35	21.23		0.00		0.00	4.50	16.28	0	**37.51**
Bacsik, Tom		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3.56	25.00	1.25	4.52	0	**29.52**
Roy, Russ		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.00	11.36		0.00	2.25	8.14	0	**19.50**
Giordano, Craig		**0.00**	**0.84**	**5.68**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**	**1.81**	**12.71**		**0.00**	**0**	**18.39**
Helseth, Jack		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	2.57	18.05		0.00	0	**18.05**
Williams, Austin		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	7.00	16.06		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	0	**16.06**
Cutright, Jack		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	1.38	4.97	3	**7.97**
Graf, Lou		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	1.25	4.52	3	**7.52**
Magnifico, Justin		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**	**6**	**6.00**
Baillee, Waldon		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**		**0.00**	**3**	**3.00**

Elite Angler Ellett Point Standings

20 July 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Knopf, Ken	13.7	18.22		0.00	31.00	24.32		0.00		0.00	24.00	24.00		0.00	5.14	22.16	3.60	25.00	5.03	25.00	6	144.69
Knopf, Debby	18.8	25.00		0.00	31.87	25.00		0.00		0.00	25	25.00		0.00	3.35	14.44	2.5	17.36		0.00	6	112.80
Patrick, John		0.00		0.00	20.55	16.12	1.18	25.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	5.80	25.00	1.80	12.50		0.00	3	81.62

FWC News Releases

Big Bend Blue Crab Trap Closure Starts July 20

Recreational and commercial blue crab traps in state waters from the Pasco-Hernando county line to the Wakulla-Franklin county line, including all waters of the Ochlockonee River and Bay, must be removed from the water before July 20, the first day of a 10-day trap closure.

This closure will give groups authorized by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission the opportunity to identify and retrieve lost and abandoned blue crab traps from the water.

Traps can be placed back in the water in this area starting July 30. Until then, blue crabs may be harvested with other gear. Blue crab harvesters may also use standard blue crab traps during the closure if the traps are attached to a dock or other private property.

Lost and abandoned blue crab traps are a problem in the blue crab fishery because they can continue to trap crabs and fish when left in the water. They can also be unsightly in the marine environment, damage sensitive habitats and pose navigational hazards to boaters on the water.

10 Lionfish = One Extra Lobster

At its June meeting in Sarasota, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission approved a new and exciting opportunity that will encourage divers to remove invasive lionfish by allowing them to take one extra spiny lobster each day during the two-day sport season this summer (July 29-30) that they also harvest 10 lionfish.

In addition, people can take a photo of their lionfish and lobster catch during the two-day season and post it on Facebook.com/LionfishReefRangers to get a "Be the Predator" T-shirt. One lucky photo entrant

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Women's Ellett Point Standings

20 July 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Haynes, Nia		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	10.50	25.00		0.00	5.00	25.00	2.00	25.00	1.00	9.09	0	84.09
Cutright, Melvina		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	1.31	16.38	2.75	25.00	3	44.38
Rothfork, Brittany	23.7	25.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	0	25.00
Ellett, Marcia		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	1.00	9.09	3	12.09
Reed, Liz		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3	3.00

Youth Ellett Point Standings

20 July 2015

GOFC member	Amberjack	pts	Bluefish	pts	Cobia	pts	Flounder	pts	Grouper	pts	King Mackerel	pts	Redfish	pts	Sheeps-head	pts	Spanish Mackerel	pts	Trout	pts	Bonus points	Total points
Kiel, Casey		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	7.80	25.00	35.40	25.00		0.00	4.06	25.00		0.00	2.13	25.00	0	100.00
Kiel, Kaitlyn		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	3.00	18.47		0.00		0.00	0	18.47
Wagner, Riley		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	14.50	10.24		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	0	10.24

FWC News

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will also win a lifetime saltwater fishing license via a drawing held shortly after the sport season.

"The FWC operates in a culture of innovation. Opportunities like this are a great way to get divers who are already in the water accustomed to removing lionfish," said Commissioner Brian Yablonski. "Our hope is that once lobster divers realize how easy it is to remove lionfish, they will continue to do so throughout the regular lobster season and beyond."

Lionfish are an invasive species that has a potential negative impact on Florida's native wildlife and habitat. With no predators or other mechanisms such as disease or parasites keeping the lionfish population under control in Florida at this time, harvest by divers is the primary means of lionfish removal.

For the 2015 spiny lobster sport season only, divers will be allowed a single spiny lobster over the bag limit per day for each day that they also harvest 10 or more lionfish. Lionfish must be kept as proof of harvest while on the water. When off the water, a photo of harvesters with their 10 lionfish must be kept to document eligibility for harvesting an extra lobster. Lionfish must be harvested the same day and prior to taking the additional lobster. All other rules, including no spearfishing zones, apply.

The two-day spiny lobster recreational sport season (also known as mini-season) falls on the last Wednesday and Thursday of July each year before the August 6 opening of the regular season. During this two-day season, the regular bag limit is six spiny lobster in state and federal waters of Biscayne National Park and off Monroe County, and 12 spiny lobster elsewhere. There is no bag limit for lionfish; harvesters can take as many as they want.

If the program is successful at encouraging lionfish removal, it could be continued in future years.

Help the FWC by reporting all lionfish catches and sightings via the Report Florida Lionfish app or at MyFWC.com/Lionfish.

FWC Enlists Gulf Reef Fish Anglers to Provide Data

As part of its goal of working with anglers to improve data collection and management of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is asking for anglers' assistance through participation in the Gulf Reef Fish Survey. This new data collection program will improve how recreational catch is monitored and provide information needed to ensure sustainable fisheries in Florida.

As of April 1, 2015, saltwater recreational anglers fishing from private boats off Florida's Gulf coast (excluding Monroe County) are required to sign up for the survey if they intend to harvest, attempt to harvest or possess any of the following reef fish species: red snapper, vermilion snapper, black and red grouper, gag, gray triggerfish, banded rudderfish, almaco jack, lesser amberjack, and greater amberjack. Anglers enrolled in the Gulf Reef Fish Survey may be selected to receive a questionnaire in the mail to report information about their recent recreational fishing trips. Additionally, FWC biologists will meet an-

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Vibrio vulnificus

Flesh Eating Bacteria

By Charlie Courtney

Recently three persons have become infected with *Vibrio vulnificus* in the Crystal River area, and one has died. As a result there has been considerable discussion as to whether it is safe to go scalloping in this area, with a number of people saying that they will visit Steinhatchee this year, instead of Crystal River. It therefore seems appropriate that we talk a bit about this bacterium and the risk of becoming infected.

Vibrio vulnificus is a bacterium commonly found in warm salt, and especially brackish, water. It is regularly found in Florida waters, particularly during the summer months, because the bacteria greatly increase in numbers in warm water.

Humans can become infected through eating raw or undercooked shellfish or by exposure of cuts and scrapes to salt water. The risk of developing severe illness is related to the number of bacteria someone is exposed to. As a result, raw or undercooked shellfish are the most important source of serious infections in people, because they feed by filtering bacteria out of the water, greatly increasing the number of bacteria they contain. In contrast, relatively clean salt water will contain many times fewer bacteria, with somewhat more bacteria found in brackish water.

In most cases an infection is of no consequence and may appear as no more than a transient skin ulcer. However, in a few individuals having compromised immune systems, it becomes a life-threatening illness characterized by fever, chills, a serious drop in blood pressure known as septic shock, and skin blisters and ulcers. Persons having liver disease, immunosuppressive diseases, or those taking immunosuppressive drugs are at much greater risk of developing a serious infection as are, perhaps, the elderly. Such persons are some 80 times more likely to develop a severe infection and, if infected, half of them will die.

Infection by *Vibrio vulnificus* is rare, but it is likely more common than previously thought because most cases are mild and go unreported — we only hear about the severe cases. In Citrus, Levy, Dixie and Taylor counties combined, there were a total of 3 cases of human *Vibrio vulnificus* infection reported in 2014, with no deaths. Thus far in 2015 there have been 3 reported infections with one death from those same counties, but all 3 cases supposedly are associated with Crystal River's Shell Island.

Additionally, there have been occasional reports of infection in counties inland to these (one case each in Alachua and Marion counties), but the data does not state whether or not the infected persons have been exposed to coastal waters of the Big Bend. State wide, an average of 30 cases are reported each year, with 9 deaths. So far in 2015, 17 cases with 9 deaths have been reported state wide.

What can you do to protect yourself from infection? First of all, do not eat raw or undercooked shellfish, including scallop meats. Never. Ever. Do you enjoy playing Russian roulette? This is the most common source of human infection.

Second, avoid exposure of open wounds or broken skin to warm salt or brackish water, or to raw shellfish harvested from such waters. Cuts and scrapes from oyster bars are an especially significant risk factor. Any cuts or scrapes should be rinsed with fresh water and washed with soap followed by an application of hydrogen peroxide, which is very good at killing bacteria.

Finally, if there is any question that you may be infected with *Vibrio vulnificus*, see a doctor immediately and inform him or her of your suspicion. This bacterium can kill you very quickly.

This article is not meant to scare anyone from enjoying our Big Bend waters. But by using some common sense, you can greatly reduce your risk of infection. To put things in perspective, the automobile trip over to the coast poses a far greater danger than infection by *Vibrio vulnificus*. Taking the steps mentioned above to reduce your risk of infection is like wearing a seat belt while in your automobile.

Check the Box

Do Something Nice for Manatees & Sea Turtles

FWC News Release

It is easy to do something nice for Florida manatees and sea turtles. Check the box for manatees or sea turtles on the form you receive in the mail to renew your annual registration of cars, boats and trucks.

When you check the box, you are donating $5 to the funds supporting conservation of these popular Florida wildlife species. You will receive one or both of the new Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) decals featuring manatees and sea turtles, depending on how many boxes you check. They are available as of July 1.

The message of this year's manatee decal: "Give them space." It is what you should do when encountering manatees while paddling through Florida waters on a kayak, canoe or paddleboard. You can help conserve them by keeping your distance and giving these large, slow-moving mammals space to surface, breathe and move freely within their habitats, which include shallow areas, seagrass beds and sanctuaries.

The new sea turtle decal features the hawksbill, Florida's most tropical sea turtle. Hawksbills are found primarily on reefs in the Florida Keys and along the state's southeastern Atlantic coast. An endangered species, the hawksbill was sought after in the past to use its beautifully patterned shell for jewelry, hair ornaments and other decorative items. Though use of its shell is banned in most of the world, it still is possible to find such goods, so please don't buy them.

Floridians can donate the $5 to receive a decal when registering a vehicle or vessel, or when renewing a registration through the mail, online or in person at county tax collectors' offices across the state.

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glers at marinas and boat ramps to collect information about their catch that day.

Anglers' participation in this focused survey will help improve estimates of recreational fishing efforts and catch for use in management decisions specifically for reef fish. The information gained from this monitoring program will assist state and regional fisheries management agencies in their mission to ensure a healthy and sustainable resource and to maximize recreational fishing opportunities in Florida. Participants who are contacted by FWC and agree to provide information will be entered into a drawing to win an annual, 5-year or lifetime recreational saltwater fishing license.

"The success of this new data collection program not only depends on anglers signing up for the Gulf Reef Fish Survey, but also, if selected, responding to questionnaires and dockside interviews," said Beverly Sauls, research scientist with FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. "Without reliable information on all fishing activities, managers are often forced to take conservative measures to ensure overfishing does not occur. Information collected from the Gulf Reef Fish Survey will help managers provide optimum recreational fishing opportunities in Florida".

Gag Grouper Opened in Most Gulf Waters, Closed in 4-County Region

Gag grouper opened for recreational harvest in most Gulf of Mexico state waters and all Gulf federal waters July 1. The same day, the season closed in state waters off the coast of Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties.

The gag grouper recreational harvest season in Gulf of Mexico state waters, not including Franklin, Jefferson, Wakulla and Taylor counties, will remain open through December 3, closing December 4.

State waters off Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties were open from April 1 through June 30 and will not be open during the July 1-through-Dec. 3 season. The four-county region includes all waters of Apalachicola Bay and Indian Pass, including those in Gulf County, and all waters of the Steinhatchee River, including those in Dixie County.

Regional seasons such as these provide additional fishing opportunities and access while continuing to rebuild the gag grouper population to sustainable levels. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission manages marine fish from the shore to 9 nautical miles out in the Gulf of Mexico.

Monroe County is also excluded from this season because it follows the Atlantic season for gag grouper.

In state and federal Gulf waters, the gag grouper recreational harvest minimum size limit is 22 inches total length and the daily bag limit is two gag grouper per person within the four-fish grouper aggregate limit.

Gag grouper also opens in Gulf federal waters July 1 and will remain open through December 2, closing on December 3. Gag caught in federal waters during the federal season may be taken ashore in Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties, but boats with gag grouper aboard may not stop and must have gear stowed while traveling through state waters in that region.

Pending Barracuda Conservation Measures

At its June meeting in Sarasota, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission gave initial approval to several barracuda conservation measures after hearing concerns from various south Florida stakeholder groups about potential declines in barracuda populations.

These proposed changes will come back before the Commission at its September meeting in Weston for final approval. If approved at that time, changes will apply in state and federal waters off Collier, Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin counties only, where the majority of barracuda population concerns have been voiced, and will include:

Creating a recreational and commercial slot limit of 15 to 36 inches,

Creating a recreational daily bag limit of two fish per person, and

Creating a commercial vessel limit of 20 fish per day.

Because there are no species-specific regulations for barracuda, they are currently subject only to general statewide regulations, which include a default recreational bag limit of two fish or 100 pounds, whichever is greater. There are no commercial trip limits and no regulations in federal waters.

In recent years, stakeholders in southeast Florida and the Florida Keys who fish and dive have voiced concerns about seeing declines in barracuda numbers. FWC staff gathered additional public input at a series of workshops earlier this year.

The available barracuda data is limited and it would be difficult to gather enough additional data to evaluate the status of the population due to their complex life history and behaviors. Therefore, a full stock assessment has not been conducted on this species and the population size is not known. However, there has been a declining trend in the number of barracuda observed during underwater surveys conducted in the Keys during recent years, as well as a declining trend in the average size of those barracuda, which is consistent with concerns expressed by stakeholders.

A slot limit would contribute to barracuda conservation by eliminating harvest pressure on the younger, more vulnerable fish, while also conserving the largest fish, which are the ones responsible for the vast majority of reproduction. Bag and trip limits would reduce overall harvest and leave more fish in the water to replenish the population and to be enjoyed by recreational divers and sport fishermen.

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