

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 26, 2021
Subject: Staff Report – Southwest Red Tide Update: Snook, Redfish, and Spotted Seatrout

Purpose:

Provide an update on snook, redfish, and spotted seatrout populations in southwest Florida following the 2017-2019 red tide event.

Why:

To allow re-evaluation of the current catch-and-release status of these species in southwest Florida based on updated information.

Top Points:

- 1) Red tide is a natural event that occurs in Florida most years; however, the 2017-2019 event was severe and caused extensive fish kills.
- 2) In an abundance of caution, FWC took short-term conservation measures for snook, redfish, and spotted seatrout, making them only catch-and-release in the most affected area of southwest Florida.
- 3) The 2017-2019 red tide event does not appear to have caused long-term negative effects on snook, redfish, and spotted seatrout in southwest Florida.

Affected Parties:

Recreational anglers and charter captains who fish for these species in southwest Florida, as well as commercial harvesters who take spotted seatrout in this area.

Summary:

The prolonged 2017-2019 red tide event and associated large-scale fish kills generated public concern, especially for three of Florida's most popular inshore fish species: snook, redfish, and spotted seatrout. Beginning in 2018, FWC responded with a series of short-term conservation measures, ultimately making these species catch-and-release only in a portion of southwest Florida. The current Executive Order (EO) for Pasco County through Gordon Pass in Collier County is in effect through May 2021 (map in Attachment 1).

Recent monitoring data indicate the 2017-2019 red tide event did not cause long-term negative effects on snook, redfish, and spotted seatrout. Anglers and charter captains from the affected area report seeing more of each species since FWC implemented catch-and-release measures. Staff will also provide an update on the red tide event that developed off Lee and Collier counties in late 2020.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff is recommending that our Executive Director rescind the catch-and-release EO and resume FWC regulations for harvest of these species. Staff welcome Commissioner input on this issue.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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