

Red Drum

Draft Rule Review and Discussion Update No. 2 - February 8, 2007



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Update No. 2 – More information on current regulations was added to slide 5. More information was added to slide 7 and the staff recommendation (slide 10) was also modified.

Update No. 1 - This item was updated following a meeting of the Red Drum Workgroup in mid-January 2007. Draft rule recommendations and workshop results were added. Results from the workshops and surveys have been included, which has made it necessary to update the entire document.

This is a review and discussion of a draft rule for red drum. Following the 2005 red drum stock assessment, a Red Drum Workgroup was formed as a means to provide input to staff regarding the future management of the red drum fishery. After reviewing assessment data twice in 2006, this group recommended proactive regulations. Their suggested changes were presented at nine public workshops. The results of these workshops, as well as online surveys, were presented to the workgroup in mid-January 2007 for review. The workgroup made final management recommendations to staff for the draft rule.

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2005 Stock Assessment Results Recap

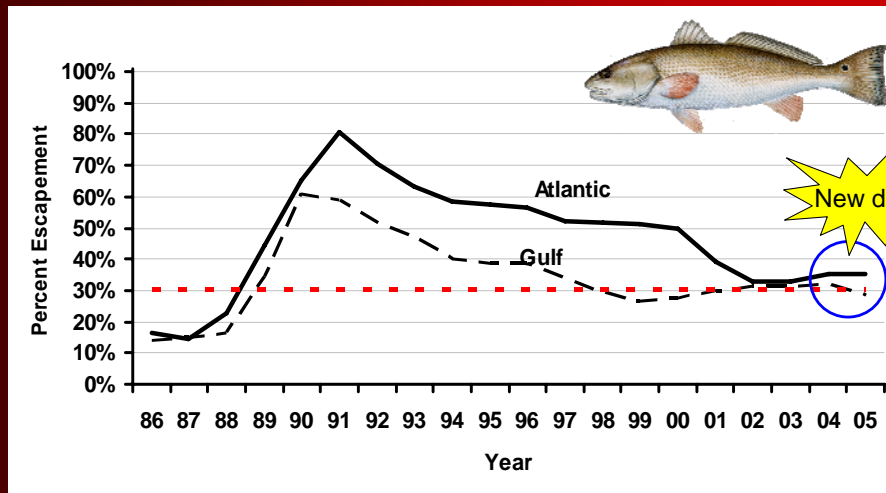


- In 2003 we were meeting the management objective of 30% escapement on both coasts (Gulf -32%; Atlantic -34%)
- Number of trips and number of red drum harvested has increased since the late 1980s
- Recruitment and abundance are stable but fishing effort is increasing and this trend is expected to continue
- Next assessment due in 2008



This slide provides a brief recap of the 2005 red drum stock assessment, which included data through 2003. The assessment indicates that red drum populations are probably achieving 30% escapement through age 4. In 2003, the escapement was estimated to be 32% on the Gulf coast and 34% on the Atlantic coast. The number of trips and the number of red drum harvested have increased since the late 1980s. Recruitment (age-0) and abundance (age 1 to 3) have been stable since 1990. However, if fishing effort continues to increase, the next stock assessment, which is due in 2008, will likely conclude that escapement will have decreased. Between now and then, the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) will be collecting data on size, age structure, and catch-and-release mortality of sub-adult and adult red drum in the Tampa Bay estuary. These additional data and increasingly refined analytical techniques will provide improved assessments for future management of the red drum stock.

Escapement



- Escapement is the proportion of fish surviving through age 4 relative to the number that would have survived to that age if there was no fishery

This graph shows the escapement rate trend for both the Atlantic and Gulf coasts since 1986 and includes preliminary updated information from 2004 and 2005 not included in the assessment. The horizontal dotted line represents the 30% escapement goal. Escapement is the proportion of fish surviving through age 4 relative to the number that would have survived to that age if there was no fishery. Escapement is used as a proxy for spawning potential ratio (SPR). As we know little about the offshore adult spawning population, we cannot determine SPR, and instead must use the numbers of juveniles in the estuaries (escapement) to estimate the abundance of adults. The escapement goal for red drum has been set at 30% to ensure an adequate abundance of the spawning population, which in turn should ensure a stable supply of recruits to the stock. If escapement drops below 30%, studies indicate that recruitment would likely decrease over time, subsequently resulting in decreased abundance.

Before being managed aggressively in the mid 1980s, escapement rates were below 30% on both coasts. However, these rates increased rapidly in response to strict regulations placed on red drum in the mid 1980s, and peaked in 1990 and 1991. Starting around 1992, escapement rates declined due to increasing fishing effort and harvest. This trend continued through the late 1990s on the Gulf coast, and through 2002 on the Atlantic coast. The additional preliminary data from the 2004-2005 years (circled) shows escapement increased slightly on the Atlantic (35%) and decreased slightly on the Gulf (29%).

Workgroup Formed



- DMFM formed a Red Drum Workgroup to review the results of the assessment and discuss potential management options for the future of the fishery
- Group has 24 members representing various parts of the state and fishing stakeholders
- Has met three times; meets via videoconference
- Group decided they wanted to put proactive management measures in place to: 1) prevent more restrictive measures after the next assessment, and, 2) to ensure the long-term sustainability of one of Florida's premier fisheries



After evaluating the results of the assessment and the data on increasing fishing pressure, the Division of Marine Fisheries Management decided to form a Red Drum Workgroup to advise staff on the future of their fishery. This group is made up of members from Florida Guides Association, Coastal Conservation Association, Inshore Saltwater Anglers of Jacksonville, South Florida Fly Fishing Club, Ocean Reef Club, International Game Fish Association, Florida Sport Fish Association, Redfish Nation, as well as tournament directors and various recreational anglers.

The Workgroup has met three times via videoconference from various FWC offices around the state. After some very lively discussions they decided they wanted to put proactive management measures in place to: 1) prevent more restrictive measures after the next assessment; and, 2) to ensure the long-term sustainability of one of Florida's premier fisheries.

Specific Workgroup Recommendations



<u>Options (all bag limit = 1)</u>	<u>Escapement % Atl.</u>	<u>Glf.</u>
▪ 20-26" slot	42	35
▪ 21-27" slot	40	37
▪ 18-26" slot	41	34
▪ 19-26" slot	42	35
▪ 21-26" slot	43	37
▪ 18-25" slot	45	36
▪ 21-27" slot, Mar. or Apr. closed	41	38
▪ 20-26" slot, Mar. or Apr. closed	42	35
▪ 21-26" slot, Mar. or Apr. closed	43	37
▪ 18-27" slot, Sept. or Oct. closed	49	43

No closed season

- Recommended to raise management goal to 40% escapement
- Current regulations: **18-27" slot, bag=1, no closed season**
Escapement estimate - Atlantic - 36% and Gulf - 32%

More specifically, the Workgroup recommended ten management options to be taken to the public workshops. However the majority of the Workgroup participants preferred the 20-26 inch slot, bag = 1, and no closed season. This option is estimated to result in an escapement rate of 42% on the Atlantic and 35% on the Gulf within three years of implementation.

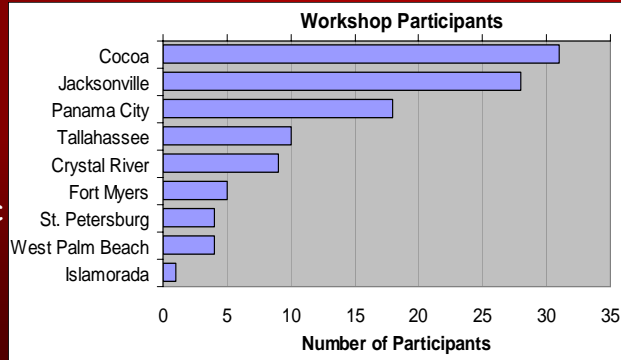
The Workgroup also recommended raising the management goal for red drum from 30% to 40% escapement, which would hold this important fishery to a similar high standard as in other high profile state fisheries such as snook and spotted seatrout. As a reminder, the current regulations for red drum are 18-27 inch slot, bag = 1, no closed season. If we keep the current regulations and assume that fishing mortality rates remain at average levels, then in three years we estimate that the escapement rates would be 36% on the Atlantic and 32% on the Gulf.

Public Workshops



- 9 statewide workshops (+ one make-up), November - December and make-up in January
- Locations: Panama City, Tallahassee (2), Crystal River, St. Pete, Ft. Myers, Jacksonville, Cocoa, West Palm Beach, and Islamorada

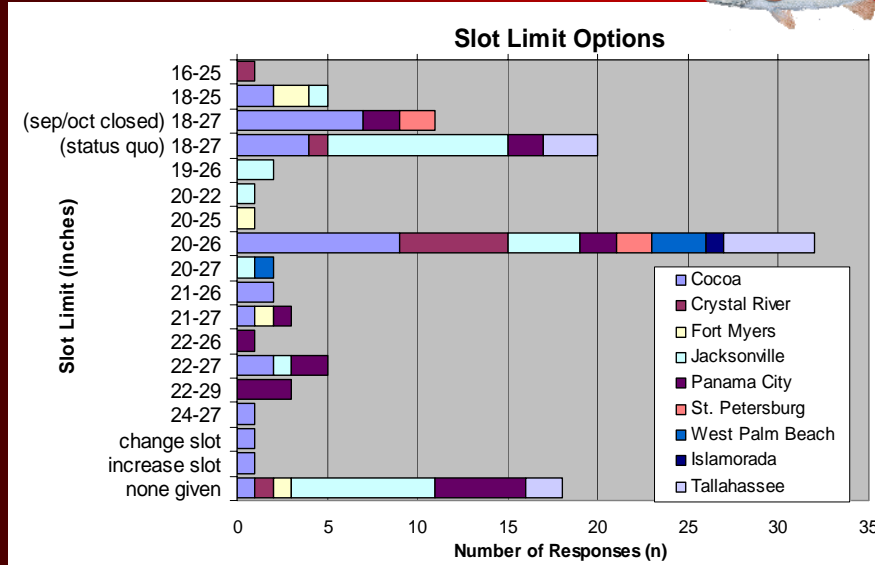
- Total attendees: 110
- Oral public testimony: 55
- Written survey public testimony: 110



There were nine statewide workshops held from November through December. The Tallahassee workshop was poorly attended, likely due to inclement weather (tornado warnings). Thus, we held a make-up workshop in Tallahassee in January 2007. Other workshop locations included Panama City, Crystal River, St. Petersburg, Ft. Myers, Jacksonville, Cocoa, West Palm Beach, and Islamorada.

A total of 110 members of the public attended the workshops. The graph shows the numbers of participants at each location. Of the 110 participants, 55 gave oral public testimony and all attendees completed a written survey provided during the workshops to further solicit public preferences for red drum management options.

Workshop Survey Results

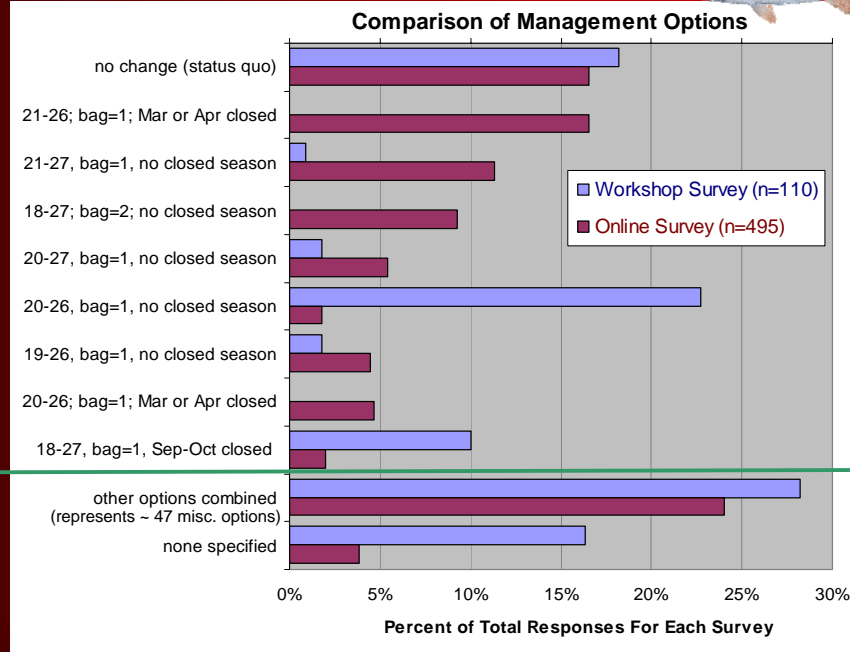


- Bag limit: 80% wanted to keep bag at 1-fish
- No Closed Season: 70% workshop, 75% online
- Go to 40% Escapement: 56% workshop, 43% online

From the survey, the preferred slot limit options of respondents have been examined. Approximately one third (31%) of workshop respondents favored a 20-26 inch slot limit either with (n=6) or without a closed season (n=25). There was statewide support for this option though the majority of support came from the Cocoa and Crystal River workshops. Just over one quarter (28%) of workshop survey respondents, particularly at the Jacksonville, Cocoa, Crystal River and Panama City workshops, preferred maintaining the current slot size regulations at 18-27 inches, and 10% of the participants suggested adding a two-month closure during September and October. Approximately 17% of the respondents did not specify a slot limit preference.

In addition to the workshop survey, we also conducted an online survey using the same survey module. The online survey had 530 respondents. Maintaining the current red drum bag limit of one fish was preferred by 80% of workshop participants and 80% of online survey respondents. The vast majority of workshop attendees (70%) and online survey respondents (75%) did not favor a closed season for red drum. Also, 56% of the workshop attendees suggested raising the management goal to 40% escapement, while only 43% of respondents of the online survey favored increasing the management goal.

Workshop and Online Survey Results



This graph compares the red drum survey results from responses provided by the workshop attendees and from online respondents. The responses to the survey varied between the workshop and online respondents. The strongest support (22%) for proposed management options among workshop respondents was the 20-26 inch slot; bag=1; no closed season option. However, only 2% of the online survey respondents favored this option. Among online survey respondents, the 21-26 inch slot; bag=1; March or April closed season option and maintaining status quo each received strong support (17%) from of the respondents. Likewise, the workshop respondents also had a strong preference (18%) for maintaining the current red drum regulations, however they had no support for the 21-26 inch slot, bag=1, March or April closed season option. Survey respondents at the workshops also favored (10%) the current slot and bag limits but with a two-month closure during September and October. The online respondents showed some support (10%) for increasing the bag limit to two while maintaining the other current red drum regulations; though, much (54%) of this support was from the Northeast respondents.

Approximately 47 other options were suggested by respondents of both surveys, but each option did not amount to more than 5% of the total responses from each survey and there was very little agreement between the two survey results. Nearly 16% of workshop respondents and 4% of online respondents did not offer a preferred management option.

Revised Workgroup Recommendations



▪ Post Public Input

- 20-26" slot, bag = 1, no closed season
Atlantic - 42%, Gulf - 35%
- Management goal raised to 40% escapement
- Habitat protection is of utmost importance
- License all anglers
(eliminate shoreline exemption)



After reviewing all the public comments, the Red Drum Workgroup recommended the 20-26 inch slot, bag = 1, and no closed season option. According to model predictions, this option could result in 42% escapement on the Atlantic coast and a 35% escapement on the Gulf coast three years after implementation. The workgroup also recommended raising the management goal to 40% escapement. The workgroup also wanted to stress that protection of habitat is of utmost importance for red drum and all of Florida's fisheries. It was felt that if habitat loss and restoration is not adequately addressed, then changing the regulations will have little effect on red drum populations. The workgroup members also felt that licensing all anglers is very important to improve the quality of data used in stock assessments and to provide adequate funding for research and enforcement.

Staff Recommendation



- 20-26" slot, bag = 1, no closed season
- Staff recommends raising the established FWC management goal from 30% to 40% escapement which will enhance the quality of the red drum fishery
- Approve draft rule for Final Public Hearing at the April meeting, which would allow new rules to be effective in July 2007



Staff is recommending changing the legal slot limit to 20-26 inches while maintaining the year-round fishery and the one fish daily bag limit. Staff also believes that raising the management goal to 40% escapement will enhance the quality of the red drum fishery. We believe this is a proactive approach to enhance and improve the quality of the fishery, while continuing to allow ample fishing opportunity for anglers throughout the state.

Staff is seeking approval of the draft rule for Final Public Hearing in April, which, if approved, would allow the new rule to be effective in July 2007.