

Largemouth bass is our freshwater rock star (higher directed effort than any fish in Florida and the official freshwater state fish) and what we can accomplish for bass fisheries (access, habitat, water quality, new opportunities) will also improve black crappie, striped bass and their hybrids, panfish, catfish, and commercial fishing. Abundant, diverse, and productive aquatic habitats also help support countless species of amphibians and reptiles, birds, mammals, and invertebrates. While this plan defines Division of Freshwater Fisheries (DFFM) Vision, it is an Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) integrated program to increase the relevance of our freshwater research (Fish and Wildlife Research Institute), habitat management (Division of Habitat and Species Conservation), fish management (DFFM), outreach (Office of Community Relations), and regulatory compliance (Division of Law Enforcement) programs. Many of our research and management programs are funded with federal grants from the Sport Fish Restoration Act.

Sustaining Fisheries Values

- **Ecological**
 - Ensuring healthy lakes and rivers for all fish, wildlife, and people.
- **Economic**
 - \$2.4 billion impact = 24,000 jobs.
- **Social**
 - Providing positive alternatives for communities, families, and youth that adds to the quality of life for all of us.



Our bass fisheries provide significant value to our state. Management for quality bass fisheries will serve as an umbrella that provides benefits for a wide variety of things.

Ecological benefits: Ensuring healthy lakes and rivers benefits many species of fish and wildlife as well as trophy fisheries. Providing necessary habitat and harvest protection to produce high quality bass fisheries will benefit lake, river, wetland, and watershed conservation.

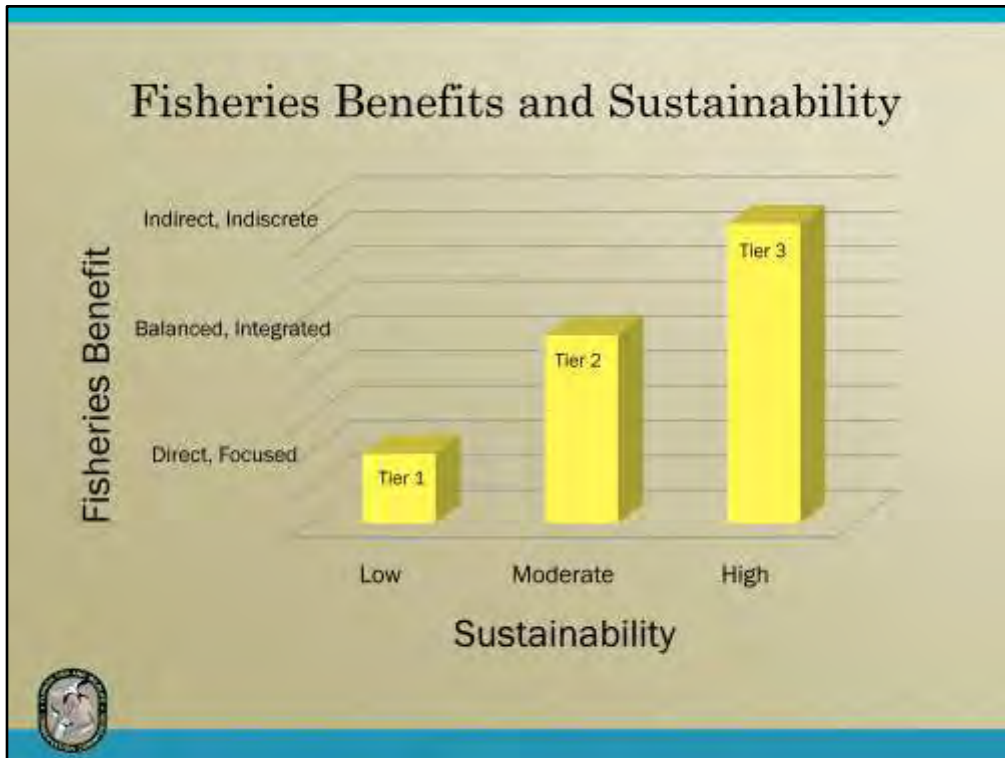
Economic benefits: Documenting and increasing the economic impacts derived from fishing strengthen local economies, fund fisheries and lake management programs, and drive tourism and angling-related businesses. National professional bass fishing tournaments have huge economic impacts. Enhancing Florida's reputation will draw these events to our smaller towns and cities. These events garner worldwide attention attracting non-resident anglers to Florida throughout the year. Healthy lakes with vibrant fisheries also enhance property values and development potential, while justifying the need for sustainable development practices to protect aquatic resources into the future.

Social benefits: Communities benefit from a higher quality of life resulting from family and youth involvement in fishing. Programs such as Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs[®] have successfully reduced the potential for youth attraction to dangerous lifestyles (www.futurefisherman.org/programs/hofnod/index.html). Encouraging youth and families to get outside and enjoy fishing improves health by reducing the potential for obesity and other threats to public health. Elements of the BBMP integrate with the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network.

Ecological, economic, and social factors are interrelated and underappreciated. The Black Bass Management Plan will elevate these important factors within the psyche of citizens, elected officials, anglers, educators, health practitioners, and the business community.



We must take a long term approach to succeed in this effort. Declines to lake and river habitat for sport fisheries will only continue unless we effectively engage and influence the process as Florida continues to grow.



The BBMP is a key element in how DFFM is re-defining our approach. Management projects identified within the plan fall into a Tier 1-3 structure that defines fishery benefits and the sustainability of these benefits. Some projects will provide immediate, direct benefits to anglers while others will take years or decades to be fully appreciated as critical to sustaining our valuable fisheries resources. Tier 1: Direct and Focused- stocking, regulations, and enhancements that are easily recognized. Tier 2: Balanced and Integrated - broader lake and watershed management where we lead the effort. Tier 3: Indirect and Indiscrete - complex; multi-jurisdictional; where we influence the larger process.

Fisheries management must be sustainable by ensuring that our fisheries have the capacity to endure in a rapidly changing environment, remaining diverse and productive over time.

Some of the most apparent fisheries projects we can do may not last long. It is important that we achieve a balance in our efforts to provide short-term recognizable results with long-term investments that garner less public or political recognition.

Cornerstones of the Plan

1. **Science -based** research to guide and evaluate management.
2. **Public involvement** to understand and incorporate opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.
3. **Adaptive Management** of ecological, economic, and social factors.
4. **Promotion** of these factors to gain public support for lake, river, and watershed management.



The BBMP is founded on four principles; good science, public involvement, adaptive approach in management (try, learn, and adjust), promotion of ecological, economic, and social values to gain wide angler, citizen, community, corporate, and intra-governmental support. Adaptive Management is an approach that attempts to strike a balance between competing factors or values. Many times the steps from start to finish are not known; however, with constant monitoring and adjustment, progress occurs.

BBMP Team

- Dale Jones, Leader: DFFM
- Perran Ross, Facilitator: University of Florida
- Dennis Renfro, TAG support: DFFM
- Bob Wattendorf, Writing Team Leader: DFFM
- **DFFM:** Allen Martin, Barron Moody, Marty Hale, Bill Poudier, Chris Paxton, Marty Mann, John Cimbaro, Katie Woodside, Nicole Kierl, Mike Matthews, Eddie Leonard, Matt Gardner, Jon Fury
- **FWRI:** Nick Trippel, Jason Dotson, Wes Porak, Jim Estes
- **DHSC:** Matt Phillips
- **DLE:** Guy Armstrong



This was a truly FWC integrated effort. We appreciate help from many FWC staff who participated. Special thanks goes to Doc Kokol's staff with Community Relations with help on final wording of the document.

Technical Assistance Group (TAG)

- Chris Horton/Noreen Clough, B.A.S.S. Conservation Director
- Dr. Mike Allen, University of Florida
- Shaw Grigsby, Professional Angler/Ironwood Productions
- Todd Kersey, Florida Freshwater Fishing Coalition
- Ken Duke, Bassmaster Magazine Editor
- Mark Detweiler, Big Toho Marina Owner
- Gary Simpson, Media/Industry/Professional Angler
- Mark Jackson/Kris Keprios, Central Florida Tourism Development
- Tommy Thompson, Florida Outdoor Writers Association
- Terry Seagraves, Kissimmee Tourism/Professional Angler
- Peter Thiveros, Professional Angler
- Herb Stephens, Bass Club Member, Angler



We are fortunate to have assembled an excellent panel of for our Technical Assistance Group (TAG) representing industry, academia, media, fishing organizations, and professional fisherman. This panel met four times and held a few telephone conferences. The helped interpret and prioritize public input received throughout the process and commented an many drafts of the Plan. We sincerely appreciate their expertise, time, input, and patience.

TAG Vision

- Florida black bass fisheries thriving in quality habitats provide anglers with more locations and opportunities to catch quality bass and higher trophy bass catches. Fishing quality and angler satisfaction are sustained with higher angler recruitment and fishing effort. With strong support from anglers and all citizens, Florida is recognized as the “Bass Fishing Capital of the World,” based on great resources and responsible management.



During the first TAG meeting, members developed this vision statement to help us frame the plan objectives. The TAG has interpreted public input received through two main campaigns. They also pointed out many concerns and how we may approach common misconceptions that create a gap between biologists and anglers.

Economic Value of Bass Fishing in Florida



- Anglers spend 15 million days a year pursuing bass in Florida (60% of freshwater fishing effort).
- Bass fishing generates \$1.25 billion economic impact annually.
- This plan was influenced by the input of thousands of anglers from all over the nation.



Fishermen spend nearly 15 million days pursuing bass in Florida and bass fishing for is a huge economic engine for Florida generating \$1.25 billion per year in direct revenues. Bass fisheries are a public resource and the objectives, priorities, and management actions are based on input from thousands of anglers. While most input was from Florida anglers, input came from over 40 states and several countries.



Florida has four separate species of black basses, with largemouth bass in north Florida exhibiting a distinctly mixed genetic heritage. The best known is the Florida largemouth bass, which is native to the peninsula. The Northern – Florida hybrid largemouth bass are found primarily in Suwannee river drainage and waters north and west of the Suwannee. Suwannee, shoal, and spotted bass also occur but in much more limited geographic ranges within Florida.



Public input and plan management actions are focused into four sections:

New opportunities: Identify new or special opportunities to create or substantially enhance black bass fisheries, and ensure FWC is proactive about opening new fisheries for the public. Successfully implementing new opportunities will require an aggressive, proactive, science-based approach that also involves local citizenry.

Habitat management: Habitat management is the most important component of maintaining good fisheries.

Fish management: Black bass management generally involves actions that affect rates of recruitment, growth, natural mortality, and fishing mortality for bass.

People management: Human interactions are critical to effective implementation of a black bass management plan, including volunteers, communication, education, influencing, ethics, outreach, marketing, partnerships, tournament management, and law enforcement.



New opportunities

- Develop partnerships to increase and enhance public access.
- Develop and implement management plans for new reservoirs.
- Provide special fishing opportunities where controlled access produces outstanding fishing success.
- Implement lake renovations on degraded reservoirs and lakes to recreate quality fisheries.
- Improve public education about locations, tactics, and current hot spots.
- Integrate with the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network to instill a passion for fishing in youth and families.



New opportunities: Identify new or special opportunities to create or substantially enhance black bass fisheries, and ensure FWC is proactive about opening new fisheries for the public. Successfully implementing new opportunities will require strong partnerships with public and private entities, along with participation of angling groups and local citizens.



Habitat management

- Work with local governments and other agencies to protect lakes, rivers, and watersheds.
- Partner with DEP and WMD during development of Minimum Flows and Levels and nutrient loading limits.
- Develop projects to enhance degraded habitat.
- Manage native plants to improve and sustain black bass fisheries.
- Implement re-vegetation projects to increase and diversify native plant communities.
- Work with stakeholders to most effectively manage *Hydrilla*.
- Work with volunteers to install fish attractors.



Habitat management: Habitat management is the most important component of maintaining good fisheries. Protection of good habitat and the enhancement of degraded habitat are needed in many lakes and rivers. FWC will cooperate with with state, local, and federal agencies to improve degraded water quality, altered hydrology, watershed, groundwater impacts. A key role we will play is engaging stakeholders to appreciate the ecological, economic, and social values freshwater fisheries provide all Floridians.



Fish management

- Protect genetic integrity of black bass species.
- Determine the biological effects of catching spawning bass.
- Increase stocking programs to establish fisheries in new reservoirs and enhance existing populations.
- Evaluate current harvest regulations to determine effectiveness and modify if necessary.
- Establish special harvest regulations to improve black bass populations at selected water bodies.
- Promote non-regulatory incentives to increase catch-and-release of quality-sized and trophy bass.



Fish management: Black bass management involves actions that affect rates of recruitment, growth, natural mortality, and fishing mortality. A statewide angling exploitation study will be used to evaluate our current regulations and determine if changes are warranted. Both biological and social science will be used to craft regulations that are necessary, are likely to provide fisheries benefits, and will be supported by the public. Guiding principles in our regulatory approach are to make regulations as simple and consistent as possible, remove ineffective regulations, and engage the public while developing new regulations. We are also developing a promotional program that will encourage voluntary catch-and-release.



People management

- Implement *TrophyCatch* to promote our valuable fisheries and foster public engagement in bass conservation.
- Build partnerships with citizens, bass anglers, governmental agencies, businesses, and other stakeholders to protect lakes, rivers, and their watersheds.
- Partner with bass clubs to evaluate alternatives to traditional tournament weigh-in practices during summer.
- Help communities attract major bass tournaments by enhancing boat launching facilities that will benefit fisheries, economies, boaters, and anglers.
- Connect marketing and promotional programs to the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network to recruit new anglers.



People management: Human interactions are critical to effective implementation of a black bass management plan, including volunteers, communication, education, ethics, outreach, marketing, partnerships, tournament management and law enforcement. It was clear from the thousands of public input we received that the public has many strong opinions on how bass fisheries and their habitats are being managed. There are serious gaps in understanding and support for FWC programs such as aquatic plant management, bass tournament exemption permitting, regulations, and stocking. There is a critical need to engage the public to understand their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. More effective public engagement will help reduce misconceptions of biological realities that many people have. While we often think we need to educate the public, it is clear that we have much to learn from them as well.

TrophyCatch will be a high-profile program to help promote and engage our anglers. E-Tournament is an experiment to help bridge the public support gap that exists with organized bass tournaments and their impacts.

Promotion

- Economic, ecological, and social values.
- Values drive the public will to protect rivers and lakes through the proper watershed management.



Through implementation of the plan, we will be able to document, manage, enhance, and increase the economic, ecological, and social values of our fisheries. Communication and promotion create the public will necessary to protect our lakes and rivers. I sincerely appreciate the support and assistance from the Commission as we have been developing the plan. The videos you participated in are being used in our promotional materials.

TrophyCatch

Florida trophy largemouth bass documentation program
Coming in Fall 2012



"My Trophy Swims in Florida!"



TrophyCatch is the promotional cornerstone of the BBMP. It will provide the market power to drive public support for management actions, expand our marketing and outreach, and build partnerships with the business community. We are finalizing the promotional materials to present to potential sponsors and plan to unveil the program in fall of 2012.

TrophyCatch

- Bass Fishing Capital of the World!
- Strong partnerships with business for angler incentives.
- Document catches of trophy bass and economic impacts.
- Encourage live release of these valuable fish.
- Document the ecological requirements of trophy fisheries.
- Publicize Florida's bass fisheries and recruit more anglers (residents and non-residents).
- Attract youth and families to fishing to increase conservation appreciation.
- Increase public commitment to protect our lakes, rivers, and watersheds.



TrophyCatch is an incentive-based program to better document the catches of trophy bass and economic impacts. The goals are to: increase catches of trophy largemouth bass (more than 8 pounds) while instilling a strong catch-and-release conservation ethic; increase the public commitment to protect our lakes, rivers, and watersheds; publicize Florida's bass fisheries and enhance their worldwide prominence to attract more anglers to Florida and encourage angler participation in fish management; and attract youth and families to bass fishing to increase conservation appreciation.

E-Tournament

- Public support for tournaments is mixed with only 20% of survey responses supporting these events.
- Most criticisms are social.
- Best management practices for staging and weigh ins.
- Alternatives for delayed release in summer months.
- Use digital technology to document catches.
- Pilot efforts with cooperating bass clubs to test protocols.
- Work with local government to expand boat launch facilities.



During our surveys, tournaments were the most controversial topic after hydrilla control. Our anglers surveys showed that 20% favored tournaments, 27% opposed them, and 53% suggested changes in how tournaments were operated and regulated. Tournaments have a huge economic impact and major events provide tremendous publicity to the State. Most issues are social rather than biological although dead bass following summer tournaments have been documented and draw sharp criticism from the public. The E-Tournament program is an experimental effort in cooperation with bass clubs to develop new tournament protocols that allow immediate release of bass rather than the traditional delayed release after weigh in. We are also working with local governments to expand boat launching facilities to avoid crowding and provide amenities such as picnic areas, restrooms, shaded walkways, and fishing piers.

Staff Recommendation

The Commission should:

Approve the Black Bass Management Plan, direct staff to implement management actions, pursue sponsored programs (*TrophyCatch* and *E-Tournament*), and continue to engage the public in this effort.



I would like to thank the Commission for your support during the past year. We are working on many management actions right now and will provide updates in the future.