

Management of Bay Scallops in Florida – A Historical Summary

Prior to 1985 there were no statewide regulations regarding the harvest of bay scallops in Florida waters; although, local rules applied in Bay, Gulf, and Pinellas Counties. In 1985, the Florida Marine Fisheries Commission instituted statewide regulations (Rule 46-18), governing the harvest of scallops and simultaneously repealed all local rules. Those statewide regulations included a closure of the fishery between April 1 and June 30 of each year and a recreational bag limit of five gallons of whole scallops, or ½ gallon of meat per person per day. Limits were also placed on the size and number of drags that could be used by vessels harvesting scallops for commercial purposes, and restrictions were placed on commercial harvest in the south end of St. Joseph Bay.

In 1994, there was an emergency closure of the bay scallop fishery in response to the perceived collapse of bay scallop populations in many areas of Florida. All state waters were closed to commercial harvest, and the recreational fishery was closed south of the Suwannee River. Additionally, the length of the recreational harvest season was reduced to three months (July–September). A formal modification of bay scallop harvest regulations, which continued both the commercial and recreational closure south of the Suwannee River, was instituted in 1995. The 1995 regulations also included a more restrictive individual bag limit (two gallons of whole scallops or one pint of meat per person per day), a boat limit of 10 gallons of whole scallops or ½ gallon of meat per boat per day, and a further reduction of the season to July and August of each year. In 1997, the season was lengthened by 10 days (July 1–September 10); otherwise, the 1995 regulations remain in effect.