

Florida Makes Tarpon, Bonefish Catch-And-Release Only June 13, 2013

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), at its June 12 meeting in Lakeland, approved a proposal to make tarpon and bonefish catch-and-release-only fisheries and moved forward with a proposal to modify the types of gear used to target tarpon in Boca Grande Pass.

This catch-and-release proposal was adopted in recognition of the fact that the economic and fishing value of bonefish and tarpon greatly exceed their value as food fishes.

The following changes will go into effect Sept. 1 in state and federal waters off Florida:

All harvest of tarpon will be eliminated, with the exception of the harvest or possession of a single tarpon when in pursuit of an IGFA record and in conjunction with a tarpon tag.

Tarpon tags will be limited to one per person, per year (except for charter boat captains).

Transport or shipment of tarpon becomes limited to one fish per person.

One fish per vessel limit is created for tarpon.

Gear used for tarpon will be limited to hook-and-line only.

People will be allowed to temporarily possess a tarpon for photography, measurement of length and girth and scientific sampling, with the stipulation that tarpon more than 40 inches must remain in the water.

Tarpon regulations will extend into federal waters.

The bonefish tournament exemption permit is eliminated. This

exemption allows tournament anglers with the proper permit to temporarily possess bonefish for transport to a tournament scale.

The Commission also approved modifying the tarpon tag program by eliminating the current reporting requirements and shifting the start and end date for when the tarpon tag is valid from July through June to a calendar year, January through December. These rules will be changed in FWC code and will go into effect Sept. 1.

The Commission also moved forward with a two-part proposal that would include adding language to the current statewide snagging definition and modifying what types of gear could be used to target tarpon in Boca Grande Pass. The proposal would add language that prohibits catching or attempting to catch tarpon that have not been attracted or enticed by the angler's gear to the snagging definition that applies statewide. This change would apply to tarpon fishing statewide. The second part of the proposal would prohibit fishing with gear that has a weight attached to the bottom of a hook. This change would apply to fishing for all species year-round within Boca Grande Pass.

This proposal will be brought back for a final public hearing at the Sept. 4-6 meeting in Pensacola.

To learn more, visit MyFWC.com/Commission and click on "Commission Meetings" and "Agenda."