

Goliath Grouper



Final Rule
March 3, 2022



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 2

This presentation provides a summary of final rules that would implement a limited, highly regulated harvest of goliath grouper (goliath). These final rules have been updated from the proposed rule to incorporate Commission direction received at the October 2021 Commission meeting. This amendment to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) goliath regulations [68B-14, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.)] would provide additional stakeholder access to this species while promoting continued rebuilding of the population. This presentation also provides considerations for future rulemaking related to addressing catch-and-release fishing for goliath at spawning aggregation sites in Atlantic state waters, which was requested by the Commission.

Division: Marine Fisheries Management

Authors: Jessica McCawley, Erika Burgess, Derek Cox, Kyle Miller, and Kali Spurgin

Contact Phone Number: 850-487-0554

Report date: February 2, 2022

Cover photo courtesy of Patrick Ford. Unless otherwise noted, images throughout the presentation are by FWC.

Overview

- Goliath abundance continues to increase
- Commissioners expressed interest in restoring some access to this fishery as it rebuilds
- FWC goliath management philosophy
 - Recognize role in ecosystem
 - Manage for diversity of stakeholder values
 - Promote continued rebuilding



Photo courtesy of Christopher Hill

Goliath abundance is increasing in Florida and this positive trend is expected to continue.

Currently, access to this fishery is provided to anglers through catch-and-release fishing and to recreational divers through ecotourism opportunities. Commissioners have expressed interest in, and recreational harvesters have requested, restoring additional access opportunities to this fishery as it rebuilds.

FWC's management philosophy for goliath is multi-faceted. The agency recognizes goliath's role in the ecosystem as a large and important predator that helps maintain healthy, resilient natural reef ecosystems. FWC also understands that there are diverse stakeholder values for goliath, and management should account for this by providing multiple means of access to this fishery while also promoting continued population rebuilding.

Recent Timeline

- **2017 and 2018**
 - 17 public workshops
 - 3 Commission meeting staff reports
 - Alternative management metrics adopted
- **May 2021: Review and Discussion**
 - Directed staff to draft proposal for a limited, highly regulated harvest
- **October 2021: Proposed Rule**
 - Approved and directed staff to explore specific changes for final rule
- **January 2022: Virtual workshops**
- **Today:** Final rule for a limited, highly regulated harvest of goliath grouper
 - Includes updates to slot size, permit cost, closed area, and potential options to consider for gear restrictions at spawning aggregation sites



In 2017, staff provided the Commission a review of goliath biology and an overview of the 2016 Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) stock assessment. The Commission directed staff to hold public workshops to gather feedback about goliath and a potential limited harvest opportunity. Staff held 16 in-person workshops throughout the state, hosted an online workshop, and collected comments through an online survey. At the April 2018 Commission meeting, staff reviewed stakeholder feedback. The Commission decided not to pursue a limited harvest at that time, and directed staff to develop a plan to improve our ability to assess the health of the goliath population. In December 2018, staff presented, and the Commission adopted, new management goals and metrics for goliath that would allow FWC to evaluate the stock through ongoing research.

Since then, goliath has remained a topic of high interest. The Commission has remained engaged in the progress of this fishery, and FWC continues to receive requests from stakeholders to allow harvest.

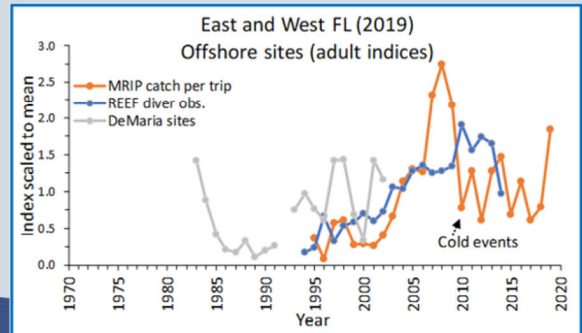
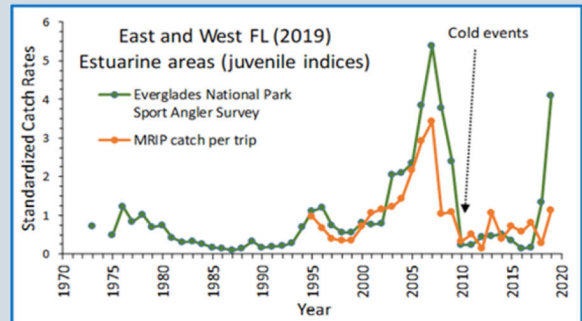
In May 2021, staff provided the Commission a review of goliath biology and management, FWC management goals and metrics, updates on ongoing research, and a review of stakeholder feedback. Following the presentation, Commissioners directed staff to draft a proposal for a limited, highly regulated harvest.

At the October 2021 Commission meeting, the Commission approved proposed rules for a limited harvest of goliath, and directed staff to explore specific changes for their consideration at the final rule hearing. Staff held two virtual public workshops in January 2022 to gather feedback on the proposed rules and updates requested by the Commission.

Today, staff will present final rules for a limited, highly regulated harvest of goliath that includes updates to slot size, permit costs, closed areas, and potential options to consider for gear restrictions at spawning aggregation sites, as well as an overview of feedback received since October 2021.

Management and Rebuilding

- Managed by FWC and federal councils
- Life history makes them susceptible to overfishing
- Harvest closed in 1990
- Goliath management requires a different approach than other fisheries
- In 2018, FWC adopted alternative management goals and metrics to monitor goliath population
 - Indices of abundance increasing



FWC manages goliath in Florida's state waters. In U.S. federal waters, goliath is managed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in the Gulf of Mexico and by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in the Atlantic.

There are a number of factors about goliath's life history that makes them susceptible to overfishing, including their tendency to gather at predictable times and locations, sometimes in large numbers, and in areas where fishermen like to fish, making them easy to target and catch.

Prior to 1983, there were no regulatory measures in place for goliath in state or federal waters. In the absence of regulations, the goliath population experienced a severe decline from the 1950s through the 1980s, and harvest was closed in state and federal waters in 1990.

Due, in part, to the fishery being closed since 1990, goliath are not suited to traditional fisheries stock assessments that rely on landings data to determine stock status. Because of their biology and their behavior, goliath require a unique management approach for conservation success. In 2018, the Commission adopted alternative goals and metrics to better evaluate goliath's relative stock status. One of the alternative metrics is indices of abundance; data for this metric indicate juvenile and adult goliath are increasing.

Summary of Proposed Final Rules

- Allow recreational harvest of 200 fish per year
- 1 fish per person with permit and tag issued via lottery

UPDATED

\$150 for residents, \$500 for non-residents

- Open season: March 1 through May 31
- Hook-and-line only

UPDATED

Slot limit: **24** to 36 inches total length

UPDATED

Create **open and closed areas** for harvest

- Post-harvest requirements



Could be in place for a 2023 season

Photo courtesy of Mason Hallberg

As the goliath fishery rebuilds, sustainable harvest is possible. Taking into consideration FWC's management philosophy for goliath, Commission direction, stakeholder feedback, and goliath biology, staff propose the following final rules for a limited, highly regulated harvest of goliath that would provide additional access to the fishery while allowing rebuilding to continue.

In summary, these final rules would:

- Allow recreational harvest of up to 200 goliath per year, with a limit of one fish per person per year;
- Require harvesters to have a recreational special use permit and tag that is issued via random-draw lottery;
- Establish permit fees based on residency;
- Set an open season of March 1 through May 31 each year;
- Restrict harvest to hook-and-line gear only;
- Establish a slot limit;
- Set open and closed harvest areas; and
- Require post-harvest reporting.

Based on Commission direction and stakeholder feedback at the October 2021 proposed rule hearing, the final rule under consideration includes changes to the permit fee, slot limit, and closed harvest area.

If approved, these final rules would be effective July 1, 2022. The first lottery draws could occur in the fall of 2022, and the first season could occur in spring 2023.

Harvest Limits

200 fish per year

- Limited number would have minimal impact on population and rebuilding
- No more than 50 fish harvested from within Everglades National Park (ENP)

Bag limit of 1 fish per person per open season

- Recreational harvest only
- Permit and tag required
 - No exemptions



Photo courtesy of Eszter Keresztes

Harvest of goliath must be limited to prevent overexploitation and maintain progress towards management goals.

Staff recommends allowing harvest of up to 200 goliath per year. FWRI has advised that harvest at this level is not expected to impact the population or rebuilding of the goliath stock. Rebuilding strategies for fisheries traditionally allow some level of harvest (e.g., red snapper, king mackerel).

Staff coordinated with Everglades National Park (ENP) in development of goliath management measures, and ENP was interested in measures that were consistent with ENP's purpose and fundamental values. This included limiting the number of goliath that could be taken from within ENP. Of the 200 goliath available for harvest each year, no more than 50 goliath would be harvested from within ENP boundaries.

Staff recommends the bag limit be set at one fish per person per open season. This opportunity would be limited to recreational harvest only. To harvest a goliath, anglers would be required to possess a recreational saltwater fishing license (unless exempt), a recreational goliath grouper harvest permit, and goliath grouper tag issued via a random-draw lottery. There would be no exemptions for the permit and tag requirements. More information regarding the details of the lottery are discussed on the following slide.

Permit Lottery

- Random-draw
 - \$10 application fee
- Eligibility based on prior wildlife violation history
- Two permit categories
 - Category I: including ENP
 - Category II: excluding ENP
- Special use permit fee, if awarded
 - ~~\$500 per person~~
 - **\$150 for residents, \$500 for non-residents**
- Limit 1 permit and physical tag per person, non-transferable

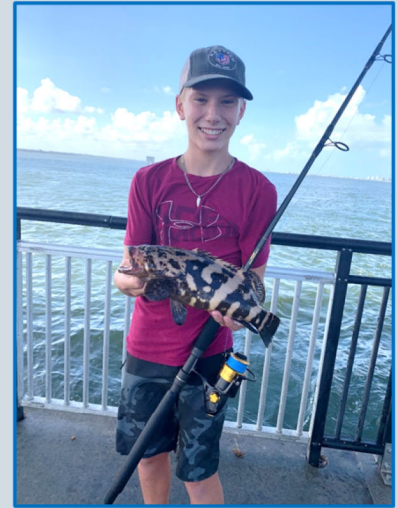


Photo courtesy of Calloway Carswell

Opportunities to harvest goliath would be available through the issuance of special use permits, awarded through a random-draw lottery. A similar system already exists for the alligator harvest program. To participate in the lottery, anglers would be required to complete an application and pay a \$10 non-refundable application fee during a 15-day application period that would occur between October 1 and November 30 each year. Specific dates for the application period would be announced on FWC's website each year.

Applicants who have been convicted of a violation related to aquatic plant control (chapter 369, Florida Statutes [F.S.]), fish and wildlife conservation (chapter 379, F.S.), animal cruelty (chapter 828, F.S.), a violation of a Commission rule, or a similar violation in other jurisdictions that relate to hunting and fishing, within the past five years would not be eligible to receive a permit and tag. These laws are consistent with laws listed in subsection 68-1.010(1), F.A.C., where a violation may result in the denial of an application for a license, permit, or other authorization issued by the Commission.

Permits would be issued in two categories: a "Category I" permit allowing harvest in all open areas including inside ENP and a "Category II" permit only allowing harvest in open areas outside ENP. Applicants could elect to apply for one or both permit categories, but could only receive one permit and tag per open harvest season.

If selected in the lottery, anglers would be required to pay a special use permit fee of \$150 for Florida residents and \$500 for non-residents. This is a change from the proposed rule for a \$500 fee for all permit holders that was approved at the October 2021 Commission meeting, based upon direction provided by Commissioners. The proposed fees cover the cost of materials and staff time needed to conduct this program. However, the Commission could choose to charge up to \$3,600 based on the proposed season length and the statutory limit of \$300 per week. After paying the permit fee, anglers would receive a recreational goliath grouper harvest permit that would include one physical tag for the harvest of a single goliath. The tag would only be valid for use within the specified open harvest season in the following calendar year. Permits and tags would be non-transferable.

Allowable Season and Gear

Open season: March through May

- Would not overlap with peak spawning season
- Less likely to overlap with red tide events

Hook-and-line only

- Use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hook required when fishing with natural baits
- Must possess and use a dehooking device

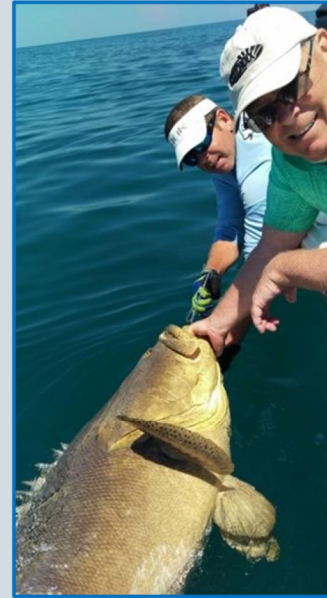


Photo courtesy of Gregg Lewis

To avoid overlap with the spawning season of goliath, staff recommends a harvest season of March 1 through May 31. A March through May season would also reduce additional pressure on goliath when they may be susceptible to impacts from red tide events, which primarily occur in the summer and late fall. Lastly, a short season that concentrates harvest effort would aid enforcement of legal harvest and streamline monitoring.

Today's final rule would only allow the use of hook-and-line gear to harvest goliath. Goliath in the proposed size range for harvest are frequently found in areas where spearing is already not permitted (e.g., bridges, piers and ENP). Additionally, allowing spearing would present challenges for anglers to estimate length of fish in the water to effectively comply with a slot limit.

To mitigate post-release mortality of goliath that are caught and released, staff also recommend requiring the use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for goliath using natural baits as well as possession and use of a dehooking device. This is similar to current requirements for other reef fish; however, these requirements for goliath will apply statewide, even where not required for other reef fish.



Establish Slot Limit

Slot limit of 24 to 36 inches total length

- Typically found in nearshore environment, prior to maturing and moving offshore
- Prevents harvest of reproductive adults
 - Supports population age structure metric
- Size range has shown largest increases in abundance
- Minimal barotrauma concerns for released fish
- Allows harvest of a desirable fish with lower mercury level concerns



Photo courtesy of Wayne Dahlberg

The final rule would set a harvest slot limit of 24 to 36 inches total length (TL). This is a change from the 20 to 36 inches TL slot limit proposed at the October 2021 Commission meeting, based on Commissioner direction to better align the slot limit with other grouper minimum size limits.

Goliath within the proposed slot limit are still in their juvenile life stage and typically weigh anywhere between 5 and 32 pounds. The proposed slot minimum of 24 inches TL coincides with the size at which goliath transition from their nursery habitat to a more estuarine environment. Most goliath within this size range are typically found in nearshore environments.

As this slot limit would prevent harvest of reproductive adults, it is consistent with two of FWC's goliath management goals: increased adult densities of goliath on natural reefs and expanded presence of goliath in older age classes. Long-term rebuilding of a stock often requires increasing the number of fish in older age classes.

For goliath, the greatest increases in the population, in recent years, has occurred in numbers of fish within the proposed slot limit. The slot minimum size limit protects the smallest individuals, which are the most susceptible to natural mortality. Conversely, the slot maximum size limit prevents removal of reproductive adults and conserves fish in older age classes.

Lastly, concerns for barotrauma of released fish and mercury levels in harvested fish are minimized with the proposed slot limit. Goliath in this size range are primarily located in shallow waters and, therefore, are less likely to experience barotrauma. Also, goliath within this size range generally have lower levels of mercury. Like many large-bodied fish in Florida, mercury levels in larger goliath are elevated. Regardless of the final selected slot limit, FWC would work with the Florida Department of Health (DOH) and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on potential consumption advisories if a harvest is approved by the Commission.

Harvest Area

Harvest allowed in state waters of Florida, except:

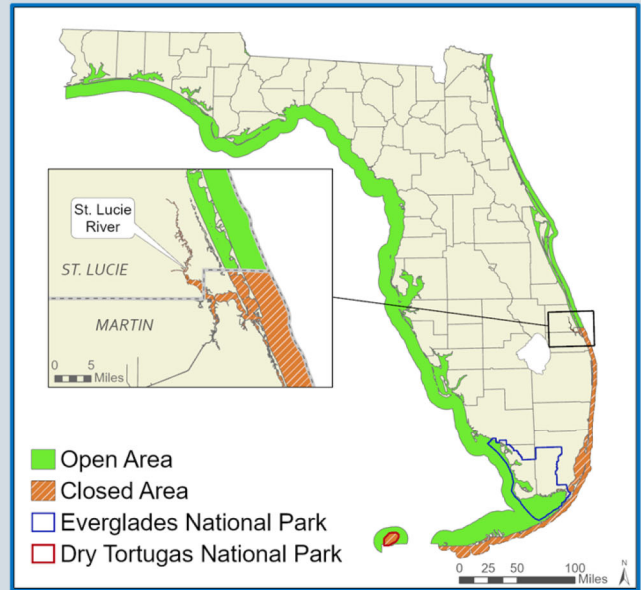


- **Martin** Palm Beach County south through the Atlantic coast of the Keys



- **All of St. Lucie River and its tributaries**
- Dry Tortugas National Park

Harvest would continue to be prohibited in federal waters



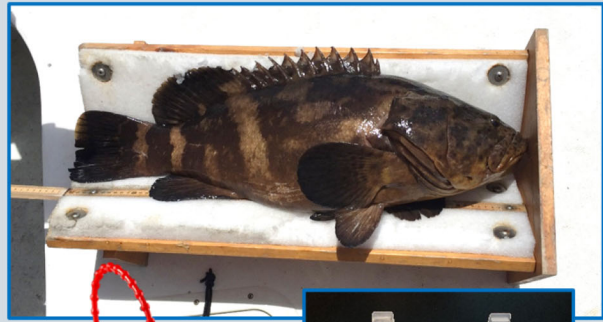
As previously mentioned, stakeholder values of goliath vary widely. FWC recognizes the importance of managing goliath for a range of stakeholder values by allowing continued catch-and-release opportunities, dive viewing opportunities, and ecotourism. To balance harvest opportunities with the existing ecotourism and dive viewing activities focused on goliath in southeast Florida state waters, staff recommend allowing harvest in state waters of Florida except for Martin County (including the St. Lucie River and its tributaries) south through the Atlantic coast of the Florida Keys. At the request of the National Park Service, harvest would not be allowed in Dry Tortugas National Park.

The proposed rule approved in October 2021 did not include Martin County or the St. Lucie River in the area closed to harvest. However, based on stakeholder input, the Commission directed staff to include these waters for their consideration in the final rule.

Harvest of goliath would continue to be prohibited in federal waters, where FWC does not have management authority for goliath.

Post-Harvest Requirements

- Immediately apply tag to goliath
- Report harvest data
- Submit fin clip for genetic analyses



ENP could establish additional reporting requirements within the Park



A person who harvests a goliath under the proposed recreational goliath harvest permit would be subject to post-harvest requirements. These requirements would include attaching an FWC-issued goliath tag to the harvested fish, submitting required reports, and, if requested, submitting a biological sample to FWC.

Immediately after a goliath is harvested, a permit holder would be required to securely attach an FWC-issued tamper-proof, goliath tag around the fish's lower jawbone. FWC would provide this tag in the permit package.

Within 24 hours of harvesting a goliath, a permit holder would be required to report their harvest and information about their catch to the Commission via the Commission's online license system (GoOutdoorsFlorida.com) or via the Fish | Hunt FL mobile app. Required information could include date of harvest, fish length, location of catch, and other information relevant to the harvested fish and research needs. A person who is issued a goliath harvest permit, but does not harvest a goliath, must report that they did not harvest a goliath within 24 hours following the end of the applicable harvest season.

A person who harvests a goliath may also be required to submit a biological sample, if requested by the Commission and required by the terms of the permit. This biological sample could include a fin clip from the harvested fish to be used for genetic analysis. Instructions and all equipment needed to take and submit these samples would be provided in each permit package. Information obtained from fin clips can be used to inform the Commission's goliath metrics and management goals related to genetic diversity and population size.

Based upon their authorities, ENP may establish additional reporting requirements for goliath harvested within the Park.

Additional Non-regulatory Actions

Continue ongoing efforts to:

- Recognize goliath's role in ecosystem and promote stock rebuilding
- Enhance and restore mangrove habitats
- Work with partners to promote best practices for catch-and-release
- Promote ecotourism and dive viewing opportunities
- Gather data to support FWC goliath management goals



Staff will continue ongoing efforts in support of the Commission's management philosophy of recognizing goliath's role as a large and important predator that helps establish and maintain healthy, resilient natural reef ecosystems, and allowing users access to goliath while also promoting continued population rebuilding. Staff will also continue projects to enhance and restore mangrove habitats that serve as important goliath nursery grounds. Additionally, non-consumptive activities related to goliath will continue, including a popular catch-and-release fishery as well as popular ecotourism and dive viewing opportunities. Staff will work with partners to promote best practices for catch-and-release fishing to minimize damage to fish and reduce post-release mortality. Long-term data collection will also continue in support of utilizing FWC's alternative metrics and management goals to monitor the status of the goliath population.

Stakeholder Feedback

- Feedback from 2017 and 2022 workshops, Commission meeting public comment, written comments, and phone calls
- Stakeholders either strongly support or strongly oppose a harvest
- Those who support a harvest:
 - Mixed opinions on allowing spearing
 - Many support lottery system, but want greater access
 - Most would like a lower fee and/or ability to harvest larger fish
- Some are opposed to harvest due to insufficient data, goliath susceptibility to environmental stressors, and high value for ecotourism
- Divers requesting additional protections at spawning aggregation sites



Since 2017, staff have received stakeholder feedback on goliath management from many sources including in-person workshops throughout the state, a virtual workshop, surveys, small group meetings, written comments, phone calls, and public testimony at Commission meetings. In January 2022, staff held two virtual workshops and posted a recorded presentation online in order to gather feedback on the proposed harvest and solicit ideas about protections for goliath at spawning aggregation sites. Feedback received since 2017 on goliath and the harvest proposal are summarized here.

Stakeholder opinions on goliath are strongly held and highly variable. These voices can be split into two main groups, those who strongly support a harvest and those who strongly oppose one.

Those who support a harvest have differing views on the proposal. There are mixed opinions on whether spearing should be included as an allowable gear for harvest. Many support the proposed lottery system to ensure only a limited number are harvested, although others would like additional access, such as a short open season with a small bag or vessel limit that is open to all recreational harvesters. Most of those who support a harvest would like to see a lower permit cost and/or the ability to harvest larger fish.

Those opposed to harvest have cited reasons such as insufficient data on the goliath population, the fish's susceptibility to environmental stressors such as cold snaps and red tide events, and the high value of ecotourism for the species.

Divers have also requested the Commission explore additional protections for goliath at spawning aggregation sites, which is a separate issue from the harvest proposal.

Reducing Potential Impacts of Targeted Catch-and-Release on Spawning Aggregations

Goal: limit potential catch-and-release injury without closing fishing

- Could prohibit handlining within 1,000 feet of 11 reported spawning aggregation sites
 - From July through September
 - Possession of handlines prohibited unless stowed



Direction requested on bringing a separate potential action at a future Commission meeting



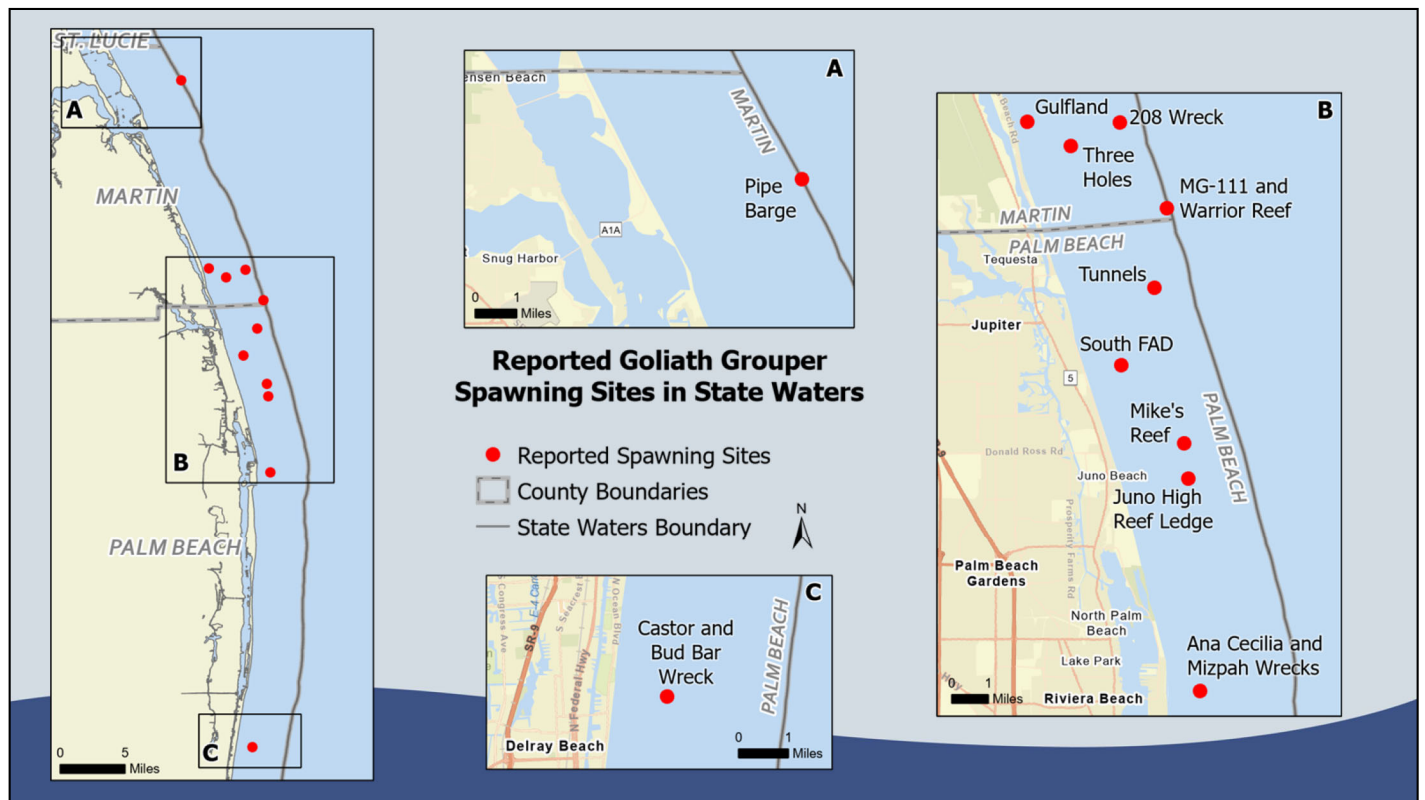
Photo courtesy of Patrick Ford

At the October Commission meeting, dive stakeholders raised concerns about the impact of catch-and-release fishing on goliath at spawning aggregations sites. Commissioners directed staff to explore gear restrictions as a possible method to reduce these potential impacts and noted they would like to see solutions that would not include closed areas.

The goal of staff was to develop a recommendation that would restrict the use of potentially harmful gear that is specifically used to target goliath, while limiting impacts to anglers participating in other fisheries. This recommendation is based upon discussions with fishermen who target goliath for catch-and-release fishing, knowledge of local fishing activity, and guidance from FWC law enforcement.

Handlines can be used by those who do not have appropriate gear to safely catch a goliath and are more likely to impact goliath health and survival when used inappropriately. Improper handling of a handline could result in damage to the jaw of a fish due to lack of stretch in the line when compared to monofilament. Additionally, anglers can cleat a handline to a vessel and then use the vessel to help pull a hooked goliath away from structure. Handlining can also increase the speed with which a fish can be brought to the surface, amplifying barotrauma concerns.

If Commissioners direct staff to pursue rulemaking on this topic, staff recommend prohibiting handlining within 1,000 feet of 11 reported spawning aggregation sites from July through September. Inside this 1,000-foot radius of these sites, possession of handlines would be prohibited unless stowed.



Staff worked with divers and goliath researchers to identify these 11 spawning aggregation sites within state waters.

These sites include:

- Pipe Barge near the northern end of Martin County;
- Gulfland, 208 Wreck, Three Holes, and MG 111/Warrior Reef near the southern end of Martin County;
- Tunnels, South FAD, Mike's Reef, Juno High Reef Ledge, and Ana Cecilia/Mizpah between Jupiter and Palm Beach; and
- Castor/Bud Bar near Boynton Beach.

FWC only has authority to implement gear restrictions at spawning aggregation sites located within state waters.

Diver Proposal for Spawning Aggregation Sites

- Commission directed staff to work with dive stakeholder groups to address catch-and-release fishing for goliath at spawning sites
- Dive stakeholders proposed an alternative:
 - Protections at **3 sites instead of 11**
 - **No fishing** permitted within 1,000 feet of:
 - MG-111/Warrior Reef
 - Ana Cecilia/Mizpah
 - Castor/Bud Bar
 - July 15 through October 15 each year



At the October Commission Meeting, Commissioners directed staff to work with dive stakeholder groups to address the impacts of catch-and-release fishing for goliath at spawning aggregation sites. After preliminary discussions regarding staff's recommendation to restrict handlines, dive stakeholders suggested an alternative solution that restricts all fishing, but at fewer locations. Rather than gear restrictions within 1,000 feet of 11 sites, the diver proposal would prohibit fishing within 1,000 feet of three sites. These sites have been identified by divers as having the highest density of goliath within state waters during the spawning season: the MG-111/Warrior Reef, Ana Cecilia/Mizpah, and Castor/Bud Bar. The divers requested these restrictions apply from July 15 through October 15 each year.

Harvest Considerations

- A limited harvest would:
 - Allow a unique recreational fishing opportunity and accommodate diverse stakeholder values
 - Be unlikely to alleviate interactions between fishermen and goliath that result in lost catch
 - Rebuilding progress increases goliath-stakeholder interactions
 - Add to scientific knowledge and aid FWC management goals, but would not result in accepted formal stock assessment



A limited, highly regulated harvest is possible while the goliath population continues to rebuild and, as proposed, would provide a unique recreational fishing opportunity while accommodating a diverse range of stakeholder values.

As the goliath population continues to rebuild, interactions with goliath will continue to increase for both anglers and divers. Fishermen, particularly in south Florida, are likely to have more frequent interactions that result in lost catch of other species because they fish at many of the same locations where adult goliath occur and aggregate, like artificial reefs. Although some stakeholders cite these negative interactions when commenting in support of allowing some level of harvest, any level of sustainable harvest is unlikely to reduce these interactions.

Although data provided by a limited harvest would not result in a formal stock assessment, these data would add to existing scientific knowledge about goliath and aid in the monitoring of goliath stock status relative to FWC's alternative metrics and management goals.

Staff Recommendation

Approve final rules for goliath harvest

- Allow recreational harvest of 200 fish per year
 - Limit of 50 fish from ENP
- 1 fish per person, with non-transferable permit and tag issued via lottery
 - \$10 application fee

UPDATED \$150 for residents, \$500 for non-residents

- Open season: March 1 through May 31
- Hook-and-line only

UPDATED Slot limit: **24** to 36 inches total length

UPDATED Create **open and closed areas** for harvest

- Post-harvest requirements



If approved, staff will advertise changes to the proposed rules via Notice of Change and rules will go into effect July 1, 2022

Direction requested for future actions at spawning aggregation sites



First season in 2023, if approved; provide update in 1-3 years

Staff recommends approving the final rules to provide additional stakeholder access to goliath while promoting continued rebuilding of the population through a limited, highly regulated harvest. These rules would allow recreational harvest of up to 200 goliath per year with a maximum of 50 being harvested from within ENP. A person would be required to obtain a non-transferable recreational goliath harvest permit and tag, issued via a random-draw lottery, to legally harvest a goliath. There would be a \$10 fee to enter the lottery. The permit and tag would authorize a person to harvest one fish during a single open season, and no one could receive more than one permit and tag per open season. The cost of the permit would be \$150 for Florida residents and \$500 for non-residents. The season would be open from March 1 through May 31 of each year. Hook-and-line would be the only allowable gear. Goliath harvested must be within a slot limit of 24 to 36 inches total length, and harvest would be permitted in all state waters except those of Martin County (including the St. Lucie River and its tributaries) south through the Atlantic coast of the Keys and within Dry Tortugas National Park. Harvesters would also be subject to post-harvest requirements.

If approved and directed, staff recommends making the rules effective July 1, 2022. Since the staff recommendation includes changes to the permit fee, slot limit, and closed area, staff would advertise the changes to the approved rules via Notice of Change. Staff also recommends returning in one to three years after final approval with an update. Staff has evaluated the proposed rules under the standards of 68-1.004, F.A.C., and found them to be in compliance.

If approved, the first harvest season would be held in 2023.

Staff also request Commissioner direction on additional spawning aggregation site protections.