



WES-PP-5: FRESHWATER FISHING LICENSE EXEMPTION FOR CHARTER VESSELS

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: DEFER TO COMMITTEE

PROPOSED POLICY: SUPPORT elimination of individual licensing requirements for freshwater fishing conducted on a licensed charter vessel, mirroring the state's policy for saltwater charters.

BACKGROUND: In the State of Florida, a freshwater fishing license is required for anyone fishing in freshwater bodies such as lakes. This license is necessary for both residents and non-residents of Florida. Similarly, a saltwater fishing license is required for anyone fishing in coastal and ocean waters. However, if an individual is saltwater fishing on a licensed charter boat, no fishing license is necessary as the charter boat should have all the necessary licensure. The same does not apply to a charter boat that is fishing in freshwater. Anyone who fishes aboard a freshwater charter boat must carry an individual license. The Lake County Board of County Commissioners would like to see this policy changed so that the licensing requirements for freshwater charter boats matches the policy for saltwater charter boats.

Captain David Williamson, a local fishing guide, recently met with the Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners to discuss concerns about the current licensing regulations for freshwater fishing guides. He operates in the Harris Chain of Lakes, Lake Yale, and the St. Johns River, all of which are freshwater bodies. Currently, each of his clients is required to purchase a fishing license individually, while saltwater captains have the option to obtain a single license that covers the entire boat.

Captain Williamson is advocating for a change in the regulations to allow freshwater fishing guides the same licensing flexibility that saltwater guides have. This change would simplify the process for both clients and captains, ensuring that all members of a fishing group are properly licensed.

Recognizing the importance of freshwater fishing as a significant driver of ecotourism in Lake County, the Board of County Commissioners supports this proposed regulatory change to foster growth in the local charter fishing industry.

Past efforts/previous legislation: [1989V1Pt2.pdf \(state.fl.us\)](#)

In 1989, the Florida Legislature enacted ch. 89-270, Laws of Florida, to create a mandatory vessel license program for vessels hired for the recreational purpose of taking or attempting to take marine fish. Persons paying to saltwater fish from licensed vessels are not required to purchase an individual saltwater fishing license.

At the time the Legislature created the mandatory licensing program for vessels chartered for recreational saltwater fishing, no similar program was established to license vessels chartered for the purpose of recreational freshwater fishing. Any individual that pays to charter a vessel to



freshwater fish must purchase an individual freshwater fishing license. It is the responsibility of the vessel operator to ensure that every paying passenger is properly licensed.

Saltwater licensing requirements have since been transferred to s. 379.354, F.S. Subsection (7) pertains to the licensing of a charter vessel. Additionally, s. 379.353, F.S. provides exemption from individual licensing requirements when saltwater fishing off a licensed charter vessel pursuant to s. 379.354.

ANALYSIS: Lake County is home to over 1,000 freshwater lakes providing recreational, tourism, and freshwater fishing opportunities year-round through licensed boat captains and guides. Freshwater charter boats deliver services that typically include a captain or guide who is knowledgeable about local fishing spots and techniques, as well as the necessary fishing gear and bait. However, what they are not able to provide is a seamless charter experience as potential clients must get and provide their own fishing license prior to using the services of the charter boat. This creates potential hardships for both the charter boat captain and the user of their services.

FISCAL IMPACT: While this issue does not have a negative fiscal impact on Lake County, it does have implications for our local business community and tourism industry. Local fishing guides would face an additional expense to procure the license that covers the entire boat. However, this cost could be offset by increased business, as the simplified licensing process may attract more clients, boosting the local charter fishing industry and contributing to the overall growth of tourism in the area.

FAC STAFF NOTES:

- **Statutes:**
 - [s. 379.354, F.S.](#)
 - Provides licensing requirements for saltwater and freshwater fishing
 - Subsection (7) provides licensing requirements for charter vessels
 - Only applies to vessels wherein a fee is paid for the purpose of taking saltwater fish
 - [s. 379.353, F.S.](#)
 - Provides exemptions to the requirements of s. 379.354
 - Notably, this includes exemption from individual licensing requirements when saltwater fishing off a licensed charter vessel; in other words, the charter vessel's license serves as an umbrella license for a specified number of passengers to fish
 - No such exemption exists for freshwater fishing
- **Rules:**
 - [68B – 2.003, F.A.R.](#)
 - Requires proper licensure for the recreational and commercial harvesting of saltwater organisms
- **Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Resources:**
 - [What the FWC Saltwater Charter License authorizes: | FWC \(myfwc.com\)](#)
 - [Basic Requirements for Florida Fishing Guides](#)



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ASSIGNED COMMITTEE: WES

BOARD SUPPORT: Yes

UNFUNDED MANDATE: If counties receive any shared revenue/benefit from FWC Licensing revenues, this proposal could potentially reduce revenues/benefits.

PROTECTIVE OF HOME RULE: N/A