

## BAY SCALLOPS: A PROTECTED SPECIES IN SWFL

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The Florida bay scallop is a bivalve mollusk that grows and lives in seagrass beds in relatively shallow water, 4 to 10 feet deep. At one time scallops ranged abundantly from Palm Beach to Pensacola. Today, healthy populations can only be found in selected locations along Florida's West Coast - principally St. Joseph Bay, and the area between the Suwannee and Weeki Wachee rivers.

In recent years, bays scallops have been seen in greater numbers in southwest Florida waters, in part due to restoration efforts in the area. With greater awareness of their recovery, unfortunately come many reports of illegal harvesting. Readers should be aware, that recreational harvest of bay scallops is prohibited in all southwest Florida waters.

### Legal Requirements

In Florida, commercial harvest of bay scallops is banned. Recreational harvest is only allowed in state waters north of the Pasco-Hernando county line to the west bank of Mexico Beach Canal and only during a limited season, this year June 29 through September 24, 2013.

For readers interested in traveling to Florida's Big Bend during the recreational harvest season a few rules apply. In general, recreational scallopers between the ages of 16 and 65 must have a current Florida saltwater fishing license to collect scallops. There are some exceptions; these are listed in the FWC "Florida Recreational Saltwater Fishing Regulations," which is available in bait shops, FWC offices, or at the [FWC web site](#). All non-residents over the age of 16 are required to buy a license unless they are fishing (scalloping) from a for-hire vessel (guide, charter, party boat) that has a valid vessel license.

Two new brochures: Recreational Harvesting of the Florida Bay Scallop [Citrus County](#) and [Taylor County](#) are available through [Florida Sea Grant](#). Both brochures include a boat ramp and marina locator for visitors to those areas.

### Life History

Scallops live about one year before either dying off naturally or being eaten by crabs, octopuses, or a variety of shell crushing finfish. They spawn in the fall, and after about a two-week larval period, develop a small shell and settle onto seagrass blades where they continue to grow until late spring to early summer. They then fall from the grass blades and become free swimmers. Unlike oysters and clams, scallops are active swimmers. They click their shells together, forcing expelled water to propel them quite rapidly. Scallops are also prolific spawners - a single scallop can produce more than one million eggs per spawn. Because they are so heavily preyed upon, only about one in a million will reach adulthood.

*(Continued on page 2)*

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To monitor bay scallop populations in the state and maintain an abundant breeding population, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) annually reviews the status of the fishery.

Volunteer opportunities exist for the public to assist in evaluating bay scallop populations in southwest Florida. These are no-harvest events organized to monitor and document the health and status of the bay scallop population in the respective areas. Reservations are required to participate. For more information, visit [www.flseagrant.org](http://www.flseagrant.org).



Bay Scallop References Mentioned Above (full website addresses):

<http://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/bay-scallops/>

<http://flseagrant.org/recreational-scalloping-in-florida>



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