

# CHARLOTTE HARBOR FISHERIES FORUM: MEETING V SUMMARY REPORT



# CHARLOTTE HARBOR FISHERIES FORUM:

*Providing a venue for public engagement in local fisheries issues and building links between stakeholder knowledge, science, and management*



**April 23rd, 2015**

**Thursday, 6-8:30 pm**

**Laishley Marina**  
120 Laishley Ct.  
Punta Gorda, FL 33950

Charlotte and Lee anglers: your knowledge can help local fisheries thrive.

Join local researchers for the next meeting of the Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum!

**Speaker: Captain Justin McBride,**  
From the Lee County Div. of Natural Resources - Marine Program, talking about "Creation of boating restriction zones at the county level."

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## **Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum 5 – April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015.**

**Laishley Marina.**

**120 Laishley Ct., Punta Gorda, FL. 33950**

### **Report**

On Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015, Florida Sea Grant Extension and the University of Florida (UF) convened the fifth meeting to facilitate the development of a Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum. The meeting in Punta Gorda, Florida, was open to the general public and participants were invited through emails, media, fliers distributed locally, and personal invitations.

Twenty eight stakeholders signed in for the meeting, including recreational and commercial anglers, local fishing club members, charter captains and guides, business owners, part-time residents, researchers, tourism personnel, a county commissioner, natural resources workers, and law enforcement. Florida Sea Grant extension agents Captain Betty Staugler (Charlotte County) and Joy Hazell (Lee County) led and facilitated the meeting. University of Florida graduate student Chelsey Crandall and researcher Dr. Jynessa Dutka-Gianelli were also present.

The Charlotte Harbor Fisheries Forum is a collaborative effort to provide a venue for public engagement in local fisheries issues and to build links between stakeholder knowledge, science, and management. The objective of this meeting was to focus on one of the subjects identified by the stakeholders as a key topic during previous meetings: the creation of pole-and-troll zones, a defined area in which boaters would not be allowed to run their internal combustion engines. After the research team introductions, Captain Betty Staugler explained the meeting agenda. Next, the stakeholders introduced themselves and identified how many of the previous fisheries forum in Charlotte Harbor they had participated in: over 20 individuals had participated in previous fisheries forums, with 6 stakeholders who were participating in the forum for the first time. Following this, Joy Hazell explained the ground rules for the meeting that the stakeholders had agreed upon in previous meetings. Captain Betty Staugler presented a short overview of the project objectives and forum definition as well as a summary of the first three forum meetings, followed by a short summary of the most recent forum meeting discussions presented by Kiley Gray, a local scientist.

Captain Justin McBride, from the Lee County Division of Natural Resources - Marine Program, gave a presentation on "*Creation of boating restriction zones at the county level.*" Stakeholders engaged in an active discussion about the particulars of creating local speed controlled and pole-and-troll-zones. Captain McBride explained some of the criteria for regulatory restrictions at the state, county, and municipality levels. He described the process of proposing pole-and-troll zones, which could begin with the forum bringing recommendations to the County Commissioners, who could then pass them on to state regulatory agencies. Which agency became involved would depend on the goal of the restricted zone: if the objective is to protect seagrass beds and/or adjacent habitats, the proposal plan should be presented to Florida Department of Environment Protection (DEP); however, if the zone targets the protection of local fisheries, the plan should be presented to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Therefore, the first step before moving forward with the pole-and-troll proposal would be to define the specific objectives of the zone. The petition to state agencies should come from the Board of County Commissioners. If the objective is to protect fisheries, the plan would be presented to FWC during the scheduled FWC commissioners meetings. FWC law enforcement would be involved in regulation the boaters behaviors. If the pole-and-troll zone is to be presented to DEP, the request will go to legislature, and DEP could handle the permit for the restriction zones. Captain McBride suggested that before moving forward with the proposed plan

it is important to have different groups involved in the discussions to ensure the representation of stakeholders with diverse opinions: those that will support the pole-and-troll zones and also those that won't support the zones. It will be important to recognize the resistance and obstacles from the groups that oppose the zones as well. One recommendation was to make sure that the different groups of stakeholders are represented in the public meetings and that the process is bottom-up, allowing participation and discussion from various groups.

Captain McBride encouraged forum participants to consider the benefits and the trade-offs of the creation of pole and troll zone(s) will bring to the region. The plan will have to involve the law enforcement, resource managers (DEP, FWC, and other agencies), charter captains, anglers, etc. The establishment of these zones will have start-up and maintenance costs: for example, manufacturing, maintenance, and inspection of signs. The plan must address how to handle the enforcement of the pole-and-troll zones, and it was advised to involve the different agencies from the beginning (DEP, FWC, sheriff, local enforcement).

The creation of an education and outreach program targeting all stakeholders will be important. If forum participants can include diverse groups of stakeholders from the beginning, it will be more likely that these groups will "buy in" and embrace the project, which will aid in compliance.

Stakeholders asked Captain McBride to give specific examples of places where the pole-and-troll zones were implemented with success. Good examples include the Indian River Lagoon, in the Florida east coast, Tampa Bay, Florida Bay, and Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge. Captain McBride suggested the stakeholders focus on these specific case-studies to learn how they were created and succeeded or failed in their objectives. Overall, the process of creating pole-and-troll zones is neither simple nor quick.

Other topics discussed were:

- In reference to situation when the pole-and-troll zone is located adjacent to National or State Parks: what can the park staff do? \*They can establish pole and troll zones but only out to 100', and it was advised to keep this approach separate from the parks because park management plans can change and changes to the plan could impact whether or not a pole-and-troll zone remains in place.
- What would be his suggestion to this group: start with a pole-and-troll zone proposal for Charlotte County only or include Lee County as well? In this case, Captain McBride suggested that the stakeholders "think big," in terms of Charlotte Harbor, define where they want the zones to be implemented, and then, they would figure out the agencies that would be involved in the process and whether it spanned both counties
- The first step is to define the goals of the proposed pole-and-troll zone, so the best area and approach can be identified.
  - a. For example, it may be that once the objectives are identified, the forum may decide that a boater education campaign could meet those goals as well as implementing pole and troll zones would
- Would a slow speed zone accomplish the same thing and if so would that simplify the process? The process would be about the same. Slow boating and pole-and-troll zones are "headaches" to implement, because the extensive spectrum of regulations. There is a range of the zones to be selected: it is important for the group to keep the process open.
- It is important to remain inclusive; pushback happens when you don't include people

- Before looking at a map or thinking about agencies, the first step should be to define your objectives
- What to do when boaters don't follow the regulations? Boater education is an important aspect because people usually resist implementation of new rules and regulations; compliance is challenging to enforce. One suggestion is to include people early in the process, giving them "ownership" so they would modify their behavior even in the absence of enforcement.

After this interactive session of questions and answers with the guest speaker, the facilitator Joy Hazell summarized a list of the main steps to create a pole-and-troll zone:

- Define the goals
- Identify the mechanism, agencies (DEP, FWC, etc.)
- Identify key stakeholders to be involved, and include others.
- Identify sources of funding for start-up and long-term maintenance: Marine Advisory Committee (MAC), West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND, multi-county, covering Charlotte, Lee, Manatee, and Sarasota counties), etc.
- Enforcement
- Define place and designation of zones
- Create an education and outreach program: educate about the zones, benefits, etc.
- Identify key people in the agencies and politicians that support the proposal
- ?

**Forum Activity:** (check flip chart notes from each group)

Facilitator Joy Hazell led the next forum activity, in which participant worked in small groups to discuss the creation of pole-and-troll zones. All present agreed that it is important for the forum to focus on a specific topic in depth, and they opted to continue focusing on pole-and-troll discussions.

Participants were asked to define their goals and identify the stakeholders to include in the process, including those they think might give pushback to the idea, and to write their answers in flip charts. Next, each small group presented their ideas to the whole group.

**Activity results:**

**I- Define the goals of the proposed pole-and-troll zone:**

- Better fishing and safety
- 100 yds. from shore: pole-and-troll to shore, speed limitation?
- Have suitable pole-and-troll zones established
- Designated access lanes
- Possible idle, transit, and run zones
- Improve fishing and protecting nursery habitats
- Improve fishing
- Improving catching
- Protect grass beds beyond the bars and mangroves
- Prevent propeller scarring of seagrass

- Protecting nursery and bait fish habitats will promote all target species as well
- Improve fish and marine species habitats
- Maintain and enhance suitable fish habitats
- Provide a quieter habitat for all marine species;
- Provide a quieter atmosphere for ecotourism
- Improve the economic value of Charlotte Harbor

**II- Identify the stakeholders to include:**

Guides, recreational fishermen (private anglers, people on rental boats, kayaks, SUP, personal watercrafts, etc.); commercial fishermen (mullet, shrimp, crab, clams, oysters), Audubon?

**III- Education and Implementation: How do you sell this idea?**

Enforcement, peer-pressure, education, highlight the benefits (e.g., happy clients = happy guides; improve quality of the harbor will improve the fishing experience, work involving stakeholders, bottom up = easier to gain support and stakeholders to advocate = success story);

Important: sunset clause in case plan fails; emergency exclusions (medical, weather?), be aware of abuse on exclusions

**Next Steps: where do we go from here?**

**Next Forum: May / 28.**

The group requested to continue the discussion on pole-and-troll zones.