

Oyster Management in Florida



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Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission

Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.

- State management authority for fish and wildlife
- 7 Commissioners
- 6 Divisions
- Division of Marine Fisheries Management, Analysis & Rulemaking
 - Help the Commission develop policies and regulations
 - Present rule recommendations at Commission meetings
 - Commissioners approve final rule



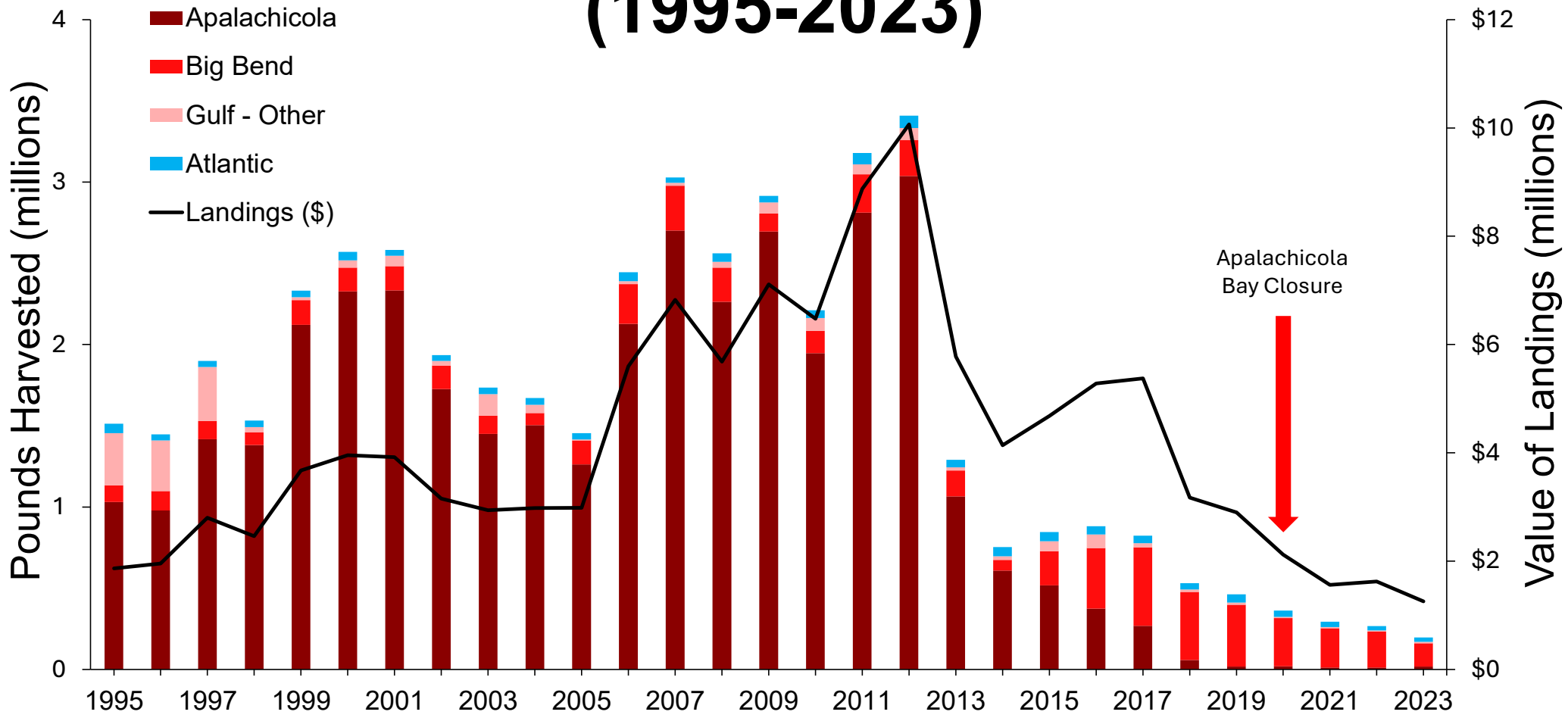
Oyster Rulemaking in Florida

Region-specific management tailored to the state of the resource

- Reopen the Apalachicola Bay wild oyster fishery
- Next Steps
 - The Big Bend
 - Northeast Florida
 - Pensacola



Florida Commercial Oyster Harvest (1995-2023)



Apalachicola Bay

Commercial fishery

- Former cornerstone of Florida's commercial oyster fishery
 - 90% of statewide landings
 - 10% of national landings
 - Supported over 2,500 jobs
- Tonging on subtidal reefs

Recreational fishery

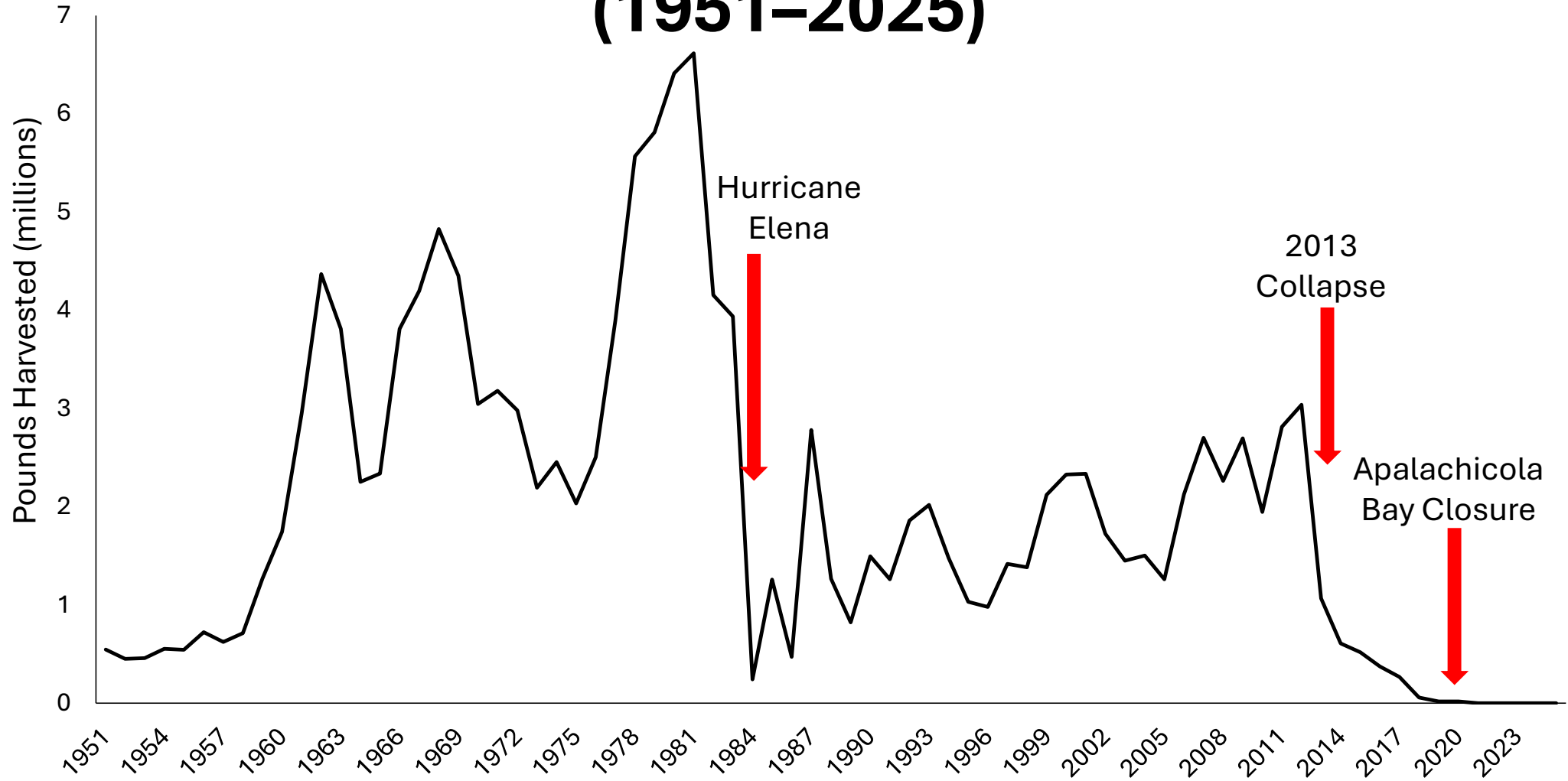
- Intertidal and subtidal reefs
- Tonging and hogging



Photos courtesy of Florida Memory Project



Apalachicola Bay Commercial Oyster Harvest (1951–2025)



Summary: Management in Apalachicola Bay

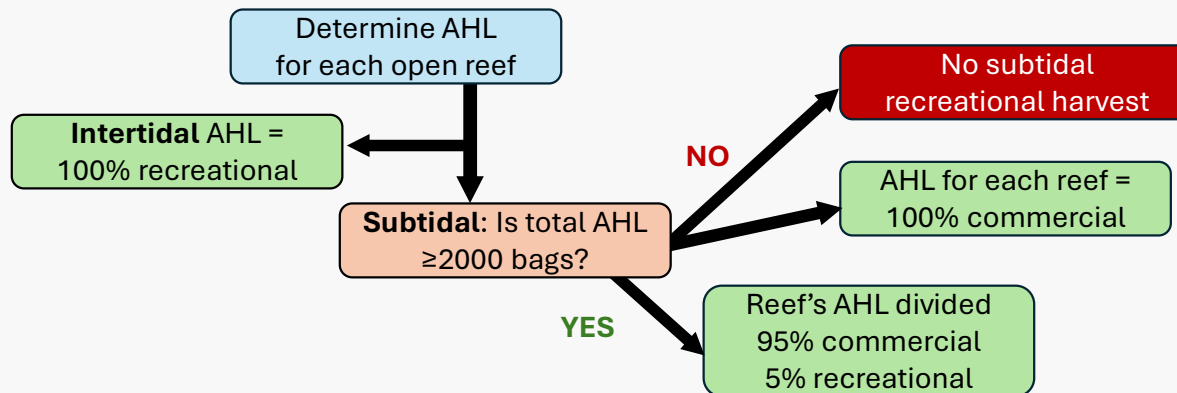
Reopen the iconic Apalachicola Bay oyster fishery while promoting continued recovery

- Only reefs meeting threshold opened to harvest
 - Set harvest levels based on annual monitoring
- Professionalize the commercial fishery
- Provide recreational harvest opportunity
- Resume cultching program on harvested reefs



Apalachicola Bay Rules and Regulations

- Establishing an ecological threshold: 400 bags of legal sized oysters per acre
- Annual Harvest Level (AHL): 10% of legal-sized oysters on open reefs
- Distributing the AHL

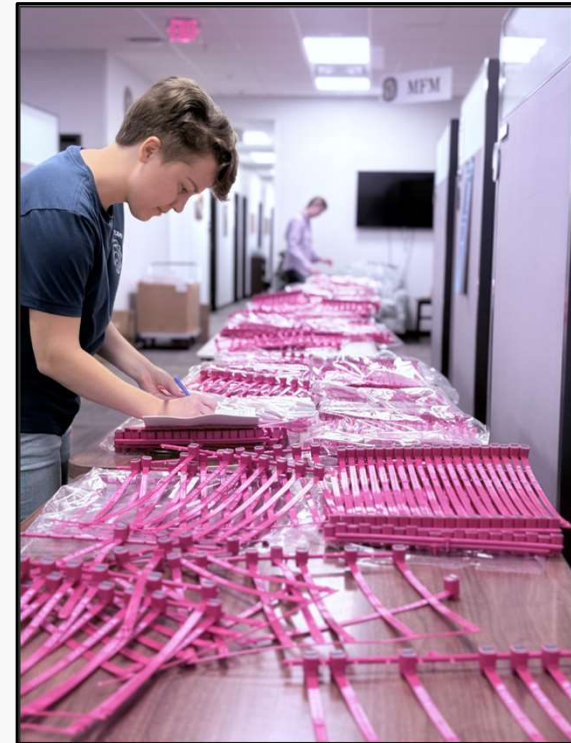


- Renewals
 - Must harvest and sell one bag of oysters
 - Must renew by June 30 each year
- Reporting Requirements



First Season of Wild Harvest in Apalachicola Bay

- Participation
 - Commercial Endorsements: 152
 - Recreational Permits: 215
- FWC Law Enforcement prioritized education over citations
- FWRI monitoring results used to determine annual harvest levels and which reefs will be open to harvest
- Continued engagement with stakeholders
- Reporting was a challenge with this user group

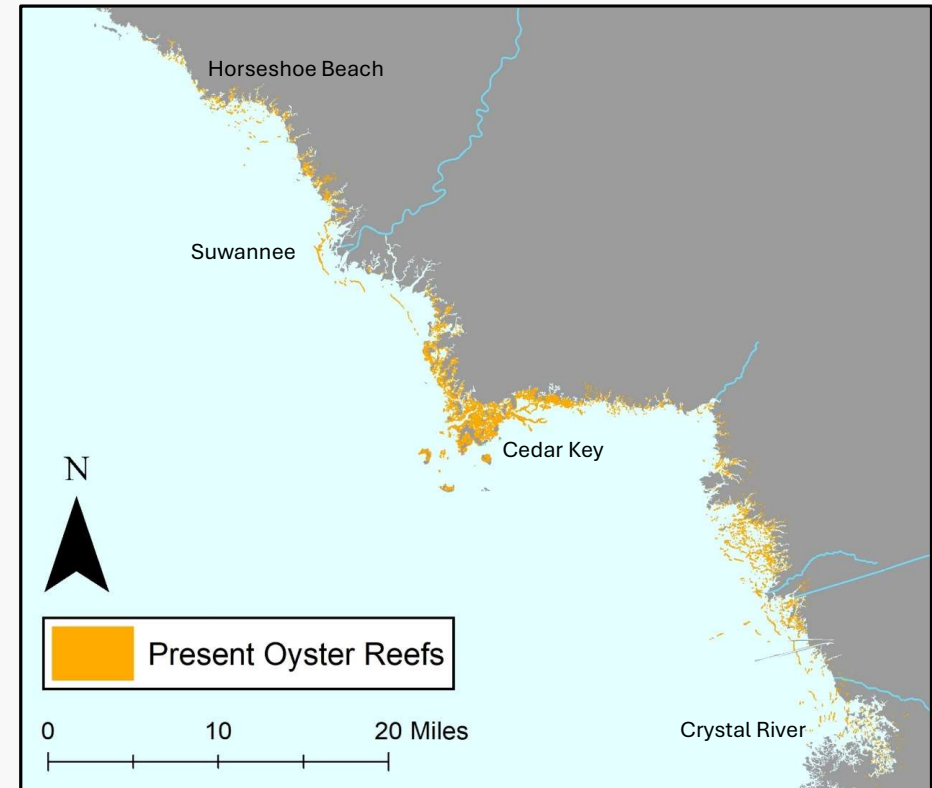


Next season opens October 1, 2026



The Next Focus: Big Bend

- Low-lying remote area with low salinity
- Over 1,800 acres of oyster reef
- Decades of continued reef loss
 - 88% loss of offshore reefs
 - 50% loss of nearshore reefs
- Historically 2nd-largest source of landings
- In 2017, surpassed Apalachicola
 - Effort shifted to the Big Bend



Rule development will occur throughout 2026



Questions?

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