

Legislative session: Big changes coming for anglers



SEBASTIAN -- A shot from the jetty on the last day of the contest at Sebastian Inlet.

TALLAHASSEE — Fishing from a beach, catwalk, jetty or pier will no longer be free of charge in Florida.

The Florida Legislature's \$66.5 billion budget approved Tuesday features a significant change for anglers who fish in saltwater from shore. For the first time since 1989, Florida resident saltwater anglers will be required to purchase a \$7.50 fishing license.

There was no increase for the standard saltwater fishing license that remains \$17 per year. Anyone fishing from a non-licensed boat in the state's marine waters is required to have this license. Also not changed is the license for non-resident licenses. A 3-day license is \$17; a 7-day license is \$30; and a one-year license is \$47. Although rarely enforced, this license has been required of non-residents since 1989.

The new license requirement is anticipated to effect between 115,000 and 185,000 anglers, said Jackie Fauls of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Legislative Affairs office. The Legislature estimates the creation of the license would generate an additional \$900,000 a year.

Fauls noted that Governor Crist still must approve the creation of the license, but it is necessary in order to meet a National Marine Fisheries Service policy that will institute a national saltwater angler registry beginning in January 2010. Anglers fishing in states that do not require a fishing license would be subject to a federal license that could cost between \$15 and \$25 a year.

"If the Feds came in it would cost Florida \$19-\$20 million in lost license fees," explained Trip Aukeman, deputy director of the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida's advocacy group. "CCA has supported the repeal of the shoreline fishing exemption since the fishing license was instituted in 1989."

If the shoreline license is approved, licenses would be available at retailers and county tax collector's offices July 15. Enforcement of the license would begin Aug. 1.

House Bill 1423 (Senate Bill 2536) was approved at 7 p.m. Friday and addresses several other issues requested by the FWC. Included in the legislation were increases to snook, lobster, turkey, waterfowl, special opportunity hunt and wildlife management area permits. These increases will not take effect until July 1, 2010 and wording mandates the fees collected will go directly back to the respective resource managed by the fee.

FEE CHANGES

• The shoreline exemption for anglers in Florida has been removed, subject to the Governor's approval. Florida residents will pay a \$7.50 annual fee for a fishing license to fish from shore-based structures and land. Exemptions that would apply: Anglers on food stamps, temporary cash assistance and Medicaid; disabled anglers; children under 16; seniors 65 years of age and older; plus a "cane pole" exemption for anglers using a pole or line with no retrieving device fishing in the county of their residence.

Other fee increases to take effect July 1, 2010:

- Snook permit goes from \$2 a year to \$10.
- Lobster permit goes from \$2 to \$5.
- Waterfowl permit goes from \$3 to \$5.
- Wild turkey permit for resident hunters goes from \$5 to \$10.
- Wild turkey permit for non-residents goes from \$100 to \$125.
- Creates an annual deer permit for \$5.
- Limited entry or special-opportunity hunting/ fishing activities not to exceed \$150/day or \$300/week.
- Wildlife Management Area Permit on lands for which FWC is the lead manager, for hunting and fishing uses, goes from \$25 to \$30.
- Allows the FWC to charge up to \$5/day or up to \$30/year, for non-hunting and fishing uses.
- All monies collected through the above listed fees are required by law to go back to FWC for use in research, management and law enforcement of each species.