



**RICK SCOTT**

GOVERNOR

2012 NOV 15 PM 2:35

OS EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

November 07, 2012

Ms. Rebecca Blank  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Blank:

I am writing to update you on the condition of Florida's oyster fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. In a previous letter dated September 6, 2012, I requested that you declare a commercial fishery failure for Florida's oyster harvesting areas in the Gulf of Mexico. At that time we had information that predicted this collapse, specifically in Apalachicola Bay. We continue to see evidence of this fishery failure across many of our oyster producing areas along the Gulf coast and appreciate your continued attention to this serious concern.

Our concerns regarding the oyster stocks in Apalachicola Bay have been heightened even further by a recent follow up assessment completed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services on October 23 and 24, 2012. This most recent assessment of two important oyster harvesting bars in the bay documents the lowest densities of harvestable oysters on record within the past 22 years. These assessments are predictive of dramatic reductions in actual oyster harvest and ultimately a major commercial fishery failure. We recognize your determination of this commercial fishery failure will require evaluation of actual oyster landings data over the next several months and associated economic value of the oyster harvest. We will make certain this information is provided to your NOAA Fisheries staff so they can complete their review as soon as possible after the winter harvest season.

The lack of freshwater flow from the Apalachicola River and associated increases in water salinity in Apalachicola Bay is the primary cause of this serious decline in oyster stocks. These impacts on oysters are one of several key indicators of a much wider ecological and economic collapse in this region of our state. We intend to continue to seek support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to further document the damage to fish and wildlife resources in the Apalachicola River watershed and bay.

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We also will continue to communicate the renewed sense of urgency this situation has created to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers given their role in managing water flows into the Apalachicola River. It is abundantly clear major adjustments to the water control plan are needed immediately to avoid even more serious and long term impacts on natural resources and communities in this region. Moreover, the people who depend on the Apalachicola River and Bay for their livelihoods are facing a very real crisis now and need expedited action by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

As this disaster unfolds, please let us know if you need additional information to complete your assessment of Florida's Gulf coast oyster fisheries. We stand ready to provide any assistance you may need.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a distinct "S".

Rick Scott  
Governor