

## **Agency Efforts to Outreach Barotrauma and the use of Venting and/or Descending Devices**

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

TPWD used to engage in offshore trips to show anglers how to use descending devices, but have stopped after a study was published showing that venting does more harm than good. It is currently partnering with Texas Sea Grant to produce materials that encourage the use of venting and descending tools, and explains their proper use. TPWD is adapting and using the print materials developed by Florida Sea Grant. A brochure will be produced and information will be pushed out via social media.

Zack Brown is the best contact person.

### Texas Sea Grant

Agents hand out barotrauma devices on a limited basis. They're partnering with TPWD to produce outreach materials.

### Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

FWC created a catch and release brochure that covers barotrauma. They also have a proper fish handling website and barotrauma video. It was noted that anglers need to learn when and how to properly use the devices. Additionally, each device has its benefits and downfalls, so anglers need to understand their options and choose what works best. They conducted a citizen science program asking anglers to use descending devices so the agency can gather information on the barriers that prevent anglers from using the devices and to understand how to better encourage their use. The study has not yet gone under final review. However, it found that for each tool, there is a learning curve for anglers and each tool has pros and cons. It was found that in all cases, descending fish in areas with current was challenging. Moving forward, it's not entirely clear what FWC will do to promote the use of descending deceives. Many tackle shops don't sell these devices so they may use the study to work with the industry and sell the device. FWC is considering working with FishSmart. It was noted that we all need to be relaying the same message and working together, or it won't work. Fish don't know boundaries so the states and federal water agencies should unify in their approach.

Rich Abrams is the best contact person.

### Florida Sea Grant

Agents have taken a series of offshore trips with anglers to introduce them to descending gear. They completed a year-long project taking outdoor writers fishing and encouraging them to write articles on descending devices. Sea Grant has conducted an angler survey to gather an understanding of knowledge of barotrauma and the use of mitigating devices. They're also working with FWC to design a guide certification program that will include use of descending and venting tools. Agents have published papers on a variety of barotrauma related issues. They've developed a barotrauma brochure designed to complement the catch and release brochure and the venting brochure they already publish. They've also created a draft deep-water release exhibit for table top exhibits and any other appropriate mediums. They would love feedback and would welcome partnership in the development and use of the tools. Other Sea Grant agencies have used the information on the posters and in the brochures and they would be happy to join forces with anyone that wants to use and promote the materials. They own the website domain

CatchandRelease.org and they will update the page with their new materials. The page includes information on sustainable fishing and catch and release techniques. As far as is known, the site is the only place where all the science and information is housed together. They're working in partnership with FWC on a sustainable certification for charter captains. The Florida Friendly Fishing Guide program, which will be an online module, includes catch and release and barotrauma mitigation pieces.

Betty Staugler is the best contact person.

#### Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

LDWF distributes a catch and release brochure which they're currently updating in partnership with Louisiana Sea Grant. The agency plans to distribute the brochures and produce training videos. They've also partnered to host the Louisiana Fisheries Forward program which educates and trains fishermen to promote sustainable practices, including barotrauma reduction.

#### Louisiana Sea Grant

Partnering with LDWF through the fisheries forward program.

#### Mississippi/Alabama Sea Grant

Agents have distributed descending devices as a promotional item. Studies are being conducted and videos are being produced on the use of descending devices.

#### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

The agency has produced a video and brochure on catch and release practices. They've also funded research on decompression devices. Currently, they're working through the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group as part of Deepwater Horizon restoration. This is a 7-year project in planning phase and it will likely allow for the distribution of descending devices.

Sean Meehan is the best contact person.

#### Fish Smart

Fish Smart is a program initiated by the American Sportfish Association, that has been dedicated to reducing discard mortality through various outreach and educational efforts including workshops, videos, and printed materials. Fish Smart has partnered with numerous agencies, including FWC and Florida Sea Grant to distribute devices and survey users.