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Director

(850) 487-0554  
(850) 487-4847 FAX

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

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620 South Meridian Street  
Tallahassee, Florida  
32399-1600  
Voice: (850) 488-4676

Hearing/speech-impaired:  
(800) 955-8771 (T)  
(800) 955-8770 (V)

MyFWC.com

December 23, 2015

Submitted via Electronic Mail

Ms. Margo Schulze-Haugen, Chief  
National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)  
Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division  
[Margo.Schulze-Haugen@noaa.gov](mailto:Margo.Schulze-Haugen@noaa.gov)

Dear Margo:

In March 2010, The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) prohibited all harvest of lemon sharks (*Negaprion brevirostris*) in waters of the State of Florida. This action was primarily taken to protect newly identified lemon shark aggregations present off Southeast Florida from December through the following April, which span both state waters and adjacent federal waters of Florida. During recent years, these aggregations have been shielded from commercial harvest as the federal commercial season for the Large Coastal Shark (LCS) complex (including lemon sharks) was opened in July, and would close prior to December when the sharks began to aggregate.

Recently, NMFS HMS Management Division announced that the federal commercial season for Large Coastal Sharks (LCS) would open on January 1, 2016. This change in the federal open LCS season would make the Southeast Florida lemon shark aggregations vulnerable to commercial harvest. The FWC is concerned for the potential depletion of these aggregations as their predictable presence provides unique ecotourism and species-specific research opportunities that would not otherwise be available.

The FWC requests NMFS HMS Management Division promptly initiate development of management action alternatives that when implemented, would result in additional protection for Southeast Florida lemon shark aggregations. The FWC is prepared to provide assistance to NMFS in support of this effort, and appreciates your timely consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Jessica McCawley  
Director

jm/lg