

The Bahamas Regulates Fly Fishing Industry

By Bahamas Information Services Jan 5, 2017

At Press Conference, January 4, 2017 to announce Bahamas Fly Fishing Regulations – Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources, the Hon. V. Alfred Gray, Acting Permanent Secretary Cephas Cooper, and Acting Director/Department of Marine Resources Edison Deleveaux, addressing the press at the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources.

NASSAU, The Bahamas -- Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources the Hon. V. Alfred Gray announced that on Monday, January 9, 2017 Fly Fishing Industry regulations will come into effect. Minister Gray made the announcement at a Press Conference at the Ministry's offices on January 4, 2017 to introduce the Regulatory Framework for the Fly Fishing Industry of The Bahamas.

Fly Fishing, he said, is worth more than half a billion dollars annually for The Bahamas, and for more than 20 years, stakeholders of the industry under several administrations have sought to have regulatory oversight established.

Said Minister Gray: "Ladies and gentlemen, the Fly Fishing industry in The Bahamas is said to be worth more than half billion dollars. For more than 20 years, and under several administrations, the men and women involved in the Fly Fishing industry of The Bahamas have been seeking to have this very important industry regulated.

He continued: "The Fly Fishing industry worldwide is said to be worth (in revenue terms) over \$5 billion, and in The Bahamas it is said to be worth more than \$5 million in revenue annually."

Detailing the process that has brought industry developments to this point, he said: "About six or seven years ago, the majority of the guides in The Bahamas, formed themselves into a registered body called the 'Bahamas Fly Fish Association'. Two years ago, the Government of The Bahamas, led by my Ministry, agreed to the regulation of the Fly Fishing Industry in The Bahamas. As a result, months of consultations and negotiations began with all stakeholders throughout The Bahamas."

He said, "The Flats Fishing sector is an important part of the Bahamas' tourism product and is responsible for the employment of hundreds of Bahamians throughout The Bahamas. This is particularly true for the islands of Andros, Abaco, Acklins, Crooked Island, Eleuthera, Bimini, Long Island and Mayaguana. Because this sector was not governed by any form of regulations, those involved in the industry acted as they desired, without any rules or regulations and without any safeguard for conservation and sustainability of the industry. This position we believe could not be continued."

Minister Gray pointed out that The Bahamas was the only country in the Caribbean, the Americas, and other competing jurisdictions, with no law governing Fly Fishing.

Consultative meetings, he said, were attended by all stakeholders including the Ministry of Tourism, fishing guides, marina and hotel operators, fishing lodge operators, Bahamas National Trust, other conservation groups, and non-governmental organizations – all under the guidance of the Attorney General's Office, with input from the Department of Marine Resources.

Interested persons and private sector stakeholders who were unable to attend the meetings gave input by email and fax, and where necessary those views were factored into the final regulation.

Regulations require that all persons using the Flats, such as guides, anglers, and do-it-yourselfers (DIY's) have a license issued by the Department of Marine Resources in New Providence, or by the Family Island Administrators in the Family Islands. Soon licenses will be issued online, for a small license fee – Daily Fee \$5.00; Weekly Fee \$20; and Yearly Fee \$60.

All guides are expected to be certified over time by the Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Marine Resources, in conjunction with approved Fly Fishing associations in The Bahamas.

Minister Gray pointed out aspects of the regulations to be noted:

1. Bahamian certified fishing guides will be employed if two or more anglers are fishing on the Flats by means of a vessel (skiffs, etc.);
2. Only Bahamian registered vessels will be allowed on the Flats;
3. Only Bahamians will be allowed to act as guides;
4. All anglers over the age of 12 years will need a license to fish;
5. Do-It-Yourselfers or DIY's will need no fishing guide;
6. A conservation fund will be established for the conservation and management of the Flats and its Fishery Resources;
7. No commercial fishing will be allowed on the Flats;
8. The Fishery covered by this regulation includes the Bone Fish, the Tarpon, the Cobia and the Permit.

The fines and penalties as set out in the regulations will be strictly enforced.

Minister Gray stated the regulations would come into effect on Monday, January 9, 2017. He encouraged everyone to observe the regulations and so strengthen the future growth of the Fly Fishing Industry.