

Draft “Blue Star Fishing Guide” Framework for Advisory Council Consideration

I. Mission of the Program

The mission of Blue Star Fishing Guides is to promote responsible angling in South Florida through education, communication, and partnership.

Blue Star Fishing Guides is a voluntary program with no regulatory component, implemented and coordinated through NOAA and National Marine Sanctuary Foundation in partnership with local charter fishing ventures, local and state agencies. The framework that follows was developed in partnership with charter fishing captains, staff at Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and local stakeholders.

II. Program Goals and Objectives

The goal of the program is to develop a voluntary education, recognition, and endorsement program for charter fishing operators to expand on their awareness and knowledge, and ultimately that of their clients, about responsible angling practices, the South Florida ecosystem, and FKNMS.

III. Eligibility for Program Recognition

- A. Charter captains/guides with occupational captain’s license

IV. Program Criteria for Blue Star Fishing Guides Participation

A. Comply with Applicable Laws and Regulations

1. Comply with federal, state, local laws and regulations
 - a) Stay updated on laws/regulations
2. Reporting illegal actions: see something, say something
 - a) C-Ocean, law enforcement, open line of communication
 - b) Having a ‘who to call’ list

B. Follow Established Policies, Recommendations, and Guidelines for Responsible Angling

1. Trip Planning
 - a) Safety aboard vessel for clients
 - b) Set expectations of catch / release, etc
2. Catch Techniques / Use appropriate Techniques, Tackle, Gear
 - a) Limit fight times - do not exhaust fish
 - b) Appropriate use of light tackle (i.e. how light do you need to go)
3. Release Technique
 - a) Be prepared with release tools (i.e. descending devices or venting

- gear)
- b) Release fish in best possible condition
- 4. Fish Handling
 - a) Be prepared with fish handling tools
 - (1) Don't lay fish on deck
 - (2) Don't hold up by a boga grip
 - b) Leave in the water if possible - keep fish wet
 - (1) No more than 30 seconds out of water
 - c) Limit removal of slime layer
 - d) Ethical handling of fish, bait
 - (1) Use towel around eyes to calm fish if releasing
 - e) Rubberized nets
 - f) No sunscreen on hands
- C. Exceed Standards Specified by Law, Policies, and Guidelines to Promote Responsible Stewardship of Fisheries Resources
 - 1. Ethical Catch - take only what you need/want
 - a) Know what the goal of the trip is for clients
 - 2. Interaction with other boaters/anglers on the water
 - a) Respect with other boaters - general boater education
 - 3. Proper disposal
 - a) Trash from vessel
 - b) Recycling of materials, engine oil
 - c) Fuel waste
 - 4. Respect for Resources / Habitats
 - a) Preserve, protect, respect wildlife
 - b) Call in distressed wildlife
 - c) Do not target fish during spawn
 - d) Use proper anchors / moorings
- D. Participate in Trainings
 - Agree to participate in trainings - in person and/or online.
- E. Conduct an Onboard Educational Briefing
 - Conduct briefing at dock / before lines in the water
 - 1. Basic Info about: NOAA's FKNMS/USFWS National Wildlife Refuges / National Park Service, zoning rationale
 - 2. Set expectations of catch: take home vs release
 - a) Trophy catch vs hook and cook vs catch and release
 - 3. Ecosystem messaging - how ecosystem is interrelated
 - 4. Basic boater safety brief
 - 5. Explain best practices efficacy, rationale, etc
 - 6. "Importance of today's trip is all about ensuring tomorrow's trip"

- F. Provide Outreach and Education Materials
 - Durable, Laminated materials
 - 1. Include spawning and maturity rates (life histories) of fish
 - 2. Fish, turtle, bird, mammal ID information
 - 3. FAQs for rationale of conservation/reservation areas and regulations
 - 4. Shifting Baselines
 - a) What changes have captains seen on the water?
 - G. Promote the Blue Star Fishing Guides Program
 - 1. Logo (which links to Blue Anger website) on guides:
 - a) Website
 - b) Business card
 - c) Email signature
 - H. Participate in at least one conservation related activity per year
 - 1. Can include cleanup, etc through association/group
 - I. Require captains/mates to attend a continuing education opportunity once per year
 - 1. Can include annual framework review meeting, Council/Gulf meeting, FWC, FKNMS meeting
 - 2. Guest speaker at associations
- V. Process for Program Participation
- A. Initial Evaluation
 - 1. Test/examination - rigorous
 - B. Initial Training Workshop
 - 1. Modules should include all aspects of flats, inshore, offshore
 - 2. Materials NOAA can provide:
 - a) 'Tips and Tricks' from other anglers
 - (1) Wisdom over the years
 - (2) I.e. how to use Facebook to attract certain clientele
 - b) Provide educational materials for vessel
 - (1) "Learn more" binder
 - (2) Basic Info placard
 - c) Where to find more information
 - C. Recognition from NOAA's Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Guide/business will be included on the list of program participants, receive all program materials, including vessel decal/plaque/sticker, and is recognized on the NOAA/FKNMS website via press release.
 - D. Annual Evaluation/Ride Along (options)

1. NOAA staff/volunteer polling clients on docks after trip
2. Phone survey of guides / captains
3. Online client survey
4. Checking trip advisor
5. Voluntary ride along - if clients are willing / if room on vessel
 - a) NOAA can be taking video/photo for marketing purposes

E. Refresher Training

1. Online
2. Shorter than initial training
3. Demonstrate knowledge (use newsletter to stay up to date)

F. Annual Renewal

Participation automatically expires at end of calendar year. Recognition renews once annual requirements are met.

VI. Framework Review

An annual review of the Blue Star Fishing Guides program framework will ensure that the program is functioning as intended and provide the opportunity to address issues that were not foreseen when the framework was developed initially.

Annual meeting with captains/guides - can use to discuss framework and be opportunity to keep communication open with NOAA FKNMS staff and recreational anglers

VII. Raising Public Awareness About Blue Star Fishing Guides

A. NOAA promotion of the program

1. Increased marketing through articles, radio shows, outreach, website promotion, spotlight features, Facebook, etc
2. Social media
3. Tourist Development Council
4. Magazine articles (quarterly)
5. Cross promotion
6. Filming opportunities (i.e. b-roll footage for TDC)
7. Traditional media

B. Networking with other anglers, agencies, advisory council

1. Open lines of communication to sanctuary, law enforcement, etc
2. Directory of captains
3. Annual meeting

C. Obtaining free educational materials for clients

D. Increased investment with the resource

E. Discounts at retailers, other businesses

F. Opportunities for professional development

G. Give aways of tools (i.e. Seaquilizer)