

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

April 19, 2023

DESTIN
FORT
WALTON
BEACH
FLORIDA



World's Largest Lionfish Tournament to be held in Destin-Fort Walton Beach

(Okaloosa County, Florida) – Okaloosa County Destin-Fort Walton Beach Tourism and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission celebrate the 5th Annual Lionfish Removal & Awareness Festival on May 20-21, 2023 at the Destin Harbor. Lionfish are an invasive species that prey on native fish with no known predators due to their venomous spines. The Emerald Coast Open tournament is a key component that helps mitigate the growing lionfish threat in the Gulf of Mexico.

“The success of this annual event is undeniable,” said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. “It not only helps to remove this invasive species, but it brings so many different local industries together within a family-friendly atmosphere that’s accessible to the public. This event grows each year and it could not happen without the hard work of the Coastal Resource Team within our Tourism Development Department.”

The festival includes the Emerald Coast Open Tournament May 19-20. The tournament gives divers the opportunity to compete for prize money totaling nearly \$100,000 in categories like most lionfish caught and largest and smallest lionfish. Last year’s tournament was a great success and removed 13,835 lionfish from local waters. Tournament weigh-ins will be held behind AJ’s Seafood & Oyster Bar on May 21.

Leading up to the tournament, Emerald Coast Open Restaurant Week offers the public unique lionfish dishes prepared by chefs at local restaurants. Each dish will be judged and the winning chef crowned at the end of the week. You can view the schedule [here](#).

The festivities also include Lionfish & Libations on May 20 at the HarborWalk Village, where the public can try samplings of various local brews paired with food provided by participating vendors.

“Emerald Coast Open and the Lionfish Removal & Awareness Day Festival continues to grow and provide awareness of lionfish removal which lessens the threat to our native wildlife in Destin-Fort Walton Beach. Our community sponsors make it possible for us to host an event that is not only educational but an enjoyable experience for families to attend on the Destin Harbor,” said Alex Fogg, Coastal Resource Manager, Destin-Fort Walton Beach.

For official tournament rules, registration and more information, please visit: www.emeraldcoastopen.com.

For more information on Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida, please visit: www.destinfwb.com.

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