

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

May 21, 2024

DESTIN  
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BEACH  
FLORIDA



### World's Largest Lionfish Tournament Celebrates Another Successful Year, records

#### Record-breaking Largest Lionfish

**Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida** – Divers in the Emerald Coast Open lionfish tournament were able to successfully remove 7,411 invasive lionfish despite rough weather in the Gulf of Mexico during the May 17-19 weekend event. Including the pre-tournament, 11,844 lionfish were removed for the entire event. Lionfish have few predators due to their venomous spines and cause negative impacts to the native ecosystem.

“These divers put in a lot of effort to help our ecosystem against this invasive species,” said Okaloosa County Vice Chairman Nathan Boyles. “I congratulate the winners and extend an invitation to all the participants to return next year to Destin-Fort Walton Beach for this worthy endeavor.”

The event boasted 147 participants from around the country and at least three international participants who competed for \$125,000 worth of cash and gear. Winners in this year's contest include the following teams:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place Most Lionfish: VJL Seafood (1,776 lionfish)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Place Largest Lionfish: Deep Water Mafia El Gato Negro (18.70 inches **\*\*new record\*\***)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Place Smallest Lionfish: Lookin' Back (1.89inches)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Place Pre-tournament: Bob Brown (590 lionfish)

Along with the pre-tournament and weigh-ins on Sunday, the tournament included the Lionfish Festival and Restaurant Week. The Lionfish Festival gathered various conservation-oriented vendors along the HarborWalk surrounding the weigh-in area who provided giveaways and lionfish education to families who visited the event.

Restaurant Week celebrated the delicious lionfish featured in cuisine by chefs at local restaurants. This year's winner, La Paz, celebrated their second win in a row.

“I'm extremely proud of how this event has grown over the years,” said Destin-Fort Walton Beach Coastal Resource Manager Alex Fogg. “I want to thank all of the sponsors, divers and volunteers who made this annual event possible. They stuck it out in rough weather and still brought home a lot of lionfish.”

Save the date: The 2025 Emerald Coast Open will take place May 16-18, 2025.

Learn more about the tournament at [emeraldcostopen.com](https://emeraldcostopen.com)

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