

# Lionfish



## Be the Top Predator!

Nonnative lionfish from the Indo-Pacific region have invaded Florida waters! Since 2009, lionfish numbers have been increasing rapidly throughout Florida's coastal waters and pose a significant threat to our native species and ecosystems. As a diver, you are Florida's primary means of control. Read on to find out how you can help, and please encourage others to take up the fight!





## History of Invasion / Ecological Threat:

Lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) were introduced to the coastal waters of southern Florida more than 25 years ago. Since that time, lionfish have spread throughout the Caribbean and are now invading the Gulf of Mexico. Marine biologists are concerned that lionfish will significantly alter the population dynamics of our native marine species resulting in further impacts to the health of Florida's reefs. The lionfish invasion also has the potential to significantly impact recreational and commercial fishing and the overall economy of Florida. You can help control lionfish by removing them whenever you see one.

## LIONFISH FACTS:

- Lionfish are not aggressive and use their venomous spines only for defense
- Can reach 22 inches in length, but most are less than 15 inches
- Are found in brackish river mouths, bays, estuaries and open oceans to a depth of at least 900 ft
- Are general predators that consume a wide variety of fish and invertebrates
- Currently have no significant predators in the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico
- Have venomous spines that can cause painful wounds
- Are slow moving and relatively easy to capture or kill with dip nets or spears
- Have free-floating egg masses and larvae that are distributed by ocean currents



## Methods of Control:

Although complete eradication is not likely given the current range and distribution of the species, localized control is possible through consistent and sustained harvest pressure. Harvesting by spear and hand held dip net has proven to be the most efficient and effective means of control. Divers are safely and efficiently harvesting significant numbers of lionfish with small, lightweight pole spears. Dive safety always comes first, and care should be used to avoid damaging reefs when targeting lionfish.

## Food Quality / Handling:

Lionfish are commonly eaten and comparable in texture and taste to hogfish or black sea bass. Many harvesters who choose to clean lionfish prefer to clip off the venomous fin rays prior to cutting fillets as a safety precaution. Even fish that have been on ice for many hours can cause painful injuries. Treat stings by immersing wound in hot (not scalding) water for 30 to 90 minutes and seek medical attention as soon as possible. **Handle lionfish carefully!**

## Your Assistance is Needed:



Harvest by recreational and commercial divers is currently Florida's only means of controlling lionfish and minimizing unwanted ecological consequences. Please safely remove lionfish whenever possible and consider participating in lionfish derbies. There are no minimum size limits, closed seasons or bag limits for lionfish, and a recreational fishing license is not required to harvest or kill lionfish with dip nets, pole spears, Hawaiian slings or any other spearing device that is specifically designed and marketed exclusively for lionfish.

# Lionfish Reporting:

Scientific data is needed and you can help by reporting sightings and harvest at: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/SightingReport.aspx> or [REEF.org/lionfish](http://REEF.org/lionfish). As an alternative, information can also be provided by calling: 877-STOPANS.

For additional information on lionfish control, please visit: [MyFWC.com/WildlifeHabitats](http://MyFWC.com/WildlifeHabitats) and click on “Nonnative Species” and “Marine Species.”



Photos by FWC staff & Carol Cox



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