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Board of County Commissioners

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FORT
WALTON
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FLORIDA



Destin-Fort Walton Beach to host World's Largest Lionfish Tournament

(Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida) – Divers from across the country will be descending on the beautiful Gulf of Mexico waters, May 17-19, 2024, for the main event of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's Emerald Coast Open, the world's largest lionfish tournament.

This competitive event creates an opportunity for divers to compete for prizes, while also helping the ecosystem recover from the invasive lionfish species that prey upon native fish. Divers are allowed to begin harvesting lionfish from sunrise to sunset and will be competing with more than 100 other divers in categories such as most, largest and smallest lionfish.

"This is a great example of how the local diving and coastal business community comes together to create a festive atmosphere, while also removing this invasive species and educating the public about our local ecosystem," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "I'm proud of our Coastal Resources team within our Tourism Department who work hard every year to make this a free premier event for local families and visitors."

Each year the success of the Emerald Coast Open tournament grows, bringing education and awareness to the public about the lionfish species. In 2023, 144 divers participated, removing a record number of 24,699 lionfish and awarding winners prizes with a combined \$95,000 in cash and gear. This year is expected to be even more rewarding with cash prizes for the top 10 finishers.

The Emerald Coast Open includes a pre-tournament, Restaurant Week and the Lionfish Festival. 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 Lionfish Festival will take place along the HarborWalk, featuring vendors and activities for kids and families.

"The success of this event cannot happen without all of the sponsors, divers and volunteers who work together to not only help mitigate the population of this species, but also bring awareness to the public with a fun event in beautiful Destin-Fort Walton Beach," said Okaloosa County Coastal Resource Manager Alex Fogg.

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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