

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

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

Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida – Destin-Fort Walton Beach proudly hosts Emerald Coast Open, the World's Largest Lionfish Tournament, May 16-18, 2025. Divers from across the country will compete for over \$100,000 in prizes.

The event builds upon the success of previous years, with the goal of helping to manage the invasive lionfish population in the Gulf waters. In the 2024 tournament, more than 100 divers harvested nearly 12,000 lionfish, and this year's event is expected to surpass those numbers. Competitors will vie for top prizes in categories for the smallest, largest, and most lionfish.

"Each year the Emerald Coast Open demonstrates the very best in how our businesses and diving community collaborate to create an exciting atmosphere for residents and visitors who attend this event," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "I applaud the efforts of our Natural Resources team who bring a high level of energy to this event every year and the effort they put in to educate the public about this invasive species."

The Emerald Coast Open features a variety of events in addition to the main tournament, including a pre-tournament, Restaurant Week and the Lionfish Festival. Leading up to the tournament, Emerald Coast Open Restaurant Week showcases local chefs' uniquely crafted lionfish dishes for the public to enjoy. Each dish will be judged and the winning local restaurant will be crowned at the end of the week. You can view the schedule [here](#).

The Lionfish Festival is free to the public and will take place along HarborWalk Village in Destin, featuring conservation-focused vendors, educational talks, music, and fun activities for children and their families. Tournament awards will be announced on May 18 at AJ's Seafood and Oyster Bar.

"The Emerald Coast Open tournament not only helps remove invasive lionfish, keeping our fisheries healthy but also provides valuable education and awareness through the Festival and Restaurant Week," said Alex Fogg, Natural Resources Chief. "Marine conservation is a key component of Destin-Fort Walton Beach's tourism initiatives, and these events help maintain the health of our waters and marine life."

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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