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Florida takes a step backwards:If you’re planning a fishing trip to Florida, you need to visit tax office

By Frank Sargeant
from
The Outdoor Wire

February 4, 2026 - If you’re planning a Florida fishing trip this spring or summer—whether for bass and crappies in fresh-water or snook, reds and trout on salt, there’s a licensing change you need to know about before you arrive. In late 2025, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission quietly eliminated online and phone sales of short-term non-resident fishing licenses. The 3-day and 7-day licenses once favored by visiting anglers can no longer be purchased through GoOutdoorsFlorida.com or the Fish|Hunt FL app. Instead, out-of-state anglers must buy those licenses in person at a county tax collector’s office or an authorized license agent before fishing.

Annual non-resident licenses remain available online. But for anglers in Florida for only a few days, the change adds a layer of friction that didn’t exist before—and it’s already being felt on the water. For years, short-term licenses were one of the easiest parts of planning a Florida fishing trip. You could buy one online in minutes, download it to your phone, and be legally fishing the same day you landed. That convenience mattered to families on vacation, weekend travelers, and anyone squeezing fishing into a tight schedule. Now, unless visitors know the



The license may put an end to weekend fishing trips for many Florida visitors who don’t have time to physically visit license sales locations. (Photo/Courtesy: FWC)

rule change ahead of time, their first fishing day can begin with a search for a license agent—assuming one is open, nearby, and actually sells fishing licenses. That’s time lost during what is often the best bite of the day. It’s important to note one major exception: this change does not affect most saltwater charter fishing. Florida’s for-hire saltwater vessels operate under a “blanket” license that covers anglers on board, resident or non-resident. Anyone booking a guided offshore or inshore saltwater trip is typically unaffected. The impact falls primarily on do-it-yourself anglers and freshwater guides,

where individual licenses are still required. FWC declined to comment when asked directly about the reasoning behind the change. But the structure of the rule—and how it was implemented—offers some clues. One likely factor is administrative efficiency. Short-term non-resident licenses generate relatively little revenue per transaction but reportedly carry the same backend costs as longer-term licenses: credit card fees, fraud screening, customer support, and dispute resolution. From an agency standpoint, thousands of low-dollar, short-duration on-

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line transactions are costly to manage. By shifting those sales to tax collectors and retail agents, FWC offloads much of that burden. In-person purchases reduce chargebacks, incorrect license selections, and identity issues, while moving customer service responsibilities to local offices that already handle them. There’s also a revenue-stability angle that’s hard to ignore. Annual non-resident licenses—still available online—bring in significantly more money per sale and are easier for the agency to forecast and budget. Requiring in-person purchases for short-term licenses may push some visiting anglers toward annual licenses, even if they’re only fishing for a few days. Others, however, may simply decide not to fish at all. That’s where the concern lies. Freshwater guides in Central Florida report increased confusion among visiting clients, some of whom arrive assuming they can buy a license online as they always have. A few guides say bookings have softened, particularly for short notice trips, as visitors reconsider whether the

hassle is worth it. FWC has released no data yet on participation or revenue trends since the change. The irony is that license dollars are not incidental to Florida’s fisheries. Revenue from fishing licenses funds conservation, habitat work, research, enforcement, and stocking programs. Anything that suppresses legal participation—especially among visitors—has downstream effects that extend beyond inconvenience. FWC has pointed out that licenses are still available at hundreds of locations statewide, and that simplifying the online license catalog makes the system easier to manage. From an internal operations standpoint, that may be true. From an angler’s perspective—particularly one flying in for a short trip—it feels like a step backward, an aggravating anachronism. Fishing access isn’t just about ramps and shorelines. It’s also about how easy it is to participate legally. Florida markets itself as the fishing capital of the world, and much of that reputation rests on visiting anglers who come for a few days, spend money locally, and leave with plans to return. Whether the change ultimately increases revenue efficiency or quietly discourages participation is something only time, and transparent data, will answer. For now, visiting anglers would be wise to plan ahead—and policymakers might consider whether administrative convenience is worth the cost of lost casts, lost trips, and lost goodwill.

The SAF announces Nighthawk Custom is Gold-level corporate partner

BELLEVUE, Wash. — Feb. 4, 2026 — The Second Amendment Foundation (SAF) is pleased to announce that Nighthawk Custom has joined the organization as the newest Gold-level corporate partner. “We choose to support SAF because of the people,” said Nighthawk Custom Director of Marketing Landon Stone. “They’re the difference-makers—motivated, driven, and unafraid to put in the work to get things done. Their impact is clear in the results they deliver for the Second Amendment.” Since 2004, Nighthawk Custom has become a globally respected name in precision firearms—defined by craftsmanship, integrity and an uncompromising pursuit of excellence. Based in Berryville, Ark., the company is driven by a singular philosophy: One Gun, One Gunsmith. Every 1911 and double-stack pistol is crafted start to finish by a single gunsmith, with each billet part being hand-fit, polished and perfected. Beyond its legendary 1911s, Nighthawk Custom continues the legacy of Cooper Rifles of Arkansas, crafting precision bolt-action rifles in-house. The company is also the exclusive U.S. importer of Korth revolvers and Cosmi shotguns, bringing world-class craftsmanship to American shooters. As part of their Gold-level corporate partner commitment, Nighthawk Custom recently donated a custom pistol build for one lucky winner through SAF’s monthly sweepstakes program. The donation, along with support from Field Ethos, helped raise \$25,000 for the organization’s work. “Much like the quality craftsmanship Nighthawk Custom provides, SAF is equally driven to deliver lasting results so all Americans can fully exercise their Second Amendment rights,” said SAF Senior Vice President Lauren Hill. “We are greatly appreciative for Nighthawk Custom’s commitment to SAF’s critical work and look forward to working closely with them over the coming year as we fight to defend the right to keep and bear arms in courtrooms across the nation.” For more information about SAF’s corporate partner program, contact Hill at lhill@saf.org.

World Bass Enterprises unveils the Champions Tournament featuring top 50 Anglers and record setting \$3 million purse... from sports page 1

zations on the planet. The family-friendly event at Old Hickory Lake, hosted within Sanders Ferry Park, will feature a fireworks show, a flyover, interactive games, fishing activities for all ages, food and beverage vendors, and multiple musical acts including a to-be-named Friday night headline musical act. Separately, World Bass Enterprises will hold a pro-am competition on Sunday, Nov. 1 at Percy Priest Lake which will feature the top 15 anglers from "The Champions" tournament fishing alongside legendary anglers, celebrities and more. Nearby, The Gaylord Opryland Resort in Nashville will host a



number of ancillary event activations including the tournament’s media day and opening ceremonies, as well as the Official Expo of The Champions, featuring 70,000 square feet of expo booths from top brands across fishing, hunting, and outdoor sports. “As a longtime bass fishing enthusiast, I have always marveled at the incredible skill of the

world’s top anglers and believed they deserved a marquee platform to showcase their talents to the world,” said World Bass Enterprises Founder and CEO Brian Bird. “And there is no better way to crown a true world champion than by bringing the two biggest tours together to fish on the same lake. We’re thrilled to introduce this world class event that will unify the sport, establish an an-

nual tradition, and increase exposure to pro fishing by welcoming in new audiences.” “There has always been friendly competition and banter between the anglers on each tour, but no way to actually settle the score on the water,” said four-time Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour Angler of the Year Jacob Wheeler. “The opportunity to crown a true world champion across the entire sport is something our anglers have wanted for a very long time, and we’re thrilled to finally have that chance this October in Nashville. The fact that there is more than \$3 million in total prize money is remarkable and a true testament to the elite nature of this competition.” “The entire bass fishing community is energized to see who is the best of the best, and have the opportunity to chase a \$1.25 million grand prize,” said two-time Progressive Bassmaster Elite Series Angler of the Year Brandon Palaniuk. “And while we will be competing individually for the purse, I know the rest of the anglers on The Progressive Bassmaster Elite Series will be fired up to try to bring home the

first-ever Champions Cup to our tour.” Excel Sports Management is serving as Executive Producer of “The Champions” tournament providing strategy, commercial sales, and production support. Additional details on “The Champions” tournament including qualifying anglers, ticket sales, broadcast information, and more, will be announced at a later date. For more information on “The Champions” tournament fans can visit worldbassenterprises.com.

ABOUT WORLD BASS ENTERPRISES: Established in 2026, World Bass Enterprises serves as the founder and host organization for “The Champions” tournament, the annual world bass fishing championship where the top 50 anglers in the world across The Progressive Bassmaster Elite Series and Major League Fishing’s Bass Pro Tour compete for record-setting prize pools and The Champion’s Cup. For more information visit worldbassenterprises.com.

Progressive Insurance named a Platinum Sponsor and the Official Insurance of Bassmaster Angler

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., Feb. 4, 2026 — B.A.S.S. announced that Progressive Insurance has been named a Platinum Sponsor and the Official Insurance of Bassmaster, further strengthening a long-standing relationship between the two organizations and underscoring Progressive’s commitment to professional bass fishing and the outdoor lifestyle. As part of the agreement, Progressive will serve as the title sponsor of the Bassmaster Angler of the Year award, the Bassmaster Elite Series, the Bassmaster Classic Celebrity Pro-Am and the Bassmaster Classic Tailgate. Progressive will also be the title sponsor of one Bassmaster Elite Series tournament during the season. “As the country’s No. 1 boat insurer, Progressive is thrilled to strengthen its involvement with Bassmaster, an organization that embodies our passion for the outdoors and commitment to community,” said Eric Doubler, Progressive Recreational Lines Direct Business Leader. “With

our expanded sponsorship, we look forward to deepening our connection with the amazing angler community while enhancing and delivering memorable experiences to fishing enthusiasts and fans.” Progressive’s expanded role connects the brand with Bassmaster’s most prestigious competitive honors and marquee fan experiences. The Bassmaster Angler of the Year award is widely regarded as the most respected title in professional bass fishing, recognizing consistent excellence and performance across an entire Elite Series season. Earning Angler of the Year honors requires anglers to compete at the highest level across diverse fisheries and conditions, making the award a defining career achievement. Progressive will serve as title sponsor of the Bassmaster Elite Series, which features the sport’s best anglers competing across the country on iconic fisheries, with each event drawing national attention through live coverage,

broadcast programming and extensive digital storytelling. The series serves as the primary pathway to the Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Classic presented by Under Armour and showcases the skill, preparation and innovation that define elite-level competition. Progressive’s title sponsorship of the Bassmaster Elite Series tournament further reinforces its presence on the water. Each Elite Series event is a multi-day competition that brings anglers, fans and local communities together, generating significant economic impact while highlighting fisheries management and conservation efforts in host regions. The Bassmaster Classic Celebrity Pro-Am, another event sponsored by Progressive, pairs professional anglers with celebrities, industry leaders and notable outdoor enthusiasts in a unique format that blends competition with entertainment. Held during Classic week, the event

Please see sports page 5



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