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## ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship Provides Update on Coosa River Fishery Discussions

This afternoon, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Commissioner Chris Blankenship issued the following statement announcing his decision on the Coosa River fishery:

“Over the past several months, I have sought input through our Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division from anglers, tournament directors, homeowners, city and county officials, legislators, Auburn University scientists and other stakeholders regarding the bass populations and size distributions on the Coosa River reservoirs. My intent was to have meaningful conversations about any impacts and solutions that could result from a proposed slot limit. However, misunderstanding and misinformation about a proposed slot limit took hold and spread through the fishing community. Throughout this process, no pre-determined decision had been made, and all information and options were under review and consideration.

“From all indications, the overall bass stock status on the Coosa is healthy, especially for small and medium-size fish. However, it is clear to ADCNR and local fishermen that, while the population of bass is relatively abundant, the vast majority of bass on the Coosa currently top out at less than five pounds.

“In an effort to increase top-end-size bass on the Coosa, which studies have shown to be in decline, a slot limit was considered. A slot limit would have a short-term negative economic and cultural impact on bass fishing on the Coosa. In the long term, it is believed that there would be a positive impact to the fishery’s size structure. The feedback we received from the majority of stakeholder groups is that they are satisfied with the current size structure and population density of the bass on the Coosa system.”

“After taking into consideration all of the fisheries data collected by our staff, various scientific studies and feedback from tournament and local fishermen as well as many city and county government entities, I have determined that the short-term economic impacts of a 14-20 inch slot limit outweigh the long-term benefits of a larger size structure of the bass population on the Coosa River reservoirs. **At this time, no changes for the Coosa River fishery will be presented to the Conservation Advisory Board for consideration.**

“However, ADCNR has shared with tournament organizers the Auburn University study findings as well as our staff concerns regarding extreme post-release mortality that occurs with tournaments in warm

water months, detrimentally impacting the larger-size bass. We anticipate responsible tournament organizers will modify live weigh-in tournaments during the warm water months. We would also like to work with tournament organizers to limit live weigh-in tournaments during this period or otherwise modify the structure of these tournaments to improve bass survivability.

“ADCNR will continue to study the issue on the Coosa and talk with anglers, property owners, tournament organizers, city and county officials and state legislators to ensure the population of bass stays healthy and sustainable. We are committed to working together with all stakeholders to provide recreational and tournament anglers with access to this important resource.” – ***ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship***

ADCNR promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama’s natural resources through four divisions: Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Learn more at [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com).

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