



Openers

Net Ban—Dented but Fixable

Like getting rear-ended out of nowhere, the fishing community has been hit with the unthinkable.

Florida's historic net ban, considered the most important fisheries reform ever, suddenly was struck down by a rural judge friendly to a few commercial interests. Whack.

Fortunately, the bizarre lower court decision has been "stayed," pending entangled appeals to come.

But for several days, Circuit Judge Jackie Fulford's ruling and refusal to postpone its effect opened the door to frenzied roe mullet gilling. The First District Court of Appeal in Tallahassee then reversed the stay denial, so the net ban is back in place. For now.

Most insiders say the courts will never uphold Judge Fulford's ruling. But...could another rear-ender come out of the woods?

It's also rumored that gill netters are lobbying decision makers to "settle" the endless legal wrangling by allowing larger-mesh "seine" nets that would actually function as gill nets.

Most folks, understandably, don't quite know the difference between gill nets, which primarily entangle fish, and seine nets, which pocket fish without normally gilling them.

Cleverly, at first glance, the gillers say they simply want large meshes beyond two inches in order to let baby fish through.

But the obvious intent in reality is to snag fish and bring back the entanglement gear that caused so much slaughter prior to the net ban in 1995.

Seems like yesterday as they say, there being lots of yesterdays out there now, that Florida Sportsman launched the "Ban the Nets" campaign in '92. Fed-up anglers from around the state, notably the Florida Conservation Association (now Coastal Conservation Association Florida) forced the constitutional net ban adopted by 72 percent of the voters.

Now, a generation later, the new upheaval does at least remind and inform the public of that turbulent past. The state is appealing Judge Fulford's ruling and strong support comes from CCA Florida. Everyone's support is vitally needed.

Connect up at CCAFlorida.org or via Florida Sportsman.

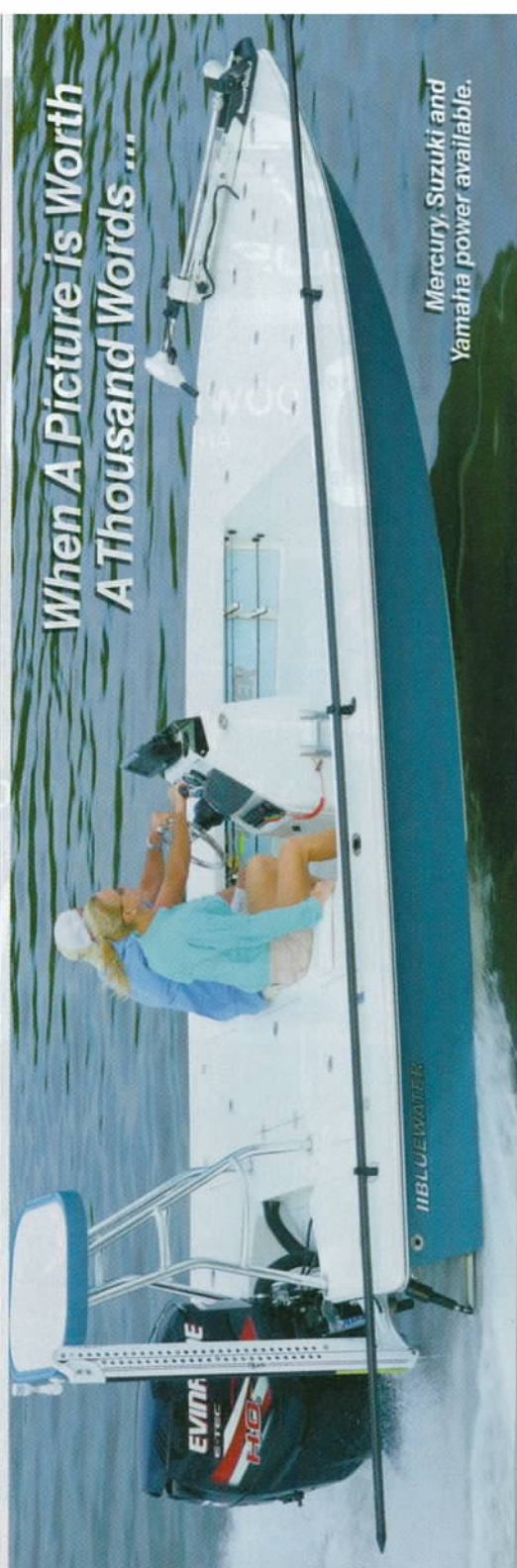
Rear-enders can usually be fixed.



Cover from March 1992, above. Here, a typical gill net haul of Spanish mackerel in the 1980s.

Karl Wickstrom

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