



FLORIDA QUOTA HUNT WORKGROUP

FINAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopted Unanimously by the Workgroup—May 28, 2008

The Workgroup met on May 28, 2008 for its final meeting to review and consider the comments, concerns and suggestions made on the April, 2008 Public Workshop Draft Recommendations by the over 250 hunters who participated in four regional workshops in April and May, 2008 and the over 150 online and email comments received by the Workgroup in April and May, 2008. The Workgroup reviewed and considered every option identified in the workshop process, made some adjustments to their recommendations and unanimously adopted the findings and recommendations below for presentation to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at its September, 2008 meeting. The Public Input Report can be found at <http://consensus.fsu.edu/FWC/quotahunt.html>. A May 28 Quota Hunt Workgroup meeting summary will be posted by the end of June, 2008.

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION CONSIDERATION OF THE WORKGROUP CONSENSUS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Workgroup gratefully acknowledges the support and involvement of the Commission and the FWC staff in facilitating its efforts to study the Quota Hunt system and develop consensus recommendations informed by their collective experience and the ongoing input from the hunter community. If the Commission decides to consider modifications to this consensus package of recommendations, the Workgroup recommends that the Commission continue to seek its input and if appropriate consider re-convening the Workgroup to further respond to the Commission's direction.

QUOTA HUNT WORKGROUP FINDINGS

- 1. Purpose of Quota Hunt Program.** The Florida Quota Hunt Program is designed to provide system users (hunters) fair access to Florida's Wildlife

Management Areas (WMA's), while protecting the habitat, properly managing the resource, and providing a quality hunting experience. The FWC's stated objective for the Florida Quota Hunt Program is: to help prevent overcrowding and control harvest on Wildlife Management Areas (WMA's) and provide hunters with quality hunting experiences.

2. **Hunting is in Decline.** The number of Florida hunters, as measured by annual hunting licenses, has been trending downward in recent years, as has the percentage of hunters relative to the overall population.
3. **Quota Hunt Program Based on Science.** The Florida Quota Hunt Program should continue to be based on and informed by the best available science, to ensure a sustainable harvest and enhance resource and habitat protection.
4. **Isolated Fixes to the Program.** FWC responses to concerns and issues raised by hunter stakeholders that have arisen since the quota hunt was established in 1975 have often been piecemeal and isolated, rather than comprehensive and systematic.
5. **Program has not Ensured Fairness.** Based on a historical review and the recent 2007-2008 quota hunt check station survey statistics, the Workgroup believes that the Quota Hunt Program has failed to achieve a fair distribution of hunting opportunities for Florida's wildlife management areas due to its complexity, inaccessibility and susceptibility to manipulation. The unintended consequences and documented abuses of the program point out shortcomings in the program that have deprived hunters of the opportunity to hunt on public lands.
6. **Quota Permits Used to Control Resource.** Data collected for the 2007-2008 Hunting season suggests that individuals in possession of extra permits that go unused are preventing other hunters from enjoying the resource.
7. **Program Not Effective in Recruitment and Retention.** The current Quota Hunt Program is not effectively contributing to the long term successful recruitment and retention of hunters of all ages, so vital to the future of hunting in Florida.

**QUOTA HUNT WORKGROUP FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR PROPOSED REFINEMENTS TO THE QUOTA HUNT
PROGRAM**

I. BASING QUOTA HUNT PROGRAM DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT ON SCIENCE

- A. Quota Adjustments Based on Data.** To ensure a sustainable harvest, site specific collected data related to hunter use and demand, game populations, and habitat assessments should be used on an ongoing basis to establish and maintain quotas for each WMA, as well as determining whether a quota is needed. In addition to site-specific data, the popularity of the WMA and the demand for hunting opportunities should be considered as a factor in making management decisions.
- B. Data Collection.** The Workgroup recommends using check stations and the total licensing system as mechanisms for collecting meaningful data for making ongoing decisions on the quota hunt program (i.e., hunter use information: how many hunters use their own quota permit, how many hunters use a transferred quota permit, hunter identification, and game taken, etc.).
- C. Management Area Quota Review.** The Work Group recommends that FWC staff implement a regularly scheduled evaluation of WMA quotas and make adjustments based on science and the Workgroup's guiding principles as appropriate. The Workgroup recommends that the criteria for evaluating the impacts of its recommendations should include hunter satisfaction, a fair distribution of hunting opportunities, and recruitment and retention of hunters.

II. ACHIEVING A FAIR DISTRIBUTION AND EXPANDING HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES IN FLORIDA

- A. Expand Quota Hunts.** The Workgroup recommends that the General Gun and Archery/Muzzleloading Gun quota hunt types be expanded from 2 quota hunt types to 4 quota hunt types. The four hunt types would be: Archery, General Gun, Muzzleloading Gun and Wild Hog.
- B. Increase the Number of Permits for Phase I.** The Workgroup recommends that each applicant, for the General Gun, Archery, Muzzleloading Gun and Wild Hog quota hunts, would have the possibility of obtaining two permits, per person, for each hunt type (one permit per hunt number). This would increase the total number of permits an applicant may receive from 2 permits (1 for each hunt type) to 8 permits (2 for each new hunt type) and it would also expand the total number of choices on the worksheets from a current total of 10 choices for 2

quota types to a total of 20 choices for 4 quota hunt types. Each hunt type would require a separate worksheet.

- C. **Expand the Phase I Application Periods.** The Workgroup recommends that the application period for Phase I be expanded to 30 days for all hunt types.
- D. **Transferable Quota Permits.** The Workgroup recommends that Phase I permits be non-transferable for all hunt types. Permits issued in Phase II and Phase III would remain transferable.
- E. **Increase Opportunities in Phase II.** The Workgroup recommends that Phase II for General Gun, Wild Hog, Archery, Muzzleloading Gun, Mobility-Impaired and Spring Turkey hunt types be changed from a first-come first-served issuance to a random drawing process. The random drawing process would consist of 2 drawings and for General Gun, Wild Hog, Archery and Muzzleloading Gun, the possibility of 2 permits, per person, per hunt type (one permit per hunt number). The first drawing would include those individuals who have not received a permit for that specific hunt type. For each hunt type, the second drawing would be for those individuals who received only one permit in Phase I or the first drawing of Phase II. The Phase II application period would be 30 days.
- F. **Create an Expanded Preference System for Phase I applicants only.** The Workgroup recommends for all hunt types, that preference points be awarded each year for Phase I applicants if they do not receive a permit in one of the random drawings. The preference points would be accumulated for each hunt type until the applicant is successful in receiving a permit for that hunt type.

In the preference drawing, applicants with the highest number of preference points would be selected first. Applicants with the next highest preference points would be selected next and so forth. Only 1 quota permit may be drawn per random selection cycle (pass). Preference points may only be used for the first permit drawn. This process is designed to increase the likelihood that a hunter who did not get a permit in the previous year during the Phase I application period would have an increased chance during the current year Phase I drawings for being selected for a quota permit.

Unused preference points would be retained by the applicant and would be available for use in subsequent years. They would not be lost if the applicant did not apply during Phase I each year. There would be no points added in years for which the applicant did not apply during Phase I for a quota permit.

If an individual receives a quota permit during Phase I and can not use the permit due to an emergency situation, they may turn in the permit and retain their original preference points. There will not be a preference point awarded for that year. The unused permits will be treated as a no-show and not reissued.

For applicants applying in a group and the leader has preference, all members of the group must have preference. The member with the lowest preference points will determine the position in the preference drawing.

For the transition from the current system to the new system, applicants with a preference for a specific hunt type would be awarded 1 preference point for that hunt type. Applicants with a preference for Archery/Muzzleloading Gun, would be awarded 1 preference point for Archery and 1 preference point for Muzzleloading Gun. There will be no preference points awarded for Wild Hog, Family, Youth, Dove, Mobility Impaired or Quail the first year.

- G. Modify the Maximum Number of Permits That an Individual May Receive.** The Workgroup recommends that for each hunt type, each individual would be limited to two permits, per hunt number, for all phases.
- H. Mobility Impaired Quota – Phase III.** The Workgroup recommends that the Phase III first-come, first-served issuance be changed to a random drawing process with 1 application, 1 permit per hunt, per person with multiple drawings.
- I. Expanded Opportunities for Mobility Impaired Quota.** The Workgroup recommends that a guest be allowed to accompany the holder of a Mobility Impaired Quota Permit. On most areas they would be allowed to take their own bag limit. On Dupuis, Ralph Simmons, Seminole Forest and Three Lakes WMA's, the guest must share the bag limit with permit holder (consistent with their rules).
- J. Expand Hunt Buddy Opportunities for Mobility Impaired Hunters.** The Workgroup recommends that, for the Spring Turkey Quota hunts for mobility impaired hunters, the holder of Florida Mobility Impaired Certification card be allowed to hunt with the holder of a quota permit and to share a bag limit. The holder of the quota permit will be limited to only 1 additional person hunting with them - either the holder of a Guest Permit or a hunt buddy holding a Mobility Impaired Certification card.

- K. **No Show Pilot for Mobility Impaired Hunts.** The Workgroup recommends that a pilot project be initiated to assess the impact of non-transferability on the “no show” rate for existing Mobility-impaired hunts allowing for up to 50% of no shows to be issued by a drawing at the mobility impaired pre-hunt meeting.

III. RECRUITING AND RETAINING HUNTERS

- A. **Enhance Family Quota Hunts.** The Workgroup supports the FWC’s efforts to implement additional family quota hunts.
- B. **Create a Guest Permit Program.** The Workgroup recommends that one guest be allowed to accompany the holder of a non-transferable General Gun, Archery, Muzzleloading Gun or Wild Hog quota permit. A Guest Permit must be obtained and only one Guest Permit may be issued to accompany each quota hunt permit. Guest permits are non-transferable.

Unless exempt, the guest would have appropriate license and permits. The quota hunt permit holder and guest would enter and exit the WMA together. Shared bag limits would be considered prior to implementing any quota hunt reductions. Where the current bag limit is 2 or more, the bag limit would be shared. Where the bag limit is 1 deer, an evaluation and assessment would be made by the FWC to determine if the hunters would have to share the bag limit.

- C. **Create a Guest Permit for Spring Turkey Quota Hunts.** The Workgroup recommends that one guest (that has all required licenses and permits except a quota permit) be allowed to accompany the holder of a non-transferable Spring Turkey quota permit. The guest must share the same vehicle, remain under the supervision of and in proximity to the permit holder. A guest not participating (i.e., hunting, calling, placing the decoys or handling the game) in the hunt would not need to possess a license or permit. A Guest Permit must be obtained and only one Guest Permit may be issued to accompany each quota hunt permit. Guest permits are non-transferable. Shared bag limits would be considered prior to implementing any quota hunt reductions.

IV. GOING FORWARD

- A. **Assess the Impacts of the New Quota System following the first two seasons.** The Workgroup recommends that FWC staff collect and monitor data related to the effects of the implementation of the recommendations.

After each of the first two seasons the Work group and the public be invited to review the results and make any recommendations to the Commission as may be needed.

- B. Criteria for Assessing the New System.** The Workgroup recommends that the criteria for evaluating the impacts of the recommendations should include hunter satisfaction, a fair and diverse distribution of hunting opportunities, and enhanced recruitment and retention of hunters.
- C. Continue to Collect and Periodically Assess Quota Hunt System Data.** The Workgroup recommends that the FWC collect the necessary data in order to conduct periodic assessments of the experience with the new system following the first two seasons and make any necessary adjustments following the review of impacts on WMA hunter quotas, hunter recruitment and retention and enforcement and compliance in utilizing the system.