

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Kenneth D. Haddad, Executive Director

DATE: June 15, 2009

SUBJECT: June 2009 Executive Director's Report

Beau Turner Youth Conservation Center

On May 27th, we worked with the National Wildlife Federation, the Turner Foundation, and Beau Turner to host a very special workshop at the Turner Center. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together experts from across the country to see the Center, discuss how to better connect our youth with the outdoors and how to export the Turner Center model to other parts of the state and nation. We had a who's-who list of national leaders participating in the workshop including a former superintendent of Yellowstone, Everglades and Yosemite National Parks, the presidents of the National Wildlife Federation, the Conservation Fund, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, the American Sportfishing Association, Pheasants Forever, the Turner Foundation, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to name just a few.

It was truly impressive to see this group working together here in Florida to push for real progress on this issue that is so important to our agency. The group reviewed many of the common obstacles to getting kids and families outdoors and participated in some powerful brainstorming to find ways around these obstacles. This is exactly the kind of effort needed to move us toward success in the near future. We were pleased Commissioner Yablonski was there with several members of FWC staff. *Commissioner, is there anything you would like to add?*

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Also on May 27th, the *General Hoyt S. Vandenberg* was successfully sunk to create a new artificial reef just a few miles off the coast of Key West. Our Chairman was very involved in this project, and it will certainly bring a big boost to the local Keys economy through tourism and diving. I know he would be the first to say it took several good partners working together to get it done. The actual sinking event got enormous national, state and local media coverage. I understand our own Tim Donovan was there and he got some great footage of the sinking that we would like to share with you today. Tim would you please queue it up for us now?

The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute recently completed its annual report on bay scallops in the Gulf of Mexico. Healthy adult scallop abundances were reported at 7 out of 11 study sites, including Sarasota Bay, Tampa Bay, Anclote, Homosassa, Steinhatchee, and St. Marks. Strong levels of recruitment were noted at several sites including Tampa Bay, Anclote, Sarasota Bay, and St. Joe Bay. Restoration efforts are expected to continue in 2009 to re-establish depleted bay scallop populations in the Panhandle and Southwest Florida. The Division of Marine Fisheries Management recommends maintaining current management regulations for bay scallops to allow continued rebuilding of the Gulf bay scallop population.

Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Terrestrial Habitat Conservation and Restoration: A pending new national champion Pyramid Magnolia has been discovered by FWC staff on the Lake Talquin State Forest portion of the Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area (WMA). This discovery is particularly noteworthy because the Pyramid Magnolia is listed as endangered in Florida and reflects the importance of protection and management of the fragile slope forests where this species occurs.

Through Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative, FWC recently was awarded \$322,334 in federal funds as a part of a \$1 million award from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's State Wildlife Grant Competitive Program. The project will support multistate sandhill restoration in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Funds for this project in Florida will be matched by FWC's gopher tortoise permit program and The Gopher Tortoise Council. Florida's awarded funds will be used to support the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership's Ecosystem Support Team in conducting prescribed fires, hardwood control, and planting longleaf pine seedlings on public and private lands in the western panhandle. The Ecosystem Support Team is a land management "strike team" led by The Nature Conservancy that provides additional personnel and equipment to assist land managers who are members of the Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership, which includes FWC. The anticipated funds from this grant will affect 14,600 acres in Florida and over 38,500 acres in the Southeast. These restoration activities will improve habitat quality and connectivity for numerous wildlife species, including the gopher tortoise.

Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management

Biologists with the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management, Habitat and Species Conservation, and FWRI are coordinating a largemouth bass stocking evaluation on Lake Okeechobee. During the last two months approximately 100,000 Florida largemouth bass fingerlings were stocked in Cody's Cove, a small area located on the northwest side of Lake Okeechobee. The fingerlings were produced at the Florida Bass Conservation Center from broodstock collected in January. Genetic marking of the broodstock, which occurred at the FWRI laboratory in St. Petersburg, will allow for the offspring to be identified. During sampling to evaluate the stockings, scientist will take a fin-clip of each largemouth bass collected and have them genetically tested to see if it came from a stocked fish or a wild fish. The evaluation will provide FWC important information on using stocking as a management tool to boost the largemouth bass population in small area of a large water body.

Division of Law Enforcement

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "Partners' Outstanding Efforts with 2009 Regional Director's Conservation Award" was awarded to Captain John Burton and his officers from the Division of Law Enforcement in the North Central Region. Captain John Burton and his officers assisted the Service's manatee protection efforts during the 2007-2008 manatee seasons. The FWC Division of Law Enforcement provided additional officers in the Kings Bay and Homosassa River areas during busy week-ends as well as detailing officers from surrounding counties who normally patrolled other areas to assist when possible. These enhanced efforts ensured manatees received additional protection in their wintering areas. Captain Burton and his officers have been working closely with area stakeholders and special interest groups in a proactive effort to educate the public and improve relations within the community. Captain Burton has been with the Commission since 1990 and works out of the Crystal River Office. Congratulations to Captain Burton and his crew for a job well done!