



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission

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VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Annual Report
2011-2012



**Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission**

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FWC Volunteer Program

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*Without community service, we would not have a strong quality of life. It's important to the person who serves as well as the recipient. **It's the way in which we ourselves grow and develop...***

- Dr. Dorothy I. Height, President and CEO of the National Council of Negro Women.

Photo - Volunteer, Kyle Fabbro and Intern, Trevor Griffin, deploy wildlife game cameras to obtain white-tailed deer population indices at CREW Wildlife Environmental Area (WEA).



VALUE IN VOLUNTEERS



*Volunteers continue to make a positive impact, by increasing project capacity, as well as expanding public knowledge and awareness of the **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) mission: Manage fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.***

INTRODUCTION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) believes that volunteers are essential partners to meet the conservation challenges we face in Florida. Volunteers bring additional effort, experiences, skills, diverse ideas and perspectives to the FWC team. They also help enlist broad community support for the agency's mission.

Volunteer support is utilized throughout the agency. The Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services (PAWV) facilitates these efforts by providing volunteer coordination, placement and management. PAWV also develops external partnerships and support for FWC volunteer programs.

Volunteers work throughout the agency in many functional areas. This report highlights the many accomplishments volunteers have helped FWC staff achieve.



*Since 2007, **more than 18,000 volunteers** of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities and skills from rural, suburban and urban areas **have stepped up to meet these conservation challenges.***

Fiscal Year 2011-2012 (July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012) was another active, productive and successful year for the FWC Volunteer Program. Citizens of all ages, backgrounds and skills contributed their time to assist with activities such as facility and ground maintenance, wildlife research, biological sampling and monitoring, laboratory work and habitat restoration. The FWC benefits from the skills, experiences and dedication of volunteers, and, in turn, we strive to offer our volunteers a fulfilling, meaningful and satisfying volunteer experience.

Over the past five years, there has been a marked increase in total volunteer hours and value to the agency, totaling 445,054 volunteer hours valued at \$9,393,317 or 214 full time equivalent positions. Volunteers have donated effort to 148 projects, with 79 percent of these projects and 37 percent of total volunteers focused on conservation activities such as monitoring species of greatest conservation need and restoring wildlife habitat.



COMMITMENT

*After retiring from teaching, **FWC has allowed me the opportunity to work outside doing what I love. And, at the end of my day, I was able to give back and make a difference.** Chinsegut is an oasis, a quiet respite in a fast and frantic world.* – Dave Blatt, retired teacher and FWC volunteer.

Dave is an exceptional volunteer who has donated nearly 2,000 volunteer hours to FWC. Dave works in all weather conditions, mowing grass, maintaining trails and fire breaks, setting-up for festivals, painting, repairing fences, assisting with wildlife surveys, training volunteers and serving as an FWC ambassador at the Chinsegut Conservation Center and Wildlife Environmental Area.

Total volunteer hours increased by 7 percent from 2010-2011 to 2011-2012, an increase in value of nearly \$178,281.

Fiscal Year 2011-2012	Agency Totals
Volunteer Hours	121,780
Volunteer Count	4,299 ¹
Value of Volunteer Hours	\$2,653,596 ²
Full Time Equivalent (FTE)	~ 58 Positions

Division/Office/Institute	Volunteer Hours
Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management	2,440
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation	26,689
Division of Hunting and Game Management	40,768
Division of Law Enforcement	18,123
Division of Marine Fisheries Management	5,842
Fish and Wildlife Research Institute	19,082
Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network	1,752
Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services	7,083

Since fiscal year 2007-2008, **total volunteer hours have increased by 30 percent**, resulting in an additional value to the agency of **\$591,194³**; and total retention has **increased from 35 to 48 percent**. Volunteer retention is an important indicator of satisfaction with the volunteer experience.

1 – Volunteer Count includes both active Regular Service Volunteers and Occasional Service Volunteers during the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

2 – Value calculated using Independent Sector 2011 national estimate on value of a volunteer hour: \$21.79 (http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time).

3 – Value calculated using an average of the Independent Sector national estimate on value of a volunteer hour from fiscal years 2007-2008 to 2011-2012: \$20.75 (http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time).

Management and Restoration

Volunteers help FWC ensure that current and future generations can enjoy our fish and wildlife.

- **Prescribed fire** is one of the most powerful tools FWC employs to restore and manage wildlife habitat. Volunteers have provided prescribed burn assistance on 4,000 acres within the Everglades, Babcock/Webb, Holey Land and Guana River wildlife management areas.
- **Invasive plants** pose a significant threat to Florida's native wildlife and volunteers are helping wage the battle against them.
 - Hardworking crews fought against invasive plants this year with dozens of invasive plant removal workdays on FWC and partner conservation lands throughout central and south Florida.
 - Trained volunteers conducted chemical treatment of invasive plants and also located and mapped these invaders making contracted spraying projects more cost effective.



The use of volunteers for prescribed fire helps FWC put more fire on the ground and burn more acreage.

– Justin Ellenberger, Wildlife Biologist at the Guana River Wildlife Field Office.



Our job is to sharpen our tools and make them cut the right way... [T]he sole measure of our success is the effort which they have on the forest.

– Aldo Leopold, considered by many as the father of wildlife management and of the United States wilderness system. Aldo Leopold was a conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer, and outdoor enthusiast.

Photo – Ridge Ranger Volunteers prepare to plant pine seedlings at the Tenoroc Fish Management Area (FMA).

Scrub and Sandhill are two unique natural communities in Florida. They provide homes for a range of wildlife species, some found nowhere else on Earth. **Helping restore** these communities is a major focus for volunteer work. The FWC’s Ridge Rangers and Brooksville Ridge volunteers were hard at work on restoration projects this year:

- Planting 6,000 native plants along the Lake Wales Ridge, 280 oaks on 22 acres of the Half Moon WMA and 2,500 new wiregrass plugs on seventeen acres of the Chassahowitzka WMA and Chinsegut WEA.
- Volunteers helped evaluate the success of longleaf pine restoration projects by participating in a longleaf pine survival count covering approximately 300 acres at the Chassahowitzka WMA.

Habitat enhancements like nest boxes or feeding platforms are used to provide a boost for some species.

- Volunteers constructed and installed wood duck and bat boxes at CREW WEA, constructed 40 feeding platforms for endangered Snail Kites and removed over three miles of old barbed wire fence from Kissimmee State Park as well as FWC management areas including Crooked Lake, Carter Creek, Royce Ranch and Hilochee.

Providing **public access** to our conservation lands and the wildlife they sustain is a major responsibility of the FWC. Visitors to our wildlife management areas will benefit from a variety of projects completed with the assistance of volunteers.

- A 35-foot pedestrian bridge along one of the hiking trails at the Tenoroc Fish Management Area.
- The Florida Sportsmen’s Conservation Association volunteered over 800 hours cleaning area roadways and camp sites at the annual Corbett WMA clean-up.
- Volunteer check station operators helped check hunters in and out of Three Lakes and Herky Huffman/Bull Creek WMAs, collected biological data from harvested game and provided information.

Citizen Science

Citizen scientists help FWC biologists conduct fish and wildlife research and monitoring projects. These efforts are key to maintaining stable or increasing populations of fish and wildlife.

- Florida is home to 13 native species of bats. Working with FWC biologists at Picayune Strand WMA volunteers mist-netted approximately 1,000 bats and recorded approximately 5,000 hours of bat acoustical recordings for species inventory and assessment.
- Volunteers assisted FWC biologists on numerous white-tailed deer projects including: aerial surveys within the Everglades, Holey Land, Big Cypress and Rotenberger WMAs; deploying cameras to obtain white-tailed deer population indices at the CREW WEA; and spotlight counting deer over 14 nights at the Seminole Forest and Rock Springs WMAs.
- The Florida Scrub-Jay is unique to our state and is endangered due to habitat loss and fragmentation. Volunteers in FWC's northeast region monitored more than 3,500 acres of scrub on nine public and privately managed areas for Florida Scrub-Jay families and assisted in trap-training and banding individual Scrub-Jays.
- The Northern Bobwhite is the focus of research and management throughout the southeastern United States. Volunteers surveyed quail at the CREW WEA and participated in 92 quail covey counts at the Babcock/Webb WMA.



*Without volunteers, I would have to rely on co-workers already busy with their wildlife tasks. Volunteers free staff to do their job. **I really believe in volunteers, as they triple our productivity.***

*– Mary Dowdell, Red-cockaded Woodpecker Biologist
at the Half Moon WMA.*

Photo – Volunteers, Karyn Allman and Bob Melin, weigh a bat in a bag at Picayune WMA.



- The Southeastern American Kestrel has declined with the loss and fragmentation of habitat. Florida is unique for hosting the only nonmigrating subspecies of this raptor and is a stronghold for the bird. This year, in FWC's northeast and north central regions, volunteers prepared nest boxes for the season and monitored 23 boxes on six public properties for the presence of eggs and nestlings.
- Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (RCW) live in the pinelands of the southeast and has declined with the conversion of these habitats to other uses. Volunteers assisted FWC biologists to capture, band and release ten RCWs at the Big Cypress WMA and to monitor, band and translocate nestlings at approximately 41 nest clusters on the Citrus Tract of the Withlacoochee Forest and Goethe State Forest.
- Volunteers also assisted in monitoring the distribution and population trends of common and imperiled butterfly species for the Florida Butterfly Monitoring Network, surveyed for the presence of Florida Grasshopper Sparrows at Okaloacoochee Slough and Dinner Island WMAs, gopher tortoises at Watermelon Pond WMA and small mammals at Half Moon WMA.

*Citizen Science has been used to describe a broad range of ideas, from a philosophy of public engagement in scientific discourse to the work of scientists driven by a social conscience. As a working definition, **Citizen Science involves projects in which volunteers partner with scientists to answer real-world questions.*** (The Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

Research

FWC volunteers and volunteer interns support the FWC by collecting information used by scientists to analyze and disseminate research products and to engage in outreach activities.

- Volunteers assisted with collecting largemouth bass population and measurement data, identified gender and collected otoliths from bass and crappie samples. Other projects included propagating and rearing red drum, common snook, spotted seatrout, zooplankton and phytoplankton for the Stock Enhancement Research Facility and sampling 618 snook fish stomachs.
- Volunteers captured photographs of manatees at 285 site visits to document identifying physical characteristics such as scars. Researchers use the unique scar patterns on the trunks and tail flukes of manatees to identify individuals within the population. The sighting histories of these individual manatees also help researchers answer a variety of questions about manatee population biology.



Volunteers donate time to rewarding projects that integrate scientific data with applied habitat management for the purpose of maintaining stable or increasing populations of fish and wildlife.



- Volunteer interns play an important role in FWC's bear program. Working with researchers on projects to identify current black bear spatial patterns, they located and identified bear signs (tracks, scat and marked trees), prepared and monitored bear bait sites and assisted with the capture and handling of bears. This information will help determine lands of high conservation value as well as assess bear reproductive and fecundity rates.
- Volunteer interns also provided valuable information on a wide range of bear research topics, including a follow-up study of citizens who have contacted FWC about bear problems, examining the relationship between human population density, urbanization zones and frequency of bear sightings, as well as developing a survey of public attitudes and knowledge about Florida's black bears for the Bear Management Program.

*Commitment by volunteers has been impressive and by **teaching them the skills and abilities required for field work, it provides us a force multiplier and helps us accomplish research objectives.***

– Walt McCrown, Bear Research Program Coordinator, Florida Wildlife Research Institute

Education and Outreach

Youth, adults, families and educators experience and learn about Florida's fish and wildlife resources through a variety of FWC educational and outreach programs. Volunteers assisted staff with many aspects of these programs from preparation to instruction. Volunteers help FWC inspire Floridians to become stewards of our fish and wildlife resources.

- Volunteers assisted with the Nature Coast Fishing for Youth Program at Cedar Key, where youth learned knot tying, fish handling, rod rigging, fish identification and de-hooking and with Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network (FYCCN) programs in a variety of outdoor recreation activities.
- Volunteer instructors hosted 727 hunter safety classes resulting in 14,021 graduates, conducted huntmaster workshops and helped to coordinate 44 hunts for 303 youth and parents for the Youth Hunting Program of Florida.
- Northeast Region Volunteers conducted 12 events in over 700 elementary, middle and high schools to educate students about basic Alligator Biology and Safety.



Volunteers use their expertise to educate children of all ages about marine stock enhancement and how to become ethical anglers and stewards of Florida's natural resources.

– Gina Russo, Outreach Coordinator, Stock Enhancement Research Facility (SERF)



- Volunteer facilitators maintained a large network of teachers around the state. These facilitators offered 27 Project WILD/Aquatic WILD, 18 Growing Up WILD, four Flying WILD, three Black Bear and five Schoolyard Wildlife workshops for 1,205 participants.
- Chinsegut Conservation Center Volunteers presented recreational skill and educational programs such as Beginning Archery, Hiking and Geocaching, The Primitive Chef, Junior Birder and Wings Over Florida.
- Volunteers hosted 24 outreach events, including school programs, nature festivals and fishing derbies at the Tenoroc Fish Management Area, assisted with Snail Kite outreach events on the water, assisted staff with outreach activities at the Florida State Fair, Florida Sportsman Fishing Expos and the Tampa Tribune Outdoor Expo.
- Volunteers and volunteer interns participated in Bear Management outreach and data collection events, canvassing over 1,930 homes in eight different communities and coordinated public events and volunteer efforts to increase public awareness of black bears, speaking with over 6,000 people for the Bear Management Program. Their projects also included completing the Florida Black Bear Public Service Announcement video contest project for the Bear Management Program.

An investment in knowledge pays the best rent.

– Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Franklin was a leading scientist, author, printer, political theorist, politician, postmaster, musician, inventor, satirist, civic activist, statesman and diplomat.

Protection

Reserve Officers volunteer their time as sworn Law Enforcement Officers, purchase all associated equipment, and work under the direct supervision of FWC Law Enforcement personnel. They are excellent force multipliers, patrolling day or night, on land, on the water or in the air.

- During 2011 – 2012 eighty-eight Reserve Officers throughout the state assisted the FWC Division of Law Enforcement in its mission to protect the state's wildlife, fresh and saltwater aquatic life and human safety.



*Plans to **protect air and water, wilderness and wildlife** are in fact plans to protect man.*

– Stuart L. Udall, pioneer of the modern conservation and environmental movement in the United States and recipient of the Cornelius Amory Pugsley National Medal Award in 2007.

Operations

Volunteers donate time to a variety of administrative and operational projects. Volunteers not only contribute their skills and manpower, but save staff time and money by performing these necessary tasks.

- This year volunteers maintained a reference library of artificial reef research papers and reports, repaired equipment, performed maintenance on public use facilities and even improved the radio system at Corbett WMA providing better safety for area staff.



*Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and **they will surprise you with their ingenuity.***

– George S. Patton, general in the United States Army, best known for his command of the Seventh United States Army, and later the Third United States Army, in the European Theatre in World War II.

Get Involved!

Are you interested in:

- Becoming a conservation volunteer?
- Obtaining volunteers to help with your FWC program?

We welcome your help.

- Donate money or equipment to support FWC volunteer programs.
- Partner with FWC on current or new volunteer programs.

Contact

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Photos left to right – Eight volunteers assisted FWC staff in conducting 14 nights of deer spotlight counts in Seminole Forest and Rock Springs WMA; Hunter safety instructor training in Ocala.

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Photo - Volunteers clean roadways and camp sites at the annual Corbett WMA clean-up.



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