

FWC VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Annual Report
2014-2015



On the cover: *Volunteer interns for the Bear Management Program after a work day at the Tallahassee Museum.*

On the inside back cover: *FWC volunteers enjoy watermelon as they surround one of 350 scrub oaks they planted in the FWC's Royce Unit Scrub Restoration area. June 2015 started the second year of planting for Project Acorn, one of the FWC's Ridge Ranger projects.*



**Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission**

MyFWC.com

GET INVOLVED

Contact Sharon Tatem

FWC Volunteer Program Manager

Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

2574 Seagate Dr., Suite 101

Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Phone: (850) 921-1047

Fax: (850) 488-3940

A FORCE FOR CONSERVATION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) values volunteers as essential partners in meeting the conservation challenges we face in Florida. Since 2007, more than 32,000 volunteers of all ages and backgrounds have donated their

time to help the FWC accomplish its mission. Volunteers work throughout the agency in many functional areas from hunter safety, biological sampling and monitoring to education and outreach. They are force multipliers, especially valuable in focusing additional resources

on emerging issues. The commitment to using volunteers is threaded throughout the FWC's strategic plan and touches multiple strategic initiatives. In this report, we highlight examples of volunteer projects tackling concerns identified in the FWC's strategic plan.



FWC volunteers assist with various activities for the Youth Hunter Education Challenge at the Lewis D. Whitaker Osceola Shooting Range in Lake City, Florida.

VALUE IN VOLUNTEERS

Fiscal Year 2014-2015	Agency Totals
Volunteer Hours	111,349
Volunteer Count	4,916 ¹
Value of Volunteer Hours	\$2,568,813 ²
Full-time Equivalent (FTE)	~ 53 Positions

Division/Office/Institute	Volunteer Hours
Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management	1,824
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation	21,393
Division of Hunting and Game Management	31,393
Division of Law Enforcement	10,645
Division of Marine Fisheries Management	4,442
Fish and Wildlife Research Institute	26,445
Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network	7,955
Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services	7,252

Fiscal Year 2014-2015 was another active, productive and successful year for the FWC Volunteer Program (Figure 1). More than 111,000 hours were donated to agency efforts, equivalent to approximately 53 full-time staff.

Since 2007, volunteers have donated effort to 191 projects, with most of their effort centering on education and citizen science activities (Figure 2). Total volunteer retention has also increased from 56% to 61% over that same period. Volunteer retention is an important indicator of satisfaction with the volunteer experience. The FWC retains volunteers on average for two years. The average age of a volunteer is 44 years.

Figure 1:

1 Volunteer Count includes both active Regular Service Volunteers and Occasional Service Volunteers during the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

2 Value calculated using Independent Sector 2014 national estimate on value of a volunteer hour: \$23.07 (http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time).

VALUE IN VOLUNTEERS

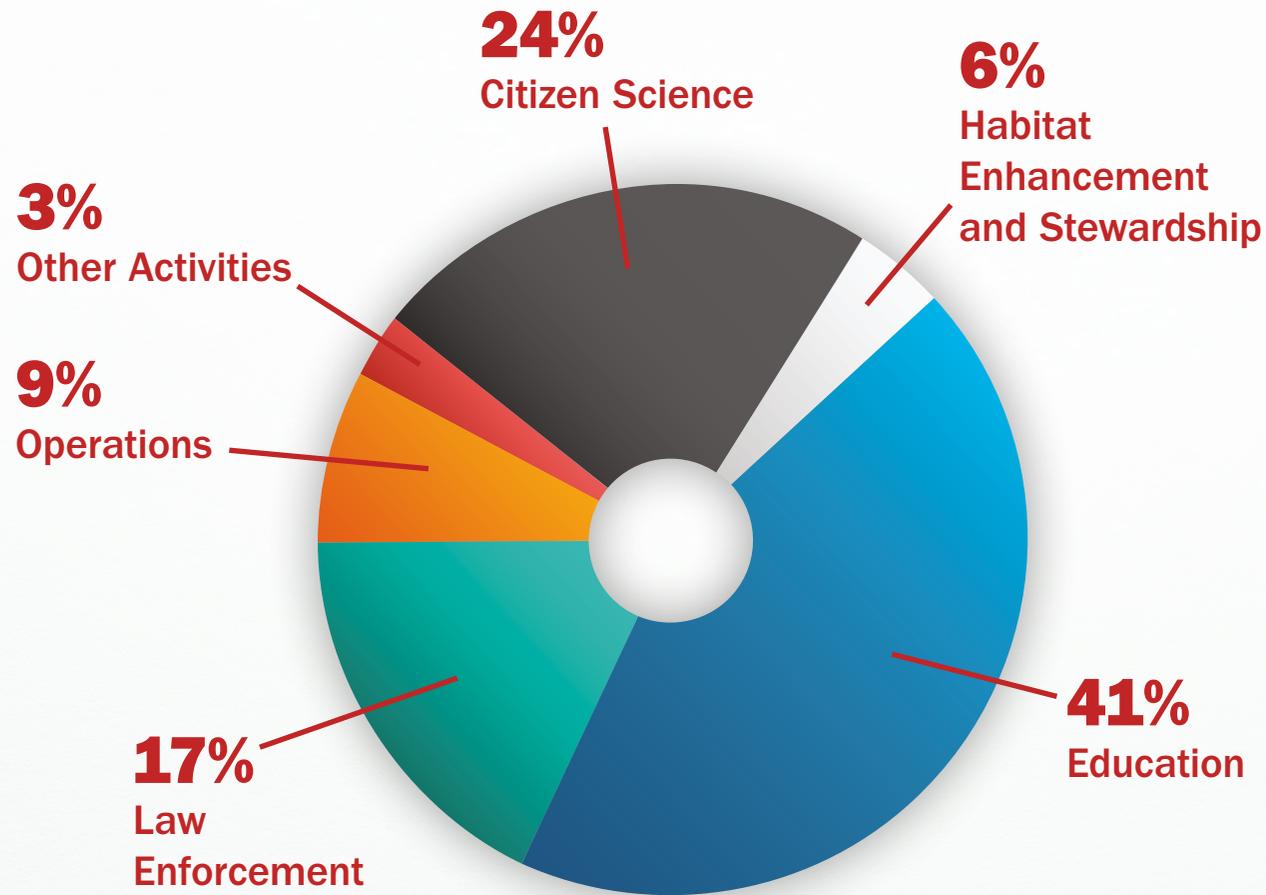


Figure 2 displays the percentage of volunteer effort (based on volunteer hours) from fiscal years 2007-2008 to 2014-2015: Citizen Science activities include scientific research, data collection and analysis; Habitat Enhancement and Stewardship activities include habitat enhancement and management as well as rescue and recovery; Educational activities include public outreach; Law Enforcement includes law enforcement activities; Operational activities include facility and ground maintenance, friends group activities, office management and volunteer training; Other Activities include volunteer effort that does not fit within the categories identified above.

PARTNERSHIP POWER

FWC Volunteer Program Annual Report – 2014-2015

The FWC's Division of Freshwater Fisheries partnered with the local community, biologists from the FWC's Aquatic Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Section and Fish and Wildlife Research Institute to initiate a large scale

fish attractor program in the Harris Chain of Lakes. Volunteers from the Hawthorne Fishing Club, Harris Chain of Lakes Bassmasters and the Villages Fishing Club (Lady Lake) constructed and installed 700 recycled plastic fish attractors. The

program will result in better habitat and better fishing opportunities in the Lake Harris system.



Bill Connelly, FWC volunteer, and James Kramer, FWC biologist, deploy artificial fish attractor units in Lake Harris. Photograph by Todd Reader, FWC volunteer and winter resident of Hawthorne, Florida.

The benefits of volunteers are numerous and demonstrate a strong connection with the mission of the FWC: **Manage fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.**

Public Benefits

- Engage the public, such as reconnecting youth with outdoor experiences.
- Gain experience, become part of a team and feel connected to something important.
- Bring awareness of conservation issues to the public.
- Stay active, healthy and enjoy outdoor activities.
- Strengthen relationships among communities and partners.

Agency Benefits

- Provide additional manpower.
- Allow staff to address other priorities.
- Expand the frequency and geographic range of data collection.
- Share unique observations and skills, potentially informing future research.
- Increase the FWC's capacity to confront emerging challenges.
- Pool of trained/experienced candidates for future employment.

Conservation Benefits

- Minimize impacts to imperiled species by restoring native habitat.
- Remove exotic species that have negative effects on native plants and wildlife.
- Help the public learn to coexist with wildlife.
- Participate in the recovery of managed species.
- Teach responsible hunting and fishing.
- Encourage wildlife habitat access, enhancement and management.





Imperiled Species - Implement prioritized species actions

Photos left to right: Cyndi Marks (left), Florida Bat Conservancy, and Jess Rodriguez (right), the FWC's Northeast Region Volunteer Coordinator, present information on the Florida bonneted bat at a volunteer training in January 2015. Volunteers are conducting acoustic surveys to help determine the geographic range of the endangered bonneted bat; Barbara Eells, FWC Volunteer, surveys shorebirds and seabirds at a variety of locations in the Florida Panhandle. Several species of shorebirds and seabirds nest along the beaches of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida. Habitat loss and degradation associated with coastal development have largely restricted many of these species to stretches of beach within parks and preserves; Connie Sweet and Liane Plumhoff, FWC volunteers, are inspecting a kestrel nest box for eggs and chicks on the Hilochee Wildlife Management Area in June 2015. The Southeastern American Kestrel is listed as threatened in Florida due to loss of nesting and foraging habitat. Since Kestrels readily take to nest boxes, biologists from the FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute established a statewide nest box monitoring program.



Expand Participation in Conservation - Increase conservation participation among youth and families representing Florida's diverse population

Photos left to right: Youth participate in a Saltwater Kids Fishing Clinic at Fort Clinch State Park in May 2015. FWC volunteers assist with these clinics throughout the state, teaching children the vulnerability of Florida's marine ecosystems, as well as teaching fundamental saltwater fishing skills and providing kids with a positive fishing experience; Jess Gornak (blue shirt with shovel), FWC Volunteer, helps a camper plant a beautyberry shrub on the shore of Lake Okeechobee at the Okeechobee Sheriff's Youth Camp in June 2015. Camp participants planted three gallon pots of either beautyberry, firebush or Walter's viburnum and learned the importance of native plants to restore wildlife habitat; Pablo Rosario, FWC Volunteer and Wounded Warrior Project Extern, assists with banding 30 morning doves at the Guana River Wildlife Management Area.



Conservation through Innovation - Use conservation tools and strategies that may enhance partnerships, incentives and streamline regulations

Photos left to right: FWC volunteers create oyster reef habitat that will support the restoration of 30 acres of historic seagrass habitat in the area of St. Andrew Bay known as West Bay. The oyster reefs will improve water quality, protect the shoreline and enhance habitat, thereby allowing seagrass to flourish once again in this area; FWC Volunteers: Greg Woodham (left), Debbie Wingfield (second to left) Volusia County Marine Mammal Stranding Team member, Sarah Christoff (right) Jacksonville Zoo Marine Mammal Response Team member, and a local resident (second to right), rescue an orphaned manatee calf in Volusia County. In addition to rescue and recovery, FWC volunteers also assist with manatee outreach, emphasizing responsible boating, because many manatees are orphaned, killed or injured by watercraft collisions. Some may also accidentally ingest fishhooks, litter, or become entangled in monofilament line.



Conflict Wildlife - Minimize adverse impacts associated with native and non-native fish, wildlife and plants

Photos left to right: Meaghan Faletti (left), FWC’s Lionfish Outreach Coordinator, and CJ Duffie, FWC volunteer, show off a lionfish before a handling and fillet demonstration at the Lionfish Removal and Awareness Day in May 2015. More than 3,000 visitors attended the event in Pensacola and more than 2,000 lionfish were removed over the weekend. The FWC encourages people to remove the exotic lionfish from Florida waters to help limit negative impacts to native marine life and ecosystems; Jeanene Arrington-Fisher (left), FWC volunteer, Tessie Offner (center), FWC biologist, and Chelsea Chynoweth (right), FWC volunteer, scope a gopher tortoise burrow looking for the exotic Argentine black and white tegu. The volunteer Tegu Task Force participates in a range of field activities, from trap surveys to necropsies, to help monitor and remove this invasive species.



Boating as a Gateway to Conservation - Strengthen and promote the conservation connections of boating while protecting people and natural resources

Photos left to right: FWC volunteers participate in a Paddle Pickup to clean Lake Talquin on October 11, 2014. These volunteers are part of a Youth Advisory Council for the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network (FYCCN). The council is comprised of 11 youth volunteers that work with the FYCCN staff to strengthen the youth conservation message by providing perspectives on outreach, programming and stewardship opportunities.



Photo: Joe Udvari holds a juvenile tarpon. Joe is a volunteer for FWC's Stock Enhancement Research Facility.



Photo: Cindy McClure assists hatchery biologists by taking fin clips from wild caught red drum. Cindy is a volunteer for FWC's Stock Enhancement Research Facility.



FWC VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Annual Report
2014-2015



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
MyFWC.com