

FWC VOLUNTEER NEWSLETTER 2016



FWC's Superheroes

While they may not leap tall buildings in a single bound, **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff** are conservation superheroes. Just this past year, our biological and educational staff managed 97 volunteer programs, engaging volunteers in a variety of rewarding activities that support the FWC's conservation mission.

Through volunteering, you can be a conservation superhero too! Simply contact one of the FWC's Regional Volunteer Coordinators to get involved and stay connected to volunteer opportunities. The Regional Volunteer Coordinators are specialists who bring their biological and citizen science expertise to train and manage volunteers for research, habitat enhancement and stewardship projects throughout Florida. Remember, volunteering is a valuable way to experience, learn about and ensure that the spectacular wildlife in Florida is around for generations to come.



Brendan O'Connor, Ashley Taylor and Jess Rodriguez help with a prescribed burn at the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Brendan and Jess are current Regional Volunteer Coordinators for the FWC's Southwest and Northeast regions, respectively. Ashley, a former Regional Volunteer Coordinator for the FWC's South Region, is currently a biologist for the Holely Land and Rotenberger WMAs.

In this edition, we share many exceptional volunteer accomplishments from a successful citizen science effort for the Florida bonneted bat to helping protect the greater Everglades ecosystem. Read on to learn about these projects and many others. We look forward to working with you!

– FWC Volunteer Program Staff

Newsletter edited by FWC staff and Amy Towne, FWC volunteer. Amy teaches English at Florida Gulf Coast University.

All photos by FWC staff unless otherwise stated.



Participants and FWC volunteers, including John (middle back row), after a youth duck hunt on property owned by the South Florida Water Management District.

Make Every Opportunity Count

By John R. Storms

I have been a Huntmaster for more than seven years and a guide on more hunts than I can remember with the FWC's Youth Hunting Program. I also help Jonathan Roberts, State Coordinator for the Youth Hunting Program, set-up and host Huntmaster Training seminars. Additionally, I have

hosted and sponsored multiple hunts over the years with the Broward Airboat Club.

As a Huntmaster, I am responsible for everything on the hunt, including inviting kids, asking guides to participate, securing the cook, organizing the food and ensuring that all the paperwork is completed. I also ask photographers to attend hunts to capture the event so that the kids can share their

experiences with family and friends. This helps encourage kids to stay involved with the hunting program. Aside from volunteering as a Huntmaster, I have also volunteered with FWC biologists to remove exotic trees from tree islands and plant trees within the Everglades region.

Why do I volunteer? I enjoy seeing smiles on the faces of both kids and parents as they enjoy Florida's great outdoors.

I also gain a lot of knowledge from the different guides and volunteers that I have the pleasure of working with at each and every hunt.

The FWC has created a great opportunity to encourage the sport of hunting in a very educational and inexpensive way. My father passed away when I was ten and I never had the opportunity to hunt with him. My first experiences with hunting were with a neighbor and my best friend's father. If they had not allowed me to hunt with them, I probably would not be who I am today. Therefore, I want to give every kid the opportunity to hunt, learn the do's and don'ts, and also discover the enjoyment that comes with being outdoors and away from technology.

Volunteering has definitely reinforced my knowledge of the ethics of hunting. Showing kids the proper way to do things and teaching them the ethics is just as rewarding as going out to hunt myself. I plan to continue volunteering with the FWC for many years to come. I believe the program is going to improve with the guidance of Jonathan Roberts. Jonathan has really made a difference in the program since he started and I look forward to working with him to make every opportunity count!

In 2015-2016, John volunteered 169 hours to the FWC's Youth Hunting Program.

Florida Bonneted Bat Citizen Science Project

By Jess Rodriguez

The FWC Volunteer Program recently received a grant from [Bat Conservation International](#) to fund a Florida bonneted bat citizen science project. This project trains volunteers to use acoustic equipment to conduct surveys for the federally-endangered Florida bonneted bat on private and public lands. Since little is known about the bonneted bat's geographic range, this project is of great importance; information from the project will help complete gaps in data about the species' range.

Ten citizen scientists and thirteen natural resource professionals have surveyed sixteen properties for the Florida bonneted bat from October 2015 through July 2016.



Florida bonneted bat (Eumops floridanus).

Although we have yet to record a bonneted bat, the project is yielding survey data on other species found in Florida such as the Brazilian Free-tailed bat, the Northern Yellow bat and the Tricolored bat. We plan to apply for additional funding to help us expand the range of our surveys. The current study area includes DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, Okeechobee and Polk counties. If you live in these areas and would like to participate in the project, please contact the FWC's Regional Volunteer Coordinators: [Jess Rodriguez](#) or [Brendan O'Connor](#).



Bonneted bat in Florida cave.

Sharing our Beaches with Shorebirds and Seabirds

By Jess Rodriguez and
Brendan O'Connor

During the summer, beaches are bustling with activity, but beachgoers are not the only ones enjoying the scene.

Florida's beaches are home to many bird species, listed by the State of Florida as a Species of Special Concern, like the Black Skimmer, or threatened, like the Least Tern.

Volunteers play a crucial role in protecting shorebirds and seabirds, ensuring that beachgoers and birds share the beach in harmony. The FWC and partners, like [Audubon Florida](#), affiliated with the [Florida Shorebird Alliance](#),



Least Tern (Sternula antillarum) adult and chick on a rooftop.

host bird monitoring and steward training for coastal areas. Stewarding entails many activities that help protect beach-nesting birds from

disturbance, such as posting signs to indicate a bird nesting area, or reporting violations observed to law enforcement. Stewards also educate the



Black Skimmer (Rynchops niger).

public about a bird's sensitivity to disturbance, which may lead to eggs and chicks being exposed to the sun or predators, or the abandonment of nesting sites.

Volunteers are also trained to monitor shorebirds and seabirds nesting on beaches and rooftops. They check for the presence of eggshells or birds demonstrating mating behavior or food gathering. Shorebirds and seabirds nest on flat gravel rooftops due to the scarcity of suitable, undisturbed beaches. Rooftops appeal to shorebirds as they provide relative peace and quiet as well as a haven from most predators. Human occupants often feel otherwise, because the mess and smell of droppings can make them unappealing housemates. However, by granting volunteers permission to monitor active rooftops, supportive building owners can make a big difference to help bird species survive.

While rooftops provide more protected nesting habitat, the benefits may be countered by the hazards they pose, such as chicks falling off the roof or drowning in gutters. If a chick lands at street level, they face threats from vehicles and predators. On active rooftops where no parapet is present to prevent chicks from falling, volunteers visit the property between three and eight times per day looking for fallen chicks. Fallen chicks are returned to the rooftop using a 'chick-a-boom,' a telescoping pole with a box on the end. Volunteers place

the fallen chick in the box and safely hoist it to the rooftop.

Volunteers may make modifications to downspouts, with permission from the property owner, to improve the chances of chicks surviving a fall into the gutter. Hardware cloth is used to create cages at the bottom of downspouts which protect the chicks from wandering into danger. Foam lines these cages to soften the fall for chicks who wash down a gutter during a heavy rain event. Volunteers check these cages and return live chicks to the rooftop.

If you are interested in helping the FWC and partners with conserving shorebirds and seabirds, please contact the FWC's Regional Volunteer Coordinators or connect with the [Florida Shorebird Alliance](#).



A Least Tern chick washed down a gutter, but safe in a corral until volunteers returned the chick to the rooftop.

Shorebird and Seabird Successes

By Brendan O'Connor, Jess Rodriguez, Ashley Warren and Ashley Taylor

For shorebird and seabird volunteers, it's all about partnerships and a healthy bird population. Volunteers currently monitor approximately 420 rooftops with shorebird and seabird activity along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of Florida. Volunteers visit each of the 420 rooftops to determine bird activity during week long count windows established between March and August.

In Pinellas Park, five miles north of Saint Petersburg, FWC and partner volunteers, including *Cheryl Merz, Bailey Black, Kim Kanz, Dave Kanz, Beth Forys, Chan Clarkson, Susan Rybski, Colleen Walsh, Stephanie Cain, Deb DelSole, Virginia Edwards, Stephanie Anderson, Lorraine Margeson, Erin McGrath and Don Margeson*, tirelessly monitor three active rooftops. If birds vacate and move onto another building, these dedicated volunteers collect all their resources and follow the birds to begin the monitoring process all over again. During the recent breeding season, they returned more than 20 Least Tern chicks to their nests. *Bonnie Jenks and Wendy Meehan*, FWC volunteers, monitor 15 rooftops in Pinellas County. FWC and partner volunteers, *Mardy and Cy Hornsby, Stephanie Cain, Don and Lorraine Margeson, Xavier Veloz, David Westmark, Barb Howard and Joan Morgan* also keep a close eye on rooftop nesting activities throughout Pinellas County. Many of these volunteers have been involved in shorebird and seabird conservation for years and have invented and improved equipment to assist in rooftop management. For example, two long-term shorebird and seabird volunteers, *Dave Kanz* and *John Hood*, improved the utility of the chick-a-boom, described on page 5.

Along the Atlantic Coast, 41 volunteers from St. Johns, Volusia and Brevard counties monitor an impressive 50 beaches and 62 rooftops, in addition to stewarding along the coast. Volunteers also steward at Julia's Island and Summer Haven in St. Johns County to assure that the beach-nesting shorebirds and seabirds are protected from disturbance.

Along the panhandle of Florida, *Barbara Eells* and *Janna Rinehart* are two volunteers who donate many hours to protect and conserve shorebirds and seabirds. *Barbara* has volunteered with the FWC for more than two years, contributing approximately 600 hours. She covers four sites in Bay and Gulf counties, surveying, monitoring and posting roughly ten miles of coastline each year. *Barbara* also contributes additional time to other shorebird partners in the area, such as the [United States Fish and Wildlife Service](#). Thanks to *Barbara's* efforts, her sites contributed 12 Snowy Plover fledglings to



Dave Kanz, as well as Lorraine and Don Margeson, monitor rooftops in Pinellas County.



Janna Rinehart is also an active sea turtle volunteer. Her husband, Bob Rinehart, photographed Janna assisting with the release of a sea turtle.

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the population during the 2015 breeding season.

Janna has volunteered with the FWC for more than a year, contributing approximately 124 hours. *Janna* surveys a seven mile stretch of coastline in Gulf County, a favorite stop for shorebirds and seabirds to feed during the winter, including the federally-endangered Piping

Plover and -threatened Rufa Red Knot. *Janna* collects and reports data on the birds she observes feeding at this site, especially noting information for banded birds. And, if that wasn't enough, *Janna* and *Barbara* are also active sea turtle volunteers.

Let's not forget the shorebird and seabird successes of

South Florida. Volunteers helped create ground nesting habitat for state-threatened Least Terns at Grassy Flats Preserve in Palm Beach County. The preserve is a manmade spoil island in the intercostal waterway in Lake Worth created in 2014; and, in 2015, ten Least Tern nests were documented on the island. Unfortunately, only one of the original ten nests was successful. To optimize nesting habitat for Least Terns, Palm Beach County Environmental Resource Management, FWC biologists and volunteers overlaid the island with more than 100 cubic feet of gravel and shell material. Decoys, which have been successful in the past, were also used to recruit Least Terns to nest in the area. The decoys used at this site were constructed by *Jordi Baneres*, FWC volunteer, who also participated in the island restoration. Volunteers played a large role in counting 32 Least Tern nests and two American Oystercatcher nests in late spring 2016. The large increase of nesting birds, in comparison to 2015, suggests the island restoration met the approval of Least Tern parents.

Shorebird and seabird conservation could not be completed at the statewide level without the hard work and dedication of volunteers. We thank you for your continued efforts to partner and make a positive impact on conserving our important bird species.



Barbara Eells monitors shorebirds and seabirds along the beaches of St. Joe Peninsula State Park. Photo taken by a passer-by upon Barbara's request.



Decoys were used to recruit Least Terns to nest at Grassy Flats Preserve in Palm Beach County.

A Hands-On Approach for FWC's MMPL Volunteers

By Gina Lonati

When you volunteer with the FWC's Marine Mammal Pathobiology Lab (MMPL) in St. Petersburg, Florida, you never quite know what to expect each day. Volunteers receive a hands-on education involving active marine mammal rescue, release, research, biology and medicine. We consider volunteers an important part of the MMPL team and, as such, we expose them to a wide array of responsibilities. Our core duties – live and dead marine mammal response – are the same for our volunteers. Therefore, volunteers assist with injured/sick/entangled/orphaned animal rescues, dead animal investigations and dissections, field observations and wild animal health assessments. They record data, collect tissue samples, examine organs, pull nets, restrain manatees, maintain our boats, organize reports, and much more, all alongside biologists working at the MMPL.

The MMPL has more than 48 active volunteers who work with seven MMPL staff members. Between April 2015 and March 2016, volunteers dedicated 4,697 hours, which is equivalent to approximately 521 nine-hour work days. *Mike* and *Stacy Dunn*, two of MMPL's volunteers, were recognized with the "Manatee Hero Award"

from the Save the Manatee Club last September. *Tara Whitcomb*, another volunteer, was featured in Volunteer Florida's "30 Volunteers in 30 Days" this past April. We also had two volunteers, *Carol Lyons* and *Chuck White*, contribute more than 1,000 hours of service to the MMPL.

The MMPL has also hosted numerous international, veterinary and undergraduate students looking for hands-on experience with marine mammals. A recent poll of past volunteers revealed that more than half of respondents had subsequently been employed in the field of marine biology, and over 25 percent are now

on a veterinary career path. Many cited their experiences at the MMPL as integral to their successful career paths. Specifically, volunteers commented that their time with the MMPL was "a very proud bullet point on my resume" and "a unique opportunity/experience compared to other candidates when applying for a job." Volunteers have appreciated the positive morale and hands-on approach, thanks to an incredibly knowledgeable, supportive and friendly staff.

For information about volunteering for the FWC's MMPL, please contact [Gina Lonati](#).



Tara Whitcomb commits at least four days a week to helping staff with live and dead marine mammal response, cleaning equipment and our facility, organizing files and performing inventories for various projects.

The Spotlight Shines on the FWC's Tequesta Volunteers

By Marshalluna Land

The FWC Tequesta Field Lab in Tequesta, Florida uses volunteers to assist with rescues, recoveries and necropsies of manatees throughout Southeast Florida. We shine the FWC's spotlight on four exceptional volunteers:

Kelly is always reliable, eager and doesn't mind getting dirty! Her help allows our field station to effectively collect samples and conduct research that ultimately goes toward conserving the manatee population of Florida.



Kelly McCorry assists with the release of *Sully*, a manatee rescued in March 2015 for severe cold stress symptoms, and released in January 2016. *Kelly* was fortunate enough to experience *Sully's* journey from rescue and rehab to release with our partners at Miami Seaquarium.

Joe is a volunteer for both the Tequesta Lab and the

Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program (MRRP). *Joe* willingly and enthusiastically adopted multiple outdoor MRRP bins in Miami-Dade County, one of the areas of highest fishing traffic in the state. He even took the initiative to incorporate the program into his professional career where he educates youth and the general public about the conservation of Florida's environmental resources. *Joe* has also proven to be an all-star volunteer during several of our lab's most recent rescue efforts.



Joe Land assists with the rescue and transport of a manatee with watercraft-related injuries in Tavernier, Florida.

Steve is a native of South Africa and joined the Tequesta Lab to gain experience while pursuing a career in fish and wildlife conservation. *Steve* assisted with multiple rescues, several rescue attempts and a necropsy. He has also expressed interest in other FWC areas, which led to opportunities to assist with turtle surveys as well as seining activities with marine fisheries.

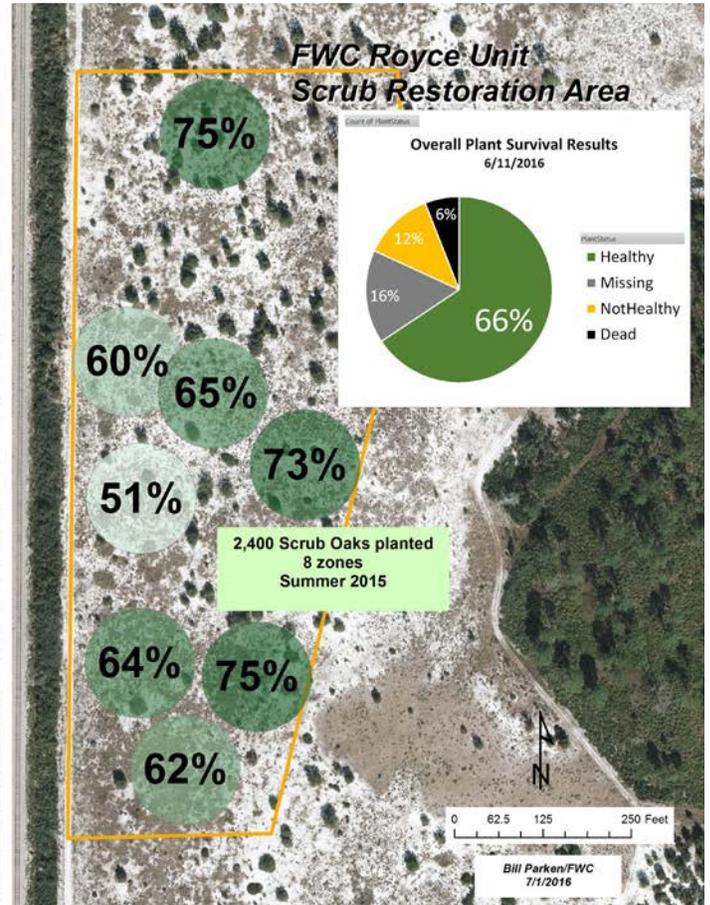


Steven LeRoux assists with the rescue and transport of an injured manatee to Miami Seaquarium for rehabilitative care.

Keith is a native to Miami, Florida and has served the Tequesta Lab for many years. He has assisted with multiple rescues and rescue attempts, in addition to searching for injured animals both by land and boat.



Keith Romer helps with the rescue of an injured manatee in Tavernier, Florida as well as its transport to Miami Seaquarium for rehabilitative care.



Ridge Ranger volunteers survey, map their survey results and celebrate the tallest scrub-oak plant to date, now 17" tall (bottom right).

Good Results on Last Summer's Scrub Restoration Plantings

By Bill Parken

On June 11, 2016, eight volunteers from the FWC's Ridge Ranger Volunteer Program surveyed 320 of the 2,400 scrub oaks that volunteers planted last summer in the Royce Unit Scrub Restoration Area of the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife Environmental Area, and noted an overall survival rate of 66 percent!

In the past, we manually recorded data from similar

surveys in the field, and later entered the information into a database, requiring several days of data entry. However, during this survey, Ridge Rangers entered plant data into their smart phones via an ArcGIS App called "Survey 123," uploading data in real time to an online FWC Database, allowing instant analysis. We had the results when we arrived back at the office!

The next planting will include 1,400 new scrub oaks in the Royce Unit.



Volunteers Collect Valuable Data for the Greater Everglades Ecosystem

By Ashley Taylor

The Everglades, Holey Land and Rotenberger Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in South Florida are part of the greater Everglades ecosystem, where water levels greatly affect wildlife. During high water

events, FWC biologists conduct night time mammal spotlight surveys to determine how the high water levels are affecting deer and other wildlife. Often, white-tailed deer and other terrestrial wildlife take refuge on levees or tree islands within the WMAs. When this happens, deer may run out of their usual food, causing them to eat plants they do not typically consume and become physically stressed. When necessary, the FWC restricts public access on the three WMAs so mammals are

not additionally stressed by the presence of people and their vehicles or vessels.

During high water in January through April of 2016, volunteers assisted FWC staff in conducting these important mammal spotlight surveys. T.J. Wilkerson and Andrea Kennedy, assisted staff with numerous surveys over the three-month period and contributed more than 35 volunteer hours. While conducting surveys, the



Sergio Gonzalez, FWC biologist, collects weather data: temp, humidity and wind speed before taking volunteers out to conduct a mammal spot light survey.

volunteers counted more than 150 white-tailed deer and even saw mother bobcats with kittens.

During the high water event surveys, biologists and volunteers slowly drive down a levee to spotlight and document all mammals sighted on the road, canal bank, or in the marsh. White-tailed deer, opossums, raccoons and bobcats are the most common species observed, although the primary focus of the survey is white-tailed deer. The three WMAs remain closed to the public until there are less than 10 white-tailed deer counted on a survey – an indication the high waters have retreated enough for deer to disperse back into the habitat. Additionally, browse surveys on tree islands are conducted throughout high water events to document what plants the deer are feeding on and the amount of food available, as well as to search for any dead wildlife.

Since surveys of all three WMAs must be conducted once a week and it takes two people per survey, volunteers that pair with a staff member on surveys are invaluable, as they allow FWC staff to allocate time to other priorities. Volunteers benefitted by learning about key FWC wildlife management efforts while contributing to valuable information collected by the FWC on the effects of high water conditions in the greater Everglades ecosystem.



FWC volunteers help staff remove a boardwalk at Little Gator Creek WEA.

Boardwalk Removal at Little Gator Creek WEA

By Brendan O'Connor

Little Gator Creek Wildlife Environmental Area (WEA) is located between Lakeland and Dade City, Florida, just south of Green Swamp. An important Wood Stork rookery covers approximately 10 acres of the 53 acre basin swamp on the WEA. This site has an interesting history which includes Native Americans mining chert, a flint-like stone they chipped into tools. The site was purchased in 1982 under the Conservation and Recreation Lands Program and is comprised of a mosaic of habitats dominated by pine flatwoods, basin swamp, dome swamp and other wetlands.

Little Gator Creek WEA is home to many invertebrate

species, including white-tailed deer, gopher tortoises, pine warblers, alligators, Bachman's sparrows, river otters and snakes.

Staff from the FWC's Wildlife Habitat Management Section identified the need to remove a deteriorated 450-foot boardwalk on the WEA. The boardwalk was located in an area of dense trees. Accessing and using equipment in this area was impossible without damaging a large swath of swamp. Over the course of three workdays, 11 volunteers worked with FWC staff to remove the boardwalk. This hardy group rolled up their sleeves and waded into the knee-deep water armed with chainsaws, hammers, saws and true grit. These volunteers contributed 66 hours to the removal of the boardwalk, working in a difficult environment with dedication and perseverance.

Leon County Middle School Student Learns about Endangered Species Anatomy

By Bonnie Abellera

It isn't every day that you get to reconstruct the vertebrae of an endangered panther skeleton. *Michael*, a 13-year old student from a Leon County middle school, had that opportunity when he volunteered last summer for the FWC's Imperiled Species Management (ISM) Section.

On permanent loan from the University of Florida's Natural History Museum, the panther skeleton was a jumbled puzzle of bones stored in the ISM's education office—to be pieced together some day. *Michael* stepped up and accepted the challenge to bring order to

the bone chaos. Since there are no diagrams of a panther skeleton available, *Michael* looked online for cat skeleton diagrams and meticulously pieced the pile of bones together and temporarily secured them in place with a length of twine. The panther vertebrae section is currently on display at the Leon County library in downtown Tallahassee and will be used for educational displays at festivals around the state.

Additional endangered species anatomy display challenges for *Michael* were reconstructing a Kemp's ridley sea turtle shell and arranging bones for a manatee flipper display. Who says that volunteering can't be interesting or unique? Thank you, *Michael*, for your volunteer service to FWC's ISM Section!

Becoming an Outdoor Woman Workshops

By Lynne Hawk

The Becoming an Outdoor Woman (BOW) workshops might be designed primarily for women, but they are an excellent opportunity for anyone 18 years of age or older to learn the outdoor skills associated with a variety of outdoor pursuits. We strive to offer a variety of topics in our workshops, balanced between hunting and shooting, fishing, and other activities such as canoeing and camping.

If you would like to participate in an upcoming workshop in West Palm Beach (February 17-19, 2017) or you would like to become a volunteer instructor for the BOW program, please contact [Lynne Hawk](#).



Michael reconstructs the vertebrae section of an endangered panther skeleton.



Erika White, volunteer instructor, teaches archery during a BOW program.

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The FWC needs your support to further develop citizen science throughout the state. By donating, you can help our programs expand, as well as improve training, educational materials, project supplies, recognition awards, recruitment events and volunteer management capacity. Our goal is to continue building partnerships and implement a statewide network of trained volunteers throughout Florida. If you know of a corporation or are a corporation interested in sponsoring FWC Volunteer Programs, please contact Sharon Tatem, the FWC's Volunteer Program Manager. In addition to your generously donated time and talent, we welcome tax-deductible monetary contributions. Donations can be made online through the [Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida](#). Donations can also be made via check, payable in U.S. funds only, to the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, with FWC Volunteer Programs in the memo section. Thank you for your consideration!

Please send checks to:

FWC Volunteer Programs
c/o Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida
P.O. Box 6181
Tallahassee, FL 32314-6181

How to Get Involved

The FWC offers a variety of volunteer and internship programs. Visit [MyFWC.com](#) for more information about how to get involved. In addition, visit the [FWC Calendar](#) for upcoming events and sign up with [GovDelivery](#) to receive news and information updates on topics of your choice.

If you need further assistance in locating a volunteer program that suits your interests or would like to submit an article for an upcoming volunteer newsletter, please contact the FWC Volunteer Program Manager or a Regional Volunteer Coordinator.

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