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THE NEWSLETTER OF FLORIDA'S WILDLIFE LEGACY INITIATIVE

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Florida's revised 2012 State Wildlife Action Plan receives final approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative is pleased to announce that the first revision of Florida's State Wildlife Action Plan received final approval from the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) in September.

The cover of the 2012 Action Plan

The Action Plan is part of a nation-wide effort by all 56 states and U.S. territories for conserving all of the state's wildlife and vital natural areas for future generations, and to qualify for [State Wildlife Grant funding](#). It outlines what native wildlife and habitats are in need, why they are in need and, most importantly, what we are going to do about it. This revision focused on, 1) revising the [Species of Greatest Conservation Need list](#), 2) writing and incorporating a chapter on [climate change](#), 3) revising the approach to conserving [freshwater habitats](#), 4) incorporating information on the [first five years of Action Plan implementation](#), and, 5) reducing redundancy and reorganizing to improve clarity and readability.**To read the 2012 Action Plan, please visit our updated State Wildlife Action Plan website.** The updated site allows the user to view the entire plan, individual chapters, or each of the 45 habitat sections that detail Florida's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine habitat categories.The Legacy Initiative thanks FWC staff, stakeholders, partners, and the public for providing input and comments throughout the 2010-2011 revision process; your participation is key to ensuring that the Action Plan is an effective tool for conserving Florida's diversity of wildlife resources for future generations. For more information about the revision process, please visit the [Action Plan revision website](#) or contact [Brian Branciforte](#), the State Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator.[Top of Page](#)

Share Your Knowledge of Fish and Invertebrate SGCN in Florida!

Kelly Rezac, Wildlife Legacy Biologist**Jeffrey Wilcox, Fish Taxa Coordinator**Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative is wrapping up a project that will expand the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's](#) (FWC) species ranking system to include more than 500 additional fish and invertebrate [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#) (SGCN). Developed in 1990, the system provides scores that assess the biological vulnerability to extinction and the current level of understanding and management of terrestrial vertebrates and freshwater fish. One of the key strengths of this system is that it allows biologists and managers to track species over time even when key life history information is missing. By incorporating these species into the system, we will ensure that all wildlife across taxa receive adequate attention and are tracked over time.

FWC solicits public input on the accuracy of the rankings and any evidence or documentation that could alter the rankings substantially. Please keep in mind that the ranking system is a coarse filter, and a change of a point or two is not substantial.

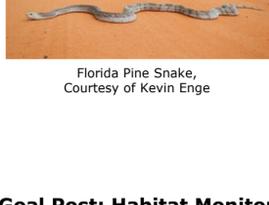
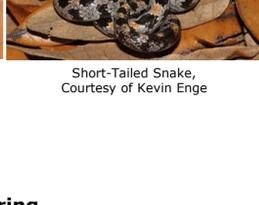
Fish scores are currently available for review at <http://share1.myfwc.com/MFR/default.aspx>. This site includes instructions, guidance documents, the scores for all newly-ranked fish species, and an online comment form.Bluenose Shiner,
Courtesy of D.G. BassIf you are interested in reviewing invertebrate scores, or have questions about the review process or this project, please contact [Kelly Rezac](#), the Legacy Initiative Monitoring Goal Lead.[Top of Page](#)

Report Your Sightings of Mink and Upland Snakes

Mink

Florida is home to three known subspecies of [mink](#)-Atlantic salt marsh mink, Gulf salt marsh mink, and [Everglades mink](#), and all three are listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in [Florida's State Wildlife Legacy Plan](#). The secretive nature of this small, semi-aquatic mammal makes them difficult to study, and biologists know little about their distribution and abundance.In an effort to learn more about this species, FWC launched a Web-based reporting system that allows Florida residents to share mink sightings with biologists. Please report your sightings [online](#) (including photos, if possible). For more [information about this study](#), visit MyFWC.com/Research, click on Wildlife, and select "Public Asked to Share Mink Sightings" under "Terrestrial Mammals" or contact [Chris Winchester](#).Mink looking out of den,
Courtesy of Patrick Leary

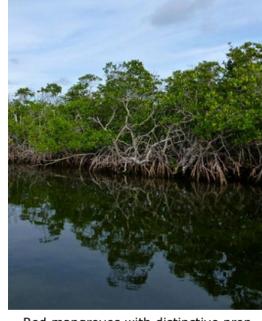
Upland Snakes

The southern hognose snake, [short-tailed snake](#), and [Florida pine snake](#) are rare, nonvenomous, upland SGCN that spend much of their time underground. FWC biologists are asking the public to report sightings [online](#) (including pictures, if possible) in an effort to determine the current distribution and status of these species, which have all been petitioned for federal listing. For more [information about this study](#), visit MyFWC.com/Conservation, select "How You Can Conserve," and choose "Snakes" under "Living with Wildlife" or contact [Kevin Engle](#).Florida Pine Snake,
Courtesy of Kevin EngleShort-Tailed Snake,
Courtesy of Kevin EngleSouthern Hognose Snake,
Courtesy of Kevin Engle[Top of Page](#)

Goal Post: Habitat Monitoring

Ryan P. Moyer, Associate Research Scientist**Amber Whittle, Habitat Research Administrator****Kelly Rezac, Wildlife Legacy Biologist**Mangrove-built island, [John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park](#),
Courtesy of Ryan Moyer

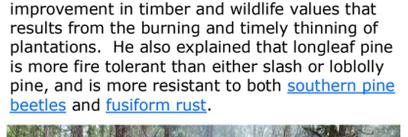
Mangrove shoreline, Courtesy of Ryan Moyer

A primary component of the [Legacy Initiative's monitoring objective](#) is to work with partners to coordinate and expand existing mapping and monitoring activities in high priority coastal habitats that are being impacted by climate change and sea level rise. [Salt marshes](#) and [mangroves](#) are important coastal habitats in the State of Florida; however, statewide estimates of salt marsh and mangrove area are outdated and need to be revisited.Mangrove distribution is changing in response to climate change and sea-level rise: in the early 1980's, the northern limit of red mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*) on Florida's west coast was (Ripon Springs); however, it now occurs as far north as the Cedar Keys, representing a habitat migration of almost a full degree of latitude. As sea-level rise occurs along the west coast of Florida, islands of dead cedar and palmetto trees become surrounded by *Juncus* marshes, thereby representing a fundamental, undocumented shift in habitat type. Future sea-level rise is expected to cause fragmentation of salt marsh and loss of acreage where hardened shorelines and other obstacles prevent the landward migration of salt marsh grasses. Thus, a coordinated statewide mapping and monitoring program is necessary in order to inform management decisions that will ultimately protect Florida's vulnerable coastal habitats, and the numerous species that depend upon them.The Coastal Habitat Integrated Mapping and Monitoring Program (CHIMMP) at the [Fish and Wildlife Research Institute](#) (FWRI) seeks to identify, coordinate, and expand the network of mapping and monitoring activities being conducted in salt marsh and mangrove habitats by a variety of potential partners. A meeting of potential partners from around the state will be held to determine participation, to explore the availability of mapping imagery and monitoring data and to understand similarities and differences among the various monitoring programs.Since the extent of monitoring programs throughout the State is unknown, CHIMMP will identify research and monitoring programs, leverage any duplicate efforts, and identify data gaps and needs. In future years, the program hopes to fill identified data gaps in mapping and monitoring efforts. CHIMMP will also focus on developing or refining methods for overall coastal wetland monitoring studies and make recommendations on selection criteria for the location of future monitoring sites. CHIMMP is expected to reduce mapping and monitoring costs by distributing and leveraging resources and effort across a network of collaborators and data-sharing partners around the state. The program will reduce coastal wetland habitat mapping costs by leveraging imagery acquisition costs with [Water Management Districts](#), the [Florida Department of Revenue](#), and any other public or private partners with need for such data sets.For more information about this project, please contact [Ryan Moyer](#) or [Amber Whittle](#). To learn more about the Legacy Initiative's Monitoring Goal, please contact [Kelly Rezac](#).Red mangroves with distinctive prop roots along a tidal creek shoreline,
Courtesy of Ryan Moyer[Top of Page](#)

Using Partnerships to Advance Habitat Management on Private Lands

Eugene Kelly, Landowner Assistance ProgramWith more than half of Florida's rural lands in private ownership, it is inevitable that private lands will continue to play a key role in the conservation and management of our native wildlife. In order to promote partnerships that advance wildlife management on private lands, incentive programs, such as the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's](#) (FWC) [Landowner Assistance Program](#) (LAP), were developed to provide wildlife-related assistance with land-use planning and habitat management. These groups also provide workshops throughout the year to educate landowners about various aspects of habitat management.This past June, a workshop and field tour on the Straughn and Simmons properties in Alachua County demonstrated how cooperative projects can achieve more than individual efforts. The workshop was organized by the [National Wild Turkey Federation](#) (NWTFF) and conducted in cooperation with LAP, the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS), the [Florida Forest Service](#) (FFS), the [University of Florida's IFAS Extension Service](#), and the [Alachua County Environmental Protection Department](#). It highlighted a variety of habitat management practices, including prescribed fire, that are available to landowners who want to enhance the wildlife values of their land while continuing to generate needed income from silvicultural production.The adjoining Straughn and Simmons properties historically supported sandhill groundcover - a fire-adapted community dominated by a canopy of longleaf pines and a diverse groundcover of grasses and forbs. According to the [2012 State Wildlife Action Plan](#), the [sandhill habitat](#) in Florida is in poor and declining condition primarily due to habitat conversion and lack of appropriate fire management. Legacy created the [Terrestrial Goal](#) in an effort to increase fire-related management on Florida's upland habitats.Sandhill is home to a wide variety of species, including over 100 [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#), as Joe Vaughn of FWC pointed out when he explained that a well-maintained Florida sandhill rivals tropical forests in terms of the species diversity it supports. Ricky Lackey of NWTFF mentioned the benefits of growing season prescribed fires to [wild turkeys](#), explaining that although a nest may occasionally be lost to a fire, the overall benefits to the turkey population will usually exceed any negative impacts. Turkeys will often re-nest after a fire and enjoy the improved forage that results as the native legumes and grasses respond to the fire with increased flowering and seed production.

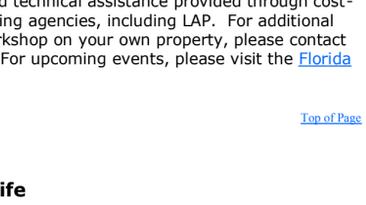
With the landowners' objectives including restoration of the pre-existing sandhill vegetation over portions of the property to make the land more inviting to wildlife, LAP staff, with assistance from FFS and NRCS, prepared management plans that outlined a step-wise process to restore the sandhill. Restoration activities, such as progressively replacing the planted slash pine with longleaf pine and promoting regeneration of the long-suppressed groundcover plant species through the reintroduction of fire, were recommended.

The 30+ attending the workshop were treated to a rare opportunity to witness the tangible benefits of fire on groundcover vegetation and to see that growing season fires can be conducted without damaging a planted pine overstory. They also observed a 1-acre demonstration fire conducted by Alachua County Forester Dave Conser and other FFS staff. Dave provided information on the improvement in timber and wildlife values that results from the burning and timely thinning of plantations. He also explained that longleaf pine is more fire tolerant than either slash or loblolly pine, and is more resistant to both [southern pine beetles](#) and [fusiform rust](#).

Top Left: Dave Conser (FFS) addressing the group prior to the burn demonstration, Courtesy of Ricky Lackey; Bottom Left: Joe Vaughn (FWC) applying fire to a slash pine stand with a drip torch, Courtesy of Eugene Kelly; Bottom Right: A relatively cool, fast-moving, low-intensity burn conducted prior to the field tour to demonstrate to participants the benefit of growing season burns to native sandhill groundcover plants, Courtesy of Eugene Kelly

Many of the habitat and timber management practices that were illustrated during the workshop can be implemented by private landowners with funding and technical assistance provided through cost-sharing programs administered by a number of partnering agencies, including LAP. For additional information on these programs, or to host a similar workshop on your own property, please contact your [Regional LAP Coordinator](#) or visit the [LAP website](#). For upcoming events, please visit the [Florida Forest Stewardship Calendar](#).[Top of Page](#)

Coalition on a Mission: Teaming With Wildlife

Florida's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition currently numbers 228 members. You can join our efforts and help secure long-term dedicated funding for Florida's wildlife conservation and related education and recreation: [Sign up and learn more about Florida's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition!](#)**You can help!****Join the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition!**[Top of Page](#)

Share how you are implementing the State Wildlife Action Plan!

To share how you are implementing Florida's State Wildlife Action Plan in Legacy's Newsletter, please contact [Caroline Gorga](#).**If you are not currently receiving FWLI's e-mails, please [sign up!](#)****To remove your name from FWLI's mailing list, please contact [Heather Hitt](#).**