



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Commission Meeting
April 13 – 14, 2016
Jupiter, FL
Minutes

*A digital recording of the entire meeting is available upon request. Please contact the Community Relations Office at (850) 488-4676 for additional information.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held its regular meeting April 13 – 14, 2016, at the Wyndham Grand Jupiter at Harbourside Place, located at 122 Soundings Avenue, Jupiter. Chairman Brian Yablonski called the meeting to order with the following members in attendance:

Ronald Bergeron, Fort Lauderdale
Chuck Roberts, Tallahassee
Bo Rivard, Panama City

Aliese Priddy, Immokalee
Robert Spottswood, Key West
Richard Hanas, Oviedo

Senior and Presenting Staff:

Nick Wiley	Executive Director
Eric Sutton	Assistant Executive Director
Bud Vielhauer	General Counsel
Colonel Curtis Brown	Director, Division of Law Enforcement
Thomas Graef	Director, Southwest Region
Steve Shea	Director, Northwest Region
Shannon Wright	Director, Northeast Region
Chris Wynn	Director, North Central Region
Diane Eggeman	Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management
Tom Champeau	Director, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management
Jessica McCawley	Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Gil McRae	Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
Dr. Thomas Eason	Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Doc Kokol	Director, Office of Strategic Initiatives
Erin Rainey	Director, Division of Licensing and Permitting
Melissa Recks	Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Martha Bademan	Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Kipp Frohlich	Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Dr. Brad Gruver	Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Carol Knox	Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Major Brian Smith	Division of Law Enforcement
Kristen Sommers	Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Brian Branciforte	Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

There were fifty-seven individuals registered to speak to the Commission during the two-day meeting.

Meeting Opening

Chairman Yablonski called the April 13 – 14, 2016 meeting to order at 8:37 a.m.

Chairman Yablonski introduced Mayor Todd Wodraska of the City of Jupiter and invited him to address the Commission.

Mayor Wodraska welcomed everyone to Jupiter. He highlighted several of the wonderful recreational opportunities in the area.

Chairman Yablonski recognized Mr. Greg Langowski, a Regional Director for the Office of U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, representing Senator Marco Rubio.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Ms. Erin Rainey, Director of the Division of Licensing and Permitting, gave the invocation.

Commissioner Spottswood led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Adoption of Minutes

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Vice Chairman Priddy and carried, the February 2016 minutes were approved as written.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

Upon a motion by Commissioner Hanas, seconded by Commissioner Bergeron and carried, the April 2016 Meeting agenda was approved.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Vice Chairman Priddy and carried, the April 2016 Consent Agenda items were approved as amended to postpone item five, Derelict Vessel Removal Grants Rule.

Awards and Recognition

Mr. Bud Vielhauer, General Counsel, presented the Prosecutor of the Year Award to Prosecutor Sherri Collins.

Colonel Curtis Brown, Director of FWC's Division of Law Enforcement, presented a retirement plaque to Lieutenant Colonel Mark Warren for over 32 years of service to FWC.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked Lieutenant Colonel Warren and all Law Enforcement staff for their dedication to the job.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Wiley highlighted the following items from the Executive Director's report:

- Officer David Brady received medal of heroism from the Governor and Cabinet.
- Trophy Catch boat give-a-way.
- George H.W. Bush Vamos a Pescar Education Fund.
- FWC/Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida memorial wall dedication ceremony.
- South Florida fish attracting device known as Bug Light.
- Bear management update. Chairman Yablonski asked staff to work with stakeholders and come back in June with a range of options to discuss moving forward.
- Apalachicola oyster status.
- Record rainfall in South Florida. Chairman Yablonski invited Mr. Larry Williams, State Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), to address the Commission. Mr. Williams asked that Commissioner Bergeron join him to be recognized for his major efforts related to the Everglades and the

recent high water level situation. Commissioner Bergeron personally met with partner agencies and private landowners in the area to coordinate an effort that would alleviate some of the pressure created by the high water. Commissioner Bergeron thanked all the partners involved in these coordinated discussions. He noted another meeting today to discuss continued deviations for 90 days to ensure the water levels continue to be addressed the best way possible for all of the environments and wildlife that are affected by water releases.

- Algal bloom and fish kills in the Indian River Lagoon and Banana River.
- Commissioner Bergeron asked the Commission to consider passing a resolution to recognize the efforts of the Governor for his work related to the Everglades high water situation and the Indian River Lagoon fish kill event. Chairman Yablonski agreed that a resolution would be a great way to address this. Executive Director Wiley asked staff to draft this resolution and present it to the Commission for their review and adoption before close of business at this meeting.
- Everglades Coordinator announcement and introduction – James Erskine.
- Staff recognition and introduction – Andrea Dominguez.
- Staff recognition and introduction – Officer Bradley Toby.
- Staff recognition and introduction – Caroline Gorga.

Item Requiring Action – Draft Rule – Gulf Red Snapper

Ms. Martha Bademan with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management presented the staff recommendation for the 2016 recreational red snapper harvest season in all State waters off the Gulf of Mexico. She also provided an update on red snapper actions taken by the Gulf Council at its recent meeting. Mr. Gil McRae, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, provided an update on the Gulf Reef Fish Survey which directly relates to red snapper.

Chairman Yablonski commented that if this all goes smoothly, potentially the 2018 red snapper season in the Gulf of Mexico could have a better informed season projection because of the improved data collection.

Mr. McRae responded that as long as each of the Gulf States get their data collection systems certified, then data collected by the states could be used for the 2018 red snapper season projection.

Ms. Bademan continued her presentation on staff recommendation adopting a recreational harvest season that would begin May 7, and open Saturdays and Sundays in May. The season would then reopen continuously beginning the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10. Finally, the season would reopen for Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in September and October including Labor Day. This would result in a 78-day season for 2016.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked if the federal season would be consecutive fishing days and whether or not there is flexibility to change those days based on weather or natural disasters.

Ms. Bademan responded that the federal season will be open for consecutive days and there has been flexibility in the past based on major natural disasters.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Ms. Pam Anderson, First Vice President of Panama City Boatman's Association, National Association of Charterboat Operators, member of the Government Affairs Committee for the Bay County Chamber of Commerce, addressed the Commission in opposition to sector separation and in support of the Gulf Reef Fish Survey.

Mr. James Zurbrick, Director for Fish for America USA, addressed the Commission. He noted that the majority of active charter fishermen want sector separation and spoke in favor of extending the sunset on sector separation.

Mr. Gary Jennings with Keep Florida Fishing and the American Sportfishing Association addressed the Commission in support of the staff recommendation on the proposed State season and in opposition to extending or removing the sunset on sector separation.

Mr. Shane Cantrell with Charter Fisherman's Association addressed the Commission in support of extending the sunset on sector separation and the Commission's ability to set its own State season.

Mr. Bill Tucker addressed the Commission with support of removing the sunset on sector separation. He noted that the main biomass of this species is in federal waters off the Gulf of Mexico and that state seasons result in a shorter federal season.

Mr. Trip Aukeman with Coastal Conservation Association Florida addressed the Commission. He requested the Commission direct staff to vote to oppose extending the sunset provision for sector separation at the Gulf Council.

Mr. Gary Alberts addressed the Commission regarding sector separation. He noted support for eliminating the sector separation sunset. He asked that the Commission withdraw support of the Graves Bill (H.R. 3094). If the Graves bill does move forward, he requested removing the commercial sector from the bill.

Mr. Brad Gorst addressed the Commission in support of setting the State season to be consistent with the federal season. He noted that sector separation sunset should be eliminated.

Mr. Eric Mahoney representing the Clearwater Marine Association addressed the Commission. He requested the Commission direct staff to eliminate the sunset clause for sector separation or approve the extending the sunset clause. He noted the Gulf of Mexico fishery should be managed by separating all the sectors.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski noted that the first consideration would be for the proposed State season dates.

Commissioner Rivard noted that he supports voting for the biggest opportunity for all anglers for this species and noted that the State season is not expected to affect the federal for-hire component of the recreational fishery because of sector separation.

Chairman Yablonski noted the next discussion point is the Commission direction on the sector separation sunset.

Executive Director Wiley commented that some of the federally-permitted for-hire vessels like sector separation because they received specific days to allow them a longer timeframe to fish.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about sector separation and the plan for improved data collection.

Mr. McRae noted that data collection will not be affected by sector separation.

Commissioner Spottswood noted that eliminating sector separation could have a negative impact on the number of available days for the for-hire sector while only providing a day or two benefit for the private angler.

Commissioner Roberts commented that the Commission did not support sector separation in the beginning, but it has shown that it can provide a better fishing opportunity for federally-permitted for-hire vessels. He noted support for extending the sunset to 2020 which will allow more time to analyze the system and come up with any changes to the system as needed.

Chairman Yablonski agreed with extending the sunset to 2020.

Commissioner Rivard also agreed and asked that the Commission work with the Gulf Council to get more days for private anglers to fish in federal waters. He commented that he hopes to attend a Gulf Council meeting to see how this process works and get a better understanding of the input that is received from stakeholders in that arena.

Finally, Executive Director Wiley provided an update on the Graves bill (HR 3094). He noted that Senator Graves would like to work more with the commercial sector, hear their concerns, and potentially amend the bill language to ensure the commercial sector is comfortable with the bill.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Rivard, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried, the Commission approved staff recommendation for the State season dates.

Chairman Yablonski summed up the comments from the Commission and provided direction to Ms. Bademan to go back to the Gulf Council and support the extension of the sector separation sunset until 2020.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) Report

Ms. Bademan presented a report on actions taken at the GMFMC meeting on April 4-8, 2016 in Austin, TX.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Bill Kelly with the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association addressed the Commission in support of the GMFMC's regulation changes for commercial yellowtail snapper harvest. He also expressed support for changing sector allocations for king mackerel.

Ms. Pam Anderson addressed the Commission with a suggestion that red grouper sector allocations should be reviewed at the Gulf Council.

Mr. James Zurbrick addressed the Commission regarding the potential change to the hogfish minimum size limit from a 12 inch to a 16 inch fork length. He opposed the suggested 16 inch minimum size limit because it would reduce his commercial harvest by 30 percent. He supported a minimum size limit of 15 inches.

Mr. Gary Jennings addressed the Commission in support of the Council's recent final action on king mackerel management and supported status quo on king mackerel sector allocations.

Mr. Garrett Alberts addressed the Commission with a request to increase the data collection on many of the species that are frequently caught off the coast of the State of Florida.

Mr. Shane Cantrell addressed the Commission in support of a March 1 opening for gray triggerfish and improved data collection via a smartphone app for the for-hire industry and private anglers.

Mr. Bill Tucker addressed the Commission regarding concerns for the Graves bill. He asked for the feature online for checking the validity of saltwater product licenses and restricted species endorsements to be brought back.

Mr. Brad Gorst addressed the Commission supporting status quo management for red grouper. He supported a 15 inch minimum size limit for hogfish and felt a 16 inch minimum size limit is a bit extreme. He supported a March 1 opening for gray triggerfish.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski provided direction to go consistent with the possible federal closure of recreational gray triggerfish harvest in Gulf State waters.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked if the Council is set on the 16 inch minimum limit for hogfish.

Ms. Bademan responded that the minimum size limit for hogfish still has to go out for public hearing and then come back to the Council for a final action in June.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Report

Ms. Bademan presented a report on actions from the SAFMC's March 7-11, 2016 meeting in Jekyll Island, GA.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Bill Kelly addressed the Commission in support of reallocating of yellowtail snapper to the commercial fishery to avoid a commercial quota closure in instances when the recreational fishery does not meet its quota.

Mr. Gary Jennings addressed the Commission opposing red snapper management options that would close harvest of other reef fish to protect red snapper and expressed concerns about the results of the recent red snapper stock assessment. He also opposed limited entry programs for the South Atlantic.

Mr. Trip Aukeman addressed the Commission and expressed concern about the Atlantic red snapper fishery. He advocated for solutions that allow harvest of red snapper while avoiding dead discards.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about the ability to transfer percentages of allocations on an annual basis between sectors related to certain species.

Ms. Bademan responded that the general idea the Councils have discussed is to allow allocation to be transferred from one sector to another in cases where harvest by one sector stays below a set trigger point.

Staff Reports

Lionfish Removal Outreach and Reward Program

Ms. Melissa Recks with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management presented an overview of the program for 2016 and presented options for future programs.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Bill Kelly addressed the Commission in thanks for the innovative approach to this issue. He noted concerns about spear guns being allowed for use during the lobster mini season which may increase the burden on law enforcement.

Ms. Pam Anderson addressed the Commission in support of the programs presented.

Mr. Gary Jennings addressed the Commission with appreciation of the innovative approach to this topic.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Spottswood asked if the recreational anglers would be selling these fish and what the requirements are for doing so.

Ms. Recks responded that there are many different aspects to think about when discussing recreational anglers selling lionfish due to health and food safety concerns.

Commissioner Hanas asked about the attainability of the stated goal of removing 25,000 lionfish in a year.

Ms. Recks responded that based on tournament catches the previous year, staff believe the goal to be attainable.

Chairman Yablonski commented on the innovative approach of this proposal and the improvements from last year. He noted the need to be flexible on the scallop idea because of new information and data related to the scallop fishery.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about separating the mini season from the qualification of harvesting lionfish.

Ms. Recks noted that separating the mini season from the qualification of lionfish harvest is the approach proposed for this year's program.

Commissioner Roberts asked if the incentive was more than one lobster per day if they harvested more than 50 lionfish. He asked how FWC plans to address the ability to sell the lionfish without holding a Saltwater Products License (SPL).

Ms. Recks noted that the extra lobster incentive is only one per day, no matter if the individual harvests 50 lionfish or 500 lionfish. She commented that many of the recreational divers who harvest lionfish already have their SPL so that they can sell these lionfish and that lionfish is often the only species that they sell commercially. Staff has researched the possibility of exempting lionfish harvesters from the SPL requirements in the past, but has concerns about the ability to address seafood safety issues that might arise in association with the sale of these fish by recreational license holders.

Commissioner Spottswood asked about the commercial aspect of this issue and whether or not we can create incentives to increase this sector of the fishery.

Ms. Recks confirmed that FWC has already committed to working with the commercial sector on this and harvesters have the incentive of selling the lionfish for profit. She also noted that they can sell the lionfish used to participate in this program.

Chairman Yablonski asked staff to work more with the commercial fishery and even restaurants to help move this aspect of the lionfish issue forward and improve the market.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried, the Commission approved staff recommendation.

Chairman Yablonski recognized Senator Maria Sachs and invited her to address the Commission.

Senator Sachs thanked the Commission for all the great work on recent bills related to boating safety. She commented that Florida is the number one state in boating fatalities and she wants to work with partners to reduce this number.

Red Drum Stakeholder Engagement

Ms. Recks presented an update on the innovative methods used to gather stakeholder input on the status of the red drum fishery in the Northwest and Northeast Management Zones.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Mike Conneen, Executive Director with Anglers for Conservation, addressed the Commission. He noted concern about this species in Brevard County and the pressure placed on this species. He requested catch and release only near some of the areas which experienced the recent fish kills such as the Banana River and Indian River Lagoon.

Mr. Trip Aukeman addressed the Commission with a request for a one fish bag limit statewide, four fish limit per vessel, and no allowance for captains to harvest a bag limit on charters.

Mr. Byron Maharrey with the Everglades Coordinating Council addressed the Commission. He asked about efforts to gather stakeholder input on the status of this fishery in the southern management regions.

Mr. Terry Gibson with North Swell Media, LLC addressed the Commission related to red drum fishing in the Indian River Lagoon in light of the recent fish kill.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski reminded everyone that this conversation is on the agenda because of the public outcry from fisherman related to their concerns for the species in Northwest Florida.

Commissioner Roberts commented that he is still hearing from stakeholders about concern with this species from Panama City to Carrabelle and the requests to reduce the limit from two to one. He believes there is a lot of value in having a consistent one fish bag limit along the Gulf Coast of Florida.

Commissioner Hanas supported Commissioner Roberts' position and asked if FWC should continue with the surveys or take immediate action via executive order.

Commissioner Rivard added support for taking action now via executive order to reduce the bag limit to one fish.

Chairman Yablonski confirmed that executive order would be the appropriate mechanism to make this change.

Executive Director Wiley advised that the executive order should take into account a timeline to provide notice to red drum anglers.

Commissioner Roberts suggested an effective date of May 1, 2016, for all of Northwest Florida to reduce the bag limit to one fish.

Chairman Yablonski commented that holding off on changes in the Northeast Management Zone at this time is the right path moving forward since the stakeholders do not have the same issues with this fishery in that area.

Mr. Vielhauer commented that the executive order could be extended through six months to provide flexibility for staff to present draft rules in June and then potential final rules in September.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Commissioner Rivard and carried, the Commission approved an Executive Order to reduce the bag limit from two fish to one fish effective May 1 to November 1, 2016 in the Northwest Management Zone.

Item Requiring Action – Draft Rule – 68E-1, Marine Turtle Permits

Ms. Carol Knox with the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation presented draft rule amendments to Rule 68E-1, Marine Turtle Permits.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Vice Chairman Priddy and carried, the Commission approved staff recommendation.

Public Comment on Items not on the Agenda

The following individuals registered to speak on items not listed on the agenda:

Mr. Byron Maharrey congratulated the Commission on a successful bear hunt. He also commented on the successful recovery of goliath grouper and asked the Commission to consider options to allow limited harvest, and raised concerns about compliance with airboat muffler requirements.

Mr. Chuck O'Neal addressed the Commission regarding the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Fawn Avant addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Mr. James Woodard addressed the Commission in opposition of any future Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Marcella Zurita addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Mr. Michael Tanguay addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Jill Rosolek addressed the Commission in opposition of any future Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Tara Lester addressed the Commission with her son Kendall in opposition to the Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Susan Hargreaves addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Megan Sorbo addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Jennifer Leon addressed the Commission regarding Captive Wildlife and requested that FWC staff update the Florida Administrative Code related to captive wildlife to conform to the federal regulations relating to neonatal non domestic cats.

Ms. Kathy Stearns addressed the Commission regarding captive wildlife and her exhibition of animals.

Mr. Lee Day addressed the Commission with an open invitation for a live debate on the policies of the Commission. He noted opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt and any future Florida black bear hunts.

Mr. Gary Jennings addressed the Commission regarding water quality issues around the State, and stated his appreciation for the Commission's recent actions to mitigate impacts from these issues. He also noted frustration regarding the Our Florida Reefs process, specifically their failure to recognize public input, lack of credible science, and their stated goal to restrict fishing in Southeast Florida.

Mr. Newton Cook, Executive Director of the United Waterfowlers of Florida, addressed the Commission and thanked Commissioner Bergeron for his efforts related to the Everglades high water issues. He noted that the Florida black bear hunt was a success for the species.

Mr. John Rosier, President of the Everglades Coordinating Committee and the Dade County Fulltrack Conservation Club, addressed the Commission. He thanked Commissioner Bergeron for his efforts related to high water in the Everglades. He noted a request for permits to go out and check camps of areas that have previously been closed due to high water.

Mr. Joe Muscanero, owner of Hyacinth Macaw Aviary, addressed the Commission regarding protection for a flocks of wild parrots in South Florida. He has recently met with FWC Law Enforcement staff on this issue. He requested assistance from the FWC to preserve these species and protect these animals from people that are stealing the eggs and illegally selling these species.

Mr. Shawn Denton addressed the Commission regarding wild greater parrots and noted the positive impact they have on South Florida's economy.

Mr. Anthony Rogers-Wright, Policy Director of Environmental Action, addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Melinda Colon, member of the Sharks After Dark and the Shorebound Anglers Alliance, addressed the Commission regarding multiple counties enacting fishing ordinances outside of their authority. She requested assistance from FWC in providing guidance to the counties to ensure they are not overstepping their authority to create and enforce fishing regulations.

Mr. Vielhauer commented that when they become aware of such planned ordinances, FWC staff have communicated with the counties in question.

Chairman Yablonski added that providing information to the Florida Association of Counties may be beneficial.

Mr. Todd Hallman, President of the Florida Sportsman's Conservation Association (FSCA), addressed the Commission.

Ms. Katrina Shadix addressed the Commission requesting no future Florida black bear hunts.

Mr. Glenn Hughes with the American Sportfishing Association addressed the Commission regarding recreational fishing issues. He noted his support for allowing sector separation to sunset in 2016. He also voiced concern regarding the Our Florida Reefs process, and asked for the Commission to focus full attention on water issues.

Ms. Rosella Birnbaum addressed the Commission regarding the 2015 Florida black bear hunt. She offered ideas for moving forward with bear management in a positive way without the use of a hunt.

Commissioner Exchange

Commissioner Bergeron commented that he takes into consideration the comments and viewpoints of all stakeholders in making decisions as a Commissioner and he would say the same for the other Commissioners as well. He added that several issues that come before the Commission can be emotional, and by taking the facts into consideration along with the comments of everyone on each side, these decisions can be made.

Recess Wednesday's Portion of the Meeting

Chairman Yablonski adjourned the meeting at 4:34 p.m. to reconvene at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, April 14, 2016.

Thursday, April 14, Reconvene

Chairman Yablonski reconvened the meeting at 8:41 a.m.

He invited Mr. Blue Stephanos to address the Commission.

Mr. Stephanos thanked Executive Director Wiley and the FWC for their support after the boating accident involving his son who was lost at sea. He recognized FWC for being involved in the search and rescue efforts from the very beginning.

Executive Director Wiley commented on the support of FWC to get boating safety into schools to help proactively educate individuals who will be the next generation of Florida fishermen and recreational boaters.

Award and Recognition

Chairman Yablonski invited Mr. Todd Hallman to present the FSCA Wildlife Resource Management Award.

Mr. Hallman presented the award to Dr. Thomas Eason, Director of the Division of Habitat of Species Conservation.

Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida Update

Chairman Rodney Barreto of the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida (Foundation), provided an update on Foundation related activities. He announced Andrew “Andy” Walker as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation. He then highlighted the recent unveiling of the FWC memorial wall at the Headquarters building of FWC. He invited Brett Boston, Executive Director of the Foundation, to provide an update on the recent unveiling of the Suncoast Youth Conservation Center located in Apollo Beach.

Staff Report – Venomous Reptiles

Major Brian Smith with the Division of Law Enforcement presented information related to venomous reptile rules.

Chairman Yablonski noted that this topic is on the agenda based on the few incidents related to escapes of venomous reptiles. He commented that the Commission was interested in reviewing the rules and policy related to this topic to see if changes need to be made to improve the safety and security aspects of the program.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Curt Harbsmeier with the Florida Bar addressed the Commission in support of keeping the venomous reptile program at FWC.

Mr. Phil Goss, President of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers, addressed the Commission in support of moving forward with collaboration on any changes related to this topic.

Mr. Eugene Bessette with the Florida Reptile Industry addressed the Commission in support of a coordinated effort to discuss possible changes to the rules for venomous reptiles.

Mr. Scott Quint addressed the Commission.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about emergency plan requirements in case of natural disasters. She requested an update on one of the permit holders from a recent incident and the penalty associated with the incident. She asked that staff look at increased penalties for permit holders related to escapes of venomous reptiles. Related to the education requirement, would it be possible to require continuous education? Finally, she asked if there was a registry for first responders to cross check who in the State is permitted when responding to emergencies.

Major Smith responded that there are several requirements for emergency plans in order to obtain a permit from FWC for venomous reptiles. He commented on the two permit holders who had the recent escapes and the actions that took place related to penalties.

Commissioner Roberts asked about the Administrative Hearing process and removing that opportunity after multiple incidents. He noted that the venomous reptile permit holders as a group need to be heavily involved with the enforcement of this permit. He commented that the industry can provide guidelines and recommendations which can be presented to the Commission for additional discussion. He added that the idea of guidance from the industry on the number of times which the escapes happen before an automatic revocation of license is processed would be beneficial for consideration of any changes.

Mr. Vielhauer responded that the Administrative Hearing process is required for revocation of any license with FWC.

Chairman Yablonski asked if the license was annually renewed by permittees.

Major Smith confirmed that the license has an annual application process.

Commissioner Spottswood asked about a system to track the number of venomous reptiles permitted throughout Florida. He suggested the FWC site visit check-in process be discussed as a way to ramp up security measures.

Commissioner Bergeron noted that those in the industry would probably want those who are violating the rules on multiple occasions to have their licenses revoked.

Major Smith commented that this industry has been very helpful in working to come up with options.

Chairman Yablonski noted that taking time on this important issue is vital to making the program better. He added that the division between native and non-native species sounds like a good approach and that the conversation needs to happen regarding a prohibited class.

Commissioner Roberts responded that the education aspect of this is important.

Strategic Follow-Up

Conflict Wildlife

Mrs. Kristen Sommers with the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation presented an update on the 2016 Python Challenge™ and on Wildlife Impact Management.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski thanked Mrs. Sommers for the presentation. He thanked Vice Chairman Priddy and Commissioner Bergeron for their attendance and participation in this year's program and multiple events.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about iguana populations. She also asked about the stomach contents found in the pythons from this program.

Mrs. Sommers responded that iguana populations are firmly established in South Florida and there is an increasing number of human-wildlife conflict questions from the public on this species. The agency does not anticipate being able to eradicate this species and is currently looking at ways to provide better technical assistance to citizens who are experiencing economic impacts. She then noted what types of animals were found in the stomach contents of some of the pythons captured during this year's competition.

Commissioner Bergeron congratulated staff for the successful 2016 Python Challenge™. He noted that the education aspect of both this year's event and the 2013 event are highly impactful to help alleviate some of these issues. He also commented on the success of the exotic pet amnesty day program that allows owners to turn over exotic species, no questions asked, so that these animals are not just released into Florida's environment.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Newton Cook addressed the Commission.

Mr. Manley Fuller with the Florida Wildlife Federation addressed the Commission.

Imperiled Species Management Plan

Dr. Brad Gruver with the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation provided a presentation on the brief history of the Imperiled Species Management Plan.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Priddy asked for the number of species which have been removed from the threatened list.

Dr. Gruver noted that there are 16 species coming off the threatened list as part of the new plan, and there have been some species in the past that were removed from the threatened list. He noted he would research that and send the specific details to Vice Chairman Priddy.

Public Comment

The following individual addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Byron Maharrey addressed the Commission.

Staff Reports

Bird Island Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) Update

Mr. Kipp Frohlich, Deputy Director of the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, presented a review of the CWA location in Martin County better known as Bird Island.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski commented on the wonderful success of this particular area. He added that there may be several similar areas in the queue to be reviewed for approval as CWAs. He suggested the Commission package a larger amount of these areas together for review and possible approval to become protected CWAs.

Commissioner Bergeron agreed with the Chairman's CWA proposal and agreed the importance is there.

Commissioner Hanas agreed with the idea as well.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Manley Fuller addressed the Commission with encouragement on this topic and the proposal to move forward with more of these CWAs.

Mr. David Cox with Audubon Florida addressed the Commission with thanks for the establishment of Bird Island as a CWA. He noted he was here on behalf of Mrs. Julie Wraithmell, Deputy Executive Director of Audubon Florida, who could not attend this meeting. He requested that the Commission review Stick Marsh in Indian River County, which has great nesting habitat for native bird species and could potentially be a wonderful CWA.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski asked staff to work with other partners including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Audubon Florida, and the landowners of specific properties to get a list of potential CWA areas for June 2016, then to work with stakeholders on public comments with a draft rule to follow in September 2016 and a potential final rule in November 2016.

Securing a New Model of Non-game Wildlife Conservation Funding

Mr. Brian Branciforte with the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation presented information on securing a new model of national non-game wildlife conservation funding and an update on the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (AFWA) Blue Ribbon Panel.

Chairman Yablonski commented that the Blue Ribbon Panel is a significant effort for conservation at a national and federal level, and that this is the group of species that gets lost. He added that the main effort of this panel is to find a solution to this issue.

Executive Director Wiley noted that one of the Foundation members, Connie Parker, sat on the Blue Ribbon Panel. He noted the Panel only reviewed opportunities which would not take away from other fish and wildlife funding.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Manley Fuller addressed the Commission in support of this effort.

Mr. David Cox addressed the Commission in support of this idea and commented on the invested time and commitment to this issue.

General Counsel Report

Mr. Vielhauer presented an update on legal matters related to the agency.

Future Agenda Items

Mr. Eric Sutton, Assistant Executive Director, reviewed potential agenda items for the June 2016 Commission meeting scheduled to take place in Apalachicola, Florida.

Chairman Yablonski asked for the Florida Bay discussion to be in the queue for a future meeting.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

The following individuals registered to speak on items not listed on the agenda:

Mr. Byron Maharrey addressed the Commission regarding airboat muffling requirements. He requested assistance from staff in guiding airboat companies to use motor vehicle style muffled engines.

Mr. Andrew Adams with Imagine Our Florida addressed the Commission.

Commissioner Priddy suggested that anyone providing public comment that would like to ask questions can submit their questions to the Commission by email.

Ms. Aymee Laurain representing Imagine Our Florida addressed the Commission regarding deforestation and controlled burns related to Florida black bear habitat. She requested that FWC review the controlled burn schedule for the Osceola and Ocala National Forests. She recommended additional coordination with the partner agencies who manage these lands to ensure the impacts to all of the species who use this land for habitat are minimal.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked Ms. Laurain to work with the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation about the State management tool of prescribed fire separate from the Federal agencies who manage the controlled burns on the federal lands in the State of Florida.

Ms. Janne Jain addressed the Commission.

Ms. Jennifer Leon addressed the Commission in opposition to the Florida black bear hunt.

Ms. Jill Rosolek addressed the Commission in opposition to the Florida black bear hunt.

Mr. Karl Ambrose addressed the Commission with concern of the timing of the prescribed burns as related to the Florida bear management plan as referenced on page 32. He noted that the projects associated with the national forests in Florida, which assist in management for other species such as the Red Cockaded Woodpecker, have destroyed normal bear habitat and are causing a lot of nuisance bear issues.

Ms. Kate Macfall with the Humane Society of the United States addressed the Commission in opposition of the 2015 Florida black bear hunt. She noted concern about the fact that staff were asked to bring forward proposals for another hunt.

Chairman Yablonski clarified that the current rule has a recurring hunt and that the request for staff to bring forward several options based on the 2015 hunt and updated population estimates will help guide the Commission discussion in June.

Ms. Elizabeth Felton addressed the Commission regarding captive wildlife.

Ms. Katherine McGill addressed the Commission in opposition to the Florida black bear hunt.

Mr. Manley Fuller addressed the Commission related to Everglades Restoration with thanks to Commissioner Bergeron for his leadership in this area.

Mr. Michael Conner addressed the Commission

Ms. Lynda Cozart addressed the Commission in opposition to the Florida black bear hunt.

Mr. Bill George addressed the Commission regarding changes to the alligator permit process. He voiced support for future Florida black bear hunts.

Mr. Vernon Cheney addressed the Commission regarding invasive plant management issues. He thanked FWC staff for agreeing to meet with this stakeholder group.

Mr. Todd Hallman addressed the Commission with a request to increase fines for wildlife violations and additional funding for law enforcement officers.

Mr. Newton Cook addressed the Commission regarding issues on Lake Conway and conflicts with duck hunting. He requested additional clarification from FWC's legal office related to the discharge of firearms.

Mr. Vielhauer responded that he would get that information and respond to Mr. Cook.

Mr. John Rosier addressed the Commission.

Ms. Laura Nirenberg addressed the Commission.

Mr. Bishop Wright addressed the Commission in support of the decision to approve the Florida black bear hunt in 2015.

Mr. Tony Grogan, owner of spearboard.com, addressed the Commission regarding marine fisheries issues including the harvest of lemon shark from an aggregation off Jupiter, observations of sawfish, and the flawed process for Our Florida Reefs meetings.

Ms. Alexis Foxx addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2015 Florida black bear hunt.

Mr. Adam Sugalski, Campaign Manager for Stop the Florida Bear Hunt, addressed the Commission in opposition to a Florida black bear hunt.

Mr. John Sprague with the Marine Industries Association of Florida addressed the Commission. He commented on the poor water quality of the St. Lucie River. He also commented on the upcoming retirement of FWC employee Patricia Harrell who worked extensively with stakeholders and how much she will be missed. Finally, he voiced concern over the Our Florida Reefs process and requested that FWC and DEP step in to keep unnecessary proposals from moving forward.

Commissioner Exchange

Chairman Yablonski commented that Executive Director Wiley, current Vice President of AFWA, was voted to be the next president of AFWA for a year term starting in September 2016.

Commissioner Hanas thanked Executive Director Wiley and the staff of FWC for their hard work conserving the fish and wildlife resources of the State of Florida. He noted that some of the people who spoke during public comment had a hard time addressing the Commission with respect even though there is room for civil disagreement on these issues.

Commissioner Bergeron congratulated Executive Director Wiley on being selected as the next President of AFWA. He thanked staff for their dedicated work to provide the detailed information needed for these meetings so that the Commission can make decisions on tough issues. He applauded the law enforcement officers that are out in the woods and on the water serving the people and wildlife of Florida. He noted thanks to the new Everglades Coordinator, Mr. James Erskine, who will come on board with FWC soon.

Commissioner Roberts echoed the congratulations to Executive Director Wiley. He also congratulated Dr. Thomas Eason for the award he received at this meeting. He noted appreciation for the Foundation and its goals to improve income streams for the agency.

Commissioner Spottswood commented that the issues of FWC are very intricate and require a lot of research to get up to speed for the meetings that he has been involved in.

Vice Chairman Priddy requested that all the parties interested in Bear Management get more involved with waste management on a local level. She commended the Commissioners and staff for being able to keep a professional demeanor over the course of the last few meetings.

Chairman Yablonski commented that wildlife biology is based on science, and that it was and is the goal of the Commission to make decisions based on science. He thanked the Commissioners for support of the CWA proposal and their willingness to move forward with reviewing more areas for potential classification. He noted that FWC’s Regional Directors have worked to pick up the slack while there is no assigned Regional Director in the South Region. He named several other staff members who worked tirelessly to ensure that these meetings run as smoothly as possible.

Commission Administrative Matters

The next regularly scheduled Commission meeting is set for June 21 – 23, 2016 in Apalachicola, Florida, commencing at 1:30 pm on the first day and 8:30 a.m. each day thereafter.

Adjournment

Chairman Yablonski adjourned the meeting at 2:11 p.m.

Brian Yablonski
Chairman

Nick Wiley
Executive Director

Respectfully submitted:

Lisa Zullo
Commission Assistant