



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Commission Meeting
June 22 – 23, 2016
Eastpoint, 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 June 22 – 23, 2016, at the Franklin County School, located at 1250 Highway 98, Eastpoint. 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
Tom Reinert	Director, South 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
Erin Rainey	Director, Division of Licensing and Permitting
Charlotte Jerrett	Chief Financial Officer
Melissa Recks	Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Kipp Frohlich	Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

There were 115 individuals registered to speak to the Commission during the two-day meeting.

Meeting Opening

Chairman Yablonski called the June 22 – 23, 2016 meeting to order at 8:46 a.m.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Chairman Yablonski asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of those who lost their lives in the tragic incidents in Orlando.

Mr. Tom Champeau, Director of the Division of Freshwater Fisheries, gave the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Commissioner Roberts.

Adoption of Minutes

Upon a motion by Commissioner Hanas, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried, the April 2016 minutes were approved as written.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried, the June 2016 Meeting agenda was approved.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Upon a motion by Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Commissioner Spottswood and carried, the June 2016 Consent Agenda items were approved.

Staff Reports

Critical Wildlife Areas

Mr. Kipp Frohlich, Deputy Director of the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, presented an overview of Critical Wildlife Areas (CWAs). He provided information on proposed CWAs and proposed amendments to existing CWAs to provide enhanced protection for concentrations of wildlife during critical life stages.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski thanked Mosaic for being great partners related to CWAs in Florida. He also thanked Ms. Jean Hall for capturing bird life photos at several of the CWAs throughout Florida and allowing use by FWC.

Commissioner Hanas thanked staff for putting in the effort to establish and improve CWAs in Florida.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Ms. Megan Sorbo addressed the Commission. She thanked the Commission for working on CWAs to create more protected habitat.

Mr. Bill Sagues addressed the Commission with thanks for the efforts on CWAs. He noted the importance of protecting habitat for species that are not considered game species.

Mr. Whitey Markle with the Florida Sierra Club addressed the Commission. He commented that human population growth is the cause of habitat loss.

Mr. Gary Jennings with the American Sportfishing Association addressed the Commission. He noted some of the restrictions imposed on the public without scientific evidence for the closure such as an area in Biscayne Bay. He added agreement that some areas are important to conserve for resource protection and supported working more on this issue.

Ms. Kathy Swaggerty addressed the Commission in support of the CWA designation for Lanark Reef which was presented by staff.

Ms. Julie Wraithmell, Deputy State Director with Audubon Florida, addressed the Commission with thanks for taking up CWAs and moving forward with new and improved habitat conservation.

Mr. Sandy Safely with the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida addressed the Commission. He added support for the proposals with additional participation in the workshops to provide suggestions.

Ms. Maria Bolton-Joubert addressed the Commission with thanks for bringing up CWAs.

Ms. Elizabeth Fleming with the Defenders of Wildlife addressed the Commission in support of the staff recommendation on improving and establishing new CWAs.

Mr. Manley Fuller, President of the Florida Wildlife Federation, addressed the Commission in support of the staff proposal.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski noted that this action can have a positive impact for many generations into the future. He directed staff to return to the September 2016 meeting with more detailed and specific drafts for each area.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked the Chairman for his leadership on this issue. He commented that this effort can be tied to the wishes of Floridians based on their passage of Amendment One.

In an effort to accommodate everyone with the limited restaurant options in the area, Chairman Yablonski noted that the Commission would be taking a break for lunch at 11:45 am and will reconvene at 1:30 pm.

Bear Management

Chairman Yablonski provided a recap of the stakeholder outreach and comprehensive action taken by FWC on bear management over the last year.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked staff for all the continued efforts on bear management.

Dr. Thomas Eason, Director of the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, presented details on FWC's comprehensive approach to bear management.

Dr. Eason introduced Dr. Joe Clark, Branch Chief of the U.S. Geological Survey's Southern Appalachian and Research Branch and also Adjunct Professor with the University of Tennessee. Dr. Clark presented an update on Florida's bear population estimates and provided information on the science behind this process used to generate the estimates.

Commissioner Bergeron asked if the population studies are complete.

Dr. Clark noted that the preliminary population estimates were provided in early spring, that additional models are being run on the data, and final estimates should be available within a month.

Dr. Eason continued his presentation on FWC's approach to bear management.

Dr. Eason then asked Ms. Jennifer Vashon with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to address the Commission related to the recent review of FWC's Bear Management Program with a focus on the hunt by a seven-member expert panel.

Commissioner Bergeron commended the counties who passed ordinances to address the waste management aspect. He noted that waste management is the most effective way to reduce human bear conflicts.

Ms. Vashon addressed the Commission representing the expert panel of scientists who reviewed the FWC Bear Management Program and noted that panel members would concur with the staff recommendation, option 2, to be presented.

Ms. Diane Eggeman, Director of the Division of Hunting and Game Management, presented information and options for the Commission to consider related to bear hunting.

LUNCH

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Bergeron asked for clarification about the percentage of conflicts dealing with garbage. He agreed that hunting is a valuable management tool. He asked if the data collection included the demographic review in the Bear Management Units (BMUs) compared to the habitat and available food. He complimented the Bear Management Team for bringing together all of the scientific data for this species.

Dr. Eason noted that when communities employ the Bear Wise messaging and ordinances, there is a 75-95% reduction in human-bear conflicts in those areas. He advised that the bear program has demographic data for the four BMUs proposed for hunting. Some of the demographic data is older and for some BMUs incomplete, but staff are implementing studies to start gathering this data.

Commissioner Roberts complimented staff for a well-prepared and informative presentation covering data collection efforts, review of the bear management plan, expert panel review of the current bear management program, and extensive public outreach. He thanked staff for their professionalism and providing all the information needed to make a good decision, and noted he fully supports option 2, the staff recommendation regarding a hunt.

Chairman Yablonski provided a reminder about civility and respect during public comment.

Vice Chairman Priddy reminded everyone of the process for public speaking and gave additional guidance on the public comment period.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Ms. Sheri Hutchins addressed the Commission in support of bear hunting based on her experience in the local community seeing fewer nuisance bears since the 2015 hunt.

Mr. Karl Ambrose addressed the Commission with thanks to the Law Enforcement staff for making the environment at the meeting safe and Ms. Sarah Barrett with the Bear Management Program for being so kind. He requested that the Commission work more with the United States Forest Service (USFS) to review the longleaf pine restoration projects being conducted in Osceola and Ocala National Forests to determine if those projects are having an effect on food source, causing bear displacement and therefore increasing conflicts.

Ms. Lisa Grossman addressed the Commission in opposition to the bear hunt. She noted the first step in amending a FWC bear hunt is to reform the current Commission.

Ms. Megan Sorbo addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2016 bear hunt proposed by staff. She recommended several options to help address human-bear conflicts without approving a hunt for this species.

Mr. Joe Guthrie addressed the Commission in support of Dr. Clark providing the most up-to-date and highly scientific data for black bears in Florida. He noted opposition to setting harvest objectives until additional demographic data can be gathered and recorded for each BMU.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked Mr. Guthrie for taking the time to comment on this topic.

Mr. Fred Bohler addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2016 black bear hunt in the interest of gathering more data. He also emphasized repeat offenders of feeding bears and waste management issues being the biggest problem in human bear conflict.

Mr. Dan Stetson addressed the Commission in opposition to the 2016 black bear hunt in Florida.

Mr. Bill George addressed the Commission in support of the 2015 black bear hunt in Florida. He noted that reaching the quota happened quicker than anticipated in 2015. He added concern for adjusting the hunting areas and suggested keeping them as the BMU area as a whole. His other concern was the first come first served proposal.

Mr. Newton Cook, Executive Director of United Waterfowlers of Florida, member of the Board of Directors of Future Hunting in Florida, member of several Technical Assistance Groups for FWC, and Chair of the SFWMD Recreation Working Group, addressed the Commission. He noted support for a bear hunt in 2016 based on the data presented and the success of the 2015 hunt.

Mr. Chuck Echinique addressed the Commission with a petition signed by an overwhelming number of hunters and fishermen in support of science based management by FWC and the continued authority of FWC to act on behalf of the resource and the residents of Florida.

Mr. Brayden Harris with Seasons of Hope Outdoors addressed the Commission with thanks for being allowed to hunt with hounds.

Ms. Katrina Shadix addressed the Commission in opposition to the black bear hunt in Florida. She added that several of her friends and family members will not be renewing their hunting licenses which will remove funding from FWC's budget.

Mr. RJ Hill addressed the Commission with thanks for allowing the heritage of hunting to be passed down for generations in Florida.

Mr. Matt Spencer addressed the Commission with thanks to staff for providing data in the presentation. He commented that the hunters of the State see it as a responsibility as stewards of wildlife to support conservation and have supported the recovery of many species which have rebounded, and that it is their responsibility to help manage populations.

Ms. Shannon Geis addressed the Commission in opposition to a black bear hunt in Florida, and in favor of non-lethal methods to reduce human-bear conflict.

Mr. Luke Spencer addressed the Commission with thanks for conservation successes by the FWC. He supports a hunt for black bear in Florida.

Mr. Gary Hopkins with Southeastern Dog Hunters Association addressed the Commission in support of Option one presented by staff.

Ms. Sara Weston addressed the Commission with thanks for the opportunity to hunt and support of the staff proposal.

Mr. Scott Williamson addressed the Commission in opposition of any future hunts for this species. He suggested instead that the counties work harder to address waste management and conflicts that occur because of those attractants.

Ms. Alexis Foxx addressed the Commission in opposition to a hunt for black bears in Florida.

Ms. Susan Conyac addressed the Commission in opposition to a 2016 black bear hunt in Florida.

Dr. James Kennamer with the National Wild Turkey Federation addressed the Commission in support of staff proposal.

Ms. Bonnie Basham addressed the Commission in support of staff proposal.

Mr. John Rosier, President of Dade County Fulltrack Conservation Club, Everglades Coordinating Council (ECC) and Broward County Airboat Club, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Ms. Elizabeth Neville, on behalf of Animal Welfare Group (AWI), addressed the Commission in opposition to a future hunt by selecting option four.

Ms. Kate MacFall, with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), addressed the Commission in opposition to a future hunt.

Mr. Whitey Markle, representing the Florida Sierra Club, addressed the Commission in opposition to a future hunt.

Ms. Leslie Carlile addressed the Commission in opposition to the hunt.

Mr. Marvin Mayer addressed the Commission in opposition to a 2016 hunt. He noted concern for the economic impacts of approving a hunt after several tragic incidents happened in the State of Florida. He suggested option three of delaying a hunt.

Ms. Patti Hughes addressed the Commission with concern about the validity of the data provided by staff.

Mr. Henry Hamlin addressed the Commission in support of a hunt in 2016 based on the data.

Ms. Laurie Hood, Founder of Alaqua Animal Refuge and Director of the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, addressed the Commission in opposition to a bear hunt.

Mr. Rusty McKeithen with Florida Dog Hunters and Sportsmen Association addressed the Commission. He noted concern for bears taking other imperiled species such as gopher tortoises and supported a hunt in 2016.

Ms. Jana Wiggins addressed the Commission in opposition to a bear hunt.

Ms. Marcela Zurita addressed the Commission in opposition to the hunt.

Ms. Maria Bolton-Joubert addressed the Commission in opposition to a hunt.

Mr. Joe Douglas addressed the Commission in opposition of another hunt as it did not help reduce the nuisance bears getting into trash and pet food.

Ms. Melissa Forberg addressed the Commission with concern about the trophy hunts.

Mr. Steve Gafford addressed the Commission in opposition to killing bears due to a human problem of not securing trash or bird feeders. He suggested waiting to see if the moratorium on saw palmetto berry harvest has any positive effect.

Mr. James Woodard addressed the Commission in opposition to a hunt.

Ms. Hanna Hodges addressed the Commission in support of the proposed hunt.

Ms. Jeanne Jain with Southwest Florida Animal Advocates addressed the Commission in opposition to the hunt. She suggested that deer feeding be suspended for a period of time prior to any future hunts to determine if feeders have an effect on the hunt.

Ms. Sandy Tedde addressed the Commission in opposition to future bear hunts.

Mr. Lane Stephens, Executive Director of the Allied Sportsmen's Association of Florida, member of the Board of Directors of the Future of Hunting in Florida and Lake Okeechobee Habitat Alliance, and Coordinator for the Florida Legislative Sportsman's Caucus, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Ms. Kay Haering addressed the Commission in opposition to a bear hunt.

Mr. Hugh Boyter with the Florida Chapter of The Wildlife Society addressed the Commission in support of the science behind the decision to support a limited hunt in subpopulations as long as the demographic data is available to ensure the appropriate harvest of the species without negatively affecting the population.

Mr. Andrew Adams with Imagine Our Florida addressed the Commission in opposition to a hunt.

Ms. Aymee Laurain with Imagine Our Florida, Inc., addressed the Commission with the recommendation of conducting an updated/projected habitat survey based on the controlled burns by the USFS. She recommended updating the population count and conducting a biological survey that takes all of these factors into account.

Ms. Samantha Gentrup addressed the Commission in opposition to a hunt. She asked for the actual data from the survey based on the workshops related to discussions on a potential 2016 hunt. She supported option four.

Mr. Adam Sugalski, Director of Stop the Florida Bear Hunt, addressed the Commission in opposition to the hunt.

Ms. Elizabeth Fleming with Defenders of Wildlife addressed the Commission with examples of financial efforts in support of education and outreach along with waste management measures specifically related to black bear in Florida. She noted opposition to a hunt at this time.

Ms. Amber Crooks on behalf of the Conservancy of Southwest Florida addressed the Commission with strong opposition to a 2016 black bear hunt in Florida. She noted concerns about the data and requested additional studies on habitat and food supply for this species. She requested the Commission support option four.

Ms. Maureen Meagher with Stop the Florida Bear Hunt addressed the Commission in opposition to a hunt.

Ms. Christina Scaringe with Animal Defenders International addressed the Commission in opposition to a hunt. She requested that FWC coordinate with other agencies on commenting prior to development which can benefit habitat for this species.

Ms. Susan Cerulean addressed the Commission in opposition of a hunt.

Ms. Gladys Delgadillo addressed the Commission in opposition of a hunt.

Ms. Sally Sanders with the Ethical Choices Program addressed the Commission with a request to exhaust all possible methods of bear management prior to moving forward with a hunt.

Mr. Matthew Schwartz, Director of the South Florida Wildlands Association, addressed the Commission in support of option four. He noted concerns regarding habitat loss and lack of commenting in coordination with other agencies.

Ms. Lesley Cox addressed the Commission in opposition of a hunt. She suggested that nuisance bears should be trapped and relocated to an area where they could be hunted by permit holders.

Ms. Karen Johnson addressed the Commission in support of coordinating with the counties to make sure there are more waste management ordinances in place.

Chairman Yablonski commented on the addition of the hunter ethics training because of the previous comments of Ms. Johnson.

Mr. Bobby Sullivan addressed the Commission in regards to private land habitat enhancement projects on his land. He noted the quality of wildlife was great until 2010 when the bears starting coming on his property.

Mr. Chuck O'Neal with Speak-Up Wekiva addressed the Commission on behalf of citizens who could not make it to the meeting but who oppose the proposed hunt. He noted support for option four.

Mr. Bryan Wilson addressed the Commission in support of option four and noted the perception by the public is that the Commission only wants to focus on the hunting aspect of bear management.

Ms. Carla Wilson addressed the Commission in opposition to the bear hunt.

Ms. Anita Page addressed the Commission with concern that the data collected for the population estimates was compiled prior to the 2015 hunt. She questioned whether it provided an accurate depiction of the population. She asked the Commission to project the future habitat and food source options for this species.

Mr. Manley Fuller addressed the Commission in support of option three with a request to come back in 2017 with additional supporting data to calculate bear hunting harvest objectives.

Ms. Nonie Maines, with Nonie's Ark Animal Encounters, addressed the Commission requesting FWC to postpone the bear hunt.

Ms. Fawn Avant addressed the Commission in opposition of the bear hunt.

Ms. Chole Diefenbaugh addressed the Commission requesting the bear hunt be postponed until it is determined whether or not the new bear proof trash cans work.

Ms. Rachael Curran addressed the Commission opposing the bear hunt.

Ms. Gina LaBruno, member of the Florida Sierra Club, addressed the Commission in opposition to the hunt.

Ms. Hannah Bartges with the Center for Biological Diversity addressed the Commission with a request to repeal the bear hunt rules. She also requested the Commission restore the black bears status as threatened.

Ms. Laura Bevan with HSUS Southern Region addressed the Commission with continued opposition to a black bear hunt in Florida as was voiced in the decision for a 2015 hunt.

Ms. Diane Dotson addressed the Commission with a request for reassessment of how FWC manages human-wildlife conflicts. She noted support for option four.

Ms. Jennifer Leon addressed the Commission in support of option four.

Dr. Joseph Travis addressed the Commission and provided details as to his experience in data analysis. He advocated for additional data analysis to get to a more accurate population number. He commented that additional studies and modeling could provide input as to which specific data points are necessary and which are not.

Ms. Nicole Cordano addressed the Commission regarding conversion projects on the National Forests in Florida which are driving bears out of their natural habitat.

Mr. Todd Hallman, President of the Florida Sportsman's Conservation Association, addressed the Commission in support of the science and support of a hunt.

Ms. Moshe Ramsay addressed the Commission in opposition of the bear hunt.

Mr. Lee Day addressed the Commission in support of option three.

Mr. John Fuller with the Future of Hunting in Florida, Inc. addressed the Commission with support from the Board of Directors to support the staff recommendation.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski asked the Commissioners if they had any questions for staff on the proposal presented.

Commissioner Bergeron noted that addressing the safety issue deals mostly with managing garbage and other human attractants. He thanked staff for their continuous work with the counties and municipalities regarding waste management efforts to reduce human-bear conflicts. He asked if the higher level of demographic data would show any details related to habitat and biological sustainability. He noted that the public may understand better if FWC can study and provide information based on habitat capacity and that they may be more accepting of that information to support a hunt.

Dr. Eason responded that taking care of human attractants is the core thing that can reduce the human-bear conflicts, and that hunting and other measures would be complimentary to waste management efforts. He noted that demographic data would indirectly provide information as to habitat sustainability and food sources, but would not directly answer the question as to what the habitat can sustain as far as population numbers.

Executive Director Wiley noted that this type of study could be completed, but that a lot of extrapolation would need to be completed for this type of study.

Chairman Yablonski asked what staff involvement has been relative to working with local governments to adopt bear wise ordinances.

Dr. Eason noted that prior to the resolution that the Commission passed last year, staff worked proactively with local communities, cities, and counties to establish bear wise practices and ordinances. He credited those counties with the recent ordinances passed for their efforts, with FWC staff providing technical assistance and support.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked Ms. Eggeman about the hunting of other species in Florida based on carrying capacity. She then asked Dr. Eason if he could characterize the quality and quantity of food and habitat available that led to the rate of recovery seen during the period of time from when there was no hunting to bears being removed from the State Endangered and Threatened Species List.

Ms. Eggeman responded to the question about hunting other species related to carrying capacity and noted that it is a policy decision whether or not to wait until a species reaches carrying capacity before hunting.

Dr. Eason responded that historically bears were limited by severe habitat alteration and unregulated overharvest. As a result, bears were relegated or isolated to the small areas in Florida depicted on the 1970s map. He noted that even now there are habitats where bears could be sustained where they are not currently found. He commented that the State is doing a great job at conserving large blocks of land while human populations are growing.

Vice Chairman Priddy commented that her understanding was that once the final population numbers are provided by Dr. Clark that there is enough time to provide feedback on the potential harvest objectives and

number of permits to be issued. She also asked about the actual costs of the DNA hair samples submitted by FWC.

Ms. Eggeman provided details about how harvest objectives and the number of permits to be issued would be determined using the final population estimates provided by Dr. Clark. She provided additional information regarding carrying capacity, noting that in harvest theory maximum sustain yield occurs at half of carrying capacity. That is the point at which reproductive rates are the highest and population has the most resiliency to recover.

Dr. Eason noted that the cost of FWC work related to the DNA hair samples was approximately \$45.00 per sample.

Chairman Yablonski noted that all options are up for consideration and will be discussed as needed until a final motion is passed.

Commissioner Roberts commented that our staff, who are highly regarded as professional and knowledgeable about bear management, have compiled the science needed to support any decision made. He made a motion to approve the staff recommendation, option 2, seconded by Commissioner Priddy.

Commissioner Rivard thanked the speakers for their civility during public comment. He provided a big picture overview of this topic. He highlighted that the recovery of this species is an absolute success and noted optimism related to bear population increases along with human population increases. It took predecessors making difficult decisions to get this species to the point of this discussion today. Prior to 2015, it had been 21 years since a bear hunt. Therefore, the public has had little, if any, experience with information about hunting this species. He commented that he considers hunting a viable option for bear management and an important part of the bear management plan. He noted that there may not be any urgency to have a hunt this year. He supported having a sense of urgency on all other aspects for managing human-bear conflicts and using resources gained from last year's hunt to support those efforts. He commented that he does not support the motion to move forward with a hunt for 2016, but would like staff to bring back a recommendation for 2017.

Commissioner Spottswood commented that the Commission will not satisfy everyone when making a decision but should strive to remove any doubt from this process to make it as credible and transparent as possible, leaving no stone unturned so it is obvious that the Commission did everything possible to make the best decision. He noted that he is prepared to make a decision and suggested that the Commission move forward with a vote on the motion.

Commissioner Hanas thanked everyone for their comments. He noted concern for pushing back on the staff recommendation due to the fact that it could further delay decisions which have an impact on the conservation of this iconic species. He noted support for staff recommendation.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked the stakeholders for their comments. He commented that his decision on this is no discredit to staff and commended staff on their efforts related to this item. As a hunter, he takes a little more interest in taking additional time to review every available detail before making a decision to move forward with hunting an iconic species like the black bear. He noted that option four would be irresponsible and support for option three to postpone a hunt until 2017.

Vice Chairman Priddy commented about the letter from Dr. Aresco, Dr. Travis and, Joe Guthrie. She noted that FWC staff and the panel of experts are the actual bear experts. She added concern that the science is not being used to make this decision when it clearly shows that the species can be sustained with a hunt. The Bear Management program will continue to conduct needed research on bear populations and work on all of the other measures to manage the species throughout Florida, with or without a hunt. She voiced support for the staff recommendation.

Chairman Yablonski noted that FWC is making decisions on hunting much like other wildlife agencies throughout the country and Canada. He noted that the stakeholder comments about the Commissioners having special interests or potential for financial gain from this decision were completely unfounded. He also noted the concern that many expressed that FWC is taking multiple approaches at once to address human-bear conflicts so it is difficult to determine the effect of any one specific effort, but then stated that is okay since the primary drive behind these efforts is solving the conflict. He supported waiting until 2017 before considering another hunt.

Commissioner Spottswood noted that the agency should not find itself in this same position next year to come up with a reason to delay again. He then stated his goal is to get all of the details fleshed out for a potential hunt in 2017.

Commission Action

A motion by Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Vice Chairman Priddy, to approve staff recommendation of option two moving forward with a bear hunt in 2016 was not adopted.

A motion by Commissioner Bergeron, seconded by Commissioner Rivard, to adopt option three which would postpone a bear hunt until 2017 passed. The motion was supported by Commissioner Spottswood and Chairman Yablonski and opposed by Commissioner Roberts, Vice Chairman Priddy, and Commissioner Hanas.

Public Comment on Items not on the Agenda

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

Mr. David Youngblood addressed the Commission with concerns regarding illegal deer depredation permits.

Mr. Bill George addressed the Commission regarding collection of alligator eggs on public lands. He noted concern that the fee to collect these eggs is currently \$5.00 per egg and that the collector can then sell these eggs at an inflated price of \$50.00, or whatever the current market value is, to persons out of state.

Mr. Chuck Echenique commented on the positive changes in the Recreational Licensing Issuance Services (RLIS) system related to the issuance of statewide alligator harvest permits. He expressed concern that the Alligator Trapping License is considered a commercial license, but that the statewide alligator hunts are structured more like recreational hunts. He requested staff review the option to allow for commercial take opportunities during these types of hunts.

Mr. Lane Stephens addressed the Commission regarding red snapper management. He noted support for HR 3094 if Congress moves forward with Legislation.

Mr. John Rosier addressed the Commission with thanks for the changes to the RLIS system for the issuance of statewide alligator harvest permits.

Ms. Karen Johnson thanked the Commission for their decision related to bears.

Ms. Diane Dotson addressed the Commission regarding captive wildlife.

Ms. Jennifer Leon addressed the Commission with thanks to staff for meeting to discuss captive wildlife issues.

Recess Wednesday's Portion of the Meeting

Chairman Yablonski adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m. to reconvene at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, June 23, 2016.

Thursday, June 23, Reconvene

Chairman Yablonski reconvened the meeting at 8:40 a.m.

Awards and Recognition

Chairman Yablonski asked Colonel Curtis Brown to present the Boating Officer of the Year Award. Colonel Brown invited Major Richard Moore to present this award to Officer Jarrod Molnar.

Chairman Yablonski then invited Captain Pat Kelly with the Florida Guides Association (FGA) to present the next two awards.

Captain Kelly presented the FGA Trained-Eyes Coast Watcher Officer of the Year Award to Officer Brian Ferguson. He then presented the FGA Captain Phil Chapman Conservation Award to Michael Murphy.

Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida Update

Mr. Andy Walker, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida (Foundation), provided an update on Foundation related activities. He commented on the addition of two new Foundation board members, Mr. Douglas Cone and Dr. Tracy Baker. He stated interest in meeting with each of the Commissioners to learn how they envision the Foundation can improve support of FWC.

Chairman Yablonski introduced two officials from the area, Sheriff Mike Mock from Franklin County and Mr. Ralph Thomas, Chairman of the Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners.

2017 – 2018 Budget Development Overview

Ms. Charlotte Jerrett, Chief Financial Officer, presented details for the 2017 – 2018 Budget Development.

Commissioner Rivard requested staff look to increase funding for nuisance alligator trappers if it is available.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked that the proper allocation is appropriated to Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) for habitat restoration and improvement.

Ms. Jerrett confirmed that FWC did receive additional funds related to land management which will be distributed based on the list of priority issues previously created and approved by the Commission.

Chairman Yablonski noted concern for the lack of funding from the sale of bear hunt permits since that will not occur in 2016. He requested that the organizations who spoke in opposition of the bear hunt increase their involvement with funding to support waste management activities that will lose what potential money would have been directed to those activities if a hunt was approved for 2016.

Executive Director Wiley asked for clarification on direction on the budget related to bear management since the funding structure will change based on the decision not to have a hunt in 2016.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about the funds received from the Conserve Wildlife license plate and whether or not they were directed specifically to waste management efforts in the local municipalities which had bear wise ordinances.

Executive Director Wiley responded that there was specific language from the Legislature directing that 60 percent of the money from the sale of bear hunt permits go to communities that had bear wise ordinances. The funds from the Conserve Wildlife license plate are administered by the Foundation and not through the legislative appropriation process, but a significant portion of those funds are directed to bear management due to the high priority of the issue.

Commissioner Spottswood noted that the Conserve Wildlife license plate has other species associated with it and some of the funding will go towards those species. He noted that if the Commission wants to find a funding source directly for bear management, then that needs to be directed through this budget process.

Chairman Yablonski asked for a proposal in the budget to assist with directing funds to the waste management efforts of bear management. He also noted the opportunity for other organizations to provide funding assistance

to waste management efforts. It will take everyone pitching in to ensure this effort receives the funding necessary to be successful.

Public Comment

The following individual addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Ms. Bonnie Basham addressed the Commission on day one due to this item being postponed. She requested increases in the Boating and Waterways management Section of the budget.

Executive Director's Report

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

- Apalachicola Oyster status
- Lionfish Removal and Awareness Day

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Report

Ms. Jessica McCawley, Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries Management, presented a report on actions from the SAFMC's June 13-17, 2016, meeting in Cocoa Beach, FL.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Spottswood asked about potential closed seasons or areas for bottom fishing to protect Atlantic red snapper. He asked when that type of action would go out for public comment, which areas it would affect, and when the Council would make a decision.

Ms. McCawley responded that the Council approved this type of closure in the past; however, it was repealed before implementation. The Council is again considering closed areas and closed seasons for bottom-fishing because the red snapper stock continues to be negatively affected by dead discards. She noted that the areas most likely to be impacted are in federal waters north of St. Lucie Inlet. She indicated that any action the Council may take would not go into effect until 2018 and affirmed that there would be many opportunities for the public to provide comment.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked who prepares the Council's assessments that continue to be rejected.

Ms. McCawley noted that these assessments are part of the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process, in which representatives from the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute participate. However, NOAA Fisheries' Beaufort Laboratory and Miami Laboratory produce most of the assessments.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Gary Jennings with the American Sportfishing Association addressed the Commission with commendation for FWC staff who participated in the SAFMC meeting. He expressed frustration that red snapper continues to be closed in Atlantic federal waters and gave support for most of the adaptive management options the Council is considering for red snapper. However, he cautioned that limited entry and sector separation for all for-hire fisheries in the Atlantic are premature. He expressed appreciation for FWC's coordination of mutton snapper management with the federal councils and support for the proposed management measures.

Captain Pat Kelly addressed the Commission in opposition to how the SAFMC managed fisheries, specifically proposals for limited entry for the for-hire fleet, sector separation, closed areas, or limited access for recreational anglers.

Mr. Richard Gomez with the Key West Charter Boat Association addressed the Commission in support the proposed mutton snapper recreational bag limit and in opposition to increasing the recreational minimum size

limit. He advised that a 300-pound mutton snapper commercial trip limit is too low. He added support for limited entry for the Atlantic for-hire fleet due to overcapacity in the Keys.

Items Requiring Action – Draft Rules

Red Drum

Ms. Melissa Recks with the Division of Marine Fisheries, presented a draft rule to reduce the red drum bag limit to one throughout the northwest management zone for consideration by the Commission.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Sandy Safley, representing the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) of Florida, addressed the Commission in support of the staff recommendation.

Chairman Yablonski asked Mr. Safley to provide information on the Statewide Tournament Anglers Rodeo (STAR) tournament.

Mr. Safley provided details for the tournament.

Mr. Kenneth Porter addressed the Commission in support of an increase in the bag limit for red drum in the Big Bend.

Mr. Ted Forsgren with CCA addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Mr. Danny Riley with the Florida Big Bend Fly Fishers Organization addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation and suggested that in the future the Commission consider a management goal of at least 50% escapement.

Mr. Jim Brown addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Roberts commented that all of the stakeholders he talked to are in agreement on the reduction in bag limit.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about the timeframe for reviewing the fishery again and evaluating the possibility of a future bag limit increase.

Ms. Recks responded that, although the Commission can readdress the topic at any time it chose, the stock assessment schedule is usually three to five years between assessments and after the next stock assessment is completed that may be a time to re-evaluate the bag limit.

Chairman asked what the lag would be in the data, or what years would be included, for the next stock assessment.

Ms. Recks responded that stock assessments are usually completed about a year after the last data is collected. She also noted that the 2015 red drum stock assessment had a longer lag because of complications related to a change in how recreational data is collected, but that staff anticipates that will not be a problem for the next red drum assessment.

Commission Action

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

Mutton Snapper

Ms. McCawley presented proposed draft rules on mutton snapper for consideration by the Commission. She also summarized stakeholder feedback received at mutton snapper public workshops held during February 2016. She provided the staff recommendation to approve the proposed draft rules for additional public workshops and a final public hearing. Specifically the proposed draft rules for mutton snapper included increasing the minimum size limits to 18 inches; reducing the recreational bag limit to three fish per person within the ten fish snapper aggregate bag limit; modifying the May through June commercial trip limit in all State waters to be three fish per person per day or trip from April through June in Atlantic State waters; and establishing a 300-pound commercial trip limit from July through March in Atlantic State waters.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Justin Grubich with Pew Charitable Trusts addressed the Commission in support of the staff recommendation and requested a year round closure at a section of Western Dry Rocks known as Boca Grande Bar to protect the spawning aggregations of multiple species that spawn at the site.

Mr. Don DeMaria addressed the Commission to request protection for the mutton snapper aggregation at Western Dry Rocks as he believes that a reduced bag limit and increased size limit will not afford the stock meaningful protection. He noted that Western Dry Rocks is a multi-species spawning site and closing the area would ensure year-round fisheries.

Mr. Eric Brazer, Deputy Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance, addressed the Commission in support of the staff recommendation with regard to the commercial trip limit in federal waters.

Mr. Richard Gomez, past president of the Key West Charter Boat Association, addressed the Commission in opposition to any closure at Western Dry Rocks because they fish for many species year-round at this site.

Mr. Brett Fitzgerald, Executive Director of the Snook and Gamefish Foundation, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendations for the mutton snapper bag and size limit. He requested additional discussion at a future time on closure of the Western Dry Rocks spawning site.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Spottswood thanked the stakeholders for attending the meeting, especially those that traveled from South Florida. He noted that he has heard support for staff recommendation from many stakeholders. He commented that the staff recommendation, including the size limit increase, will accomplish the Commission's goal without imposing unnecessary restrictions on the users. He expressed agreement with people who have recommended that the commercial trip limit be greater than 300 pounds.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked how a 500-pound commercial trip limit versus a 300-pound trip limit would affect the Commission's ability to achieve their goal for mutton snapper management. She also asked staff to bring back additional information on the concept of a closure of Western Dry Rocks.

Ms. McCawley responded that a 500-pound commercial trip limit would not necessarily have a negative impact, as a reduction in commercial harvest is not necessary, yet it would prevent future expansion of the fishery. She agreed to provide the Commission with additional information about spawning and a closure at Western Dry Rocks.

Chairman Yablonski noted he does not support a closure at Western Dry Rocks.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Commissioner Rivard and carried, the Commission approved staff recommendation, including the suggestion to hold additional workshops, with the amendment of the commercial trip limit being increased to 500 pounds.

Barracuda

Ms. Recks presented a draft rule to establish a slot size limit of no less than 15 inches and no more than 36 inches, fork length, on Barracuda in South Florida for consideration by the Commission.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Justin Grubich addressed the Commission and commented that it is unfortunate that there is not a stock assessment available for this species. He noted support for staff recommendation.

Ms. Brooke Black with the Bonefish & Tarpon Trust addressed the Commission with a request for a smaller slot size range of approximately ten inches instead of the proposed range of 21 inches.

Mr. Don DeMaria addressed the Commission with concern of barracuda being introduced into the commercial fishery because of the potential for food borne illness.

Mr. Richard Gomez with the Key West Charter Boat Association addressed the Commission with a request to modify the size limit to a slot limit of 25 – 36 inches (instead of the proposed 15-36 inches). He added concerns about the negative economic impact some rules have on the charter boat captains. He noted they were willing to support the recommended one fish over the slot recommendation but would prefer an allowance of three fish over the slot per vessel.

Mr. Brett Fitzgerald with the Snook and Gamefish Foundation addressed the Commission in support of the staff recommendation. He thought the Commission was moving in the right direction and trusted they would take further action in the future if needed. He also offered assistance getting the word out on these types of fisheries.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski asked how FWC can reach out to the small minority stakeholders related to any new regulations on this species. He also noted enforcement being an educational aspect in the beginning.

Commissioner Spottswood thanked staff for covering all the bases and noted support for the staff recommendation. He asked the preference of staff about the slot limit and what the impact would be in adjusting the slot limit. He asked if there are any major health problems associated with commercial harvest.

Ms. Recks noted that the impact of adjusting the slot would depend on whether the upper or lower end was adjusted. Increasing the lower end from 15 to 25 inches may essentially eliminate the food fishery, while decreasing the upper limit may impact the trophy fishery. She noted that the proposal is a coordinated approach to dealing with several industries and the need to balance the regulatory impacts in order to accommodate everyone interested in this species. She also noted that one third of the ciguatera cases in Florida come from barracuda.

Commission Action

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

Staff Report – Bay Scallops

Mr. Gil McRae, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, and Ms. Recks, presented information related to the bay scallop population in St. Joseph Bay. Ms. Recks also presented a staff recommendation to cancel the 2016 bay scallop harvest season for Gulf County, including St. Joseph Bay.

Commissioner Roberts asked for an update on the restoration effort. He also asked if the number of scallops collected for the restoration was enough to have a positive impact on the population.

Ms. Recks noted that FWC has initiated the restoration efforts and at this point there are 650 scallops in the cages to protect them from predators and increase spawning success.

Commissioner Roberts mentioned that the options of lowering the bag limit and a shorter season along with collecting more than the current amount in the restoration activity could have a positive effect just before the season opens. The need for monitoring and enforcement of the restoration areas is important.

Chairman Yablonski thanked Commissioner Roberts for participating in the workshops.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Commissioner Jerry Barnes with the Gulf County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) addressed the Commission. He requested the future scallop seasons be shortened if the populations can be brought back to a successful population size. That would have less impact on the resource and the economy in the future.

Ms. Patricia Hardman, President of the Coastal Community Association of South Gulf County, addressed the Commission. She asked why the scallops are not being collected now for restoration efforts. She suggested setting the bag limit based on a count, instead of a volume, in order to promote harvest of large scallops. She was opposed to a season closure. She requested a shortened season for 2016 with a count limit per person or a minimum size limit.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Roberts noted the major concern at the workshops was that closing the bay this year could lead to a long-term closure. He proposed opening the season on Monday, August 22, closing on Labor Day, September 5. He also asked that collection of additional scallops for restoration along with implementation of a spatial closure around the caged scallops be completed prior to opening the season. He also suggested the Commission consider a bag limit of 40 scallops per person or 200 per vessel, whichever is less, in addition to the shortened season.

Mr. McRae noted the additional restoration efforts available to FWC.

Ms. Recks noted that staff can move forward with restoration efforts.

Chairman Yablonski asked if the two week season would minimize the derby effect. He also asked if this would shift efforts to other areas that have higher populations but maybe could not sustain a heavy harvest by a shifted effort.

Ms. Recks responded that it is difficult to predict, but that a 15-day season is not likely to have the same effect as a three day season. Effort may shift to other areas like St. Marks or Steinhatchee, but staff do not expect that to have a long-term damaging impact.

Commissioner Rivard commented with his concern about not providing enough protection for this species in this area and having some negative effects for years to come. He asked if it is a reasonable approach to help protect this species in the area to allow a rebound in the future.

Mr. McRae commented that the delay in the season and potentially the cap of 40 per person would create two safeguards in helping this population. The combination of focused high volume restoration activities and these adjustments to the season will give the scallops a chance to come back without the potential impact of a closure on the local economy.

Commissioner Rivard supported the direction of Commissioner Roberts with his proposed season dates and per person bag limit.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about any provisions for the season to occur as normal in future years.

Commissioner Roberts responded that future years need to be re-evaluated for the next few years to ensure the population recovers. He asked staff to bring forward potential statewide season and bag limit changes for review at a future meeting.

Executive Director Wiley commented that the closure of the areas for restoration be done by Executive Order.

Commission Action

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

General Counsel Report

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

Vice Chairman Priddy asked Bud to follow up on the comments by individuals on day one about dropping the lawsuit related to the bear hunt if the Commission delayed a hunt.

Mr. Vielhauer confirmed he will follow up on that.

Future Agenda Items

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

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

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

Chairman Ralph Thomas with the Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners addressed the Commission regarding a recent resolution in Wakulla County. This resolution related to FWC regulations implementing the Net Limitation Amendment, supporting efforts to eliminate hardships crippling the commercial fishing industry, calling for the FWC to suspend rule 68B-4.008(1)(d), limiting net size to two-inch mesh for restricted species endorsements licensed in Wakulla County. Chairman Thomas read the Wakulla BOCC resolution to the Commission.

Commissioner Roberts asked if there is a consensus for the size of the nets that everyone would like to use.

Chairman Thomas responded that the fishermen would have to answer that, but the idea is to allow the fishermen the flexibility to use different mesh-size nets seasonally. They wanted to use the right tool for the right job in the right season.

Mr. John Taylor, President of the Wakulla County Commercial Fishermen's Association, addressed the Commission supporting the request of Chairman Thomas and the Wakulla County BOCC. He commented that they want to protect the resource and put people back to work.

Ms. Dana Peck with the Wakulla County Commercial Fishermen's Association addressed the Commission supporting the request of Chairman Thomas and the Wakulla County BOCC. She commented that authorizing the requested variance to the mesh size will help the restaurant owners, the fish sellers, and bait sellers, and boost the local economy.

Mr. Roger Nichols with the Wakulla County Fishermen's Association addressed the Commission supporting the request of Chairman Thomas and the Wakulla County BOCC.

Mr. Bill Anderson addressed the Commission supporting the request of Chairman Thomas and the Wakulla County BOCC. He noted that the fishermen of Wakulla County should be submitting a formal request for a waiver.

Chairman William Massey of the Franklin County BOCC addressed the Commission supporting the request of Chairman Thomas and the Wakulla County BOCC. He noted that he was a shrimper for 27 years.

Commissioner Howard Kessler with the Wakulla County BOCC, addressed the Commission supporting the request voiced by Chairman Thomas. He noted this would be for three counties in order to conduct a study on the bycatch for different size meshes. He also noted that the study would be limited to commercial fishermen who already hold a Restricted Species endorsement and already fish for mullet.

Ms. Nikki Barnes addressed the Commission supporting the request of Chairman Thomas and the Wakulla County BOCC. She supported the request to bring more job opportunities to Wakulla County.

Mr. Chuck Hess addressed the Commission supporting the request of Chairman Thomas and the Wakulla County BOCC. He stated that fishermen in Wakulla are out of work and need a consistent method to bring product to market. He commented that there needs to be a special permit open only to certain people to put people back to work.

Chairman Yablonski asked the Commission if there was any additional discussion on the net topic. He provided a background on the net ban issue and the Commission's involvement in the past. His concern is that the Constitution is very specific related to gill net bans and explained the action of the Commission in the past in defining a seine net and other types of nets to ensure that these are not in conflict with the constitution.

Mr. Vielhauer provided the background from the legal actions that have taken place over the years.

Commissioner Priddy asked if the legal issues were related to the size of the mesh.

Mr. Vielhauer stated that our rule interpreting the definition of a seine was litigated. A determination was made by the court that three-inch mesh did constitute a gill net, and would be an illegal net in violation of the Constitution.

Commissioner Roberts noted that even a study, if approved to gather data on the use of three-inch mesh, could not be done commercially.

Commissioner Spottswood asked about the practical problem that the fishermen are facing with the current mesh size.

Chairman Yablonski responded that this is a Constitutional issue, and that the Constitution prohibits entangling nets, but allows cast nets and seines. He explained that using larger mesh is not building a better seine, it is building a more effective gill net.

Commissioner Rivard asked for clarification on the nets used pre-Constitutional Amendment and how viable the fishery was.

Mr. McRae noted that prior to the amendment, there were larger nets than the 500 square foot limitation with typically larger mesh.

Executive Director Wiley commented that the way the nets are fished are fundamentally different. He noted that the fishermen who use these nets are masterful at pinpointing the appropriate stock for harvesting.

Commissioner Bergeron noted his concern with the struggle on this issue. He is sympathetic to the fishermen and the issue of killing some of the smaller fish as bycatch.

Executive Director Wiley noted that staff and Commissioners both former and current have looked at this issue several times.

Vice Chairman Priddy commented on the aspect of difference between gill net and seine net.

Commissioner Bergeron asked if there was any way the Commission could change the mesh size from a conservation standpoint.

Chairman Yablonski stated that allowing for a larger mesh size would be in violation of the Constitution and that it would be challenged in court. He stated that the Commission could not amend the Constitution.

Commissioner Rivard reminded everyone that this same issue has been addressed multiple times and has been determined to be unconstitutional.

Commissioner Roberts commented that he understands the issues and thought that there would be the opportunity to do a study, however, he has learned that this would only be available for the research staff.

Mr. McRae reported on the study by FWC and he noted that there was no disagreement between researchers and the fishermen on how these nets fish. He stated that there was a study that was conducted about a decade ago that compared two-inch mesh to three-inch mesh that confirmed that two-inch mesh nets did have higher bycatch than three-inch mesh and was not as selective for marketable size mullet.

Commissioner Roberts asked for Mr. Vielhauer to explain why the Commission could not change the mesh size based on this information.

Mr. Vielhauer explained that going to a mesh size of three inches would now be allowing these nets to be used as gill nets with the intent to gill marketable sized fish, which would violate the Constitution.

Chairman Yablonski thanked the Commission for having this conversation and thanked the individuals for attending the meeting to speak on this issue.

Mr. Scott Gudes with the American Sportfishing Association addressed the Commission with a reminder about ICAST in Orlando, Florida. He also spoke about recreational fishing in Florida and its importance to the State. He added that the states, especially FWC in Florida, are better at managing fisheries than the federal agencies who are currently responsible for doing so for some fisheries. He also thinks that if Florida and the other Gulf States managed recreational red snapper, like it does some other fisheries, it would benefit all parties.

Mr. Sean Gaherty addressed the Commission regarding decline in cobia migration and population from Panama City through Pensacola. He requested that FWC review the regulations on cobia and consider increasing the size limit and possibly reduce the vessel limit to ensure the fishery can rebound from fishing effort.

Mr. Eric Brazer addressed the Commission in opposition of HR 3094, which he called an unfunded mandate, on behalf of Gulf commercial fishermen. He noted concern for the possible approval of this bill through the federal appropriations process. He requested the Commission withdraw their support for this bill.

Mr. Garrett Alberts addressed the Commission in opposition of HR 3094. He believes that the bill is bad for Florida's interests. He noted his belief that support of the bill is fiscally irresponsible and asked the Commission for motion to withdraw support for this bill.

Mr. James Zurbrick, a director for Fish for America USA, addressed the Commission with thanks for directing Ms. Martha Bademan with the Division of Marine Fisheries to support a 14-inch hogfish minimum size limit, extension of the sector separation sunset, and formation of the Recreational Advisory Panel at the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council meeting that was currently ongoing. He spoke against HR 3094 because of his belief that it is not in Florida's best interest and implementation of the bill will be expensive for the State.

Ms. Janie Thomas, Executive Director of the Shrimp Producers Association, addressed the Commission. She gave accolades to the Division of Licensing and Permitting with FWC. She thanked staff for developing an idea to bring licensing staff to the region and work with the public to provide licensing services. She invited the Commission for a tour of the Coast Guard Sector and some of the shrimp boats during the September Commission meeting in St. Augustine.

Mr. Michael Currey with Shimano American addressed the Commission with support for HR 3094 and for FWC's abilities to manage fisheries. He also noted support for the TrophyCatch program, asked that the program be expanded, and offered to assist the Commission in increasing and improving this program in any way possible. Finally, he commended the Commission for developing the hard card fishing license.

Mr. Sandy Safley addressed the Commission to recommend continued participation in the development of HR 3094 because it offers the opportunity to develop a new means of managing a fishery.

Vice Chairman Priddy, along with Chairman Yablonski, asked Executive Director Wiley to bring an update on the Graves bill at the September meeting.

Executive Director Wiley noted the importance of keeping an eye on the development of HR 3094. He stressed, however, the importance of remaining engaged in the current council process.

Commissioner Exchange

Chairman Yablonski opened the floor for Commissioner Exchange.

Commissioner Spottswood thanked staff for the hard work to prepare for the last few days of this meeting with all the topics.

Commissioner Roberts thanked FWC staff for providing the information for this meeting. The presence of law enforcement was a positive aspect of this meeting for the safety of everyone in attendance. He thanked the Franklin County School for accommodating FWC.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked all the Commissioners for getting through this tough meeting. He again thanked Chairman Yablonski for his leadership on the CWA efforts that are moving forward. He reminded the stakeholders of Franklin County that the Commission is very sympathetic to their situation regarding the net ban, unfortunately, the Commission is unable to make any changes. He thanked Ms. Diane Eggeman and Dr. Thomas Eason and looks forward to working with the new South Regional Director, Tom Reinert.

Commissioner Rivard thanked FWC staff for all of the effort to prepare the detailed information for this meeting.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked what the Commission can do to remove the alligator off of the State Endangered and Threatened Species List due to their large population and their expansion into more urbanized areas.

Chairman Yablonski thanked the Commissioners for support on CWAs. He thanked the team for all of the logistical changes that were necessary due to the topics and public interest. He commented on the new speaker

registration system and the team responsible for making that happen. He thanked the law enforcement teams for all the preparation that went into planning this meeting. He thanked the Florida Channel crew for being here and the support of staff from the Franklin County School.

Commission Administrative Matters

The next regularly scheduled Commission meeting is set for September 8 – 9, 2016 in St. Augustine, Florida, commencing at 8:30 am each day.

Adjournment

Chairman Yablonski adjourned the meeting at 2:32 p.m.

Brian Yablonski
Chairman

Nick Wiley
Executive Director

Respectfully submitted:

Lisa Zullo
Commission Assistant