

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

**From:** Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

**Date:** September 9, 2016

**Subject:** Staff Report -- Critical Wildlife Areas

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**Purpose:**

To provide the Commission with a progress report on a state-wide initiative to establish 16 new Critical Wildlife Areas (CWAs) and modify five existing CWAs, including results of public outreach efforts and a proposed process for finalizing the recommendations.

**Summary:**

CWAs are established by the Commission to protect important concentrations of wildlife from human disturbance during critical periods of their life cycle. Currently, there are 20 CWAs in Florida. At the June Commission meeting, sites in seven counties were identified as potential new CWAs. These included:

- Lanark Reef and Flagg Island in Franklin County
- Withlacoochee Caves in Citrus County
- Dot, Dash and Dit Islands in Manatee County
- Roberts Bay Rookery in Sarasota County
- three islands in Pine Island Sound and three islands in Estero Bay in Lee County
- a bird rookery in Stick Marsh and a spoil island in Indian River Lagoon, both in Brevard County and,
- the Port Orange Rookery in Volusia County.

In addition staff recommended that five existing CWAs be modified to improve conservation:

- St. George Causeway CWA in Franklin County
- Myakka River CWA in Sarasota County
- Alafia Banks CWA in Hillsborough County
- Bird Islands CWA in Duval and Nassau Counties, and
- Rookery Island CWA in Collier County.

Staff have developed specific recommendations regarding proposed boundaries for closure and closure periods for each site, have held public meetings to present the proposals, and solicited public input. Staff will present the details for each proposal and the input received thus far. Additional input opportunity will be provided prior to the November Commission meeting. The Commission has determined that new CWAs, and significant changes to existing ones, are to be established by Executive Order following final approval.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends direction to continue the state-wide initiative and the proposed process to bring a final package to the November Commission meeting for approval.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Kipp Frohlich, Carol Rizkalla, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation