



Critical Wildlife Area Proposal: Second Chance

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Critical Wildlife Areas are established by FWC to protect important congregations of one or more species of wildlife from human disturbance during critical life stages. Many species of wildlife are subject to disturbance caused by people and their vehicles or pets, and such disturbance can cause wildlife to abandon high quality habitat critical for their survival. The establishment of new CWAs requires Commission approval.

Author: Carol Rizkalla

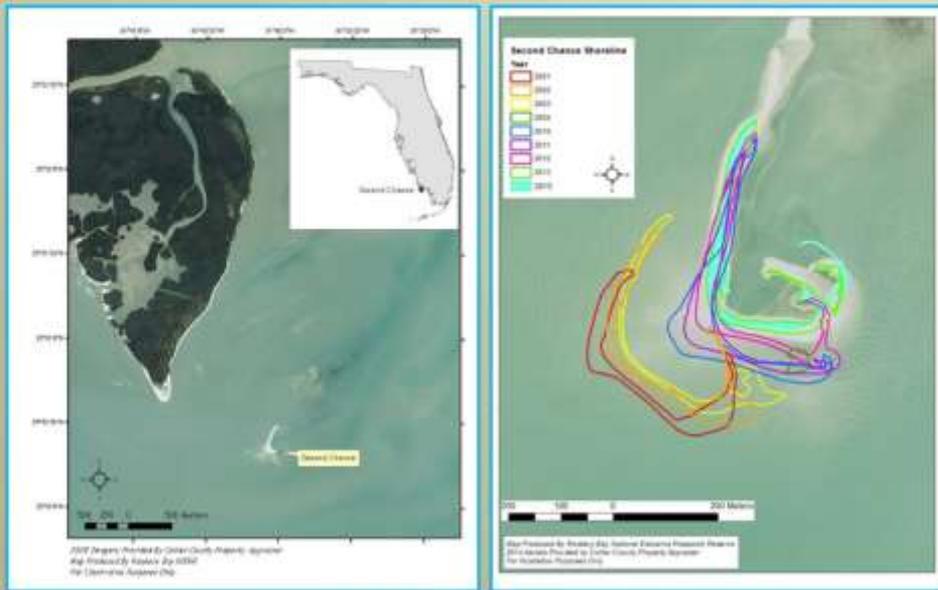
Report date: November 19, 2015

Statewide CWAs



Currently we have 19 CWAs, occurring on private, state, and federal lands. Most are seasonal, but seven (7) of these have year-round closures. Our partners range from the National Park Service to city and county governments to Florida Audubon. CWAs are the preferred approach by partners because they provide clear guidance to the public. Our partners also believe that the CWA designation of an area makes it easier to enforce site restrictions, when necessary, compared to other rules potentially applied by other agencies.

Second Chance



Second Chance is an emergent sandbar, part of a larger shoal complex, located in Collier County, Florida approximately 1.5 miles SSE of Morgan Point, Cape Romano Island and is accessible only by water. As a result of the dynamic, coastal geomorphological processes that affect this broad area, the configuration of Second Chance varies annually.

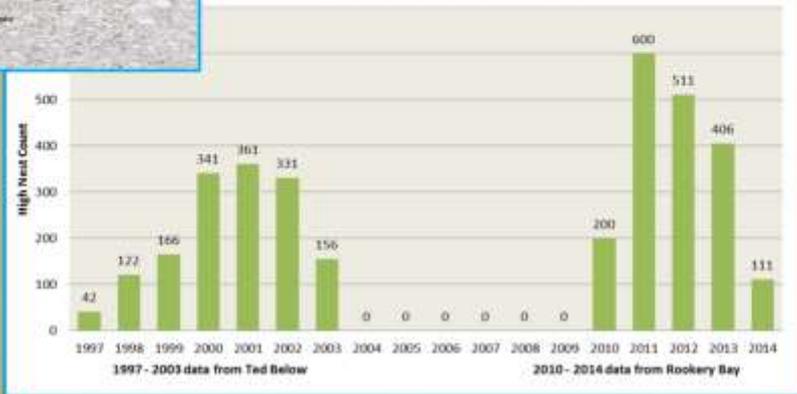
It is owned by the state of Florida and managed by Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The sandbar is periodically visible in aerial maps dating back to the 1940s. In 1997, the large sandbar re-emerged and rebuilt sufficiently to remain dry above mean high tide. While conducting a monthly coastal water bird survey that year, Ted Below, a local ecologist, documented least tern nesting on this sandbar for the first time. He named the sandbar "Second Chance" as he considered it to be a second chance for nesting least terns, that had abandoned other sites in Collier County.

Species Breeding on Second Chance



High Least Tern Nest Count - 1997 to 2014



Following strong storms, the sandbar subsided and could not support nesting from 2004-2009. By 2010 the sandbar had sufficiently re-accreted to again remain dry above the mean high tide line. Second Chance is currently 3 acres and provides breeding habitat primarily for least terns, a state threatened species, and Wilson's plovers. Black skimmers, a species of special concern, used the island from 2011-2013.

Second Chance hosted the largest least tern ground colony in the region for 4 of the last 5 years, as represented in this graph.

Sources of Disturbance



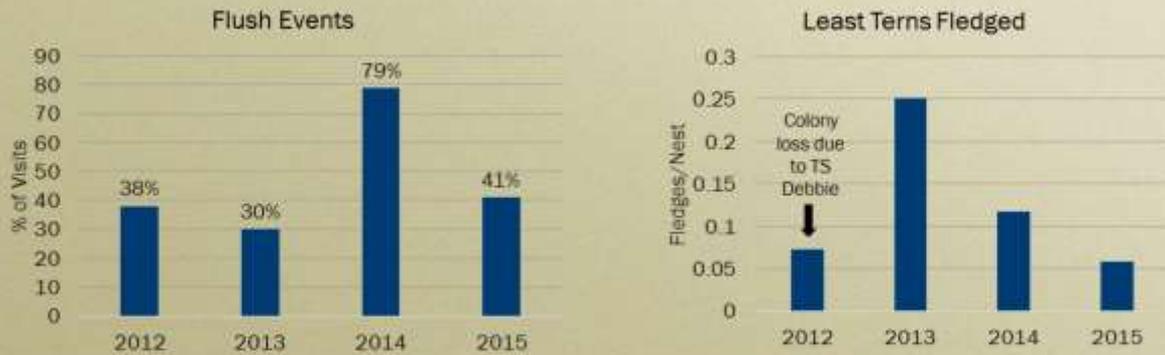
Given its location, Second Chance is a popular stop for boaters who often unknowingly create disturbance for the birds. Rookery Bay staff monitor the island on a weekly basis and often find evidence of camping and unleashed dogs. Ecotours bringing tourists for shelling have become more frequent.

Sources of Disturbance



This graph represents the percent of weekly monitoring visits during the breeding season where public use from boats and jet skis was observed at Second Chance. Note that monitoring only occurs on weekdays. If staff visited the island on weekends, these numbers would likely be much higher. The number of people observed on the island increased by almost 4-fold between 2012 and 2014. Ecotours used to be more frequent during snowbird season, rather than the summer. Due to rapid growth in the region, however, public use of Second Chance occurs year-round and is an increasing disturbance to nesting shorebirds.

Impact of Disturbance



Increased disturbance results in increased flushing of the birds. When shorebirds fly from their nests due to people or dogs, their eggs and chicks are vulnerable to predation and overheating, as reflected by the sharp decline in the number of flight-capable chicks produced.

Past Management Strategies



1998 - 2000



2001 - 2003



2010 - Present



Since its first documented use by least terns for breeding, RBNERR has attempted to partially or wholly close Second Chance to the public during the breeding season in order to protect least tern nests and chicks from human disturbance and to establish a pattern of colony protection. From 1998 to 2000 the colony was posted with educational signs connected with string and flagging. From 2001 to 2003, large “No Landing” signs were added, however the closure was not legally enforceable and failed to keep people off the sandbar. A person couldn’t be cited for entering the posted the area and disturbing the birds; a citation was only issued if a take was observed. From 2004 through 2009, Second Chance was submerged at high tide. More recently, the colony has been fenced with posts, string and flagging as are other colonies throughout the state. Rookery Bay also has a permanent educational display in the Environmental Learning Center.

Proposed Boundary



Despite the informational approach, disturbance has continued to increase over the years. In March 2015, Rookery Bay asked the FWC to designate Second Chance as a CWA. While research and species management plans have recommended a 300-foot buffer for colonial waterbird colonies, in-water postings are not feasible in this high energy environment. Instead, large closure signs would be installed around the island with the intent to prevent boat landings, similar to Caxambas Pass Critical Wildlife Area. The boundary encompasses approximately 900 acres and accounts for movement of the sandbar for at least 100 years. Any new sandbar which emerges within this boundary and becomes nesting habitat would be afforded CWA protection.



Although Second Chance is an important foraging and roosting site for migratory and wintering shorebirds and seabirds, the proposed Critical Wildlife Area would be closed only during the nesting season, March 1 – August 31. These dates encompass the nesting season for Wilson’s plover, Least tern, and Black skimmer.

Stakeholder Outreach

Public meetings - June 2015

- Unanimous support for designating the island a CWA



Two public meetings were held in June 2015 in Naples at Rookery Bay. Prior to the meetings, local interested groups such as ecotour operators and boating businesses were notified. All attendees supported protecting Second Chance.

Staff Recommendation

- Approval to establish the Second Chance Critical Wildlife Area
 - Closed from March 1 to August 31 each year
- Authorize the Executive Director to issue an Establishment Order setting the boundaries and closures pursuant to 68A-19.005, Florida Administrative Code



Staff recommends the Commission approve the establishment of Second Chance as a Critical Wildlife Area with a seasonal closure from March 1 to August 31 each year, and authorize the Executive Director to issue the appropriate establishment order.

The following slides are considered back-up material
and are not anticipated to be part of the actual
presentation



Owner Concurrence



Florida Department of Environmental Protection

History Shimmer Douglas Building
200 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3000

Rob Scott
Governor

Carla Lopez-Castano
Lt. Governor

Jonathan P. Silveira
Secretary

October 2, 2015

Dr. Carol Kirkhalla
Critical Wildlife Area Coordinator
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
8335 Northshore Boulevard
West Palm Beach, Florida 33412

Dear Dr. Kirkhalla:

Cape Romano Shoals within the Biscayne Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) is a regionally significant nesting area for rare and imperiled coastal birds, including Least Terns, Black Skuas and Wilson's Phalaropes. We understand that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation (FWC) is partnering, in coordination with the NERR, a Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) designation which would ultimately allow for the establishment of a "no-activity" buffer around the island which would be enforceable by local law enforcement. This is necessary to protect nesting birds from human disturbance which results in nesting failure. Further, to pursue a CWA, the application must include authorization from the landowner, who in this case is the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, approving permit of the CWA designation.

To that end, and on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection grants permission for FWC and Biscayne Bay NERR to pursue designation of Cape Romano Shoals as a CWA.

The Department appreciates these efforts to protect Florida's natural resources. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Mr. Keith Stone, Director of the Department's Division of State Lands, at (850) 243-2119.

Sincerely,

Gary J. Clark
Deputy Secretary, Land and Recreation

cc: Keith Lockman, Biscayne Bay NERR Manager, DEP



Year-Round Bird Use of Second Chance

