

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Nick Wiley

DATE: August 26, 2015

SUBJECT: September 2015 Executive Director's Report

In the News

FWC officer survives shooting – While patrolling St. Andrews Bay on August 7, Officer David Brady was called to investigate a disturbance involving a sailboat. He stopped the sailboat and got on board with the two male suspects and asked them to produce proof of registration and identification. One of the suspects went into the cabin to retrieve the requested paperwork; he returned carrying a handgun and opened fire. Officer Brady jumped into the water and returned fire, ultimately hitting one of the men while they repeatedly tried to run the officer over with his own patrol boat. Officer Brady suffered two gunshot wounds, but was able to survive the skirmish as a result of his tactical training, a bulletproof vest, and nearby help. Both suspects were apprehended later that evening and are currently under investigation.

Accomplishments/Awards

Florida Land Steward Partnership receives USDA Two-Chief award -

Joe Prenger was one of six people honored when the Florida Land Steward Partnership received the USDA Joint Forestry Team's Two-Chief Award. The Florida Land Steward Partnership was created in 2012 to better coordinate outreach and land management planning efforts for Florida's private landowners. It became a first-of-its-kind, one-stop center enhancing natural resource management capabilities for Florida's private landowners. Other agencies in this partnership include the University of Florida (UF) School of Forest Resources and Conservation and Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, the Florida Forest Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service Florida State Office.

Upland Ecosystem Restoration Project (UERP) Steering Committee recognized

- The UERP Steering Committee recently received the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative National Fire Bird Conservation Award in recognition of their support of habitat based landscape-scale restoration of northern bobwhite quail on public land throughout Florida. UERP is a cooperative partnership between the Florida Forest Service, Florida Park Service, FWC, U.S. Forest Service, and the Tall Timbers Research Station to improve populations of bobwhites and other declining species on public lands throughout Florida. The partners demonstrated a commitment to provide direction, allocate resources, and overcome logistical hurdles to implement habitat based restoration of bobwhite populations.

FWC biologist recognized as invasive species partner of the year - FWC nonnative wildlife biologist Jennifer Ketterlin Eckles was recognized as the partner of the year at the 12th annual Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ECISMA) Summit in Broward County. ECISMA is a partnership of federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, individuals, and interested groups that manage invasive species in the Everglades.

FWC receives national communications awards - The Association for Conservation Information announced their 2014 award winners at their annual meeting in Arizona in July. FWC staff submitted samples of work from 2014, and the agency received seven awards during the conference. The awards included first place in the regulations publication category for the Florida Saltwater Recreational Fishing Regulations and Quick Chart, and in the news release category for the "Gone Coastal" column. Second place awards were given in the communications campaign category for the "Be the Predator/Report Florida Lionfish Campaign," in the website category for TrophyCatchFlorida.com, and in the poster category for "Trophy Catch in 3 Easy Steps." Third place awards were given in the categories of online community engagement and photography for the "12 Days of Conservation" Facebook series and the "Going Home" panther release photo, respectively.

M.C. Davis honored with National Private Lands Fish and Wildlife Stewardship Award - This award acknowledges an individual- or family-run farm, ranch or forest operation that has incorporated proactive conservation and environmental protection measures. Mr. Davis more than epitomizes the incredible vision and difference that a single committed private landowner can make. He turned his Nokuse Plantation - 53,000 acres, 100 miles east of Pensacola and the largest block of privately owned conservation land east of the Mississippi - into an example of outstanding wildlife and habitat conservation. Aside from being a wetland mitigation bank, gopher tortoise recipient site, and one of the largest longleaf pine and ground cover restoration projects in the nation, Nokuse is home to the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center – an environmental education facility named after an eminent Southern-born biologist and dedicated to inspiring students, teachers and environmental professionals. Sadly, Mr. Davis recently passed away. He leaves behind an incredible lasting legacy of passion and commitment to the restoration of northwest Florida's historic biodiversity.

Events

International convention of allied sportfishing trades (ICAST) - FWC participated at the American Sportfishing Association's (ASA) 58th ICAST show in Orlando this past July. Almost 13,000 representatives of the global sportfishing community, from exhibitors to buyers to outdoor media, convened for the world's largest sportfishing trade show. FWC staff manned a new exhibit and conducted a media event to highlight how great resources and responsible management, funded by license sales and Sport Fish Restoration funds, make Florida the fishing and boating capital of the world. Staff also attended various symposiums and worked to develop partnerships that will ultimately expand the positive economic impacts of recreational fishing and boating in Florida while creating more jobs. Governor Rick

Scott, accompanied by Chairman Yablonski, met with several Florida-based fishing companies who are active partners with FWC. Executive Director Jesse Panuccio from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity also visited ICAST to gain perspective on how important recreational fishing and boating are to Florida's economy.

Partnerships

Wildlife Best Management Practices enrollment update - FWC, in cooperation with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS), developed the wildlife best management practices (BMPs) for forestry and agriculture activities. The BMPs provide a voluntary alternative to permitting requirements for state designated imperiled species. The forestry BMPs went into effect in October 2014, and now the agriculture BMPs are in effect as of June 2015. To date, Florida private landowners have enrolled over 1.5 million acres of forest and agricultural lands into this program.

Orange Creek Basin Working Group - On July 14, guided by Normandeau and Associates, the Orange Creek Basin Working Group held the first of four public workshops to develop the Orange Lake Habitat Management Plan. Orange Lake, the largest lake in FWC's north central region, is a very dynamic 12,000-acre lake in Alachua County with a strong connection to the aquifer through several sinkholes. The sinkholes combined with sparse rainfall generate wide water-level fluctuations that create varying habitat management challenges. Stakeholders including other state and local agencies at the meeting indicated their willingness to cooperate with FWC through this process. The Orange Creek Basin Working Group will work directly with all of the stakeholders to develop a plan that will guide FWC management to ensure the quality of Orange Lake's fish, wildlife, and habitat while maintaining public access to the lake for years to come.

"Pitch It" campaign - Florida is leading the nation by working with the ASA's "Pitch It" campaign. This program encourages fishermen across the country to dispose of their soft plastic lures properly as concerns about these lures accumulating in public waters are increasing. Working with B.A.S.S. Florida Conservation Director, Eamon Bolton, FWC installed and is evaluating ReBaits recycling containers at several locations. ASA posted these locations on their Keep America Fishing website.

Updates

Derelict Vessel Workshops - In response to Legislative requests and strong interest among several local government stakeholders, FWC engaged the boating community, local governments, and the public across the State to identify potential solutions regarding the issue of derelict vessels on Florida waterways. A total of six public meetings were held around the State in an effort to identify, gather, and prioritize input on several potential options for consideration during the 2016 Legislative Session.

Biscayne National Park – Biscayne National Park (BNP) selected a final option for its General Management Plan that will guide policies related to visitor use and activities in the park. The final plan includes a Marine Reserve Zone that prohibits fishing altogether within that zone, despite FWC’s objection to this closure. Regarding the closure proposed by BNP, a Congressional field hearing that included the House Natural Resource Committee and the Small Business Committee was held on August 3 in Homestead. FWC was invited to testify at this hearing titled, “Restricted Access at Biscayne National Park and Implications for Fishermen, Small Business, and the Local Economy and Environment”. This hearing included significant discussions between the legislative panel including the Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee (Rob Bishop of Utah), Rep. Don Beyer (of Virginia), and the Florida Members of Congress (Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Carlos Curbelo, Mario Diaz-Balart, and David Jolly); and the witnesses. The witnesses included FWC’s Division of Marine Fisheries Management Director Jessica McCawley, BNP Superintendent Brian Carlstrom, fishermen, business owners, and scientists.

Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen introduced a bill in the House (HR 3310 – Preserving Access to Public Waters Act) that currently has 18 Florida co-sponsors and would essentially require the National Park Service and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to seek approval from the relevant state fish and wildlife agency before restricting commercial and recreational fishermen’s access to waters in their state. FWC is supportive of this bill and is awaiting any further developments relative to the BNP General Management Plan following the hearing.

Marine Fisheries Management Workshops – FWC hosted 19 workshops across the state during the month of July to develop a better understanding of the public’s views on marine fisheries management. At the workshops staff presented on current statewide and regional fisheries management issues and asked the public to identify where they believe FWC should focus its efforts related to marine fisheries management in the coming years. Staff will present a comprehensive review of this effort at the November Commission meeting.

Apalachicola Oyster Status - Commercial oyster harvest from the summer reefs was not as high as the previous two summers. FWRI started oyster sampling to determine the status of the winter oyster reefs which are scheduled to open September 1, 2015. Winter harvest limits will be set based on the outcomes of this sampling, as well as discussions with the industry and community leaders. FWC, DACS, and UF, with funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund, have initiated a five-year oyster restoration research project to inform the design and management of future oyster reef restoration projects in the Apalachicola Bay System. A small area of East Hole oyster reef that received shell placed by oyster fishermen in 2013-14 is now producing legal-sized oysters. Staff continue to provide expertise related to the lawsuit Florida filed against Georgia pertaining to harm to Florida’s resources.

Emerging Issues

Our Florida Reefs – FWC representatives to the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative (SEFCRI), continue to participate in the *Our Florida Reefs* (OFR) community planning process coordinated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The goal of OFR is to develop management recommendations that balance the use and protection of corals reefs and associated reef resources from Martin County to the northern border of BNP in Miami-Dade County. DEP plans to release the working group's draft recommendations for public comment in February, with final recommendations to follow in July 2016. The final list of recommendations is intended to reduce impacts from a variety of sources of reef decline and staff expect many of these recommendations to fall under FWC authority. Anticipated recommendations include requests to implement multiple areas of restricted use, potentially including no-fishing marine reserves. Staff have been working to ensure other participants understand that FWC considers no-fishing zones a management measure of last resort.

Employee Spotlight

South Region Partnership Coordinator – The Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network is excited to welcome Carla Carmona as the South Region Partnership Coordinator. Carla works out of FWC's North Miami LE Field Office and is tasked with expanding participation in conservation among Florida's diverse audiences. Carla graduated from the University of Miami with a bachelor's degree in biology and marine science. She worked for Miami-Dade Parks and Recreation's Eco-Adventures as an interpretive naturalist and taught at Doral Academy as a marine science and biology teacher. Carla's Hispanic heritage and knowledge of educational programming provides her a unique perspective on how diverse groups view and interact with fish and wildlife resources. She is passionate about conservation and looks forward to sharing FWC's youth programs with her fellow South Floridians.