Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Annual Report for Youth Hunting and Fishing Programs FY 2018-19

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Executive Summary

Combination Fish-and-Wildlife Recreation Programs

Youth Programs Associated with Hunting

Conclusion

Executive Summary

Section 379.352(13) of the Florida Statutes (F.S.), authorizes the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (Commission), tax collectors, and subagents to request and collect donations when selling recreational fishing and hunting licenses or permits under section 379.354 The law specifies that all such donations shall be deposited into the State Game Trust Fund to be used solely for enhancing youth hunting, youth freshwater and saltwater fishing programs. The law further requires the Commission to provide an annual report on the status of these programs by January 1 of each year to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. This document is submitted to fulfill the reporting requirement for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018-19 and is the eleventh annual report.

Beginning July 1, 2007, the Commission implemented a process to request and collect donations for youth hunting and fishing programs in conjunction with license and permit sales. Hunting and fishing licenses and permits are sold through the Commission's Recreational License Issuance Services system. This system is used by all license vendors and includes direct sales from tax collectors' offices or subagent facilities (e.g., sporting goods stores, bait-and-tackle shops, etc.), telephone sales, and Internet sales. During the license/permit sales process, the vendor or telephone operator is prompted to request a donation before completing the sale. In the case of Internet sales, the customer is asked by the system to make a donation before completing the purchase. The specific request is, "*Please make a donation for youth programs, because the future of fishing and hunting depends on our youth*." After the customer reviews this message while purchasing a license or permit, he or she is offered three options including making a $2, $5, $25, $50 or $100 donation, a donation of any amount, or no donation.

During FY 2018-19, donations totaling $356,527.24 were collected and deposited in the State Game Trust Fund. Five-dollar donations totaled $128,720.00 and the remaining $227,807.24 was collected in various amounts. More than 150,750 separate donations were documented. The Commission received specific spending authority for $250,000 of these funds, which were used to support and expand the youth shooting sports and youth outreach programs focused on freshwater and saltwater fishing. These programs are described in detail in this report.

The Commission anticipates recurring donations will eventually reach $400,000 or more as marketing efforts gain momentum and the public sees direct benefits from these donations.

Section 379.354(8), F.S. further helps ensure the cultural heritage of hunting and sport fishing will be passed on to future generations by designating that up to 10% of fees received from specified fishing, hunting, and recreational activity permits shall be used to promote hunting and sport fishing, with an emphasis on youth participation. This funding further enhances the Commission's efforts toward youth programs.

National and international studies recognize that engagement in active, nature-based recreation leads to happier, healthier, and smarter lifestyles. Increased participation further leads to greater resource stewardship and economic benefits including job creation. Recreational hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing is big business in Florida, generating more than 188,234 jobs and nearly $16.2 billion in economic contribution to Florida each year.

During FY 2018-19, the Commission continued multiple efforts to enhance youth fishing and hunting programs. These include coordinating efforts with other government, non-government, university, private, and commercial groups who have similar interests in achieving public benefits by providing youth with opportunities to learn safe and sustainable ways to enjoy lifetime outdoor recreational traditions. Using this partnership approach, donation funding provides valuable leverage for seeking matching funds to increase support for youth programs. Moreover, the Commission uses volunteers to increase the number and impact of youth programs beyond what can be accomplished with existing staff.

Research has shown that it is important to introduce youth to the fun and challenge of nature-based, recreational activities such as hunting and fishing. It is also important to support youth through mentoring and community-based opportunities that reinforce their learning and encourage stewardship and conservation of natural resources. This is the motivation behind the Commission's commitment to the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network initiative.

The Commission delivers numerous successful youth programs, which are enhanced through donations authorized under s. 379.352(13), F.S. The following list provides an overview of all current FWC youth conservation education programs:

Combination Fish-and-Wildlife Recreation Programs

Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network (FYCCN) - (www.fyccn.org): The Commission is working with the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Inc. to establish regional youth conservation centers throughout the state, modeled after the Beau Turner Youth Conservation Center and Joe Budd Youth Conservation Center (both located near Tallahassee). These centers provide youth and their families opportunities to participate in outdoor activities and share experiences that strengthen connections with and support for fish and wildlife conservation.

Youth conservation centers provide facilities and settings for young people and families to: develop skills for hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing (youth hunts, fishing ponds, wildlife viewing trails, etc.); experience shooting sports (archery, rifle, and shotgun ranges); provide boating instruction and opportunities (kayak, canoe, jon boats, sailboats, etc.); and learn about fish and wildlife management and conservation (hands-on field programs).

During FY 2009-10, a request for partnerships resulted in more than 50 private and public entities becoming a part of FYCCN. As of June 2019, over 350 partner sites have been established across Florida, close enough to population centers to be convenient for families, while at the same time providing for accessibility by families from small town and rural areas. Approximately 200,000 youth participated in FYCCN programs and events during FY 2018-19.

To the degree that these combination programs specifically support youth hunting and fishing activities, they are considered for funding by donations gathered under s. 379.352(13), F.S. These initiatives maximize the Commission's ability to reach youth throughout the state and to garner matching funds from partners.

Youth Programs Associated with Hunting

Florida's Hunter Safety Course – (www.myfwc.com/hunting/safety-education/courses): The Commission's hunter safety course is dedicated to continuing the heritage of hunting by developing safe, responsible, and knowledgeable hunters. Throughout Florida, hundreds of dedicated volunteer instructors teach the course. The course's target is students, ages 12 to 16; although, with some exceptions, anyone wishing to hunt in Florida, who was born after June 1, 1975, is required to take the course. The traditional course consists of 12 hours of knowledge-based instruction, a test, and a three-hour field day where students demonstrate the skills they learned. In an effort to

adapt the course to today's busy lifestyles, the Commission now offers a distance-learning option where students complete a majority of the knowledge-based portion of the course on the internet and still attend a skills day. During FY 2018-19, the Commission's volunteer instructors hosted 523 classes, teaching 13,426 students to be safe, knowledgeable and responsible hunters.

Youth Hunter Education Challenge- (www.nrahq.org/hunting/yhec): The Youth Hunter Education Challenge, a national program, is recognized as the most comprehensive youth hunting program in North America. This program serves as a "graduate" course in outdoor skills and safety training for young hunters and is open to those hunters, ages 12 to 18, who have successfully completed the Florida Hunter Safety Course. Events are conducted under simulated hunting conditions to provide the best practical environment for reinforcing and testing a young hunter's skills. During FY 2018-19, multiple training events were held where teams throughout the state could test their knowledge and skills. A state tournament was held at the Ocala Conservation Center where 51 youth from around the state competed in multiple events.

Youth Hunting Program of Florida – (www.myfwc.com/YHPF): The Youth Hunting Program of Florida encourages outdoor activities through hunting trips overseen by a corps of trained hunt masters and other volunteers in cooperation with private landowners who host these weekend-long events. HuntMasters are individuals who volunteer their time and energy to provide children and their parent or guardian with a safe, educational, mentored, and fun hunting experience. Many sportsmen's groups, landowner organizations, and state and federal agencies helped develop the model for the Youth Hunting Program. During the FY 2018-19 hunting season, 423 youth and parents participated in 75 hunts sponsored by this program.

National Archery in the Schools Program – (www.nasparchery.com): The National Archery in the Schools Program is a joint venture between state departments of education and wildlife. This program promotes student education and participation in the shooting sports. The focus is to provide Olympic-style target archery training in physical education classes in grades 6 through 12. As of FY 2018-19, training for this two-week, in-school curriculum has been provided to 805 Florida schools. NASP programs in these schools have the potential to reach approximately 345,000 youth.

Outdoor Adventure Camp at the Ocala Conservation Center – (www.ocalaadventurecamp.com): The Commission's Outdoor Adventure Camp, at the Ocala Conservation Center and Youth Camp, occupies a 57-acre peninsula, rich in history and wildlife on Lake Eaton in the Ocala National Forest. Each summer, the Commission offers six, one-week-long camp sessions, full of activities to develop outdoor skills,

including hunting and fishing, for youth ages 9 to 14. An experienced camp staff team with knowledgeable Commission employees and volunteers provide educational, fun-filled learning experiences. The camp also instills in the campers an awareness of firearm safety and wildlife stewardship. Approximately 397 campers attended these sessions in FY 2018-19 and learned the necessary skills and knowledge to become better sportsmen and sportswomen.

Youth Programs Associated with Fishing

Cooperator Administered Freshwater Fish Camp Programs, Statewide: The Commission began expanding the Freshwater Fish Camp summer program in FY 2009-10 and continued expansion through FY 2018-19. Two new locations for fish camps were established this fiscal year in Mount Dora (Lake County) and Spring Hill (Hernando County Parks & Recreation), with two sportfishing education program workshops conducted to train staff for these facilities. Equipment, such as 12-foot jon boats, electric trolling motors, boating safety equipment, rods and reels, and fishing tackle, was purchased to start fish camps at these locations. In total, cooperators administered and conducted 55 Fish Camp programs at a total of 19 locations around the State, providing 854 youth with week-long fishing education camps during FY 2018-19.

Sportfishing Education Program: The Sportfishing Education Program trains volunteer instructors who work throughout the state, conducting two levels of youth programs. The first is the fishing clinic program where instructors cover the following topics: "What is Sport Fish Restoration?"; the aquatic food chain; cane pole and rod and reel rigging; bait selection; fish identification; casting instruction; fishing regulations; and angler ethics. In FY 2018-19, instructors conducted 44 of these clinics, reaching just over 1,600 youth. The second program is the long-term and mentor-based program, Hooked on Fishing – Not on Drugs®, which teaches angling skills, conservation, stewardship, and aquatic ecology. Instructors conducted 48 of these programs, each consisting of eight or more hours of programming, reaching 1,248 youth participants during FY 2018-19.

Kids' Fishing Clinics – (www.myfwc.com/education/outdoor-skills/fishing-clinics): The Kids' Fishing Clinic program began in 1996. The program targets children ages 5 to 15 and is designed to promote responsible marine resource stewardship. This goal is accomplished by teaching youth the vulnerability of Florida's fragile marine

ecosystems and fisheries resources. Kids are also taught fundamental saltwater fishing skills and are provided with a positive fishing experience. Kids' Fishing Clinics are conducted in coastal cities statewide with sponsorship by local governments, businesses, and civic organizations, which also provide the necessary volunteer effort needed to organize and conduct the events. During FY 2018-19, 1,667 youth participated in this program and approximately 1,000 parents attended these events with their children. This program is not possible without volunteers. During FY 2018-19, 410 people volunteered approximately 2,500 hours to help educate participants.

Expansion of Saltwater Youth Fishing Programs: To facilitate the expansion of saltwater fishing programs, fishing rods and reels, line, hooks, weights, cast nets, casting plugs, fisheries conservation tools (dehooking tools, slings, rubber mesh landing nets), fish identification books, Fishing Florida books (kids fishing activity books), safety equipment, and a variety of aquatic education equipment (seine nets, dip nets, magnifiers, plankton nets, water chemistry test kits, etc.) were provided to partners. Staff trained four new partners to do weeklong, 40-hour fishing camps. These five-day camps covered all aspects of basic saltwater fishing, including rod/reel types, rigging, knots, casting, lures/live bait selection, conservation practices/equipment, fish identification, regulations, and where and how to fish. The participants also learned about basic oceanographic principles related to fishing, such as tides and currents, coastal habitats and their importance to marine fish, marine food chains, and estuarine ecology. In FY 2018-19, the new partners, along with previously-trained saltwater fish camp partners conducted youth fishing activities at 24 locations for 1,603 participants.

Conclusion

Florida must engage its youth, including under-represented populations, in the traditional heritage of recreational fishing and hunting. Actively creating the next generation of anglers, hunters, and resource stewards is essential to the future of safe and sustainable use of our fish and wildlife. By so doing, a happier, healthier, and smarter group of youth will carry on the American traditions of fishing, hunting, and respect for nature.