On the Cover: Volunteer Aliben Paz collects an adult red drum from hatchery brood stock ponds to be used for marine stock enhancement research.

Volunteers Caroline Jordan and Jesse Suarez assist with wood duck nest box maintenance at Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area.
Volunteers
Get Involved

Contact Sharon Tatem
Volunteer Program Manager
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Phone (Office): 727-502-4971
Phone (Cell): 850-354-4266
Volunteer Kayla Williams inspects gopher tortoise burrows as part of the Tegu Monitoring Project.

Conserving Florida’s fish and wildlife for their long-term well-being and the enjoyment of people. It’s an inspiring mission and one that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is proud to undertake. It’s also a daunting endeavor that we cannot accomplish alone. Thankfully we have the help of thousands of volunteers.

Each volunteer brings additional effort, experience, skills, diverse ideas and perspectives to the FWC team. They also help enlist broad community support for the agency’s mission.

Despite the obstacle of the pandemic during 2019-20 volunteers assisted in maintaining facilities/grounds, wildlife research, biological
sampling and monitoring, habitat restoration, laboratory work, and education and outreach. This report celebrates not only the past fiscal year’s volunteer accomplishments but also looks back on the decade of commitment to conservation.

I want each volunteer to know how much we appreciate their work. To those who might want to join us as a volunteer, please see our contact page in this annual report or visit our volunteer webpage for more information.

Eric Sutton, Executive Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Interns at the Southwest Field Laboratory for the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute participate in dolphin prey selection and diversity research.
A Decade of Volunteer Program Accomplishments

This report recognizes the success of FWC’s investment in volunteer management and celebrates the dedicated volunteers who share their time and talents with us. We applaud their efforts as we celebrate a Decade of Volunteer Conservation Action.

In 2009, the FWC implemented a new approach to volunteer management. An agency-wide survey identified the need to provide centralized support for volunteer project design, recruitment and management. In response, the FWC established Regional Volunteer Program Biologist positions within the Public Access Services Office. Currently there are three regional volunteer program biologists and a statewide program manager. The program manager also leads an agency-wide volunteer standing team to enhance collaboration among the FWC’s volunteer programs housed in various divisions within the agency.

The goals of this effort are to recognize the value of working with volunteers, to improve the quality and professionalism of our volunteer management and to create meaningful opportunities for the public to engage with the agency in fish and wildlife conservation.

Over the past 10 years, the FWC has accomplished a great deal:

• Expanded internship opportunities.
• Expanded citizen science focused on fish and wildlife research and monitoring.
• Increased volunteer effort for habitat management and stewardship.
• Increased the number of staff working with volunteers to meet their program goals.
• Improved communication of volunteer opportunities and accomplishments through a dedicated Facebook site and other social media, an expanded website presence for volunteer programs and a quarterly newsletter.
• Formalized agency management policies and procedures, and developed staff training and other tools to enhance best management practices for volunteer operations.
• Standardized volunteer data management.
• Established cooperative relationships with Volunteer Florida, other agency volunteer programs and national community science organizations.
Total Volunteer Effort Per Activity

Over the decade, agency resources have been dedicated to increasing citizen science, habitat enhancement and stewardship volunteer opportunities. Citizen Science now comprises 27% of total volunteer effort. While habitat enhancement and stewardship comprise 7% of total volunteer effort. During this 10-year period, 34% of the 46,808 volunteers participated in these citizen science, habitat enhancement and stewardship projects. Education comprises 42% of total volunteer effort and continues to be a strong focal area for volunteer participation.
• Citizen Science includes scientific research, data collection and analysis.

• Habitat enhancement and Stewardship includes increasing the suitability of a site as habitat for a desired species, invasive plant removal, protecting nesting sites and species rescue and recovery.

• Education involves public education and outreach, including teaching Hunter Education, Fishing, Wildlife Viewing and other courses.

• Law Enforcement includes reserve officer and related activities.

• Operations includes facility and ground maintenance, friends group activities, office management and volunteer training.

• Other Activities are volunteer efforts that do not fit within the categories identified above.

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### Total Programs and Volunteer Hours

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteer Hours</strong></td>
<td>1,237,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteer Count</strong></td>
<td>46,808</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Value of Volunteer Hours</strong></td>
<td>$28,779,508</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Full Time Equivalent (FTE)</strong></td>
<td>~ 594 Positions</td>
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</table>

1. Volunteer Count includes both active Regular Service Volunteers and Occasional Service Volunteers during the 2009-2020 fiscal year.

2. Value calculated yearly using the Independent Sector national estimate on value of a volunteer hour: (http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time). The results are tabulated for an overall decade value of volunteer hours.
Volunteer Diana Ohman and former FWC biologist Carly Randazzo replace wood shavings from a wood duck nest box.

Students from Odessa Christian School volunteer to build nest boxes for the southeastern American kestrel.

Volunteer Zulieka Perez assists FWC Biologist Travis Blunden with small mammal monitoring at Half Moon Wildlife Management Area.
Volunteers

A Decade of Service

Volunteer Kyle Fabbro and intern Trevor Griffin deploy wildlife game cameras to obtain white-tailed deer population indices at CREW Wildlife and Environmental Area.

Chinsegut Conservation Center volunteer Heather Sharkey prepares to band a red-cockaded woodpecker nestling on the Croom Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest.

A Ridge Ranger volunteer hugs a pine tree where an artificial nesting cavity for red-cockaded woodpeckers was installed at the Platt Branch Wildlife and Environmental Area.
Bev Hansen teaches fellow volunteers how to monitor butterflies for the Florida Butterfly Monitoring Network at the Chinsegut Conservation Center in Hernando County.

Volunteers Chelsea Freeman and Christine Meilink mark gopher tortoise burrows at Bullfrog Creek Wildlife and Environmental Area.

Volunteers Elisabeth Torres and Zara Mansoor smile and pose as they place an artificial burrow for a Florida burrowing owl.
Ridge Ranger volunteers, a Boy Scout and his mother, plant pine seedlings to restore habitat in the Lake Wales Ridge State Forest.

Ridge Ranger volunteer Jason Hewett cuts down a sand pine to restore scrub oak habitat at Avon Park Air Force Range.

Students from Navarre Marine Science Center volunteer at the lionfish removal tournament in Pensacola.
Volunteer Bill Behnke posts signs protecting snail kite nesting habitat on Lake Tohopekaliga in Osceola County.

Volunteers clean up habitat at the Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area.

Volunteers assist in reef height and coverage surveys on the Oyster Reef Habitat Restoration in St. Andrew Bay project.
Volunteers from the Full Track Conservation Club assist FWC staff with the removal of invasive Brazilian pepper trees at Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area.

In collaboration with NOAA’s Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, volunteers on spring break from Harford Community College in Maryland clean up Florida Keys Wildlife Environmental Area at Sugarloaf Key.

Volunteers Peter Sumell and Kayla Dathe set a Havahart trap to remove an invasive black spiny-tail iguana utilizing the natural burrow of a Florida burrowing owl.
Volunteers from the BEST Academy in Brooksville assist with wiregrass planting at the Big Pine tract of the Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area.

Marine Mammal Pathobiology Lab volunteers assist a live bottlenose dolphin stranded in Tampa Bay.

Volunteer Danny Rush helps FWC staff rescue an orphaned manatee calf in Merritt Island.

Activities conducted under USFWS permit # MA770191
Volunteer Molly Phillips and intern Jessica Schroeder sort through specimens from the 2013 SEAMAP cruises with FWC Research Technician Jennifer Stepp.

Volunteer Katy Malachowski examines a sedated bear recovering from the effects of immobilization. The bear was captured, ear tagged and collared as part of the FWC’s research on Camp Blanding Joint Training Center.

Volunteer Jennifer Swain monitors bass tournaments and assists FWC biologists with field work and recording biological data on collected specimens.
A volunteer team at a bass tournament helps anglers document their fish for entry into the TrophyCatch program. TrophyCatch provides rewards that encourage anglers to live-release trophy bass while assisting FWC with documenting trophy bass catches.

Florida Youth Conservation Center Network volunteer Tom Hillyer is known as “the guardian angel of all things fishing,” and is able to fix everything the kids break. His tireless donation of time, money and equipment has helped introduce hundreds of youths to fishing.

Interns educate the community about bears during the Forgotten Coast Black Bear Festival in Charrabelle.
FWC law enforcement officers and volunteers help officiate a state tournament in Bartow for the National Archery in the Schools Program.

Reserve Officers volunteer their time as sworn Law Enforcement Officers, and work under the direct supervision of FWC Law Enforcement personnel. They are excellent force multipliers, patrolling day or night, on land, on the water or in the air.

Volunteers Gerald Fortner, Jerry Burns, Keely Coulter and Marilyn Blair remove a degraded boardwalk from Little Gator Creek Wildlife and Environmental Area in Pasco County.
Volunteers and staff, in collaboration with NOAA Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, remove nonnative zoysia grass from Wells Key in the Florida Keys Wildlife and Environmental Area.

FWC staff and volunteer Peter Sumell conduct a freshwater fisheries survey at Lake Okeechobee.

Volunteer Sarah Bachar and South Region Volunteer Program Biologist Andrea Pereyra educate volunteers on the Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program.
Fiscal year 2019-20 was unique. Although COVID-19 impacted the agency’s overall volunteer effort, the agency still accomplished many great volunteer driven projects. Volunteers contributed to 90 fish and wildlife conservation programs from July 2019 – February 2020. Due to the pandemic, projects were suspended during the spring and early summer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year 2019-20</th>
<th>Agency Totals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Hours</td>
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<td>Volunteer Count&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
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### Division/Office

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<td>Division of Hunting and Game Management</td>
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<td>Division of Law Enforcement</td>
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<td>Division of Marine Fisheries Management</td>
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<td>Office of Strategic Initiatives - Florida Youth</td>
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<td>Conservation Centers Network</td>
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**84,810**

<sup>1</sup> Volunteer Count includes both active Regular Service Volunteers and Occasional Service Volunteers during the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

<sup>2</sup> Value calculated using the Independent Sector 2019 national estimate on value of a volunteer hour: $27.20 (http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time).
FWC’s citizen scientists provided valuable observation and research assistance this year. These volunteers increase the FWC’s ability to conserve Florida’s diversity of fish and wildlife species by supporting research and management efforts including biological sampling and monitoring.

One species benefiting from volunteer help is the Florida scrub lizard. This endemic species is a focal species for the scrub ecosystem. Surveys conducted by Fish and Wildlife Research Institute staff in 1986 and 2016-17 found that the species had disappeared from Palm Beach County. FWC staff, volunteers and partners collected lizards from robust populations in two Martin County state parks and reintroduced them to Hypoluxo Scrub Natural Area in Palm Beach County. Volunteers will continue to be involved monitoring the reintroduced population.
Our wildlife management area system, one of the largest in the United States, plays a critical role in sustaining the abundance and diversity of Florida’s fish and wildlife. Our volunteers provide an important service in helping us sustain this rich legacy for future generations.

The Ridge Rangers, a volunteer program led by the FWC, supports interagency project needs along the Lake Wales Ridge and surrounding habitats. Ridge Rangers participate in a variety of conservation activities including restoration plantings, invasive species removal, debris cleanups, seed collection and propagation of native Florida plants, species monitoring, and boundary fence installation and removal.
Research

Intern Isabel (Izzy) Berry made significant contributions to a red snapper research project during Fiscal Year 2019-20. “Throughout Izzy’s 78 internship hours, her professional work ethic, enthusiasm to learn and attention to detail were an asset in the laboratory.” Rachel Struch, FWC Biologist.

The FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) provides scientific research and information syntheses through the cooperative efforts of five core groups: Marine Fisheries Research, Freshwater Fisheries Research, Wildlife Research, Ecosystem Assessment and Restoration, and Information Science and Management. FWRI provides timely information and guidance to protect, conserve and manage Florida’s fish and wildlife resources.
The FWC’s 800 volunteer hunter safety instructors teach more than 12,000 students each year how to be safe, responsible and knowledgeable hunters. Students also learn about conservation and how hunters contribute to conservation by purchasing licenses and permits, and along with other shooting sports enthusiasts, support the successful Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program.

Youth, adults, families and educators experience and learn about Florida’s fish and wildlife resources through a variety of the FWC’s educational and outreach programs, such as summer camps, fishing clinics and nature festivals. Volunteers assist staff with many aspects of these programs from preparation to instruction.

The FWC provides hunter safety courses to ensure Florida hunters are prepared to be safe, responsible and conservation-minded when they take up the tradition of hunting. People born after May 31, 1975, must complete the FWC’s hunter safety class before they can legally hunt alone. Hunter safety courses cover a range of topics including safe firearms handling, responsible hunting, tree stand safety, Florida hunting laws, survival skills and information about wildlife. Successfully completing a hunter safety course also certifies hunters to purchase a hunting license and hunt the other 49 states.
For a decade, our volunteers have shown tremendous dedication to conserving the landscapes, species and waterways that make Florida unique. Volunteers are an integral part of our daily operations and we are extremely grateful for their contributions. Even now, when things look and feel different, our volunteers remain supportive, flexible and understanding as we navigate through modified processes for volunteer involvement. We value their continued support and look forward to full operation in the future.

For questions about designing and implementing projects to successfully incorporate volunteers in education, research, habitat enhancement and stewardship projects throughout Florida contact one of the Regional Volunteer Program Biologists.

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Simon Fitzwilliam
Northeast Region Volunteer Program Biologist
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352-620-7345

Follow us on Facebook: facebook.com/FWCvolunteers

For more information on the agency’s volunteer staff and programs visit myfwc.com/get-involved/volunteer/
Melanie Berger, former biologist with the FWC, demonstrates use of acoustic equipment to FWC volunteers, Connie Sweet and Larry Wallace, at the Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area.