



Critical Wildlife Areas

November 2016

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

Thirteen new CWAs and five re-established CWAs were approved on November 16, 2016

FWC composite photo.

New and Re-established CWAs



We have identified 5 existing CWAs which require re-establishment (a change in boundary or closure dates) shown in yellow and 10 new areas which would benefit from the protection of a CWA designation. Some of the new areas include multiple islands or caves. The following slides provide a summary of comments, concerns, boundaries and closure periods.

Flag Island

Franklin County



- Establishment area in yellow
- Only area in red would be posted
- Red buffer ranges from 50-300 feet
- Year-round closure



NEW establishment

Ownership: Division of State Lands, unmanaged

Birds: black skimmer, brown pelican, American oystercatcher, and Caspian, royal, sandwich, gull-billed, and least terns

Acreeage: currently 26.5 upland, 53.5 water

As the sandbars shift over time (moving, accreting, eroding) having an establishment area (shown in yellow), would allow for FWC to change the position of the boundary markers as the islands shift.

Changes from original proposal: Change spelling of Flag.

Justification: The American oystercatcher, a state listed species, begins nesting activities as early as February (documented on Flag Island in March) and is one of the species most susceptible to disturbance. The recommended buffer distance is 300 feet to protect this species. The buffer would be 50 feet near St. Vincent Island to avoid navigation issues. The proposed buffer distance and year round closure will protect this highly vulnerable species, while also protecting other state listed species that use Flag Island for nesting, wintering, and as a migratory stopover.

St. George Causeway CWA Re-establishment

Franklin County



- No change proposed for boundary or posted areas
- Extend closure season by 2 months (March 1 through September 30)



Re-establishment:

Ownership: FDEP (Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve)

Birds: least, royal, Caspian, gull-billed, and sandwich terns, laughing gulls, American oystercatchers, brown pelicans

Acreeage: 32 acres uplands, no water posting

Changes from original proposal: No changes

Justification: Expanding the closure period to begin in March will protect state-listed species such as the state-listed American oystercatcher, which begins courtship and nest building as early as February, and is documented on St. George Causeway in March. Expanding the closure to include September will improve protection for brown pelicans and other species that nest later in the year, providing a disturbance-free area for hatchlings until they are flight capable.

The current establishment order allows for posting the causeway between April 1 – August 31.

Lanark Reef

Franklin County



- Red buffer ranges from 75-300 feet from MHW
- Generally 75 feet along sides, and up to 300 feet at ends
- 300 feet around east island
- Year-round closure

NEW establishment

Ownership: Audubon and the Division of State Lands, unmanaged

Birds: brown pelicans, black skimmers, American oystercatchers, and willets

Acreeage: Currently 34 upland, 31 water

Changes from original proposal: The establishment area, shown in yellow on the original proposal, was removed. The buffer, originally proposed at 50 feet was expanded to 75 feet along the sides. The proposal presented at the public meeting left an unregulated cut through the reef. No one supported this, indicating the cut is not suitable for navigation and should be included in the closed area.

Justification: Lanark Reef is used year round. American oystercatchers, a state listed species with documented declines, use the less vegetated portions of the islands for nesting. The 300 foot buffer at either end of the large reef, and around the smaller island, are designed to protect this species that is highly susceptible to disturbance. More than 45 species use the site throughout migration and winter, including state listed snowy plovers, brown pelicans, American oystercatchers and tricolored herons. Many other Species of Greatest Conservation Need use Lanark Reef in high numbers, with more than 1000 individual birds documented from September through January each year.

Withlacoochee Caves



Citrus County

- 6 caves – Big Mouth, Werner, Trail 10, Morris, Jackpot, Blowing Hole
- Seasonal closure
 - April 15 – August 15 and December 15 – March 15
- Posted boundary 10-50 feet from caves



Big Mouth Cave



Jackpot and Blowing Hole Caves



Morris Cave



NEW establishment

Ownership: Florida Forest Service

Bats: Southeastern myotis, tricolored bat

Acreage: 2.93 acres

Changes from original proposal: No changes

Justification: Tricolored bats have declined by 75% as a result of white nose syndrome, and Florida represents the southernmost un-infected population. Closure during the winter will protect this species during hibernation; repeated disturbances during hibernation are known to cause bats to abandon sites or die as result of insufficient fat stores. Southeastern myotis form large maternity colonies in a small number of Florida caves; only a few cave sites are known outside of Florida. Disturbance during maternity season can cause bats to abandon roosts, young bats may fall from cave walls, and pregnant bats may abort unborn pups due to stress. Closure of caves during these critical times offers protection to both species.

CWA Proposal Summary:

10 foot buffer around existing fenced caves - Big Mouth, Werner, Trail 10

50 foot buffer around existing unfenced cave - Morris

25 foot buffer around gated caves - Jackpot, Blowing Hole

Seasonal closure to protect maternity colonies and hibernating bats

Bird Islands CWA Re-establishment

Duval/Nassau County

- Create an establishment area encompassing dynamic shoals
- Post emergent islands within establishment area for the protection of nesting and migratory birds
- No posting until islands are emergent during high tide
- Work in consultation with DEP to determine posting locations
- Rename as Nassau Sound Islands CWA



Re-establishment

Ownership: FDEP (Nassau River-St. Johns River Marshes Aquatic Preserve), State Lands

Birds: least, royal, and gull-billed terns, black skimmer, Wilson's plover, American oystercatcher, piping plover, red knot

Acreeage: Varies: previously 25 uplands, presently 7 on Big Bird Island and none on Little Bird Island

Existing CWA: Little Bird Island and Big Bird Island can be posted at mean high water from May 1 through August 31.

Original Proposal: Large Establishment area but did not include Big Bird Island that was attached to Little Talbot Island State Park, post little bird at mean low water, year round.

Changes from original proposal: Revise establishment area to be smaller than original proposal but to include Big Bird Island. Post islands for protection of nesting and migratory birds.

Justification: Bird Islands is a very important site for wintering and migrating shorebirds. Protecting these areas during the winter provides a disturbance-free area for foraging and resting; red knots and piping plovers (federally listed) fail to complete migration or breed successfully if unable to adequately forage during migration. Based on history, the current shoals are expected to accrete, and become important areas for nesting and migratory birds in the future. In recent years the area formerly known as Big Bird Island became part of Little Talbot Island State Park. Due to storms, the area shown as a peninsula above is separated from Little Talbot Island State Park except at extreme low tide (shown by red arrow). This island is included in the CWA and will be posted in coordination with the State Park.

Stick Marsh Brevard County



- Posted seasonal buffer (red line) with in-water posting
 - Closed January 1–July 31
 - Include area between Islands
- Year-round closure of islands



NEW Establishment

Ownership: St. Johns River Water Management District

Birds: roseate spoonbill, great egret, snowy egret, tri-colored herons, anhinga

Acreeage: .92 acres uplands, 1.55 acres of water

Changes from original proposal: None proposed.

Justification: Roseate spoonbills are a state-listed species that meet the criteria for listing because of their small population size and the limited number of sites where they nest. Little blue herons, another species found at the Stick Marsh site are also state-listed due to a 30% decline in their estimated population size. Creating a seasonal buffer around these islands will help meet the conservation actions within the species management plan to protect nesting areas for both of these species. Closing the islands to access year round will also help to protect roosting birds from disturbance.

BC49

Brevard County



- Posted buffer (red) to prevent boat landings
- 50 feet around island and sand spit
- Seasonal closure January 1 - August 31



NEW Establishment

Ownership: FDEP (Indian River Lagoon Aquatic Preserve), Army Corps of Engineers spoil easement

Birds: wood stork, roseate spoonbill, cormorants, great egret, white ibis, great blue heron, tricolored heron, anhinga

Acreeage: 3.86 acres uplands, 2.51 acres of water (including 0.5 acre exposed at low tide)

Changes from original proposal: The proposal originally did not include the sand spit. It was added based on public input.

Justification: Wood storks are federally listed as Threatened, and the Federal recovery plan identifies reduction of disturbance at nesting sites as a needed action to assist in recovery of the species. Roseate spoonbills are a state-listed species that met the criteria for listing because of their small population size and the limited number of sites where they nest. Tricolored herons are also state listed due to a 30% decline and projected continuing decline. The state management plan for both species identifies protection of nesting sites as an important conservation action. Wood storks have been documented on BC-49 in December, and begin nesting by February, and young are flight capable 10 to 12 weeks after hatching. Tricolored herons also breed and raise young from February through August. Closure from January through August will allow protection of these species throughout the breeding season, from courtship to flight capable young.

Alafia Banks CWA Re-establishment Hillsborough County



- Addition of Sunken Island
- Posted in-water buffer (red)
 - 100 feet from island
- Year-round closure



Re-establishment

Ownership: Mosaic Fertilizer, LLC and Port Tampa Bay

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, great egrets, great blue herons, snowy egrets, little blue herons, tricolored herons, reddish egrets, black crowned night heron, green heron, roseate spoonbill, American oystercatcher

Acreage: 33.5 water, 60 upland

Changes from original proposal: The Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal, was removed.

Justification: Five species that meet the criteria for state-Threatened nest or roost on the Alafia Banks, with thousands of individual birds found on the islands throughout the year. Little blue herons and tricolored herons have an estimated population size reduction of at least 30% over the last 36 years, and a similar decline is projected into the future. Roseate spoonbills have very small or restricted populations, with very few nesting locations; reddish egrets also have a very small population size, and have declined 10% within Florida Bay, a trend that is expected to continue. The Species Action Plan for these species includes development of CWAs to support successful breeding and improve population size, and identification and protection of important foraging and roosting sites during the non-nesting season. Other state listed species such as the American oystercatcher, and Species of Greatest Conservation Need will also benefit from these protections.

The current establishment order allows for posting of Bird Island at mean high water from December 1st through September 1st.

Dot-Dash-Dit

Manatee County



- Posted buffer (red) with in-water posting
 - 25 to 100 feet
 - Remain outside of navigation channel
- January 1 – August 31



NEW establishment

Ownership: Division of State Lands (unmanaged), Carlton Arms of Bradenton

Birds: wood stork, roseate spoonbill, tricolored heron, great egret, snowy egret, black-crowned night heron, great blue heron, anhinga

Acreage: 3.4 water, 1.6 upland

Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal; reduce buffer on Southwest and South sides of Dot and Dash islands to approximately 25 feet to keep clear of navigation channel. Changed to seasonal closure after additional review of data.

Justification: Wood storks are federally listed as Threatened, and the Federal recovery plan identifies reduction of disturbance at nesting sites as a needed action to assist in recovery of the species. Roseate spoonbills are a state-listed species that meet the criteria for listing because of their small population size and the limited number of sites where they nest. Tricolored herons are also state listed due to a 30% decline and projected continuing decline. The Species Action Plan for both species identifies protection of nesting sites as an important conservation action. Wood stork nesting begins in February, but they may gather earlier to begin courtship activities. Eggs may be laid as late as June, with a 1 month incubation period followed by 10 to 12 weeks when the young birds cannot fly and are dependent on parents at the nest. Closure from January through August will provide protection for the most critical periods of nesting and rearing young.

Roberts Bay

Sarasota County



- Posted buffer on breakwater on west, north, and south
- 50 feet on north island
- 100 feet for remainder of site
- Year-round closure



NEW establishment

Ownership: Division of State Lands (unmanaged)

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, great egrets, great blue herons, snowy egrets, little blue herons, tricolored herons, reddish egrets, black crowned night heron, green heron, roseate spoonbill, American oystercatcher

Acreeage: 2 water, 2.9 upland

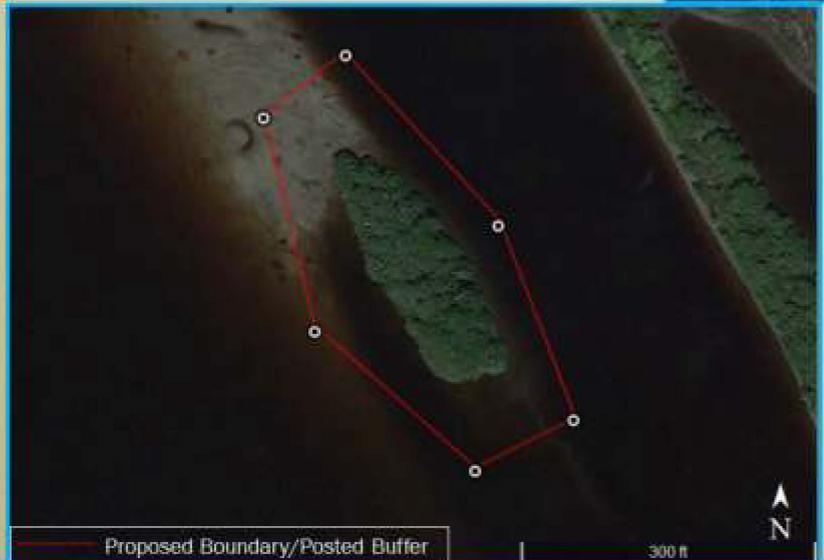
Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal; update boundaries based on input from West Coast Inland Navigation District, move boundary on west, north, and south to breakwater, buffer reduced to 50 feet on east side of north island.

Justification: Five species that meet the criteria for state-Threatened nest or roost on Roberts Bay. Little blue herons and tricolored herons have an estimated population size reduction of at least 30% over the last 36 years, and a similar decline is projected into the future. Roseate spoonbills have very small or restricted populations, with very few nesting locations; reddish egrets also have a very small population size, and have declined 10% within Florida Bay, a trend that is expected to continue. The Species Action Plan for these species includes development of CWAs to support successful breeding and improve population size. Roseate spoonbills and brown pelicans have been documented breeding from March through September. The great blue heron begins breeding as early as November, and other Species of Greatest Conservation Need, such as the green heron, have been documented to breed in October.

Myakka River CWA Re-establishment

Sarasota County

- Buffer of 50 feet on east side
- Buffer of 75 feet on west, north and south sides of island
- January 1 – August 31



Re-establishment

Ownership: FDEP (Wild and Scenic River program)

Birds: wood stork, great egret, great blue heron, anhinga, snowy egret

Acreage: 1.1 water, .42 upland

Changes from original proposal: Increased buffer to 75 feet on west, north and south sides. Shifted seasonal closure, changed from year-round after additional data review.

Justification: Wood storks are federally listed as Threatened, and the Federal recovery plan identifies reduction of disturbance at nesting sites as a needed action to assist in recovery of the species. Wood storks have been documented on the island in December, and begin nesting by February, and young are flight capable 10 to 12 weeks after hatching (can be as late as October in central Florida). Seasonal closure will protect wood storks throughout the breeding season, from courtship to flight capable young. Although 300 feet is the recommended buffer distance, the configuration of the island within Myakka river limits the size of buffers; the proposed buffers will offer increased protection and still allow for safe navigation. Other Species of Greatest Conservation Need, such as great blue herons and snowy egrets, will also benefit from these protections.

The current establishment order allows for posting above mean high water between March 1 – November 31.

Broken Islands

Lee County



- 150 foot buffer around island
- Seasonal closure
- March 1 - August 31



NEW establishment

Ownership: FDEP (Pine Island Sound Aquatic Preserve)

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, reddish egret, little blue heron, tricolored heron, snowy egret, great blue heron, great egret, yellow-crowned night heron, black-crowned night heron

Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal; shorten closure by one month.

Acreage: 12.94 uplands, 18.09 water

Justification: Three species that meet the criteria for state-Threatened nest on Broken Islands. Little blue herons and tricolored herons have an estimated population size reduction of at least 30% over the last 36 years, and a similar decline is projected into the future. Reddish egrets meet the criteria for listing because of small population size and an estimated continuing decline of 10%. The Species Action Plan for these species includes development of CWAs to support successful breeding and improve population size. Brown pelicans are a Species of Special Concern and do not meet the criteria for state listing as Threatened, but the Species Action Plan identifies the need to post and manage breeding colonies to maintain stable populations and prevent the need for listing in the future. Ending the seasonal closure in August will protect most breeding and still allow for fishing near the island during snook season. The buffer distance of 150 feet is smaller than the recommended 300 feet, but should provide improved protection and still allow for safe navigation and access to nearby flats for fishing.

Useppa Oyster Bar

Lee County



- 150 foot buffer around island
- < 50 foot buffer on north side
- Seasonal closure
- March 1 - August 31



NEW establishment

Ownership: FDEP (Pine Island Sound Aquatic Preserve)

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, great blue heron, great egret

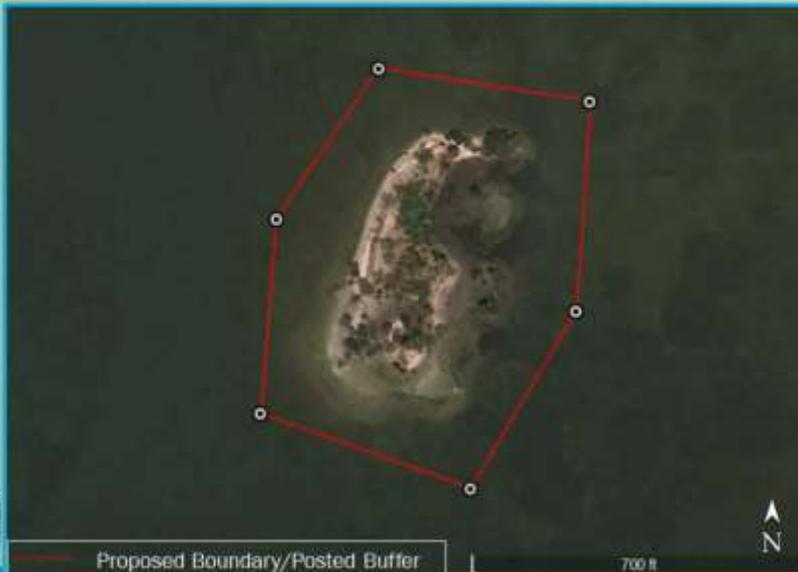
Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal; shorten closure by one month. North side will be less than 50 feet to minimize navigation concerns.

Acreage: 7.24 uplands; 8.26 water

Justification: Brown pelicans are a Species of Special Concern and do not meet the criteria for state listing as Threatened, but the Species Action Plan identifies the need to post and manage breeding colonies to maintain stable populations and prevent the need for listing in the future. Brown pelicans have been documented breeding from March through September, although most breeding is completed in August. Ending the seasonal closure in August will protect most breeding and still allow for fishing near the island during snook season. The buffer distance of 50 to 150 feet is smaller than the recommended 300 feet, but should provide improved protection and still allow for safe navigation and access to nearby flats for fishing. Other Species of Greatest Conservation Need, such as great blue herons and great egrets, will also benefit from these protections.

Hemp Key

Lee County



- 150 foot buffer around island
- Year-round closure

NEW establishment

Ownership: Ding Darling NWR

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, reddish egret, little blue heron, tricolored heron, snowy egret, great blue heron, great egret, yellow-crowned night heron, black-crowned night heron

Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal.

Acreeage: 4.87 uplands; 5.43 water

Justification: Three species that meet the criteria for state-Threatened nest or roost on Hemp Key. Little blue herons and tricolored herons have an estimated population size reduction of at least 30% over the last 36 years, and similar decline is projected into the future. Reddish egrets meet the criteria for listing because of small population size and an estimated continuing decline of 10%. The Species Action Plan for these species includes development of Critical Wildlife Areas to support successful breeding and improve population size, and identification and protection of important foraging and roosting sites during the non-nesting season. Nesting has been documented on the island year round. Brown pelicans have been documented breeding from March through September. The great blue heron, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need, begins breeding as early as November. Other SGCN will also benefit from the proposed buffer zones and year round closure.

Matanzas Pass Island

Lee County



- 100 foot buffer around island
- Year-round closure



NEW establishment

Ownership: Division of State Lands, Army Corps of Engineers spoil easement

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, little blue heron, tricolored heron, reddish egret, great blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, black-crowned night heron, yellow-crowned night heron

Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal

Acreage: 1.5 upland; 2.8 water

Justification: Three species that meet the criteria for state-Threatened nest or roost on Matanzas Pass Island. Little blue herons and tricolored herons have an estimated population size reduction of at least 30% over the last 36 years, and similar decline is projected into the future. Reddish egrets meet the criteria for listing because of small population size and an estimated continuing decline of 10%. The Species Action Plan for these species includes development of CWAs to support successful breeding and improve population size, and identification and protection of important foraging and roosting sites during the non-nesting season. Nesting has been documented year round. Brown pelicans have been documented breeding from March through September, and little blue herons and tricolored herons also nest through September. The great blue heron, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need, begins breeding as early as November. Other SGCN will also benefit from the proposed buffer zones and year round closure. Year round closure will protect nesting species and the 100 foot buffer will provide protection while still providing for safe navigation.

Big Carlos Pass M52

Lee County



- 100 foot buffer around island
- Year-round closure



NEW establishment

Ownership: Division of State Lands, Army Corps of Engineers spoil easement

Birds: American oystercatcher, pelicans, cormorants, little blue heron, tricolored heron, reddish egret, great blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, black-crowned night heron, yellow-crowned night heron

Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal; the establishment area was significantly decreased to only include M52. M50/52 was dropped from the proposal after additional data review.

Acreeage: 0.46 upland; 1.7 water

Justification: Three species that meet the criteria for state-Threatened nest or roost on M52. Little blue herons and tricolored herons have an estimated population size reduction of at least 30% over the last 36 years, and a similar decline is projected into the future. Reddish egrets meet the criteria for listing because of small population size and an estimated continuing decline of 10%. The Species Action Plan for these species includes development of CWAs to support successful breeding and improve population size. Brown pelicans, listed as a Species of Special Concern, also have a Species Action Plan that includes actions to identify and post important colonies. Nesting has been documented year round. Brown pelicans have been documented breeding from March through October. The great blue heron, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need, begins breeding as early as November. Other Species of Greatest Conservation Need will also benefit from the proposed buffer zones and year round closure.

Coconut Point East

Lee County

- 100 foot buffer around island
- Year-round closure



NEW establishment

Ownership: Division of State Lands

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, great blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, black-crowned night heron, yellow-crowned night heron

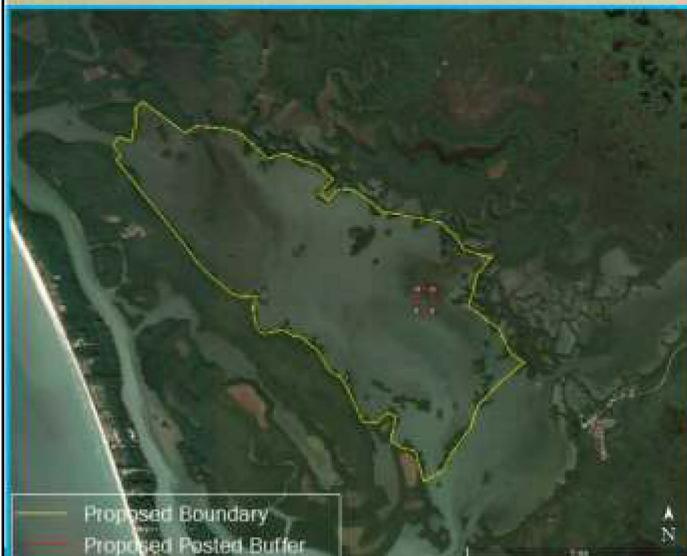
Changes from original proposal: Remove the Establishment Area, shown in yellow on the original proposal; the establishment area was decreased to only include the east island and not the west island.

Acreage: 1.21 upland; 2.5 water

Justification: Brown pelicans, listed as a Species of Special Concern, have a Species Action Plan that includes actions to identify and post important colonies to prevent the need for future listing. Nesting has been documented year round. Brown pelicans have been documented breeding from March through September. The great blue heron begins breeding as early as November. Although less than the recommended 300 foot buffer, the proposed buffer of 100 feet will protect the nesting and roosting species while allowing for safe navigation and fishing access. Other Species of Greatest Conservation Need such as the night-herons and great egret, will also benefit from the proposed buffer zones and year round closure.

Rookery Island CWA Re-establishment

Collier County



- Boundary encompassing the bay and all historically used islands (yellow)
- Posted buffer of Island 1 (red) from 100 to 200 feet
- Move or add island posting with specific criteria
 - No more than 2 islands posted at any one time
- Year-round closure
- Rename as Rookery Islands CWA

Re-establishment

Ownership: Audubon; managed by Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Birds: pelicans, cormorants, great egret, snowy egret, little blue heron, tricolored heron, reddish egret, white ibis, glossy ibis

Changes from original proposal: Reduced buffer around Island 1 to allow wider passage along shoreline. Applied criteria for when additional posting will be considered. Placed a limit on island closures such that no more than 2 islands will be posted at any one time.

Acreage: 4 water; 0.19 uplands

Justification: Three species that meet the criteria for state-Threatened nest or roost on islands in Rookery Bay. Little blue herons and tricolored herons have an estimated population size reduction of at least 30% over the last 36 years, and a similar decline is projected into the future. Reddish egrets meet the criteria for listing because of small population size and an estimated continuing decline of 10%. The Species Action Plan for these species includes development of CWAs to support successful breeding and improve population size, and identification and protection of important foraging and roosting sites during the non-nesting season. The 100 to 200 foot buffer is smaller than the recommended 300 foot buffer, but still allows for protection of the species and safe navigation in the bay. The original establishment order for Rookery Island included only Island 0, which is no longer used.

Criteria for posting 2nd island:

- Imperiled species nests are documented for two consecutive seasons on an island
- Twenty or more imperiled species nests are documented on the island and
- Human disturbance is documented during the two years imperiled species are documented utilizing the island .