

## Major Proposed Rule Changes for Hunting and FWC-Managed Areas



Draft rules  
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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This presentation covers the major proposed rule changes related to hunting and FWC-managed public areas. Full summaries of all proposed rule changes, including minor technical changes and annual calendar adjustments, are included in the additional background material.

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## Rule Development

April – July 2017: reviewed proposals received from staff, the public and cooperators

September – November 2017: solicited and assessed stakeholder input

★ **December 2017: Commission review; approve to advertise**

December 2017- January 2018: advertise in Florida Administrative Register; communicate with stakeholders

February 2018: Commission considers adoption



FWC staff has received 205 requests for changes from the public, staff, and cooperators. Some of these ideas were proposals for change to publications, policies, or other non-rulemaking issues. Staff has recommended 141 of the ideas for rule changes. The public has had an opportunity to submit comments to staff online and via email and phone.

## Statewide Rule Changes

### Dove Season Dates:

- Modify season dates to accommodate hunter preference and federal framework change

### Dove Shooting Hours:

- Expand 1<sup>st</sup> phase shooting hours to ½ hour before sunrise until sunset

### Special-Opportunity Daily Dove Permit:

- Encourage youth participation by allowing youth to take their own bag limit with no additional fee



**Dove Season Dates (68A-13.008):** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is expected to approve an expansion of the dates during which the dove season may be held, moving the closing date from Jan. 15 to Jan. 31. This regulatory change is supported by staff in response to feedback received from a 2013 statewide dove hunter survey and comments received since that time, indicating a preference for more cool-weather hunt days during a time when more migratory doves are present. We propose to shorten the length of Phases 1 and 2 of the dove season and expand and shift Phase 3 of the dove season to occur later in the year. A total season length of 90 days combined over all 3 phases would remain the same.

**Dove Shooting Hours (68A-13.008):** Expand dove season shooting hours during Phase I of the dove season from noon until sunset to ½ hour before sunrise until sunset. This proposed rule change is in response to feedback and comments received from Florida's dove hunters.

**Special-Opportunity Dove Permit (68A-9.007):** The \$35 special-opportunity daily dove hunt permit would be modified to allow for a host hunter and youth hunter to each take a daily bag limit of doves. Currently, a host and youth must share a bag limit unless the \$10 youth permit option is purchased. This permit option would be eliminated to encourage youth participation.

## Statewide Rule Changes

### Air Guns:

- Invented in 1580s
- Recent innovations greatly increase range and power
- 8 States allow take of Deer
- 4 States allow take of Turkey

### Propose to allow for Deer and Turkey:

- Allow PCP air guns for hunting deer and turkey on public and private lands
- Define pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) air gun



The first air gun was invented in the 1580's. Since that time, their design and capabilities have evolved significantly. Today, recent innovations have led to specific types of air guns that have the range and power effective enough to take big game. Currently, 8 states allow air guns to be used to take deer and 4 states allow them to take turkey.

Over the past decade, as powerful air guns have become more affordable and commercially available, the public's interest in using them to take big game has grown. As a result, we are proposing to allow the use of pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) air guns for hunting deer and turkey on public and private lands.

To accomplish this, we are proposing to create a definition of what a PCP air gun is and specify what caliber and projectile types may be used to take both deer and turkey. This is to ensure that only air guns and projectiles that can effectively take these species are allowed. Furthermore, we propose to limit the hunting seasons when air guns may be used to avoid conflicting with current methods of take allowed during a given season. For example, we are proposing to allow air guns during existing general gun hunting seasons, but not during archery seasons.

## Specific Area Rule Changes

### Expand Hunting Opportunities:

- 61 areas: add hunts, days, methods of take or species to existing hunts, or remove quotas
- Establish 3 Public Hunting Areas
  - Everglades Headwaters WMA, Hatchineha Unit (~1,460 acres)
  - Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Rolling Meadows Unit (1,800 ac)
  - Plank Road WMA (~8,000 ac)



New Hunting Opportunities – Adding new hunts, increasing the number of days of hunting, or adding methods of take or number of species to hunt or removing quotas:

### **Southwest Region (68A-15.061):** Croom WMA;

Everglades Headwaters WMA, Hatchineha Unit – (new) – establish a new wildlife management area (~1,460 acres) in Polk County as the second tract of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Everglades Headwaters WMA

**North Central Region (68A-15.062):** Bayard, Belmore, Big Shoals, Camp Blanding, Cary, Cypress Creek, Devil’s Hammock, Flying Eagle, Four Creeks, Gulf Hammock, Hatchet Creek, Homosassa, Little River, Log Landing, Lower Econfina River, Mallory Swamp, Potts, Thomas Creek - Kings Road Unit, Troy Springs, Twin Rivers; **(68A-17.005):** Watermelon Pond

**Northwest Region (68A-15.063):** Apalachee, Blackwater - Carr Unit, Blackwater - Hutton Unit, Chipola River – Altha Tract, Econfina Creek, Escambia River, Escribano Point, Flint Rock, Lafayette Creek, Ochlockonee River, Perdido River, Pine Log, Tate’s Hell, Wakulla, Yellow River; Plank Road WMA – establish a new WMA (~8,000 acres) in Leon and Jefferson counties; **(68A-17.005):** Apalachicola River

**South Region (68A-15.064):** Allapattah Flats, Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Holey Land, Okaloacoochee Slough, Picayune Strand, Rotenberger; **(68A-17.005):** CREW, John C. and Mariana Jones/Hungryland, John G. and Susan H. DuPuis Jr., Southern Glades

**Northeast Region (68A-15.065):** Caravelle Ranch, Dunns Creek, Gores Landing, Guana River, Lake Panasoffkee, Little Big Econ, Matanzas, Ocala, Richloam, Rock Springs Run, Seminole Forest - Lake Tracy Unit, Seminole Ranch, Triple N Ranch WMA; **(68A-15.006):** Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Area, Rolling Meadows Unit (new) - establish a new area (~1,800 acres) in Polk County

## Specific Area Rule Changes

### Other Rules:

- 27 areas: roads, vehicles, access, hunting equipment, scouting, check stations or camping
- 9 areas: unit designations, dates, bag limits or use of dogs
- 2 areas: measures to address declining deer populations
- Everglades Complex (3 WMAs): address unsafe target shooting



### Other Rules:

Roads, vehicles, access, hunting equipment, scouting, check stations or camping -

**Southwest Region (68A-15.061):** Arbuckle, Green Swamp West, Walk-in-the-Water

**North Central Region (68A-15.062):** Big Shoals, Camp Blanding, Jennings Forest, Thomas Creek – King Road Unit

**Northwest Region (68A-15.063):** Apalachee, Apalachicola, Chipola River, Choctawhatchee River, Econfinia Creek, Eglin, Escambia River, Perdido River, Yellow River; **(68A-17.005):** Apalachicola River

**South Region (68A-15.064):** Dinner Island Ranch, Picayune Strand; **(68A-17.005):** John G. and Susan H. DuPuis Jr., Southern Glades

**Northeast Region (68A-15.065):** Herky Huffman/Bull Creek, Little Big Econ, Richloam – Baird Unit, Three Lakes, Triple N Ranch; **(68A-17.005):** Split Oak

Unit designations, dates, bag limits or use of dogs -

**North Central Region (68A-15.062):** Bayard, Lower Econfinia River

**Northwest Region (68A-15.063):** Flint Rock, Blackwater – Hutton Unit, Chipola River

**Northeast Region (68A-15.065):** Caravelle Ranch, Charles H. Bronson, Richloam, Seminole Forest – Lake Tracy Unit

Sustainability Measures - We occasionally need to take measures to ensure the sustainability of hunting opportunities in cases where there are resource concerns, landowner requests or stakeholder concerns that cannot be addressed using non-regulatory means -

**North Central Region (68A-15.062):**

Potts – prohibit the take of antlerless deer

**Northeast Region (68A-15.065):**

Three Lakes WMA – prohibit the take of antlerless deer during the archery season

Address unsafe target shooting in designated areas as provided by s. 790.15, FS -

**South Region (68A-15.064):** Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Holey Land, Rotenberger

## Specific Area Rule Changes

### Chassahowitzka WMA:

- Eagle's Nest Sink considered "Mt. Everest" of cave diving
- 12 reported diving fatalities since 1981
- Currently self-regulated
- Propose to prohibit SCUBA diving unless 18 years old and completed no-cost registration



A unique feature located within the boundaries of Chassahowitzka WMA is the Eagle's Nest (EN) sink and under water cave system. The EN sink is often described as the Mt. Everest of cave diving because of the complexities and difficulties associated with conducting cave dives there. The site draws cave divers from as far away as Europe and the Far East. SCUBA diving in the EN cave system is very different and far more risky and dangerous than open water SCUBA diving. Cave diving demands extensive training, equipment, and experience beyond basic open water SCUBA diving training. Divers have become entangled, wedged, pinned and lost in underwater caves. There have been 12 reported cave diving related fatalities at the EN sink since 1981.

Diving at EN sink is currently self-regulated. Due to the dangers involved with diving at EN sink, staff feel that informing and educating divers about the conditions and risks associated with diving the EN sink is a key step towards diver safety and risk management. Therefore, staff are proposing to prohibit SCUBA diving within Chassahowitzka WMA, except by persons at least 18 years of age that have completed a no-cost electronic SCUBA diving registration with the Commission. This process would require divers to acknowledge the risks, dangers and specific, appropriate training and experience needed to dive the site. Additionally, signs with very specific cave diving warnings will be added at the site. Staff have worked extensively with members of the cave diving community to develop this proposal. Due to the dangers involved in this activity and the support of the cave diving community, we are asking for this rule to be approved for advertising and adoption as soon as possible if no additional public hearing is requested.

## Public Input

- Rule summaries made available online for commenting
- Stakeholders notified through email and social media
  - Sent to more than 152,000 email addresses
- Over 14,000 responses



Summaries of all rule proposals regarding hunting and FWC-managed areas were provided to the public online for commenting beginning September 23 (ongoing). The opportunity to comment was advertised and made available through FWC's HuntFlorida Facebook page and Hunting Hot Sheet. Additionally, an email blast was sent via GovDelivery (FWC's email news group service), resulting in emails to over 152,000 unique email addresses. These efforts resulted in over 14,000 responses. The proposals will remain available for public comment until the February 2018 Commission meeting.

## Staff Recommendation



- Approve proposed rule amendments for advertising in the Florida Administrative Register
- Approve proposed rule amendment for Chassahowitzka WMA for advertising and adoption as soon as possible if no additional public hearing is requested
- Provide direction or guidance to staff as we continue working with the public
- Consider for final adoption at February 2018 Commission meeting



If approved as final rules in February 2018, most would take effect July 1, 2018.