

MEMORANDUM



TO: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director
DATE: February 1, 2017
SUBJECT: February 2017 Executive Director's Report

Updates

Lake Apopka Largemouth Bass Stocking - Lake Apopka, the state's fourth largest lake, was stocked with 440,000 largemouth bass this fall to improve fishing. Using new technologies developed at the Florida Bass Conservation Center at the Richloam Fish Hatchery, brood stock were spawned in hatchery raceways during September, four months earlier than naturally occurs. By stocking during late fall, survival of fingerling bass is enhanced by cooler water temperatures and an abundance of prey. FWC scientists will evaluate the success and survival advantages of this "out-of-phase" spawning technique. This historic stocking effort was celebrated by local officials and received extensive coverage through TV, radio, newspapers and online articles. This stocking will hopefully accelerate recovery of Lake Apopka's bass fishery while on-going lake restoration projects further enhance aquatic habitat and natural fish reproduction.

TrophyCatch Program Celebrates Season 4 Champion and Boat Winner - The TrophyCatch program crowned the Season 4 Hall of Fame Champion Paul Desrosier at a ceremony hosted by Bass Pro Shops Orlando where he received the TrophyCatch championship ring, as well as a replica mount of his 14 pound 10 ounce largemouth bass caught on Jessamine Lake in Pasco County. The TrophyCatch Hall of Fame Club celebrates approved submissions of bass that were caught and released in Florida that had a verified weight of 13 pounds or more. Six other Season 4 Hall of Fame winners were also recognized at the event. The TrophyCatch boat giveaway ceremony was hosted at Bartow Ford with Andrew Bowen winning the annual random drawing from all TrophyCatch registrants to take home a brand new Phoenix 619 Pro bass boat powered by Mercury Marine.

New World Screwworm – As reported during the November Commission meeting, presence of New World Screwworm in the Florida Keys was confirmed on September 30, 2016, by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). As of February 1, per the USFWS, screwworm has resulted in death or euthanasia in at least 135 Key deer on several Keys, including Big Pine Key, No Name Key, Sugarloaf Key, Middle Torch Key, Ramrod Key and Munson Island. The last confirmed Key deer screwworm case was January 10, 2017, from Munson Island. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), USDA, USFWS, the Florida Department of Health, the Cooperative Program for Screwworm Eradication with the government of Panama and others, continue Key deer treatment and fly eradication efforts to prevent the spread of this disease. On January 6, 2017, screwworm was confirmed in a stray dog found in Homestead, FL. The dog was treated by veterinarians and is reported in good health. Following this discovery, sterile fly releases began in the Homestead area as a precautionary measure on January 13, 2017. To date, fly assessments have been conducted on 40 Keys and in the Homestead, FL area and the USDA has released over 98 million sterile flies from 34 ground release sites on twelve islands, the city of Marathon and in the Homestead area. The FDACS animal health check point at Mile Marker 106 has evaluated over 12,203 animals to date with no signs of screwworm detected. Travelers

moving north with pets, small animals or livestock must stop to get a free check for signs of screwworm. Community outreach continues to keep the public informed and to assist with identifying animals that may be infested with screwworm.

Events

Hunting Incident Investigators Academy - FWC sponsored a Hunting Incident Investigators Academy for investigators who work on hunter injury and fatality incidents from January 15-19 at the Florida Public Safety Institute. Incident academies bring together some of North America's most experienced hunting incident investigators and forensics experts to help teach law enforcement personnel the best approach to conduct hunting incident investigations. Topics such as how to find, document, and report evidence are covered. Thorough and professional hunting incident investigations lead to appropriate legal actions to remove safety threats from the field. The investigations also help hunter education professionals evaluate course curriculum and program success. Ultimately, the goal for the Hunting Incident Academy is to reduce injuries and save lives.

Hunter Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation Workshop – FWC hosted a workshop on February 1 to discuss efforts to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters (R3). This information and training workshop was led by R3 expert Matt Dunfee of the Wildlife Management Institute and included both FWC staff, and stakeholders from local, state and national organizations. It was conducted to reinvigorate FWC and stakeholder R3 efforts with updated strategies, program development, evaluation and best practices. While Florida's hunter numbers increased 2.5 percent between 2006 and 2011, according to National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, action items resulting from this meeting will help ensure more effective and coordinated R3 work in Florida.

FWC holds public meeting on proposed changes to Collier County manatee zones - The FWC held a meeting in Naples on January 31 to receive public input on proposed changes to the existing Collier County manatee protection zones. In November 2016, the FWC Commission gave approval for staff to publish the proposed manatee protection zones and hold a public meeting in the county to collect input. Final approval of the proposed Collier County manatee zone changes may go before the Commission as early as April. The FWC's recommendations for revisions to Collier County's manatee zones are based on a review of recent data including manatee distribution surveys, mortalities, habitat use, and boat traffic patterns. Most of the proposed changes will result in the removal or reduction of speed zones in regulated waterways, with only a few new regulations affecting small areas in county waters.

FWC recruiting local partners to adopt April 10 as Florida Gopher Tortoise Day – FWC is inviting local partners to get involved in adopting April 10 as Florida Gopher Tortoise Day. Individuals, organizations and local governments can join the FWC in promoting Florida Gopher Tortoise Day to increase awareness and appreciation for these long-lived, gentle reptiles. An FWC website, <http://gophertortoisedayfl.com/>, has resources to assist people in adopting April 10 as Gopher Tortoise Day in their community, such as a resolution template, sample press release and sample social media post. There is information on hosting a Gopher Tortoise Day event, including educational materials that can be downloaded and distributed at events and in neighborhoods, schools or local government offices. The website also provides a video, photos and fun facts about gopher tortoises. April 10 was officially declared Gopher Tortoise Day by the Gopher Tortoise Council and was first promoted by the FWC in 2016. In Florida, gopher tortoises are a state listed threatened species, found in parts of all 67 counties and frequently encountered in neighborhoods, along roadways and on many of the state's private and public lands.

Partnerships

Landowner-led prescribed burn associations - The FWC held two workshops December in North Florida to discuss landowner-led prescribed burn associations. Prescribed burn associations build the capacity of private landowners to safely conduct prescribed fires on their land with the assistance of fellow members. Use of prescribed fire in Florida is beneficial for wildlife and habitats and helps reduce the risk of wildfires. The goal of the FWC's Landowner Assistance Program is to help establish one or more pilot prescribed burn associations in Florida. These types of associations are already established in the Midwest, where they are achieving positive results.

Accomplishments

Major Richard Moore Retiring – Major Richard Moore is retiring on March 2, 2017, after 27 years of dedicated service promoting boating safety and conservation law enforcement in Florida. He began his career as an officer in Hillsborough County and worked his way up to Major and Section Leader of FWC's Boating and Waterways Section. He is a fisherman, hunter, recreational boater, and a nationally recognized expert and advocate for boating safety. He currently serves as the state boating law administrator and has been the manager of Florida's Boating Safety Program since 2002. He was selected as the program manager for the National Association of State Boating Law Administrator's (NASBLA) boating under the influence (BUI) courses that created new standards for teaching BUI detection and enforcement. His contributions to boating safety initiatives are numerous, and he has served in leading roles at both the state and national levels. He recently received the prestigious NASBLA Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to boating safety over the course of his career. Major Moore will be missed at the agency by all who knew and worked with him, and we wish him nothing but the best for the future.

FWC leading invasive python and tegu control efforts – The FWC is working with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences on two pioneering projects targeting invasive Burmese pythons in Florida. The two projects include using Irula tribesmen from India and detection dogs trained by Auburn University to help remove pythons from environmentally sensitive areas. In their first eight days on the job, the Irula tribesmen — world-renowned snake catchers— removed 13 pythons, including four on their first visit to Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge on North Key Largo in partnership with the USFWS. The detection dogs, which use scent profiles of pythons to help target search areas, led to the removal of the four pythons from Key Largo. The FWC also has management focus on the invasive Argentine black and white tegu. Control efforts include systematically removing more than 3,800 tegus from Southeast Florida using trained staff and building response capacity in Florida's west coast counties to combat a growing wild population in that part of the state.