



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Commission Meeting
February 8 – 9, 2017
Crystal River, FL
Minutes

*A digital recording of the entire meeting is available upon request. Please contact the Community Relations Office at (850) 488-4676 for additional information.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held its regular meeting February 8 – 9, 2017, at the Plantation on Crystal River located at 9301 West Fort Island Trail, Crystal River. Chairman Brian Yablonski called the meeting to order with the following members in attendance:

Ronald Bergeron, Fort Lauderdale
Chuck Roberts, Tallahassee
Bo Rivard, Panama City

Aliese Priddy, Immokalee
Robert Spottswood, Key West
Richard Hanas, Oviedo

Senior and Presenting Staff:

Eric Sutton	Assistant Executive Director
Jennifer Fitzwater	Chief of Staff
Bud Vielhauer	General Counsel
Colonel Curtis Brown	Director, Division of Law Enforcement
Thomas Graef	Director, Southwest Region
Steve Shea	Director, Northwest Region
Shannon Wright	Director, Northeast Region
Chris Wynn	Director, North Central Region
Tom Reinert	Director, South Region
Diane Eggeman	Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management
Tom Champeau	Director, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management
Jessica McCawley	Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Gil McRae	Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
Dr. Thomas Eason	Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Jessica Crawford	Director, Office of Legislative Affairs
Jerrie Lindsey	Director, Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing
Melissa Recks	Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Martha Guyas	Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Paul Scharine	Division of Hunting and Game Management

There were 83 individuals registered to speak to the Commission during the two-day meeting.

Meeting Opening

Chairman Yablonski called the February 8 – 9, 2017, meeting to order at 8:34 a.m.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Mr. Tom Champeau, Director of the Division of Freshwater Fisheries, gave the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Commissioner Hanas.

Special Recognition

Chairman Yablonski asked for a moment of silence in recognition of an employee and partner of FWC who recently passed away. He presented a resolution honoring the work of Mr. Thom Stork, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) with the Florida Aquarium. He invited Mr. Scott Rose, Chief Operating Officer and interim CEO of the Florida Aquarium, to address the Commission.

Mr. Rose thanked FWC for honoring Mr. Stork for his conservation efforts throughout the State of Florida.

Adoption of Minutes

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Commissioner Hanas and carried, the November 2016 minutes were approved as written.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

Vice Chairman Priddy asked the Chairman to consider including discussion on Commission Meeting protocol as a continuation from the protocol conversation started at the November 2016 Commission Meeting.

Chairman Yablonski noted that he would like to make a change effective this meeting as to the total number of minutes a speaker may be granted for public comment if they receive donations of time. He mentioned that the reduction from nine minutes to six minutes is well supported by stakeholders across the board.

Commissioner Roberts asked that public comment on items not on the agenda be scheduled for only one day of each Commission meeting. He also suggested no donation of time for this particular portion of public comment. Finally, he asked the Chairman to consider limiting the public testimony to a fixed amount of time like two hours while allowing the Chairman the right to extend the amount of time allotted as needed depending on the topic.

Vice Chairman Priddy commented on the many ways that public comment can be handled. One option would be to reduce the amount of time for speakers to two minutes, particularly if there are more than 50 speakers on a particular item. She also suggested considering a time certain during a particular meeting day for hearing public comment on items not on the agenda.

Commissioner Bergeron asked if the Commission should allow time for experts or consultants to present information.

Chairman Yablonski responded that the discretion of the Chairman would allow for the testimony of particular experts as needed.

Vice Chairman Priddy noted that the best way to involve experts in the Commission Meetings would be to include their presentation with the staff report on the particular agenda item.

Chairman Yablonski asked Assistant Executive Director Sutton to provide some background on the research conducted on both other fish and wildlife agencies and other Florida appointed boards related to how they handle public comment at their meetings.

Assistant Executive Director Sutton commented that the data compiled by staff shows that the FWC allows more public comment than most of the entities researched. He added that there are several other state fish and wildlife

agencies that require the public to submit a request to address the board for items not on the agenda to the Executive Director's Office weeks in advance of the meeting. He then stated that something of that nature is not what the Commission is looking to require. Finally, he confirmed that staff captured the requests of the Commission and will incorporate these requests into the new meeting protocol for more efficient meetings in the future.

Commissioner Rivard commented on the practice at other public meetings for a speaker to waive in support of a particular issue or previous speaker. He noted support of making the public comment period more predictable for the public and being respectful of everyone's time.

Commissioner Bergeron noted that the time limit of six minutes is more than adequate.

Mr. Bud Vielhauer, General Counsel, responded that there is a specific statute related to public entities accepting public testimony and that the Commission has established a protocol which satisfies those requirements.

Commissioner Roberts noted that if the Commission would like to include specific expert testimony, he would request that the information be submitted to the Commissioners and staff in advance. He also noted that if the Commission were to move public comment for items not on the agenda to one day of each meeting that the agendas for the Commission Meetings are published in advance which would allow individuals to make plans to participate if they wish to only sign up to speak on items not on the agenda.

Chairman Yablonski commented that he is supportive of having public comment on items not on the agenda only on one day. He stated that if there are issues with individuals being able to attend the meeting during the day which that item is scheduled, there is always a way to email or send a hard copy letter to the Commission for consideration.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Spottswood, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried, the February 2017 Meeting agenda was approved.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Upon a motion by Vice Chairman Priddy, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried, the February 2017 Consent Agenda items were approved.

Staff Reports

Federal Legislative Issues Outlook

Ms. Jessica Crawford, Legislative Affairs Director, along with invited guests Mr. Whit Fosburgh, Mr. Brian McManus, and FWC Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries Management, Ms. Jessica McCawley, presented an update on Federal Legislative Issues that may be of interest to the agency.

Ms. Crawford provided an update on why this presentation is important to FWC and then invited Mr. Fosburgh, President and CEO with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, to present information to the Commission.

Chairman Yablonski asked if conservation infrastructure was included in the details that the new administration will be reviewing and discussing.

Mr. Fosburgh responded that his agency is working with the new administration and new members of Congress to highlight the importance of conservation.

Commissioner Bergeron noted that the Commission works extremely hard to balance the conservation of fish, wildlife, and habitat in the State of Florida while maintaining the access to land and activities for the public.

Chairman Yablonski commented that he sees the opportunity for a change in the approach to conservation more similar to the style of Teddy Roosevelt and sportsmen, stressing the importance of access, use, and enjoyment.

Mr. McManus presented to the Commission federal congressional bills related to the State of Florida which were introduced last Congress with the background that none of them passed.

Commissioner Hanas complimented Mr. McManus for his work in Washington, D.C. on behalf of the agency.

Commissioner Rivard questioned whether or not the Graves Bill (H.R.3094) would be moving forward with the new Congress.

Mr. McManus responded that he has not been able to meet with Congressman Graves to determine whether this is moving forward or not.

Chairman Yablonski asked Ms. McCawley if there was any additional information from the staff perspective on the Graves bill.

Ms. McCawley responded that Executive Director had a meeting with Congressman Graves and it is the understanding of FWC that he would like to meet with the state marine directors before moving anything forward.

Chairman Yablonski commented that there are two members from Florida on the House Committee on Natural Resources which has never happened before. He then noted that FWC has supported the Blue-Ribbon Panel, yet the presentation showed light support by co-sponsors. He asked what the dynamics are like with that topic.

Mr. McManus responded that there are some tweaks being made to the legislation and the plan is to have it reintroduced in the next several months. However, there are issues regarding the price tag associated with it.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked Senator Nelson and Senator Rubio regarding issues related to Biscayne National Park and proposed closures without science to back the closures. He commented that he will remain involved in this issue with staff to ensure that the bill moves forward with requiring scientific support before issuing closures to Federal lands or waters in Florida.

Chairman Yablonski offered additional assistance related to the Blue-Ribbon Panel legislation moving forward. He reminded the Commission that at the last meeting a proposed resolution was discussed in support of the Blue-Ribbon Panel. He offered that resolution again to assist in showing support to Congress for that important topic.

Special Recognition

Chairman Yablonski welcomed Mr. Mike Nussman, President of the American Sportfishing Association (ASA), and Mr. Kirk Immens, ASA Board Chairman, and invited them to address the Commission.

Mr. Nussman thanked the Commission for this opportunity to address the topic of the future of hunting and fishing. He noted that license fees and excise taxes going back into the management and access to public lands as one of the best programs that has ever been designed for conservation. He noted the need to shift the attention to getting more of the next generation into the outdoors.

Mr. Immens addressed the Commission and highlighted the importance of fishing not only in the State of Florida, but throughout the world. He thanked the Commission for managing fish and wildlife resources in the state.

BREAK

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Tom Ingram, President and CEO of Diving Equipment Manufacturers Association (DEMA), addressed the Commission. He invited the Commission to attend the upcoming DEMA meeting taking place in Orlando in November 2017. He spoke in opposition of a shark feeding provision in Senate Bill 3099.

Mr. Tony Grogan, owner of Spearboard.com, addressed the Commission regarding the shark fin ban and the shark feeding ban. He noted the current regulations associated with the shark fishery in the United States. He requested that the federal process on allowing due process for any decisions related to rules be followed, specifically related to a Statement of Estimated Regulatory Costs (SERC).

Mr. Mike Eller with Destin Charter Boat Association addressed the Commission with thanks in recognizing that the commercial aspect of the Graves bill is detrimental to fishermen, and suggesting that sector be removed for the bill to be considered further. He noted that if FWC considers moving forward with support of any new proposed bill, Florida would lose a lot of opportunities to fish.

Mr. Shane Cantrell, Executive Director of the Charter Fisherman's Association, addressed the Commission. He asked FWC to withdraw support for the Graves bill if it is introduced again. He commented on several other federal legislative issues brought up by the presentation.

Mr. Eric Brazer, Deputy Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholder's Alliance addressed the Commission. He commented that the Graves bill is bad news for the commercial fishery in Florida and thanked the Commission for suggesting the commercial sector be removed from the bill. Finally, he thanked the Commission for supporting the shark fin ban.

Mr. Trip Aukeman with Coastal Conservation Association addressed the Commission and thanked the Commission, specifically Commissioner Bergeron, for the efforts made to oppose closures in Biscayne National Park. He asked the Commission to support state management of red snapper.

Mr. James Zurbrick addressed the Commission with thanks for removing the commercial sector from the Graves bill. He noted that the charter boat industry will be coming forward to the Commission with requests to manage their own sector.

Mr. Gary Alberts addressed the Commission with a request to withdraw support for the Graves bill if it is reintroduced this Congress. He asked the Commission to coordinate with the Federal agencies in designing a better management plan.

Mr. Gary Jennings with ASA addressed the Commission regarding the efforts in briefing Congressional delegates regarding Everglades Restoration.

Ms. Pam Anderson, Operations Manager of Captain Anderson's Marina in Panama City Beach and Fishery Representative for the Bay County Chamber of Commerce, addressed the Commission. She noted the need for reintroduction of the Graves bill (H.R.3094) so that the individual states can manage the Gulf red snapper fishery at a more local level.

Mr. Brad Gorst addressed the Commission in opposition to the Graves bill (H.R.3094) being reintroduced and supported by FWC. He commented that the charter boat sector will be penalized if that moves forward.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski commented that there currently is no proposal to reintroduce the Graves bill. There is a new administration and new committees. He mentioned that some of these discussions on the Graves bill are coming up because of potential reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Act.

Commissioner Roberts noted that the goal of FWC is to protect all fishermen and the access that Florida has to red snapper. This is the justification for FWC being included in the discussions on the Graves bill.

Vice Chairman Priddy requested staff and guest speakers keep in mind the management practices on federal lands. She expressed concerns about federal mandates related to endangered species in Florida and the additional management actions that are required without any additional funding. She noted that there could be a lot of improvement in the National Resources Conservation Services program related to available funding that makes it burdensome for small farmers and ranchers to take advantage of those programs. Finally, she asked for flexibility in National Parks to allow opportunities for programs to eliminate exotic species which negatively impact native species.

Commissioner Bergeron requested to stay involved with the past bill associated with Biscayne National Park. He echoed the concerns of Vice Chairman Priddy regarding removing exotic species in the National Parks and commented on work with the Superintendent of Everglades National Park to allow more users in to hunt these exotic species.

Chairman Yablonski asked about any flexibility for variation in management and access to National Parks.

Ms. McCawley responded that there are policies in Biscayne National Park for fishing which allow for lionfish removal by divers and possibly the use of hook and line.

Mr. Fosburgh agreed that there is a bit of flexibility on a case by case basis.

Commissioner Bergeron noted that the activities associated with removal of invasive or exotic species are common practice in many different National Parks. He thanked Mr. Pedro Ramos, Superintendent of Everglades National Park. He committed to working with staff on moving that aspect of activities forward.

Chairman Yablonski asked to invite Mr. Ramos to a future meeting. Finally, he asked if there is a timeline for when we can expect legislation to be reintroduced.

Mr. Fosburgh responded that the new administration is tied up with nominations and other activities until early summer and then more opportunities will come available to introduce bills.

Commissioner Rivard thanked the team for the presentation and update on Federal Legislative Issues.

Commissioner Spottswood asked if the lead and tackle phase-out issue has a current status.

Mr. Fosburgh responded that he feels that this issue will get repealed by Congress pretty quickly. There have been a lot of efforts to reduce the effects of lead ammunition and tackle.

Goliath Grouper

Ms. McCawley along with Mr. Gil McRae, director of the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI), presented a review of the biology and recently-completed stock assessment of goliath grouper. Staff requested direction on how to proceed with goliath grouper management and whether or not to consider a limited harvest in state waters.

Chairman Yablonski asked about the difference between the mercury concentrations in red and black grouper compared to goliath grouper.

Mr. McRae responded that there currently is not enough information on goliath grouper to provide specific guidance. He then stated that current recommendations to avoid mercury concentrations in other fish like snappers are broad and range from no more than one fish per week to one fish per month.

Commissioner Spottswood asked what FWRI needs in order to get details to better provide answers on research associated with this fishery.

Mr. McRae responded that the most economical way to obtain goliath data is through recreational fishing reporting via smart phone apps, fin clip program, etc. He noted that the information on reproduction and details on the sex of the fish are not as vital to stock assessments, but that age data is critical.

BREAK

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Skip Commagere addressed the Commission in support of status quo moving forward with this species. He added support for the shark feeding ban based on the impact it has for sharks being conditioned by food.

Mr. Tom Ingram from Diving Equipment Manufacturer's Association (DEMA) addressed the Commission. He offered to contribute additional feedback on the potential goliath grouper harvest. He suggested that opening goliath grouper harvest now would have a detrimental effect on the species and favors the status quo of no harvest. He added that goliath grouper provide economic benefits to divers in Florida and that the diving community can contribute to goliath grouper research.

Mr. Tony Grogan addressed the Commission in opposition to a limited harvest of goliath grouper. He noted major concerns for the mercury levels in a goliath grouper and felt the potential slot limit suggested by staff was inappropriate. He added there is currently a two-year grant to monitor this species with sonar. He then commented on the next of kin study.

Mr. Park Chapman addressed the Commission regarding a current research method in the Cayman Islands on Nassau Grouper that may offer additional research models for FWC to use on goliath grouper. He supported the FWC staying status quo.

Mr. Jeff Miller with CCA addressed the Commission with thanks to staff for bringing this proposal to the Commission for consideration. He noted concern for an ecological imbalance at certain areas where CCA members are witnessing these goliath grouper in the water. He added that the CCA members voted unanimously to move forward with a limited take if the science supports it and the staff proposal in the presentation would provide parameters for such a harvest.

Mr. Gerald Carrol, owner of Jupiter Dive Center, addressed the Commission. He noted opposition to shark feeding. He requested the Commission consider the economic revenue associated with goliath grouper for eco-tourism businesses in Florida. He added concern about the data, a potential slot size, and policing a tagging system for goliath grouper.

Mr. Walt Stearns, photojournalist with the Underwater Journal, addressed the Commission. He commented that Florida has the only spawning aggregation for this species that divers can view. He suggested staff review the proposed slot limit in order to reduce the impacts from levels of mercury.

Mr. Brett Fitzgerald, executive director of the Snook and Gamefish Foundation, addressed the Commission. He noted that education would be extremely beneficial in gathering additional data for this species.

Mr. Benjamin Bateman addressed the Commission with a suggestion of using hook and line only, and reducing the slot limit size to harvest the smaller size fish. Another idea would be to incentivize the youth opportunities for this harvest and support the development of an app to report goliath sightings. He is opposed to shark feeding.

Mr. Gary Jennings addressed the Commission with support of further investigation of a limited harvest.

Mr. Byron Maharrey addressed the Commission with thanks to staff for engaging everyone on this topic. He provided anecdotal evidence that the Goliath grouper may be causing reductions in other species such as snapper

and lobster. He added support for a limited harvest with a slot limit below the mercury content level and above the juvenile size. He also requested that the cost associated with this be minimal because the opportunity for most citizens and guests to participate would be eliminated.

Mr. Ed Walker addressed the Commission regarding the lack of data to be used in any successful stock assessment. He suggested a limited harvest for the scientific aspect of this issue to gather more of the data needed.

Mr. Trip Aukeman addressed the Commission with a request to move forward with a limited harvest on a regional basis.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Bergeron asked when these fish begin breeding. He also asked about the mercury levels of the recommended size fish. Finally, he asked about the negative impacts of moving forward with status quo.

Mr. McRae responded that the Goliath grouper tends to reach maturity around 5-6 years, which are typically around 1.2 meters (47-48 inches) in length. The proposed slot limit was created so that immature fish could not be harvested. The proposed slot limit of 47-67 inches is around the size where goliath reach maturity. He noted that FWC does not have specific data on the mercury levels, but they suspect these size fish would have concentrated levels. The mercury levels would likely be at a level that would require limited consumption. He noted that moving forward with the status quo and no harvest may result in pushback from constituents that feel the population densities are too high. From an assessment standpoint, not much would happen initially; but getting fin clips from a large number of fish in the proposed slot limit would not require harvest and would be scientifically beneficial.

Commissioner Spottswood noted that he understands that a limited harvest of this species could move forward without a negative impact on the sustainability of the fisheries. He noted the cautious approach by the Commission on discussing a limited harvest, but notes the importance of the science that such a harvest could bring in. He noted support for providing direction to staff to begin workshops with stakeholders on potentially opening a limited harvest for this species.

Commissioner Roberts noted support for beginning stakeholder workshops on potentially opening a limited harvest on this species.

Commissioner Rivard noted support for direction to begin workshops to gather stakeholder feedback.

Chairman Yablonski asked Mr. McRae if the limited harvest number of 100 fish would help the science improve. He then asked if the science shows any reef imbalance due to goliath grouper populations.

Mr. McRae noted that he would need to review the harvest number more thoroughly but would definitely couple the limited harvest number with other activities like number of sightings, fin clip collections, etc. He also noted that the food webs in reefs are not functioning like they did historically, and it is difficult to say what one species impact will be on a reef.

Commissioner Hanas noted concern for reaching the proper level of information that would get consensus from both the science from FWC and stakeholders in order to move forward.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked at what age and size do goliath leave state waters. She asked about how FWC understands the mercury levels in fish. She questioned whether other countries have data on their goliath grouper management if they do allow harvest.

Mr. McRae responded that when goliath reach around 1 meter in size (roughly the proposed slot limit), they start moving from their inshore habitats to offshore habitats. These offshore habitats can be relatively shallow and

within state waters in many parts of Florida. He explained that there is a good relationship between the mercury level and size of the fish, which allows us to predict the mercury concentration in various sizes. In response to goliath data from other countries, he noted that FWC has some data from these countries, but we can reach out to understand their monitoring and fisheries management plans.

Commissioner Hanas asked about the FWC attorneys stating that they believe harvest in state waters could be considered and how likely is this to happen.

Ms. McCawley responded that since the acceptable biological catch (ABC) is zero, there is the potential for the Secretary of Commerce to come in and stop harvest in state waters.

Chairman Yablonski provided direction to staff to move forward with gathering information from stakeholders and bring it back to the Commission at a future meeting in late 2017.

Items Requiring Action

Draft Rule – Gulf Red Snapper and Gray Triggerfish

Ms. Martha Guyas with the Division of Marine Fisheries presented details on Gulf Red Snapper state waters season draft rule and data for considering a Gray Triggerfish season along with Mr. McRae providing an update on the FWC Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS).

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Mike Eller addressed the Commission with concern about the data available for opening additional days for red snapper, which continues the cycle of going over the limit and having to pay back in the next year. He felt GRFS was a step in the right direction.

Mr. Shane Cantrell addressed the Commission regarding gray triggerfish harvest, which would take away from a potential 2018 season.

Mr. Jeff Miller, representing CCA Florida, addressed the Commission with concern for the council process to determine the season date length. He commented that something needs to change regarding the management of these fisheries. He stated that he is okay with the gray triggerfish closure. He is very concerned about the abundance of red snapper and expresses a lack of confidence in recreational data.

Ms. Pam Anderson addressed the Commission with thanks for continuing the work on the FWC GRFS which helps with data collection and assessments that guide management of multiple species.

Mr. Brad Gorst addressed the Commission regarding additional state seasons creating animosity between regions of the state. He noted concern for the paybacks required by going over the catch limits. He expressed concern over opening a fall gray triggerfish season due to the high 2016 overage.

Mr. Gary Jennings addressed the Commission with thanks for consideration of additional state seasons. He noted support for staff recommendations on red snapper and gray triggerfish. He strongly opposed pursuing any change to sector allocation for these species.

Mr. Benjamin Bateman addressed the Commission with support of staff proposal on gray triggerfish. He supports a 15-inch minimum size limit and a 16-fish commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish.

Mr. Ed Walker addressed the Commission with a request to take into consideration other regions of the state that do not have red snapper in state waters.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Priddy asked if the underlying problem of red snapper management and low federal seasons is obtaining an accurate stock assessment. She also asked about the impact of discards on stock assessments.

Ms. Guyas responded that the issues with red snapper are not solely due to the science behind stock assessments.

Commissioner Rivard noted if the Florida state season matched the federal season, the increase in the number of fishing days would not be significant.

Chairman Yablonski added that by being consistent with the federal season would not benefit the state as a whole.

Commissioner Roberts noted that the FWC GRFS has been an improvement and we need to continue to pursue all opportunities to gain accurate information, especially in recreational fisheries. He stated that they can only control and focus on the issues and management in Florida.

Commissioner Spottswood asked about applying the FWC GRFS instead of currently used data and would it hurt more in the short term but provide better detail in the long run.

Mr. McRae responded that the GRFS better reflects the productivity of the red snapper stock. He also noted that GRFS is undergoing a certification process with NOAA Fisheries.

Commissioner Bergeron asked about FWC's confidence in the stock assessments and science that red snapper management is guided by compared to stakeholder input.

Mr. McRae responded that FWC is part of the stock assessment process by partnering with other states and federal agencies, and they are confident in the techniques used. He noted that they have concerns about the quality of the recreational data which is why FWC implemented the GRFS program.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Commissioner Rivard and carried, the Commission approved staff recommendation for the red snapper season draft rule.

Draft Rule – Bay Scallops

Ms. Melissa Recks with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management provided a presentation related to Bay Scallops including a staff recommendation to implement regionally-specific changes to modify the 2017 scallop season dates as follows via executive order: the 2017 open season in Gulf County (including St. Joseph Bay) to run July 25 – September 10, and the 2017 open season dates in Dixie County and a portion of Taylor County (including Suwannee, Steinhatchee, and Keaton Beach) to run June 16 – September 10. Staff also recommended that the Commission direct staff to conduct further scallop restorations in the St. Joseph Bay area during 2017, including implementation of No-Entry zone via Executive Order to protect the restoration scallop cages.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Ms. Towan Kopinsky with Gulf County Tourism Development Council addressed the Commission. She noted that the St. Joe Bay community worked with FWC staff in 2016 as directed by the Commission to cage scallops in St. Joe Bay to help alleviate the concerns about reduction in populations in that area. She thanked the Commission for making accommodations for Gulf County to help save this species in that area of the state. She stated that she supported the staff recommendation for the 2017 season in Gulf County.

Mr. James Zurbrick addressed the Commission with a request to let the science dictate opening seasons earlier.

Mr. Ed Walker addressed the Commission with support of opening the waters in Pasco County for harvest of this species as soon as possible.

Mr. Red Ed Brennen addressed the Commission and suggested a reduced bag limit for the first month of the season.

Mr. Charles Norwood addressed the Commission regarding the Taylor County proposed harvest dates. He reflected on the economic impacts associated with the timing of Hurricane Hermine. He spoke in support of the staff recommendation to modify the scallop season dates to June 16 – September 10 for Taylor County.

Ms. Danielle Norwood addressed the Commission in support of the original proposal of June 16 - September 10 in Taylor County.

Ms. Chaelie Norwood addressed the Commission regarding the Taylor County scallop season proposal with a request to open June 16 - September 10.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski asked for clarification on authorization by Executive Order to open Taylor County prior to April Commission meeting if the Commission decides to move forward with that.

Ms. Recks responded that by using an Executive Order the Commission could authorize Executive Director Wiley to act on their decision at any point in time.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked about opening other areas as well as Taylor County on June 16.

Ms. Recks explained that the primary concern is that scallops are considerably smaller at the beginning of the season and this can lead to heavier impact on the population of this fishery.

Commissioner Roberts asked if there has been any interest in a reduced bag limit during certain portions of the season. He suggested that this idea be discussed for next season. He thanked staff for working with Gulf County on the challenging issue related to scallop management due to hardships.

Ms. Recks responded that this is the first she has heard of the idea but would be happy to discuss this idea for future seasons.

Commissioner Spottswood asked for clarification about the season dates in counties not included within the staff recommendation and confirmed that there would be no season in Pasco County this year.

Commissioner Rivard noted that the most recent Taylor County resolution supported the early season opening.

Chairman Yablonski thanked Commissioner Roberts for his work in Gulf County.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Commissioner Spottswood and carried, the Commission approved staff recommendation to implement a No-Entry area in St. Joseph Bay for scallop restoration and modify the 2017 season dates for Gulf County. The Commission also requested staff work with Taylor County to resolve their preference for the Taylor/Dixie County area and, if supported by the Counties, execute an Executive Order to implement the recommended season date changes for that area before March 1, 2017.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Report

Ms. McCawley presented a report on actions and discussions from the SAFMC's December 5-9, 2016, meeting in Myrtle Beach, SC and items that will be discussed at the SAFMC's March 6-10, 2017, meeting in Jekyll Island, GA.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Charlie Phillips, vice chairman of the SAFMC, addressed the Commission. He noted that the assessments are lacking the details to support better management for fisheries. Commercial fishermen are looking for better ways to run the business and manage the fishery appropriately. In regard to the exempted fishing permit (EFP) request that would pilot test a voluntary IFQ system, he would like to build this program to see if it would work instead of waiting for better stock assessments. He asked the Commission to allow staff on the Council to continue to work on alternative options.

Mr. Bill Kelly with the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen Association addressed the Commission. He noted requests for better management of the allocations to the Council. He voiced opposition to IFQ programs based on issues that have proven difficult related to this topic in the Gulf.

Mr. Shane Cantrell addressed the Commission in support of the IFQ proposal by the fishermen who are looking to address issues in the Atlantic.

Mr. Jeff Miller addressed the Commission regarding the proposed IFQ permit and requested the Commission oppose that moving forward.

Mr. Trip Aukeman representing CCA Florida addressed the Commission regarding a possible red snapper season in the Atlantic rather than throwing away discards. He noted opposition to any allocation shift for yellowtail snapper in the Atlantic unless there is a full analysis of the potential allocation shifts.

Mr. Gary Jennings addressed the Commission regarding support for maintaining separate commercial and recreational allocations for yellowtail snapper. He added opposition to the pelagic longline EFP.

Mr. Eric Brazer addressed the Commission in support of the commercial allocation IFQ EFP.

Mr. Richard Miller addressed the Commission echoing the comments of Mr. Charlie Phillips in support for the commercial IFQ EFP.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski noted that the pelagic longline EFP was last discussed many years ago. He noted the negative aspects of this fishing method and proposed a letter from the Commission in opposition to this proposal. He added mixed comments of the IFQ EFP. He noted the full proposal is not complete yet, and the Commission would need to see the details before making a final decision on that.

Commissioner Spottswood noted support with the Chairman's position on the pelagic longline EFP.

Commission Bergeron supports the position on the pelagic longline EFP.

Commissioner Spottswood noted that he is hearing quite a bit of opposition from fishermen on the IFQ EFP.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked for staff to revisit a requirement of descending devices onboard boats in the Atlantic which could alleviate dead discards for many species.

Ms. McCawley responded that if the Commission would like staff to move forward with a requirement to use descending devices for state waters, staff can bring back a proposal. She also noted that at the upcoming March SAFMC Council meeting, descending devices will be addressed. She explained that she would like to tell the Council that FWC would rather require descending devices compared to large scale closures.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked for a video presentation on using descending devices to show at the next Commission meeting.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) Report

Ms. Martha Guyas with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management presented a report on actions from the GMFMC's January 30 through February 2, 2017 meeting.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Eric Brazer addressed the Commission in support of the bottom longline EFP request.

Mr. Shane Cantrell addressed the Commission with thanks to Martha for the recent changes in devices approved for monitoring in the Gulf of Mexico. He requested support by the Commission on the triggerfish changes proposed for the April Council meeting other than the size limit change.

Mr. Bill Kelly, representing Florida Key's Commercial Fishing Association, addressed the Commission supporting the spiny lobster harvest level change and the new bully net regulations. He noted that the king mackerel fishery is very healthy and supports new, flexible allocations to increase harvest.

Mr. Mike Eller addressed the Commission with thanks to Martha for her work getting approval on the electronic logbook. He noted enforcement of poaching in the Federal EEZ by FWC law enforcement and he thanked them for their efforts.

Mr. Jeff Miller addressed the Commission in opposition to the bottom longline EFP and requested the Commission send a letter of opposition on this.

Mr. Trip Aukeman addressed the Commission with a request to go consistent with the feds on the gag grouper recreational season for the Big Bend area.

Ms. Pam Anderson addressed the Commission with concerns about the financial burden to some related to the requirement of the electronic log books reporting.

Mr. James Zurbrick addressed the Commission in support of IFQ's because of the success of those programs in other areas. He noted support for the bottom longline EFP request.

Mr. Gary Alberts addressed the Commission with a request to keep science and the fishery in mind in decisions moving forward. He noted that perhaps it is time to look at why these areas were closed and if the fishery has recovered or the issue has been resolved. He requested the EFPs be looked at as a tool to get better data and thinking outside of the box.

Mr. Brad Gorst addressed the Commission with thanks to Martha regarding approval of the electronic logbook reporting. He requested a consistent season for gag grouper.

Mr. Gary Jennings, representing the ASA, addressed the Commission with support for the postponement of the king mackerel allocation amendment. He also opposed the longline EFP and any expansion of this fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.

Ms. Lisa Schmidt addressed the Commission in support of the bottom longline EFP request.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Priddy asked for clarification for the timeframe of the EFP request. She asked if the EFP could be terminated if the number of interactions with turtles was at a certain level.

Ms. Guyas noted that NOAA has language in the EFP protocol that would allow the program to be shut down if there are a certain number of interactions with turtles.

Commissioner Rivard noted support of the EFP request if the safeguards are built in for early termination as necessary.

Commissioner Hanas asked about the information available for gag grouper recreational season.

Commissioner Roberts noted that when the gag grouper season was opened early in the Big Bend counties, it was because the fish were in state waters at that time. He noted that now the fishermen would like to request a fall season in the area. He suggested that for this year in those four counties, open for April and May, close the season, and then open again in October/November or November/December. He also noted that it is important to decide the open date because it will open according to the rule prior to the next Commission meeting.

Chairman Yablonski asked about how to make a bigger stretch of opportunity for the stakeholders for gag season in the Big Bend.

Commissioner Roberts noted that no decision has to be made today regarding the new gag grouper season for these four counties, as the current season will open in April.

Commissioner Spottswood asked about gear changes on the bottom longline EFP to decrease turtle interactions.

Chairman Yablonski stated that he opposes the EFP.

Commissioner Roberts suggested that the Commission should oppose the idea of longlining in the closed area, similar to previous stances on longline EFPs.

Commissioner Rivard supports the decision of the Commission.

Commissioner Spottswood noted that he opposes the EFP.

Chairman Yablonski stated that at this moment the Commission is opposing the EFP.

Public Comment on Items not on the Agenda

The following individuals registered to speak on items not listed on the agenda:

Mr. Benjamin Wolking and his teammates on the Gator Bots club addressed the Commission regarding their research on manatees and ideas to protect them from boats.

Mr. Bill Kelly addressed the Commission requesting additional law enforcement in the Florida Keys.

Vice Chairman Priddy asked Colonel Curtis Brown to advise on other partners in law enforcement who can help with law enforcement in the Keys.

Colonel Brown noted that the biggest partner for this effort in the area is Monroe County law enforcement, but there are also other federal law enforcement partners in the area.

Mr. Brad Lowery with the Florida Bowhunters Council addressed the Commission regarding the Black Bear hunt.

Ms. Kimberlee Norton addressed the Commission regarding bear habitat loss.

Mr. Garrett Alberts addressed the Commission in regard to the oil spill and the loss of turtles caused by the spill and asked the Commission to keep an open mind in their decision on whether or not to support the longline EFP.

Mr. Byron Maharrey addressed the Commission requesting not to minimize public comment to only the first day. He also wanted to propose a smaller slot limit in regard to Goliath grouper. He then addressed the Commission on the bear hunt and asked that we base our decision on science.

Ms. Katrina Shadix addressed the Commission regarding the bear hunt and thanked them for not holding a hunt in 2016. She addressed her concerns regarding panther issues and opposes the delisting of the species.

Ms. Lesley Blackner addressed the Commission to thank them for voting no on the 2016 bear hunt.

Ms. Jaimee Parry addressed the Commission and requested their support of HR491.

Ms. Denise Gaug addressed the Commission regarding Nosey the Elephant and requested that the Commission remove this elephant from the care of the owner due to alleged violations.

Ms. Karen Liwienski addressed the Commission regarding Nosey the Elephant and requested enforcement of the rules associated with captive wildlife.

Ms. Shannon Geis addressed the Commission with a request for information that the Commission has regarding any future proposed bear hunts in 2017.

Mr. Steve Meyers addressed the Commission and thanked Commissioners Bergeron, Rivard, Spottswood, and Chairman Yablonski for opposing a bear hunt in 2016. He noted that the 2015 bear hunt was approved more to manage loss of bear habitat due to an expanding human population.

Ms. Rebecca Heintz addressed the Commission and noted her concern about the change in the amount of time speakers will be allowed to address the Commission. She added opposition to any future bear hunt because the main issue for bear management is habitat loss.

Mr. Lex Hood with Friends of the Aquifer addressed the Commission regarding a petition to initiate rulemaking for wild and captive primates.

Mr. Karl Ambrose addressed the Commission regarding bears. He noted his concern with hounding and the owners. He suggested that there is a poaching problem in the Ocala National Forest. He noted the need for additional officers to be out enforcing the rules on hunting. He offered an example of a bad decision to release cubs in a state park where they are doing burns and cutting trees which does not allow for proper habitat for bears.

Ms. Linda Wood addressed the Commission with thanks for postponing the bear hunt in 2016.

Mr. Steve Gafford addressed the Commission with thanks to the Commissioners who voted against the bear hunt in 2016. He stated there has been a decline in the number of bears in his area of the state and that he has trail cameras and video proof of it.

Ms. Jennifer Leon addressed the Commission regarding proposed development projects in primary panther habitat.

Ms. Helena Parsons addressed the Commission regarding captive wildlife and licensed facilities or owners relinquishing their animals. She asked what FWC would do if there were no refuges available to accept these animals when they are relinquished.

Mr. Bill George addressed the Commission in support of a potential limited harvest of Goliath Grouper. He also commented on the public speaker time reduction. Finally, he noted support for future black bear hunts.

Mr. Newton Cook addressed the Commission regarding recent youth hunts at the end of waterfowl season and he thanked FWC for providing assistance. He noted that he is coordinating with the Water Management District to open up the 16,000-acre flow equalized basin on STA 3-4.

Mr. Gary Lofley addressed the Commission in support of dog hunting.

Ms. Sandra Clinger addressed the Commission regarding loss of black bear habitat. She requested additional coordination from FWC and other partner agencies related to habitat management.

Ms. Kristy Bush addressed the Commission in opposition to the black bear hunt.

Ms. Jeanne Jain addressed the Commission in opposition to any future bear hunt. She thanked Ms. Angeline Scotten for presenting information to the public on coyotes.

Recess Wednesday's Portion of the Meeting

Chairman Yablonski recessed the meeting at 7:21 p.m. to reconvene at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, February 9, 2017.

Thursday, February 9 Reconvene

Chairman Yablonski reconvened the meeting at 8:33 a.m.

Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida Update

Mr. Andy Walker, CEO of the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida (Foundation), provided an update on Foundation related activities. He reminded the Commission of the list of nine goals and priorities for the Foundation to improve capacity and organization. He noted the next meeting date for the Foundation Board is March 27 – 28, 2017. He highlighted the recent successful lunch and learn event for potential donors for the Foundation. He then mentioned the recent hires of staff which increased the total number of Foundation employees from two to four. He noted that Vice Chairman Priddy will join him and another Foundation Board member to present the BlueGreen Award to Bud Adams at his ranch in March.

Commissioner Bergeron asked about coordination with Wells Fargo regarding a grant.

Mr. Walker responded that the Foundation has agreed to coordinate with Wells Fargo on a grant for youth to attend the Everglades Youth Conservation Camp. He added that Commissioner Bergeron's granddaughter would be highlighted through the Foundation fundraising activities to help inspire the younger generation getting involved in conservation.

Staff Report – Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) 75th Anniversary

Ms. Jerrie Lindsey, Director of the Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing, provided a presentation on the history of WMAs throughout Florida and the celebration of the 75th anniversary.

Chairman Yablonski thanked Vice Chairman Priddy for her attendance at the kick-off event at Babcock Webb WMA. He invited all the Commissioners to participate in events around the state as they come up over the next several months related to this anniversary celebration.

Dr. Thomas Eason, Director of the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, commented on the future goals of the WMAs. He spoke of the role and responsibility that lies with the agency regarding management of the WMAs. He commented that the goal is to build on the great foundation that has been set over the last 75 years. He added that controlled burns are a major part of habitat management in Florida.

Chairman Yablonski asked how the message gets relayed to the public who may not be aware of the concept of controlled burns and habitat management by fire. He commented on the importance of educating the public, both

visitors and citizens of the state, on the importance of controlled burns for the native habitat and wildlife. He asked what percent of public lands are burned each year.

Dr. Eason responded that approximately 7% of the 1.4 million acres throughout the state that are directly managed by FWC undergo controlled burns each year. He noted that the agency would like to increase that percentage because of the desire to make healthier habitat for wildlife. He commented that educating the public on this is important.

Chairman Yablonski noted that FWC coordinates with the Division of Forestry at the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services which has been great partner in this effort.

Commissioner Bergeron asked how much land is burned by the Division of Forestry. He asked if there was good communication between the Division of Forestry and FWC.

Dr. Eason responded that he thought about 10 to 15% of the lands managed by the Division of Forestry are managed with controlled burns each year. He noted that the communication between Forestry and FWC is well established. He commented that the appearance of controlled burns or roller chopping can seem detrimental to someone who is not familiar with the benefits of those practices to the species and habitats in Florida.

Chairman Yablonski noted the great system already in place which allows public access to lands for hunting, but commented that there may be other opportunities to expand.

Ms. Diane Eggeman, Director of the Division of Hunting and Game Management, provided information on ideas to expand access for all user groups, including more hunting opportunities, on these areas. She commented on the role of the Division of Hunting and Game Management within the WMAs. WMAs are the foundation of public hunting opportunities in Florida and our state has one of the largest state-administered systems of public land in the country. Managing the public hunting rules and regulations for these areas and coordinating all of the activities on these public lands is a major role of this division. She highlighted some of the partner groups in the hunting community which contribute to the WMAs through volunteer efforts and funding through licenses and permits.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Mr. Bill George addressed the Commission noting the start of his outdoor activities on WMAs in Florida. He asked for more opportunities for spontaneous hunting options.

Mr. Mike Elfenbein addressed the Commission with thanks for the improvements to WMAs. He asked FWC staff to continue to improve access to public lands. He suggested working with the Commission to identify the barriers in getting more users out on the thousands of acres of land in the South Region that would be wonderful for hunting opportunities but may be restricted by federal partners or other entities.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Yablonski commented on a previous bill filed in the legislature on no net loss of hunting opportunities which requires the agency to notify the legislature each year the on the opportunities and access for hunting in the State of Florida.

Vice Chairman Priddy commented that land management is a very expensive process and understanding that FWC manages 150 different WMAs is amazing. She noted that some of the user groups who live in Florida may be several generations removed from hunting culture, so it may help to educate the younger generations on hunting and conservation.

Commissioner Hanas asked staff to work on communicating more with the stakeholders on the management options available for all of the lands and explaining the budget available to continue this role within the agency.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked the Commissioners who served many years ago and had the idea to set up this amazing WMA system. He commented that 75% of Florida's population voted for conservation with Amendment 1, and therefore, it is important for FWC to continue to manage the habitats for public use and enjoyment.

Chairman Yablonski welcomed special guest, former State Senator Charlie Dean, who worked with the agency over many years on land management opportunities.

Senator Dean addressed the Commission with thanks for hosting this meeting in Crystal River. He noted that it has been a pleasure to work in coordination with FWC leadership and staff on conservation issues in Florida.

Commissioner Bergeron noted the importance of having sustainable access and enjoyment of the lands.

Vice Chairman Priddy read a resolution celebrating the 75th anniversary of WMAs which was approved by the Commission.

Item Requiring Action- Final Rule – Proposed Rule Changes for Hunting 2017-2018

Mr. Paul Scharine with the Division of Hunting and Game Management presented proposed rule changes for hunting for 2017-2018. He highlighted an additional 4,000 acres of land being added to WMAs for hunting opportunities beginning in the 2017-2018 season.

Chairman Yablonski noted that this presentation is a rule package that comes to the Commission every year. He clarified that this package will expand the breed of dog that can be used to hunt small game on WMAs which currently allow dog hunting but only with specific breeds of dogs.

Public Comment

The following individuals addressed the Commission on this agenda item:

Ms. Rebecca Heintz addressed the Commission regarding opposition to adding any areas which provide access to hunting with dogs.

Ms. Alexis Foxx addressed the Commission and echoed the concerns from Ms. Heintz.

Mr. Bill George addressed the Commission in support of the rule package presented.

Mr. Newton Cook, Executive Director of the United Waterfowlers of Florida, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation. He thanked the Suwannee River Water Management District for adding additional lands for WMAs.

Mr. Jarrod Scharber addressed the Commission with thanks for the opportunity to speak. He noted concern for the perceived attacks on hunting with dogs by anti-hunting groups who frequently address the Commission. He added support for the staff recommendation.

Ms. Linda Wood addressed the Commission in opposition to any expansion of using dogs to hunt.

Mr. Rock Meeks, Levy County Commissioner, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Mr. David Blood addressed the Commission noting his experience hunting with dogs in his lifetime and supporting the staff recommendation.

Mr. Al Hammond, South Regional Director with the NRA, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Mr. Kenneth Lewis addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation. He asked staff to work on opening additional lands to hunt with fox hounds.

Mr. Lane Stephens, representing the Florida Doghunter's Association, the Florida Sportsman's Association and the Florida Airboat Association, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation. He noted a case in the court system in Leon County regarding private property rights near Blackwater state forest that could potentially impact the future of hunting and all activities on public lands.

Mr. Rusty McKeithen, President of the Florida State Doghunter's Association, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation. He commented that those individuals who purchase licenses and permits for hunting on WMAs pay for a majority of the management on these lands.

Mr. Rick Summers, President of Osceola Fox Hunters, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation and hunting with dogs in general.

Mr. Jim Casselman, President of United Hunters of Florida, addressed the Commission with support of hunting with dogs in the future based on the cultural history of this practice.

Mr. Mike Elfenbein addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation. He noted the time and effort by staff to go through the process of proposing rule changes each year related to hunting seasons and processes.

Mr. Jason Holifield, Chairman of the Dixie County Board of County Commissioners, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Mr. Brad Willnecker with the Southeastern Doghunter's Association addressed the Commission in support of staff proposal.

Mr. Cameron Gordon with the Orlando Chapter of Ducks Unlimited addressed the Commission with thanks for the management process for WMAs by FWC. He noted support for the staff proposal.

Ms. Jeanne Jain addressed the Commission in opposition to any hunting of small game with dogs.

Ms. Lesley Blackner addressed the Commission in opposition to the staff recommendation requesting the scientific data related to impacts of hunting with dogs on federally listed species.

Mr. Brad Ethridge addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation and thanks to staff for working on gathering stakeholder input on this rule package over the last year.

Mr. Nigel Morris, Board Member and past President of the South Florida Flatwoods Chapter of Quail Forever, addressed the Commission in support of the staff recommendation.

Mr. Dixie Hollins addressed the Commission in support of hunting with dogs. He added support of staff recommendation.

Mr. Phil Walters with GatorGuides.com addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation. He thanked Executive Director Nick Wiley for educating those that may not understand issues related to fish, wildlife, and habitat management in the State of Florida and for opening more opportunities for hunting.

Ms. Lillian Rooks addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation.

Mr. Todd Hallman, President of Florida Sportsman's Conservation Association, addressed the Commission in support of staff recommendation. He thanked everyone for attending in support of the recommendation.

Ms. Gail Zega addressed the Commission in opposition to staff recommendation and preferred to see rules in place to protect hunting dogs.

Mr. Drew Martin addressed the Commission in opposition to the staff recommendation and noted concern for lack of enforcement.

Mr. Lee Day addressed the Commission in opposition of hunting with dogs.

Mr. Chuck Echinique addressed the Commission regarding the tradition of hunting with hounds. He recognized the efforts of staff to present to the Commission well researched and coordinated proposals. He added support for staff recommendation.

Mr. Scott Davis, Vice President of the Central Florida Doghunter's Association, addressed the Commission with support of staff recommendation.

Ms. Sandra Clinger addressed the Commission in opposition to staff proposal and any hunting with dogs.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Bergeron noted that this topic has nothing to do with the bear hunt. This item is related to the culture, heritage, and roots of hunting with dogs. He noted past Commission decisions regarding fox pens and the fact that the Commission was concerned about that practice. He added support for hunting small game with dogs and staff recommendation.

Vice Chairman Priddy commented on the responsibility of the agency and staff to correct misinformation that may be disseminated by the public. She asked Mr. Scharine to clarify one more time what the changes are related to hunting with dogs. She also asked about references to purchasing hunting licenses to access lands as a wildlife viewer or hiker. She added that decisions before this Commission may not always be easy, but the responsibility is to make the best decision for the resource with the data available.

Mr. Scharine responded that this proposal removes the restriction of breeds of dogs which may be used to hunt and provides more clarification on what small game animals can be hunted with a dog. He confirmed that a hunting license is not required for access to any WMA. There are areas that have daily use fees associated with access, and those fees are required for all users.

Commissioner Hanas asked for confirmation that staff coordinate with other agencies and entities as required related to the species in the area that may be affected by hunting opportunities whether with dogs or not.

Mr. Scharine responded that it is one of the biggest considerations that staff review prior to any rule proposals for hunting.

Commissioner Bergeron noted that dogs are used in the process to protect panthers. He noted that research on this species requires radio collars being placed on panthers and along with that comes the requirement to change the batteries in these collars over time. Trained dogs assist with locating these animals so that staff can work to replace those batteries. Also, there are dogs who are trained to search for invasive species such as pythons which are devastating to the natural environment in Florida.

Chairman Yablonski added that Theodore Roosevelt hunted with dogs. He added that hunters are founders of wildlife conservation.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bergeron, seconded by Commissioner Hanas and carried, the Commission approved staff recommendation.

Chairman Yablonski noted the limited amount of time remaining for this meeting and asked for support by the Commissioners to postpone presentations on future agenda items and the Executive Director's report which would allow more time for speakers.

General Counsel Report

Mr. Vielhauer presented an update on legal matters related to the agency.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

The following individuals registered to speak on items not listed on the agenda:

Ms. Kimberlee Norton addressed the Commission requesting clarification on how FWC will track the dogs allowed to hunt in the WMAs.

Commissioner Rivard noted that future comments under this item need to be restricted to only items not on the agenda.

Mr. Joe Douglas addressed the Commission with a request to protect the environment for all users.

Ms. Rebecca Heintz addressed the Commission regarding communication on stakeholder meetings.

Ms. Alexis Foxx addressed the Commission regarding bears. She commented on the impact of the bear relocation in portions of state forest which are undergoing controlled burns and management requiring cutting trees.

Mr. Eric Hunt addressed the Commission regarding blue crab licensing and trap limits. He requested to work with FWC on ideas of how to manage this fishery to better account for the abundance of license holders compared to the available resource. He noted that it is a common occurrence now for fishermen to travel around to where the resource is most abundant and he would like to work to limit the increased pressure on these areas of high abundance.

Chairman Yablonski responded that the Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries will coordinate to see how FWC can assist related to this request.

Mr. Bill George addressed the Commission regarding the review process currently ongoing at FWC related to Florida alligator farmers and the sale of alligator eggs.

Mr. Steve Gafford addressed the Commission with concern about panthers. He asked the Commission if there is a plan to hunt panthers or manatees.

Chairman Yablonski responded that there is no plan to hunt panthers or manatees.

Mr. Jarrod Scharber addressed the Commission regarding invasive species.

Mr. Josh Maddox addressed the Commission regarding concern from some groups attacking hunting with dogs. He noted that since the bear hunt, he has noticed more of a balance in the natural areas where he hunts.

Mr. Luke Mosley addressed the Commission.

Ms. Jeanne Jain addressed the Commission regarding supporting the Commission without supporting hunting. She noted her research on funding levels at FWC and she requested that the Commission create a trust fund for only the Florida black bear.

Mr. Nigel Morris addressed the Commission regarding increased vehicular access to WMAs for quail hunting. He thanked the agency for the work on WMAs to increase these areas for vehicle access and wanted to continue to work with staff on identifying other areas where this can be improved more.

Mr. Phil Walters addressed the Commission regarding bears. He also added his support for a limited harvest on Goliath Grouper from yesterday's meeting agenda.

Mr. Todd Hallman addressed the Commission with an update on the FSCA Youth Day at the Everglades Youth Conservation Camp and thanks to the Commission and Foundation for their support of that event. He noted future youth alligator hunts.

Vice Chairman Priddy thanked Todd and FSCA for their work with youth.

Ms. Gail Zega addressed the Commission regarding perception of lack of coordination with other entities related to bear releases in areas where the clear cutting and burning is happening. She noted the irresponsibility of an individual that created a GoFundMe account for delisting the Florida panther.

Mr. Drew Martin, Conservation Chair with the Sierra Club, addressed the Commission in opposition to any future bear hunts. He noted the need to manage wildlife not only for hunting, but also for wildlife viewing. He referenced a presentation to the Commission a few years ago from Mr. Joe Hutto and how it highlighted the importance of balancing both sides of the hunting argument.

Mr. Lee Day addressed the Commission regarding the bear hunt. He referenced multiple studies related to bear management and policies related to hunting. He stated that he would get individual Commissioner email addresses in order to send these research documents for review.

Mr. Chuck Echinique addressed the Commission with a request to increase the respect level between hunters and non-hunters.

Ms. Patricia Hughes addressed the Commission regarding outreach after the last bear hunt.

Ms. Katrina Shadix addressed the Commission in opposition to hunting with dogs for deer and hog. She noted a request by her and a group of individuals she represents to meet with the Commissioners on proposed changes to deer hunting. She also requested to meet with the Commissioners on the Black Bear Habitat Restoration Act.

Ms. Shannon Geis addressed the Commission with a request for the Commission to review the Black Bear Habitat Restoration Act.

Ms. Aymee Laurain addressed the Commission regarding consideration for the words used in press releases.

Ms. Nicole Cordano addressed the Commission.

Mr. Dixie Hollins addressed the Commission regarding the data which was previously required to be submitted to the Deer Management Units for review regarding antlerless deer. He noted the great opportunity for wounded warrior hunts.

Ms. Sandra Clinger addressed the Commission.

Ms. Carla Wilson addressed the Commission and thanked them for holding this meeting and for educating the public.

Mr. Bryan Wilson addressed the Commission and commented that the decisions the Commissioners make are dramatic and asked them to consider the impact their decisions have on Florida's tourism and animals.

Mr. George Deskins addressed the Commission and thanked them on their ruling today in regard to dog hunting. He offered his services if they could ever be used for research.

Mr. Mike Elfenbein addressed the Commission and noted that he felt all were here for the same purpose. He also discussed prescribed burns and the need for fire to help control wildlife.

Chairman Yablonski thanked stakeholders for attending this meeting and providing feedback on both agenda items and non-agenda items. He noted the importance of civility and commented that everyone involved in these meetings wants to see healthy wildlife populations.

Commissioner Exchange

Chairman Yablonski invited Mr. Dave Burnell, City Manager of Crystal River, to address the Commission.

Mr. Burnell thanked FWC staff for their efforts and all they do to manage fish and wildlife resources. He invited FWC and the Commission back to Crystal River any time.

Chairman Yablonski then opened the floor for Commissioner Exchange.

Commissioner Roberts thanked staff for providing information for them to make informed decisions. He thanked the stakeholders for attending as well as his fellow Commissioners for a great meeting.

Commissioner Rivard thanked the Commission for a great meeting. He thanked Assistant Executive Director Sutton for sitting in for Executive Director Wiley and then thanked the stakeholders for the civility during the public speaking opportunities.

Commissioner Hanas began by thanking the staff for all their work in preparation for the Commission meeting. He mentioned respecting one another's opinions and how the Commission bases their decision on common sense and research. He would like to see more respect for hunters and the decision to hunt. He shared that civility is the most important thing. He knows that staff does their best to do what is right for Florida's resources.

Vice Chairman Priddy noted that she felt that FWC is not communicating well enough on our successes. Fishing and hunting seem to be the main topics at Commission meetings, yet we do much more than that and there are many other outdoor opportunities in Florida that we manage.

Chairman Yablonski echoed Vice Chairman Priddy's comments. He mentioned that there are many successes FWC could report more on. He mentioned Tall Timbers as an option to visit during the Tallahassee meeting. He thanked the Plantation Inn for hosting the meeting, and also thanked Mr. Fosburgh and Mr. McManus for traveling from Washington, D.C. to participate in the federal issues discussion. Finally, he thanked partners at Three Sisters Springs, meeting planning staff, law enforcement, the Audio-Visual team, the Florida Channel staff, and Assistant Executive Director Sutton.

Commission Administrative Matters

The next regularly scheduled Commission meeting is set for April 19 – 20, 2017, in Tallahassee, Florida, commencing at 8:30 am each day.

Adjournment

Chairman Yablonski adjourned the meeting at 1:40 p.m.

Brian Yablonski
Chairman

Nick Wiley
Executive Director

Respectfully submitted:

Lisa Zullo
Commission Assistant

DRAFT