

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners
FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director
DATE: November 29, 2012
SUBJECT: December 2012 Executive Director's Report

Awards and Accomplishments

Partners in Conservation Award -- The Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ECISMA) has been awarded the prestigious 2012 Secretary of the Interior's "Partners in Conservation Award". The award is given annually to organizations that work in collaboration with agencies throughout the Department of Interior.

The ECISMA was first established as a partnership between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. National Park Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It has since expanded to include representatives from 18 federal, state, tribes, local governments, NGOs, universities, and private citizen groups. Dennis Giardina from the Invasive Plant Management Section and Jennifer Eckles from the Exotic Species Coordination Section are FWC's representatives on the ECISMA. Dennis represents FWC as a co-chair.

Through the efforts of FWC staff and the many contributing partners, the ECISMA has initiated projects to eradicate several new infestations of invasive, non-native animals and plants in the Everglades region. They have collected scientific data on the range and distribution of several non-native reptile species such as the African Rock Python, Nile monitors and the Argentine black and white tegus. They have also raised awareness of the problems caused by invasive non-native species in Florida's environment. The Department of Interior has recognized the ECISMA for its innovative approaches to dealing with the prevention, eradication, and management of invasive non-native species in Florida. Jennifer and Dennis attended the recognition ceremony on Oct. 18 to receive the award.

FWC receives national awards for boating safety efforts -- As a part of its boating enforcement and safety efforts, the FWC is a member of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). At its annual conference in Mobile, Ala., representatives from NASBLA presented FWC with two prestigious awards.

The "Innovations" award recognizes innovative initiatives that advance boating safety. It was presented to FWC for its Statewide At-Risk Vessel Application. Abandoned and derelict boats are unsightly in Florida's beautiful waterways and pose safety, navigational and environmental hazards. Since removing these derelict

vessels is costly and time-consuming, FWC launched this program to work proactively and communicate with boat owners whose boats are at risk of becoming derelict. Through an online database, officers can identify and mark these at-risk boats, then work with the boat owners to take care of them. Members of the public can also view the database to see if boats in their area are being addressed by law enforcement.

Capt. Richard Moore, FWC's State Boating Law Administrator, received the "William B. Garner National Boating Safety Leadership" award. This recognizes individuals with exceptional vision, persistence and willingness to go beyond the status quo, and whose actions have impacted recreational boating safety at the national level. Due to the number of boaters and the varied and complex waterway issues in Florida, it is extremely important that Florida can set an example for other states. Richard has taken the lead representing the boating safety interests of Florida at both the state and national levels. Under his direction, NASBLA has made strides in educating and training officers on boating under the influence. He was instrumental in the creation of new field sobriety tests and in redesigning a national curriculum for teaching boating-under-the-influence detection and enforcement. This has led to better prepared officers who can keep boaters safer on the water.

Appointment to National Bowhunter Education Foundation -- The National Bowhunter Education Foundation (NBEF) recently appointed Steven Robbins as the regional coordinator for the southeastern United States. Robbins is a regional hunter safety coordinator for FWC in the North Central region. In this role, he also administers the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) and is a Master Bowhunter Education Instructor for Florida. As NBEF's regional coordinator, Robbins' territory includes Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee. With Robbins being a life-long bowhunter and firearms hunter and an FWC employee, these roles come naturally to him. Under his guidance, Florida's NASP and bowhunter education programs have grown significantly in numbers of students and geographical areas serviced. These efforts and accomplishments are tremendous contributions to helping recruit new hunters and continuing the heritage of these skills and activities.

Donation to Shooting Park -- In support of the FWC's shooting range program, the National Rifle Association recently donated \$25,000 towards the improvements of the Tenoroc Shooting range and \$25,000 towards the development of the Triple N Ranch Shooting Park.

In the News

Invasive Plant Management -- The USDA Agricultural Research Service's invasive plant research laboratory in Broward County, with funding provided by the FWC Invasive Plant Management Section, has tested the safety and use of the air potato leaf beetle as a biological control for the invasive air potato vine. Reducing the cost of land management and decreasing the amount of herbicides used to control invasive plants is a priority for FWC's Division of Habitat and Species Conservation. The air potato vine can grow up to 10 inches a day and is damaging ecosystems throughout Florida by producing a dense canopy over native plant communities that are food sources for wildlife.

A "Meet the Beetles" event to publicize initial field tests of the beetle was held on Friday, Sept. 21 at Long Key Natural Area and Nature Center in Davie, FL. At the event, students released 200 of the small, red-colored beetles. Students and scientists then visited another section of the park where beetles released last March have produced offspring and defoliated air potato vines in that area. The *Miami Herald* and *Sun Sentinel* newspapers, as well as *CBS Miami*, did stories on the beetles, and the FWC promoted the event live as it happened on Twitter. After the event, calls were received from science teachers, public agencies and private landowners reporting air potato vine infestations. They were interested in obtaining the beetles for release and also requested a presentation on the project. Currently, there are test releases being conducted in Alachua and Marion counties as well as in south Florida.

Tropical Storm Isaac -- The last week of August, a feeder band from Tropical Storm Isaac dumped a great deal of rain on Palm Beach County in a short time. The large amount of rain resulted in serious flooding in the western neighborhoods of Palm Beach County. FWC Law Enforcement Officers jumped into action, helping the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to assess the damage. FWC Officers then assisted by conducting door-to-door welfare checks. During these checks, officers worked with the EOC to provide food and water to families trapped in their homes by the flood waters.

The high water levels prompted the FWC to issue an emergency order closing an approximately 8-mile section of flooded road within the J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area in Palm Beach County. This action was necessary because of hazardous conditions and road damage caused by the flooding. The FWC monitored road conditions daily to determine when to reopen sections of road. In order to expedite the lowering of water levels in the Corbett WMA, the SFWMD in consultation with the FWC constructed a temporary weir on the South East section of Corbett WMA. The weir will allow water to flow from Corbett WMA through the Mecca Farms property and into the C-18 Canal. Because of this construction, the south entrance of Corbett WMA was temporarily re-routed.

The FWC also met with partner agencies at a variety of meetings to discuss pre and post storm operations. On Sept. 18, FWC joined partners at an informational meeting for one of the impacted neighborhoods in Palm Beach County. The meeting was designed to address public questions and concerns related to the high water level at the Corbett WMA.

The high water levels in South Florida also prompted temporary restrictions for the Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area. These temporary restrictions were necessary because high water levels forced area wildlife to take refuge on tree islands and levees, resulting in increased levels of stress for these animals.

Ave Maria Bear -- On Sept. 30, an FWC officer shot and killed an adult male black bear in Ave Maria in Collier County. FWC officers were on scene to assist an FWC biologist who was going to attempt to tranquilize the bear. FWC had attempted to capture the bear in a trap previously but had been unsuccessful. One officer on scene was approached by the bear, and as the officer retreated, the bear continued to follow him at an increased speed. Due to concerns for public safety, the officer shot and killed the bear. Our officers are trained to carefully consider delicate situations that may require using lethal force on wildlife. In this case, the officer had received specialized Bear Response Training and made an informed decision to shoot the bear. While this incident is rare, it is an unfortunate example of what can happen when a bear becomes used to coming into a neighborhood for food. When bears continually get rewarded with human-provided food, they can lose their fear of people. The FWC will continue working with the Ave Maria community to reduce human-bear conflict by securing garbage and other food sources for bears. Once attractants are removed, the bears will not have a reason to linger in neighborhoods.

FWC investigation uncovers illegal commercial wildlife ring -- FWC and USFWS law enforcement officers completed a comprehensive investigation in November that included more than 200 criminal violations by 21 individuals in Orange, Lake, Osceola, Polk and St. Lucie counties. The 22-month operation focused on individuals who illegally bought fish and wildlife products in Florida and shipped them out of state to be sold to the public.

Officers determined the suspects were buying products from poachers and unlicensed individuals and shipping them to markets out of state. Those out-of-state markets are still being investigated by the USFWS. The species involved include grouper, snapper, trout, redfish, snook, bass, bream, catfish, deer, turkey, ducks and alligator. Some of those are restricted species and over-harvesting, taking them out of season or taking them by illegal methods harms the resource and undermines conservation efforts.

Shutting down illegal operations like this is also important for public health. When game is harvested and sold illegally, it does not go through the same processes or undergo the same food health inspections necessary to protect the public.

In addition to the USFWS, the FWC worked with partner organizations including the National Wild Turkey Federation, Humane Society of the United States and Ducks Unlimited. This was a great team effort to support our legal commercial markets, protect Florida's valuable natural resources and allow the public to safely enjoy them. Large-scale illegal poaching operations have serious implications for the environment, economy and public health.

National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation --

Results from the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation shows that more Americans are participating since 2006. The USFWS survey is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau every five years. The data provides five year snapshots of public use of fish and wildlife and are used to determine how much Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funding states receive. Expenditure data are also used to estimate economic benefits derived from fish and wildlife related recreation.

Nationally, 11% more Americans (>16 years old) fished and 9% more hunted. Very exciting are a 13% increase in the number of kids (aged 6 to 15) that hunted and 2% increase in kids that fished. Another national survey by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation found that 2011 had a net gain in total anglers, reversing a recent trend of declining participation.

Preliminary Florida survey data showed a 12% increase in total anglers with a 35% increase in non-residents in 2011 compared to 2006. Hunting participation rose 2.5% and expenditures for both fishing and hunting also increased. Florida continues to lead the nation in total anglers, most non-resident anglers, and total angler expenditures.

With nearly 71.8 million people 16 years and older photographing and observing wildlife, wildlife viewing remains one of America's favorite pastimes. Nationally, there was no significant change in numbers of wildlife-viewers from the 2006 survey, but higher days of recreation drove wildlife watching expenditures up 7% from 2006 and 13% from 2001. Based on the preliminary Florida data, there was a 2.4% increase in total wildlife-viewing activity (residential and non-residential), and Florida ranks third nationally.

Wildlife-viewing travel related expenditures appear to have almost doubled (from \$888 million to \$1.7 billion) a reflection of the popularity of wildlife viewing among Floridians and tourists. A participation study completed by Responsive Management for Florida's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan shows wildlife viewing to be the second most popular activity for residents and tourists in the state after going to the beach. Fishing also ranked high, the third most popular activity when combining salt and freshwater angling.

Biologists boost red-cockaded woodpecker population in south Florida --

FWC released eight pairs of red-cockaded woodpeckers on state-managed lands in Palm Beach and Martin counties in October. Biologists relocated these federally listed endangered species as part of the Southern Range Translocation Cooperative, whose goal is to boost smaller, isolated populations or reintroduce populations by relocating red-cockaded woodpeckers from other areas where the birds are numerous.

A goal of the FWC red-cockaded woodpecker management plan is to secure and maintain a stable or increasing Florida population at a level above the threshold defining a Species of Special Concern. Five released pairs came from Fort Stewart in Georgia, an area that has a population of more than 300 red-cockaded woodpeckers. Biologists released these birds in the John G. and Susan H. Dupuis Jr. Wildlife and Environmental Area. The other three pairs, released in the J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area, came from Camp Blanding in north Florida.

FWC program improving boating access around state -- FWC announced the recipients for the 2012-2013 Florida Boating Improvement Program (FBIP) grants. FWC's Division of Law Enforcement manages boating access, administering grant programs for boating access and boating-related activities.

Awarded to eligible counties, municipalities and other state governmental entities, the grants will fund projects such as boat ramp construction, channel marking and derelict vessel removal. Twenty-seven different grants throughout the state totaling \$5.2 million will be awarded. Some of the areas, including Clewiston, Palatka and DeSoto and Hamilton counties, have been designated Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern by the governor and have received substantial grants. The grants will provide opportunities for economic development throughout the state. In addition to creating jobs during and after construction, the improved facilities will provide a steady flow of tourism and recreation. Specific projects planned include expanding dock and ramp space, constructing and improving restroom facilities, renovating and expanding marinas, improving access roads and parking lots and constructing facilities compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Honoring Florida's Veterans - Implementing changes to commercial saltwater fishing license requirements --

On Nov. 9, FWC announced important changes that will make it easier for Florida veterans and veterans with disabilities to enter the commercial saltwater fishing industry. The changes will modify income requirements for many of Florida veterans seeking a commercial restricted species endorsement, which allows commercial harvesters to fish for and sell species that are designated as restricted.

A media event held in Tallahassee, conducted by Commissioner Charles Roberts, provided the public with these changes that took effect Veterans Day, Nov. 11. Several media attended, including reporters from WCTV, Florida Channel and WFSU. A news release was sent out later that day to media across the state. The

restricted species endorsement allows commercial harvesters to target restricted species, including several commercially important species such as flounder, shrimp and many reef fish. These changes were approved at the September Commission meeting.

FWC officers return from Hurricane Sandy Recovery -- FWCs Special Operations Group (SOG) returned to Florida on Nov. 11 after assisting in the coastal areas of New Jersey for Hurricane Sandy recovery. The SOG team assisted local and state law enforcement departments in New Jersey with curfew enforcement, roadblocks, 911 call response and other patrol-related duties. This well-trained team has honed its post-hurricane skills over the years in Florida and was honored to be given the opportunity to help those who live in the areas that had been devastated by the storm.

Updates

Red snapper season opens in federal Atlantic waters for first time in three years, FWC collects data -- Red snapper season opened in federal Atlantic waters recreationally Sept. 14-16 and Sept. 21-23. The commercial season was open Sept. 17-23. Red snapper has been closed for harvest in Atlantic federal waters since January 2010. Atlantic red snapper is open for recreational harvest in Atlantic state waters (shore to 3 miles out) year round.

FWC interviewed anglers in person and online to gather data about recreational red snapper fishing trips, and collecting samples from harvested fish to evaluate the red snapper stock. For-hire charter and head boat vessel operators also allowed FWC biologists to sample harvested red snapper and provided information on their chartered trips during interviews with biologists. More than 2,000 red snapper were sampled by biologists as a result of these efforts. The survey responses and biological samples submitted by anglers provide valuable data about the red snapper fishery and could be used in future population assessments. While offshore conditions during the first open weekend (Sept. 14-16) resulted in a lower than expected turnout, conditions for the second weekend (Sept. 21-23) were more favorable.

Automatic weekend closures began Nov. 17 for Apalachicola Bay commercial oyster harvesters -- Beginning Nov. 17, the commercial harvest of oysters in Apalachicola Bay closed on Saturdays and Sundays. When the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) finds that resources on monitored oyster bars cannot sustain a harvest of 300 bags of oysters per acre, FWC regulations provide for the automatic weekend closure of the oyster harvest in Apalachicola Bay from Nov. 16 through May 31 each year.

The automatic closure was put in place in the mid-1980s after several hurricanes negatively impacted the bay. The closure, which acts as a method to limit harvest and give oysters time to recover from low population numbers, was successful in returning the oyster population to a sustainable harvest level. DACS regularly monitors the abundance of oyster resources in the bay. This year's report has shown that oyster population numbers are depleted. According to DACS, this is most likely due to prolonged severe drought and a lack of fresh water from the Apalachicola River. Apalachicola Bay includes all waters within St. George Sound, East Bay, Apalachicola Bay, and St. Vincent Sound in Franklin County and Indian Lagoon in Gulf County. This change does not apply to active oyster leases or recreational harvest.

New recreational license and permit issuance system (RLIS) -- In October, FWC's Office of Licensing & Permitting (OLP) began the transition to a new recreational hunting and fishing license sales system known as RLIS (Recreational License Issuance Services).

Switching from one system to another is not an easy task. Months of careful planning and programming preceded the transition, which occurred in stages. Recreational license sales through RLIS began Oct. 2. The processing of Limited Entry/Quota applications began Nov. 1. Designers incorporated years of feedback and customer-suggested improvements into the development of RLIS. The end result is a more user-friendly system.

Among the many new features and improvements with RLIS:

- Online customers can print their own license on regular paper.
- Gold Sportsman licenses are now available for both 1-year and 5-year terms.
- Youths under 16 can "pre-purchase" Saltwater Fishing, Freshwater Fishing, Hunting and Gold Sportsman licenses for their first year. (Hunter Safety Certification required for Hunting and Gold Sportsman.)
- Customers have quick and easy access to see their current and historical licenses and permits.
- When a customer purchases a new license or permit or a reprint of a license or permit all other current licenses and non limited entry/quota permits are printed on the same new license document.

The Oct. 2 start up went very smoothly with only 15 minutes of down time during the transition between the old Total Licensing System and RLIS with RLIS issuing its first license at 12:17 a.m. The transition for Limited Entry/Quota on Nov. 1 did not go as smoothly with a number of minor problems – all of which were quickly resolved. RLIS's first First-Come, First-Serve opening (when FWC reopened the Limited Entry Quota Hunts - General Gun, Archery, Muzzleloader, etc.) including returned permits for re-issuance to the public, went off without any problems on Nov. 7 at 10:00 a.m.

Feedback from customers and agents has generally been positive with all appreciating the additional information available to them and the cleaner flow through the issuance process. OLP and the vendor's (Brandt) staff are continuing to work diligently to make RLIS a complete success.

TrophyCatch bass-reward program launched -- FWC's newly launched TrophyCatch Program (TrophyCatchFlorida.com), will increase opportunities for anglers fishing in Florida to fulfill the dream of catching a trophy largemouth bass, while rewarding them for helping make other anglers' dreams come true by letting their trophy swim for another lucky angler to catch.

Recreational fishing in Florida annually generates more than \$8 billion in economic impact and supports more than 75,000 jobs. In Florida, freshwater bass alone annually provide anglers more than 14 million days of healthy outdoor recreation and generate approximately \$1.25 billion in economic impact (USFWS, 2006). The FWC's management programs are designed to provide enjoyment for even more anglers and thus increase tourism and economic benefits. TrophyCatch will help accomplish that and document progress.

TrophyCatch will enable biologists to manage lakes and rivers better by providing valuable incentives to anglers for reporting and releasing their catches of trophy bass. The information will be used to evaluate and improve management strategies that produce more and larger bass.

Events

Exotic Pet Amnesty Day -- On Oct. 20, FWC and partners held an Exotic Pet Amnesty Day at Tree Tops Park in Davie. The event enabled people to surrender their nonnative pets free of charge and with no penalties. The goal of the pet amnesty program is to reduce the number of nonnative species being released into the wild by pet owners who can no longer care for their pets or no longer wish to keep them. This is the first amnesty day to be held in Broward County. The FWC partnered with Broward County Parks and Recreation and the Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ECISMA) for this event.

Becoming an Outdoor Woman -- On Oct. 19 - 21, FWC held its Becoming an Outdoor Woman (BOW) workshop at the Everglades Youth Camp in the J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area in Palm Beach County. The program offers a fun and supportive atmosphere for participants wishing to try new things and enjoy the camaraderie of other women wanting to do the same. In four, three-and-one-half-hour sessions, the BOW workshop taught some of the basic skills associated with fishing, hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation, at all levels of physical activity, with hands-on experience.

MarineQuest Open House -- FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute hosted more than 6,500 visitors on Saturday, Oct. 27 for the 18th annual MarineQuest open house, a family-friendly event which showcases FWC research and Florida's fish and wildlife. More than 60 exhibits were on display, including those representing about 30 visiting agencies and organizations. The event was held in conjunction with the St. Petersburg Science Festival, which debuted last year.

On the two days prior to the open house, approximately 1,900 students and chaperones from more than 40 schools participated in "School Daze," a special version of MarineQuest. Students in grades four through eight learned about Florida's fish and wildlife directly from FWC scientists through hands-on demonstrations and activities.

Partnerships

Biscayne National Park and FWC continue work on General Management Plan -- Representatives from the State of Florida and the National Park Service (NPS) met to continue consulting on Biscayne National Park's General Management Plan several times from July through September. Both agencies made progress to resolve differences and develop joint solutions. Discussions focused on the long term goals the park is trying to accomplish, as well as an analysis of possible management strategies for the proposed Marine Reserve Zone. Both the State and the NPS agree on the importance of achieving these goals to help restore and preserve a portion of the park's coral reef while continuing to offer unparalleled recreational opportunities to Florida's residents and visitors. The State and the NPS are jointly examining a wide range of management strategies that could possibly achieve these goals. These options include varying degrees of access for the diversity of visitor experiences, including snorkeling, boating, wildlife viewing and fishing. FWC and NPS are dedicated to moving forward with this process in a timely and collaborative manner.

Guy Harvey Gulf Fisheries Symposium focuses on Gulf of Mexico fishery -- FWC staff participated in the first annual Guy Harvey Gulf Fisheries Symposium in St. Pete Beach Sept. 14-15. Attendance also included members of the public, recreational and commercial fishermen and representatives from other governmental and non-governmental agencies. The symposium focused on discussions on the current and future state of the Gulf of Mexico fishery. Staff served on panels discussing marine fisheries management and research.

Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Sport Hunting Plan -- FWC joined the USFWS in September for a public meeting to obtain comments on the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Sport Hunting Plan. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain verbal and written comments from the public on the Refuge's draft Sport Hunting Plan to continue

waterfowl and coot hunting and incorporate alligator hunting as an additional public use activity. FWC staff supported the USFWS by conducting presentations explaining the agency's role in the hunt proposal. They also explained the success of the statewide alligator harvest program. More than 100 people attended the event to express their opinions about the plan.

Hunter and boater safety training course in Florida high schools -- Florida's hunter and boater safety training will be featured as part of a new course for high-school credit, beginning Jan. 2013, offered through Florida's Virtual School (FLVS), which is an online public school. All of Florida public high-school students are required to take FLVS courses. The FLVS course will offer Florida's standard online hunter safety course and Florida's online boater safety course plus some additional content typically covered during the hunter safety field/skills day. When students successfully complete the FLVS course, they will receive the FWC boater safety certification and will only need to complete one of several options for demonstrating hands-on firearms skills before receiving their FWC hunter safety certificate.

For the students who complete the FLVS course, FWC will offer several options for completing FWC requirements for hunter safety certification, adding innovative, flexible, and convenient options to accommodate the likely large increase in demand by the FLVS students. This is an opportunity to educate many more students in Florida about hunting and boating safety and to get substantially more young people to complete the courses. Hunter safety is the main program for getting youth onto the path of becoming a lifetime hunter. The course will make students aware of the many other ways they can engage in various other ways with FWC through the Florida Youth Conservation Center Network and other programs.

Python Executive Leadership Workshop -- Burmese pythons are one of seven constrictor species listed as conditional species. This species can no longer be purchased or sold in Florida. Currently, pythons are found primarily in south Florida in and around the Everglades where they represent a threat to native wildlife. FWC is coordinating a meeting on Jan. 30, 2013 to develop a collaborative approach to provide direction in the areas of management, policy, and research. Top level leaders from involved partnering agencies attending will include the Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, USFWS, U.S. Geological Survey, Seminole Tribe, Miccosukee Tribe, SFWMD, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and DACS.

2013 Python Challenge™ --The FWC is hosting the 2013 Python Challenge™ in partnership with the University of Florida, the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, the Future of Hunting in Florida and Zoo Miami. The intent of the 2013 Python Challenge™ is to raise public awareness about Burmese pythons and how this invasive species is a threat to the Everglades ecosystem, including native wildlife. This month-long awareness campaign and python competition will culminate with the 2013 Python Challenge™ Awareness and Awards Event, which will be held at Zoo Miami on Feb. 16, 2013.

This event will include a high-level professional awards ceremony for the competition participants with prizes provided by sponsors for the most and largest Burmese pythons harvested; conservation-based exhibits primarily aimed at exotic wildlife and other conservation topics; educational presentations; and youth-oriented educational displays. The python harvesting competition runs from Jan. 12 through Feb. 10, 2013. The data collected from the competition will help FWC determine the extent of pythons on state-managed lands. This pilot project will also help FWC assess the feasibility of using an incentive-based model to address an invasive species management challenge. Finally, this event will provide an opportunity for FWC and its partners to educate the public about pythons in Florida. Staff anticipates announcing the launch date of the website for the 2013 Python Challenge™, pythonchallenge.org, during the Commission meeting; the target date for the website to go live is Dec. 5.

Governor Rick Scott holds work day at Florida Bass Conservation Center Workshop -- In an effort to promote Florida as the Fishing Capital of the World, Governor Rick Scott participated in his 13th 'Let's Get to Work Day' at the Florida Bass Conservation Center at the Richloam Fish Hatchery on Sept. 17. Throughout the day, Governor Scott worked with FWC employees in stocking Florida's public waters to help Florida remain the best place to fish. "By maintaining Florida's status as the Fishing Capital of the World, we can keep Florida's tourism industry strong and continue to move our economy in the right direction," said Governor Scott. "Our state welcomed a record number 87.3 million visitors last year. We are on track to another record this year, in part because of the FWC employees that I worked with today."