

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners
FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director
DATE: May 9, 2012
SUBJECT: June 2012 Executive Director's Report

Awards and Accomplishments

National recognition of Florida paddling trails -- FWC recently celebrated the designation of the "Rivers of AWE" – the Aucilla, Wacissa and Econfina rivers – as National Recreation Trails. This special event took place on National Trail Day, Saturday, June 2 at the Wacissa Springs County Park in Jefferson County. This is FWC's third addition to the National Recreation Trail System awarded by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

The National Recreation Trail designation recognizes existing trails and trail systems that link communities to recreational opportunities on public lands and in local parks across the nation. These trails join a network of more than 1,100 previously designated trails that total more than 13,000 miles. Trails attract tourism opportunities and benefit the local economy and can improve the quality of life for the local residents as well.

In the News

St. John's River Tour -- On Friday, May 4th, the FWC provided logistical support and subject matter experts to enable Governor Rick Scott to tour the upper regions of the St. Johns River. The event provided the Governor an on scene view of the challenges and opportunities concerning the St. Johns River. Captain Kline and his staff provided transportation and support vessels while Chairman Barco, Executive Director Wiley and Regional Director Garcia discussed FWC's role and scope concerning the St. Johns River.

Expert commentary was provided by Dr. Jan Landsberg, and he provided the Governor, Senator John Thrasher, DEP Secretary Herschel Vinyard and others on the tour with science based information about fish kills on the St. Johns River, possible causes and FWC monitoring systems.

The highlight of the tour was a net pull conducted by researcher Russell Brodie and his staff showing the biodiversity of the St. Johns River, and how the information

obtained by these surveys helps us manage the abundance of resources in the river. (Photos are available)

Vice President visits FWC Wildlife Management Area -- On April 23, Vice President Joseph R. Biden traveled to the FWC's Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area for an event to highlight Everglades restoration efforts. At the event, Vice President Biden also stressed the importance of state and federal partnerships to achieve restoration goals. FWC Commissioner Ronald Bergeron greeted the Vice President upon arrival and welcomed him to South Florida.

Updates

Big Cypress National Preserve -- We have continued to work closely with Big Cypress National Preserve staff and US Fish and Wildlife Service staff to finalize the hunting management plan for Big Cypress National Preserve (Preserve) so public hunting opportunities can be implemented in the Addition. This process is moving forward, and we remain hopeful that public hunting opportunities can be offered soon, possibly this coming season. The hunting management plan was noticed for public comment and public meetings were held recently. This process identified opportunities to strengthen the plan and provide the strongest possible foundation for public hunting in the Preserve. There have been some delays as a result of these efforts, but we are committed, along with NPS staff, to take the time necessary to make certain the hunting management plan is in the best possible posture to support sustainable public hunting into the future.

Depending on the timing and final outcome of the planning process, we may have the opportunity to offer public hunting this season on short notice. This likely will not allow time for a full rulemaking process or our normal process for implementing quota hunts. We are, however, mindful of the great interest and urgency associated with getting the Addition open to hunting, and we do believe we could successfully implement public hunts this season if the opportunity arises. In this case, our only option for establishing initial hunting opportunities this coming season would likely be via Executive Order after consultation with the Commission Chair. The full rulemaking process would then be utilized to establish hunting opportunities for subsequent seasons.

Biscayne National Park General Management Plan -- FWC staff will be meeting with National Park Service (NPS) staff on July 9th in Tallahassee to discuss our concerns regarding the General Management Plan for Biscayne National Park (Park), specifically the concerns raised in our comment letters and recent Congressional testimony provided by Vice-Chair Ken Wright. Our concerns have focused on elements of the GMP preferred alternative that would close significant portions of the Park to all forms of fishing and other elements that may

unnecessarily restrict boating access. We view this meeting as a good faith indication that the NPS is willing to work with FWC to consider alternatives that would achieve resource and fishery conservation objectives while continuing to allow reasonable public access and fishing opportunities.

Executive Director in Washington D.C. -- Last week (June 18 through 20), I was in Washington D.C. working on several projects. I participated in a meeting of the State-Federal Joint Task Force on Implementing the Endangered Species Act (ESA) along with several other state agency directors, the director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and representatives from NOAA Fisheries Service. I serve as Co-chair of this joint task force that was established primarily to give state fish and wildlife agencies more opportunity for involvement in endangered species issues and to provide a forum for resolving any problems between federal and state agencies regarding implementation of the ESA. This joint task force is making progress and significantly enhancing the working relationships between state and federal agencies, and we are seeing direct benefits here in Florida.

In addition, I was invited to testify before a subcommittee of the United States House of Representatives, specifically the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight. I was asked to present the state fish and wildlife agency perspective on behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The topic was "the science of how hunting assists species conservation and management." A copy of my testimony and video of the hearing may be viewed at the following link:

<http://science.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-investigations-and-oversight-hearing-science-how-hunting-assists-species>

Lake Miccosukee restoration begins -- This month, the FWC will begin draining Lake Miccosukee, located primarily in Jefferson County with a small portion in Leon County, in order to:

- Expose and dry the lake bottom to consolidate muck and decaying plants;
- Scrape 18-24 inches of muck from 25 acres of lake-bottom;
- Perform prescribed burning of woody tussocks floating on the lake; and
- Restore fish and wildlife habitat and improve boater access.

It has been almost 12 years since the last drawdown. The Lake Miccosukee Management Plan adopted in 1989 by FWC and other state and local agencies recommends drying out the lake bottom and restoring fish and wildlife habitats every five to seven years. These periodic drawdowns are timed to coincide with

droughts and mimic natural processes that have been modified by the presence of manmade dams and water control structures.

The plan was presented at a public meeting on Tuesday, June 5, at the Jefferson County Court Annex in Monticello. The project is scheduled to be completed by March 2013, when FWC will take steps to start refilling the lake. It is being done in coordination with the Florida Forest Service and other local, state and federal agencies.

Lake Jackson Executive Order -- On June 18th we issued an Executive Order (12-08) to allow anglers to take any size bass from Lake Jackson in Leon County and authorized the taking of game fish using dip nets or by hand. This was in response to Porter Sink draining several hundred acres of the lake, between Friday, June 15 and Monday, June 18 when the water in the sink dropped eight vertical feet. The majority of the 4,000-acre lake is at a reduced level due to lack of rainfall and evaporation. This Executive Order allowed anglers to harvest small bass and to take fish stranded in the mud or other areas where they could be picked up with a dip net or by hand rather than allowing them to die. The Order was coordinated among Freshwater Fisheries Management, Habitat and Species Management, Law Enforcement, Legal, Community Relations and the Office of the Executive Director.

There are significant pools of water remaining. However, additional sink holes such as Lime Sink could also be exposed if the drought continues. By not removing the bag limits, we hope the remaining pools will serve as brood fish reservoirs to replenish the lake when the rains return. Staff is monitoring the situation and will recommend rescinding the order at the appropriate time.

Media coverage has informed the public of this situation, which recurs naturally during droughts. Safety on the soft bottom was emphasized, along with county restrictions prohibiting operating ATV and other vehicles on the lake bottom. Restrictions on turtle harvest were also emphasized as this is a local concern.

The last major drying was in 2000 when a similar Executive Order was issued. Following reflooding the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management restocked the lake, and the population recovered very well responding to habitat improvements that occur following drawdowns, whether they are natural or as part of a restoration project. The lake also went down significantly in 2007.

Law Enforcement Consolidation -- As of July 1, the Division of Law Enforcement will gain staff and corresponding duties from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services (DACs). This is the result of recommendations from the Law Enforcement Consolidation Task

Force, created during the 2011 legislative session. House Bill 1383 was passed during the 2012 legislative session to make the transition official.

This includes 145 sworn members and 16.5 non-sworn support staff in the Division of Law Enforcement. There will also be four additional staff members coming to other divisions – OIT, F&B and OIG (2).

The new staff will integrate completely into the ranks as FWC members, rather than being organized as a separate section or bureau. They will be distributed throughout the state, in regions and at headquarters, depending upon their current roles and the needs of the FWC.

For example, former DEP officers who worked in a certain state park will still work there, now as FWC officers. However, they will also be expected to respond to other calls outside of the park, if needed. FWC officers assigned to certain counties will still be assigned there. Likewise, if there are calls for service inside a nearby state park or on other state lands, they will be expected to respond when they are the closest officer.

Since there was not adequate space in the FWC's Bryant Building Headquarters to accommodate the personnel transferring from DEP, some of the current FWC staff located at the Bryant Building will be moving to the Douglas building and some of the current DEP staff housed there will be moving into the Bryant Building. The main goal was to ensure that work units could work closely together.

FWC training staff will ensure that incoming personnel is trained in current FWC policies and procedures and all fish and wildlife laws. FWC staff will also be trained on several new topics as well.

DLE leadership is currently working to draft and sign an MOA between the agencies to establish expectations and operating conditions during the transition.

The FWC has submitted a budget amendment to the Legislative Budget Commission (LBC) to transfer \$14 million of DEP and DACS' budgets to the FWC.

As a larger law enforcement Division with more staff and training, FWC will be able to provide more comprehensive and broader patrol coverage across the state, including on state conservation and recreational lands and in state parks previously monitored by the other agencies. This will also eliminate extra management and support positions and establish additional patrol and first response capabilities.

The reorganization will save the state more than three million dollars over the next five years and \$1.28 million in recurring savings.

Tarpon -- This year looks like it is going to be a great year for tarpon. FWC is already hearing reports about great tarpon fishing statewide. The agency is also aware of concerns about fish handling and excitement about potential gamefish designation. Staff are already working with Commissioner Wright to find a venue and a date for a Tarpon Symposium later this year to discuss many issues relative to tarpon in Florida. Following this meeting, staff would return to the Commission in early 2013 with an update on tarpon and any potential rulemaking items.

Events

FWC Memorial Golf Tournament honors fallen officers -- On June 2, the FWC and the Wildlife Foundation of Florida held the 11th Annual FWC Memorial Golf Tournament at the Lely Golf Resort in Naples to honor fallen officers.

All tournament proceeds benefit the Wildlife Foundation of Florida's FWC Law Enforcement Memorial Fund. The fund helps defray the costs associated with travel to memorial services by FWC law enforcement personnel and families of members killed in the line of duty. The funds also help with costs for the purchase and maintenance of memorial displays and other items honoring fallen members.

This year 67 golfers attended the event which raised approximately \$5,800 for the FWC Memorial Fund.

Exotic Pet Amnesty Day held at Gatorland -- An Exotic Pet Amnesty Day sponsored by Gatorland was recently held in Orlando. Gatorland had its hands full, with more than 50 exotic pets collected, including ball pythons, Burmese pythons, bearded dragons, a Madagascar ground boa, Columbian red-tailed boas and sugar gliders.

FWC's Exotic Pet Amnesty Program is an effort 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. People can turn in their exotic pets without penalty, and all healthy pets are adopted by pre-qualified pet adopters. Another goal of the program is to foster responsible pet ownership.

While an Exotic Pet Amnesty Day is a one-day affair, Gatorland staff also said they would be glad to take in exotic pets at other times as well.

Dedication of Girl Scout mural -- On March 23, the FWC held a ceremony to celebrate the completion of a new butterfly garden and wildlife themed mural at the FWC Law Enforcement building in Miami. Senior Girl Scout Caitlin Kaloostian designed and coordinated this project in order to obtain her Girl Scout Gold Award. She held fundraisers such as garage sales to raise the funds necessary to complete

the project. The mural features native fish and wildlife and includes a Florida panther, a manatee, an alligator, fish and other animals. The butterfly garden uses native plants to attract butterflies and birds. Village of Palmetto Bay Councilmember Howard Tendrich attended the event and thanked Kaloostian and other volunteers for their hard work. Both the mural and the butterfly garden are examples of how today's youth can work toward preserving Florida's future.

Boca boating and Beach Bash for People with Disabilities -- FWC Law Enforcement attended the Boca Boating and Beach Bash for People with Disabilities on March 24 at Spanish River Park in Boca Raton. Over 3,800 people with disabilities came to the city sponsored event. FWC Law Enforcement Officers assisted the US Coast Guard with safely loading approximately 2,500 attendees onto boats supplied by volunteers. Once on board, attendees experienced a short boat ride. According to event organizers, the Bash is the largest free, fun-day in the United States, for people with physical and/or intellectual challenges.

Youth Conservation Panel Discussion -- The Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network is piloting a new program called "Careers in Conservation." As part of this pilot program, FWC Law Enforcement and Hunter Safety staff took part in a Youth Conservation Panel Discussion at the Everglades Youth Conservation Camp on April 12. Panelists spoke to secondary students about Careers in Conservation that employ skills related to archery, fishing, canoeing and wildlife viewing. The goal of the program is to inspire the next generation of conservation experts while promoting traditional outdoor recreation.

Partnerships

FWC partners with the Florida Lottery to promote new Guy Harvey Lottery Game -- FWC participated in the announcement of the new Florida Lottery Collector Series Scratch-Off ticket featuring Guy Harvey's popular marine fish and wildlife artwork. FWC Regional Director Chuck Collins spoke at the news conference held at the Palm Beach International Boat Show.

The new \$2 scratch-off game features six scenes of original Guy Harvey® Collector's Series artwork highlighting Florida's marine fish and wildlife. The Florida Lottery is working closely with the FWC to promote the game to Florida's licensed anglers to help underscore the importance of fisheries and marine wildlife conservation to Florida's tourism based economy. Early reports indicate this new Lottery Game is very successful.

FGA/FWC Spirit of Tarpon DNA Sampling Challenge -- The Florida Guides Association has teamed up with FWC to sponsor a new challenge for tarpon

anglers that encourages participation in the FWC's Tarpon Genetic Recapture Study. The new FGA/FWC Spirit of Tarpon DNA Sampling Challenge is open to all interested recreational anglers year-round starting in 2012. The challenge recognizes anglers who submit the largest number of tissue samples (a non-invasive scrape of skin from the jaw area) for genetic analysis by FWC. Four awards will be presented annually, A Grand Champion, a West Coast Champion, an East Coast Champion, and a Florida Keys Champion. The tarpon genetic recapture study, conducted by the FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute and Mote Marine Laboratory, uses DNA fingerprinting techniques to identify and track tarpon based on samples submitted by anglers.

Recognitions

FWC pilots deliver life-saving anti-venom -- Lt. Chris Colon recently received a phone call at approximately 2:30 a.m. requesting assistance from the Metro-Dade Fire Rescue Anti-Venom Unit. A victim had been bitten by a coral snake in the Pensacola area and was in urgent need of anti-venom. After checking the forecasted weather for the state, Lt. Colon called FWC Lakeland and Tallahassee dispatch centers and activated pilots Don Dougan and Frank Utermohlen for the mission.

Pilot Dougan launched his aircraft and flew to Miami-Dade Tamiami Airport where he retrieved the anti-venom and transported it to Ocala International Airport. The anti-venom was relayed to Pilot Utermohlen who continued on to the Pensacola Regional Airport. Both flights encountered substantial early morning fog and had to fly a difficult approach to Ocala.

As a result of this coordinated effort, Pilot Utermohlen arrived at Pensacola, delivering the life-saving anti-venom almost an hour and a half ahead of schedule. FWC pilots frequently coordinate with other agencies to not only protect Florida's valuable natural resources, but its people as well.