

Potential Reductions for 2013 Legislative Session

July 30, 2012

In preparation for the 2013 Legislative Session, the Governor, House, and Senate instructed state agencies to prepare a list of potential reductions equal to 5% of the adjusted recurring budget for next year. The full extent of what may be needed for budget reductions next year is not yet known. It is intended that this list will provide lawmakers with enough options to allow them to be selective in the event budget reductions are necessary.

The following list contains the staff recommendations for the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. In developing this list, agency directors carefully reviewed all activities within divisions and offices and made every effort to minimize jobs losses, conserve long term program investments, minimize impacts to existing programs' abilities to effectively operate, maximize use of federal grants, continue work in progress, delay work not yet started, and identify least critical functions. It should be noted, however, that these issues are all very important and valuable to agency services.

The 5% list totals \$10,044,801, of which \$1,198,709 is from General Revenue and \$8,846,093 is from trust funds. Also, because so much of the agency budget is used as State match for grants, an additional \$60,000 in grant funding will be lost if the matching budget included in some of these issues is cut.

Staff Recommendation

Law Enforcement

Eliminate 21 Law Enforcement Officer Positions (\$1,114,721) GR

Eliminate 56 Law Enforcement Officer Positions (\$2,949,057) MRCTF

This reduction would eliminate 77 law enforcement officer positions. The calculation is based on the officer class (8515). The actual number would vary as higher level positions are eliminated based on vacancies. The per-officer savings is \$53,109 including salaries & benefits, incentives, and human resource contract costs.

Out of the agency's \$24.4 million recurring General Revenue (GR) budget, \$22.7 million (93.1%) supports the Division of Law Enforcement. It is unavoidable to include some portion of law enforcement in any need to significantly reduce agency GR appropriations. Due to the Division of Law Enforcement's primary role of fish, wildlife, state parks, state forests, and boating safety law enforcement patrol, the vast majority of its appropriations are used for salaries of employees that provide or support the patrol function. Reducing the number of employees is the only viable solution to reducing large amounts of funding.

A reduction of 77 sworn law enforcement officer positions would significantly impede the ability of the Division of Law Enforcement to provide law enforcement services to the citizens of Florida, meet the constitutional charge to protect fish and wildlife resources, and provide disaster relief or homeland security services when needed. The reduction would result in fewer high-visibility patrols in manatee areas, panther areas, wildlife management areas, state parks, state forests, and popular boating and fishing areas, currently serving as a deterrent to illegal activities. The agency's ability to respond rapidly to calls for service from the public would be reduced, and remaining officers would have to cover larger patrol zones. Efforts to insure the health and safety of the public would be reduced if these positions were eliminated, reducing the

agency's ability to adequately provide boating safety patrol, investigate boating accidents, and respond to critical incidents that have a direct impact on the safety of Florida's citizens and visitors. FWC's ability to respond to man-made and natural disasters would also be adversely impacted. Responding safely to major catastrophic events requires extensive training, preparations, logistics, and scheduling. Having fewer people to respond to such events presents additional workload and risk to those who do respond.

Hunting & Game Management

Reduce Public-Information Related to Game Wildlife (\$60,000) SGTF

This reduction would eliminate direct-mail marketing materials that promote public hunting opportunities as well as public service announcements pertaining to alligator safety and mallard/mottled duck hybridization. The direct-mail marketing materials promote specific public hunting opportunities, namely special-opportunity and spring turkey hunts. The televised public service announcements are designed to (1) increase public awareness and cooperation to conserve Florida's unique duck species, Florida's mottled duck, and (2) promote public safety and increase awareness concerning Florida's alligator population. The proposed reduction in outreach would decrease our efforts to inform the public, potentially would reduce public safety related to alligators, would compromise conservation efforts for Florida's mottled duck, and may result in lowered public satisfaction.

Eliminate Small-Game Management Program (\$162,066) SGTF

This proposal would significantly reduce the agency's ability to provide small-game (i.e., quail, squirrel, rabbit, dove, rail, snipe, and woodcock) management, including technical assistance for small-game habitat management to federal, state, and private landowners. It would eliminate cooperative partnership efforts with other management agencies and organizations for mourning doves and bobwhite quail. The reduction would reduce the agency's ability to provide small-game hunting opportunities. The two full time equivalent positions currently dedicated to small-game management would be shifted to other programs within the Division.

Habitat & Species Conservation

Eliminate Transfer to Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services/IFAS/Invasive Exotic Plant Research funding (\$844,171) IPCTF

This proposal would eliminate the agency's cash transfer to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to fund invasive exotic plant research at a quarantine lab in Ft. Pierce for insects that must be quarantined before being released. Currently, the agency pays \$844,171 on a recurring basis to help support this program. The impact to FWC would be minimal.

Reduce Habitat Restoration Funding (143,000) LATF

This issue would reduce the agency's ability to contract with the private and public sectors to conduct prescribed burning and other habitat management/restoration techniques for Florida's gopher tortoises and other threatened species with the possibility of it not occurring in some key regions of the state. Habitat management is a primary tool for long term conservation of gopher tortoises and other threatened species as described in the agency's management plan that was developed with input from more than 180 stakeholders. Prescribed burning provides the most cost-effective, efficient mechanism for improving threatened species habitat, while at the same time decreases fuel loads which reduces the risk of wildfires.

Reduce Lake Restoration (\$639,211) SGTF

This reduction would decrease funding for aquatic habitat management and restoration projects. The impact would be significant since the program was reduced 50% in FY 2009-10 due to declines in documentary stamp revenues. An additional reduction in spending authority would limit maintenance operations that are needed to sustain habitat quality and protect investments previously made on lake restoration projects. Reduced funding would also result in fewer aquatic habitat enhancement projects in public waterways, and limit maintenance or repair of water management infrastructure on state owned lands. Engineering services for some lake and wetland projects would be delayed, as would start-up and planning for future restoration projects. Monetary contributions to partners for various enhancement and restoration projects would be reduced or withdrawn. Monitoring of aquatic plant and animal communities needed to evaluate present and future restoration activities would be reduced. A significant portion of the aquatic habitat enhancement projects are conducted by private sector contractors and reduced funding would directly impact the economic situation of these private contractors.

Reduce Invasive Plant Management Funding (\$1,700,000) IPCTF

This proposal would reduce the agency's ability to manage aquatic and terrestrial invasive plants. The impact would be significant as a net program reduction of \$16.9 million since FY 08/09 (a 42% reduction) was necessitated due to declines in documentary (doc) stamp revenues. An additional reduction in funding would result in significantly fewer invasive aquatic plant control projects in public waterways and upland invasive plant control projects on public conservation lands. Delays or cancellation of plant control projects can cause geometric increases in growth of invasive plants. With the significant program funding reductions that have occurred since FY 2008-09, the upland plant management program is not able to initiate any new projects, and is only able to keep a small percentage of previous project sites from becoming re-infested. Further cuts would result in fewer project sites being funded, ultimately resulting in additional sites becoming re-infested after having spent significant tax dollars getting the invasive plants under control. Increasing invasive plant populations can have adverse impacts on recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, boating, swimming, and ecotourism, as well as adversely impacting beneficial native habitat that is critical for the management of fish and wildlife. These impacts would adversely affect the economy of communities in close proximity to these resources. In addition, excessive invasive plant populations in public waterways can restrict water flow and cause flooding during critical periods resulting in danger to human health and safety. A significant portion of the invasive plant control projects are conducted by contractors in the private sector. Reduced funding would directly impact the economic situation of these private contractors.

Freshwater Fisheries Management

Reduce Freshwater Fisheries Management Operations (\$160,582) SGTF

This reduction of \$160,582 in the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management's land management special category would reduce the division's ability to spend potential proceeds generated from management activities by 46%. Past use of this appropriation has been to spend revenue from the sale of sand at Tenoroc Fish Management Area on Tenoroc management activities as required by statute. Section 259.032(11)(d), Florida Statutes, requires revenue received through leases, sales, and contracts be used to supplement land management operations. This reduction would leave the division with a total of \$189,418 remaining in this category.

Marine Fisheries Management

Reduce Recreational Saltwater Outreach and Aquatic Education (\$20,000) MRCTF

This proposal would reduce state matching operational funds used for Outreach and Aquatic Education programs under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Grant. Funds for this program support the education of recreational anglers on the importance of personal stewardship and fishery conservation and management actions that can be taken by the individual angler. This proposal would reduce long-term support and recruitment of anglers in Florida. Loss of these state match dollars will result in the loss of \$60,000 of federal grant dollars that would no longer be available to the agency. The recreational saltwater outreach and aquatic education program supports kids' fishing clinics, adult clinics and outreach training, marine fisheries education for Florida teachers, and a large number of public outreach events and publications in partnership with private, local, state, and federal organizations. Therefore, recreational saltwater outreach and aquatic education program activities currently conducted with the \$80,000 funds (\$20,000/state and \$60,000/federal) would be reduced.

Reduce Commercial Saltwater Blue Crab Outreach (\$4,000) MRCTF

This proposal would reduce by one half the number of commercial blue crab outreach education programs undertaken by the Marine Fisheries Services Section. These programs include education regarding new commercial blue crab regulations; publication of SEASTATS (a brochure that discusses the blue crab, and includes information on appearance, including how to distinguish males from females, distribution and habitat, reproduction, molting, feeding, parasites and diseases, and similar species found in Florida waters); and, produces signage to be posted at boat ramps indicating that it is a felony to molest commercial blue crab traps. Reduction of these funds would reduce the ability of the Division to disseminate this information to the stakeholders.

Reduce Blue Crab Advisory Board Meetings (\$6,000) MRCTF

This proposal would reduce the number of meetings held by the Blue Crab Advisory Board (BCAB), which is established in Rule 68B-45.007(12), Florida Administrative Code. This board is composed of commercial blue crab harvesters and processors and advises the Commission on management issues regarding the fishery, including the Effort Management Program, and any other problems in the fishery. The Commission relies on recommendations by the board as a part of any rulemaking regarding the commercial blue crab fishery. Reduction of these funds could reduce the number of times per year that the BCAB could meet.

Reduce Trap Retrieval Program (\$82,642) MRCTF

This proposal would reduce by approximately one-half the statewide retrieval of lost or abandoned commercial spiny lobster, stone crab, and blue crab traps using competitively-bid, contractual services. Currently \$25 of the commercial license fee for these three fisheries is specified by the Legislature to be spent on trap retrieval of lost or abandoned traps during closed seasons [sec. 379.367(2)(b), sec. 379.365(1)(a) and sec. 379.366(3)(a), F.S., respectively]. This program is designed to ensure that commercial fishing gear does not remain in the marine environment longer than necessary and reduces potential impacts on marine fisheries and their habitat. The elimination of these funds would reduce the efficiency of the Trap Retrieval Program. The trap retrieval program is authorized in s. 379.2424, F.S. If reduced, statutory changes would be needed to reduce the fee paid by the commercial fishermen or to redirect savings.

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

Reduce Red Tide Research & Monitoring (\$83,988) GR

This reduction would further curtail collaborative research and monitoring efforts between Mote Marine Laboratory and FWC to monitor waters for red tide in support of shellfish safety regulations initiated by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. FWC's red tide monitoring and research program has been reduced by more than 60% in the last three years. The formerly statewide red tide response capability is now focused only on Southwest Florida. Response to red tides in the Panhandle, such as those that have caused prolonged closure of oyster beds in Apalachicola Bay in the past, is currently a major challenge and will be increasingly difficult with additional loss of funds. Further budget cuts will also curtail red tide information available to state and local agencies responsible for reporting on beach conditions for visitors. Negative economic impacts of red tides in Florida have been estimated to exceed \$20 million annually for past blooms.

Eliminate Oceanaria Reimbursements for Manatee Rehabilitation (\$854,000) MRCTF

FWC has managed the Oceanaria Reimbursement Assistance Program for rescued, rehabilitated, and released Florida manatees since 1991. Since July 2000, \$1.15 million annually has been available to reimburse the three contracted and federally permitted manatee rehabilitation facilities in Florida: Lowry Park Zoo, Miami Seaquarium, and Sea World Florida. This amount was reduced to \$854,000 in FY 11-12. These specialized, federally permitted, facilities are the only institutions available for acute-care, veterinarian-based rehabilitation of manatees. This reduction would reduce or eliminate this service to the State of Florida at a time when the number of manatees killed and injured annually is at record levels. Presently, the oceanaria are reimbursed for only about 50% of qualified expenses.

Reduce Marine Fisheries Assessment (\$283,015) MRCTF

This reduction will reduce marine fisheries monitoring and assessment efforts that support science-based management of valuable commercial and recreational fisheries. Saltwater fishing in Florida generates over \$11.3 billion in economic impact and supports over 163,000 jobs. Scientists in this program monitor the abundance of recreational and commercial fishes in six estuaries around the state and conduct detailed studies offshore which inform management actions such as size limits and closed seasons. This information is critical to evaluating the effects of current fishery regulations and predicting future stock levels. This reduction would create a significant data gap for statewide fisheries assessments for species such as snook, seatrout, red drum, red snapper and gag grouper.

Defer Maintenance at FWRI Headquarters and Field Laboratories (\$265,000) Trust Funds: (\$199,000) MRCTF; (\$33,000) NGWTF; (\$33,000) SGTF

FWRI headquarters in St. Petersburg consists of 132,000 sq. ft. of specialized laboratories, hazardous waste storage and research facilities. Several smaller laboratories located in Cedar Key, Gainesville, and Tequesta have similar capabilities. FWRI has historically kept maintenance costs well below those for comparable private sector facilities through an aggressive program of preventative maintenance. This reduction would eliminate or severely curtail preventative maintenance activities associated with our scientific support facilities potentially increasing costs in the long term associated with costly repairs. Critical life safety functions would be maintained.

Executive Direction and Support Services

Reduce Public Services and Public Access

Reduce Planning and Design Services (\$71,569) CARL

This reduction would curtail services for planning and designing public access and administrative facilities. These services include site planning, permitting, design and construction administration for amenities such as parking, roads, hunting blinds, check stations, wildlife viewing structures and administrative and management facilities such as water control structures, equipment storage buildings, and field offices. Potential impacts include deferred maintenance and resulting higher costs, reduced public access and risks to public safety. (OPAWVS)

Eliminate Florida Wildlife Magazine Editor Position and Staff Assistant (1.50 FTE, \$72,024) SGTF

Prior to the 2011 Legislative Session, the Florida Wildlife Magazine was a printed publication. As a cost cutting measure, the agency recommended and the Legislature approved changing the printed publication to an electronic based magazine in 2011. Additional savings could be generated if the electronic version of the magazine were eliminated as well. If we were to eliminate the electronic magazine, the agency would provide similar information to the public and stakeholders through other communication channels. (OCR)

Limit Public Outreach (\$1,962) SGTF

The agency recently eliminated a leased private storage room that was used to house magazine issues and files saving \$1,962 annually. These funds are currently being used to enhance outreach and communications with the public. Alternatively, they could be cut if needed. (OCR)

Reduce Operational Support Costs

Eliminate Broadcast Media and Newspaper Clipping Service (\$ 4,788) SGTF

While these services are worthwhile, they are not critical to the agency's mission. The Office of Community Relations could eliminate them and rely solely on internet access (Google search engine) to continue monitoring broadcast media framing of fish and wildlife conservation issues. The Office would also run the risk of not having access to important news reports that are not indexed by Google. (OCR)

Reduce Travel (\$60,000) ATF

This reduction would eliminate a significant portion of in-state travel by the Executive Director, Assistant Executive Director and Commissioners. Reducing executive management's travel would restrict collaboration between FWC and other state/federal natural resource agencies that enhances the total conservation effort in Florida. In addition, curtailing executive management's travel limits opportunities to foster public understanding and appreciation for the economical and community importance of conserving Florida's fish and wildlife habitat. (OED)

Reduce Finance & Budget Office Part-Time Staffing (\$96,000) ATF

This proposal would reduce the Office's ability to hire temporary help in times of peak workload and to meet needs for special projects. This reduction would likely lead to overtime costs for regular employees in lieu of hiring temporary help. (FBO)

Reduce Finance & Budget Office Operational Costs (\$100,000) ATF

A variety of strategies could be implemented to reduce FBO expenditures in the Expense category: Utility conservation measures, reduced up-keep and maintenance on the Bryant building, end-of-year pre-loading of postage meters, reductions in copier leases and reductions in telecommunication expenses. This would result in a reduction of support and service to agency programs. (FBO)

Reduce Finance & Budget Office Equipment Replacement (\$15,000) ATF

This proposal would eliminate the Office's ability to replace failed or outdated equipment that has a unit cost in excess of \$1,000. (FBO)

Reduce Regional Office Operational Costs (\$41,000) ATF

This reduction in overhead would be accomplished by eliminating service agreements (HVAC, pest control, reduced lawn service and janitorial services), cut back on postage, copier contracts, office supplies and other "common area" maintenance expenses. These reductions would reduce the quality of the work environment in the regional offices and reduce the agency's ability to provide services to staff and the public. The Commission's regional offices, located in West Palm Beach, Lakeland, Ocala, Lake City and Panama City, serve as the main point of contact for the public, both in person and via telephone. Each regional office houses a call center which takes the vast majority of public calls for the region. These offices serve as hubs for Commission support and middle management staff who in turn provide the administration, coordination and leadership necessary for the delivery of divisional projects and daily operations. (RO)

Reduce Agency Information Technology Support

Eliminate Spending for Application Development Services for the Commission's Smaller Offices (\$33,000) ATF

Eliminate all funds to pay for programming, website development and license requirements for the smaller Offices in OED that currently have no dedicated budget for these services. This would include the elimination of many upcoming mapping enhancements to the website, as well as halting efforts to automate paper process into our document management system. (OIT)

Reduce Spending for Hardware and Software Replacement Purchases (\$100,000) ATF

This proposal would result in a 50% reduction of necessary software licenses and maintenance purchases by this office to provide enterprise services for the Commission, such as backup licenses, VPN licenses, Google GIS mapping, ESRI GIS mapping licenses, Statistical research licenses, etc.). This proposal will also reduce funding necessary to replace aging technology services by 50%. This includes wiring, switches routers, video conferencing, desktop computers, commission data backup, UPS, and telephones. (OIT)

Eliminate One OPS Programmer (\$80,000) ATF

This reduction will directly affect efforts to automate many paper based processes for issuing licenses and permits that exist today. This OPS position is currently the sole internal knowledge base for our existing permitting application. All support for this application would have to be acquired from a private vendor, significantly increasing support costs. (OIT)

Abbreviations

ATF – Administrative Trust Fund
CARL – Conservation & Recreation Lands
FBO – Finance and Budget Office
FCO – Fixed Capital Outlay
FTE – Full Time Equivalent Employee Position
FWC – Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
GR – General Revenue
IFAS – University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
IPCTF – Invasive Plant Control Trust Fund
LATF – Land Acquisition Trust Fund
LE – law enforcement
MRCTF – Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund
OCO – Other Capital Outlay (capitalized property items)
OCR- Office of Community Relations
OED- Office of Executive Director
OIT- Office of Information Technology
OLP – Office of Licensing and Permitting
OPAWVS – Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services
OPS – Other Personal Services (includes part-time & temporary employment wages)
RO – Regional Operations
PIC – Public Information Coordinator
SGTF – State Game Trust Fund
TF – various Trust Funds
WMA – Wildlife Management Area

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