

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners
FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director
DATE: April 10, 2013
SUBJECT: April 2013 Executive Director's Report

Awards and Accomplishments

FWC officers receive recognition -- Two FWC officers were recently presented *Lifesaving Awards* for their actions:

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office called the FWC regarding two fishermen whose boat had capsized near Shoal Lighthouse. The seas became rough and their boat's propeller got entangled in the anchor line, causing the boat to be swamped. Officer Jimmy Johnson responded and quickly located the men sitting on top of their overturned 16-foot boat. He helped them retrieve their personal belongings from the water and transported them to awaiting family members on shore. Officer Johnson was recognized in Governor Scott's weekly message to state employees for his quick response and preventing a tragic situation.

While on nighttime patrol, Officer Nathanael Martir-Negron saw a boat speeding in the Meloy Channel in Miami-Dade County. He was approximately 400 feet from the boat when it suddenly collided with a channel marker. As he activated his blue lights and approached, he heard three people onboard screaming that their friend had been thrown overboard. Despite the darkness, Officer Martir-Negron immediately searched the area and found the 21-year-old victim, who was without a lifejacket and calling for help. He tossed the victim a flotation device and pulled him into his patrol vessel. The victim was disoriented and in pain from a head injury, so Officer Martir-Negron contacted dispatch and requested that emergency medical personnel meet him at the closest dock. The victim was transported to a trauma center and was treated for a concussion and lacerations. He was initially listed in critical condition, but fortunately recovered from his injuries. Officer Martir-Negron's quick actions saved the life of this young man.

Additionally, Investigator Laurie Luher was recognized in the Governor's weekly message for receiving the *Community Involvement Award* for her outstanding service to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Laurie, a chronic myeloid leukemia survivor, has volunteered over 100 hours of support to leukemia patients through the National Home Office Initiative.

FWC scientist receives two lifetime achievement awards -- FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute freshwater fisheries scientist Wes Porak, who has enjoyed a 30-plus year career with the FWC, received two lifetime achievement awards for his efforts in conservation of black bass in Florida. The Florida Chapter of the American Fisheries Society honored Porak with the Rich Cailteux Award, which recognizes individuals who have maintained a long-term commitment to research, management and/or conservation of Florida fisheries and aquatic resources. This award honors individuals for their career contributions to the fisheries profession and for enhancing the visibility of the Florida Chapter. The Florida Guides Association honored Porak with the Phil Chapman Conservation Award, which recognizes individuals who show a true commitment to the conservation of Florida's natural resources. Porak is the first freshwater scientist to receive this honor since the creation of the award named after Phil Chapman, an FWC fisheries biologist and conservationist.

Officer recognized as the FCCA Regional Officer of the Year -- In March the Naples Chapter of the Florida Coastal Conservation Association recognized FWC Officer Thomas Van Trees as the Regional Officer of the Year. Van Trees received the award in recognition for his outstanding work in law enforcement, working to protect Florida's valuable natural resources. Since graduating from the Academy in the fall of 2009, Officer Van Trees has been a valuable asset to the FWC. Officer Van Trees is currently assigned to Collier County in the FWC's plain clothes Resource Protection Unit. His skills and ability to blend with the average fisherman has helped him to identify and apprehend countless intentional violators who otherwise might not have been held responsible for their actions. Last year, Van Trees was also an integral part of a major commercial net fishing case which resulted in the seizure of over 7,000 pounds of illegally harvested mullet and individual fines totaling more than \$35,000

Director of Investigations receives Sheriff Neil J. Perry Service Award -- Amy Schmidt, Director of Investigations for FWC's Office of Inspector General, was awarded the "Sheriff Neil J. Perry Service Award" from the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation. The award honors individuals for outstanding achievement, innovation, creativity and dedication to measurably increase program efficiency which further the Commission's goals.

Emerging Issues

Red tide in southwest Florida -- FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) biologists, with help from FWC Law Enforcement and other partners, have been responding to a red tide bloom that has affected manatee health in southwest Florida. FWC staff and partners have been monitoring manatee distribution and searching for distressed manatees with both aerial and on-water surveys. Through

March 14, FWC staff and partners rescued 11 red-tide-affected manatees in 2013 that were later taken to Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo for rehabilitation. Also through March 14, FWC staff documented 184 manatee deaths related to red tide in 2013, the highest number for that cause of death in any calendar year on record. Researchers are collecting and analyzing data aimed at better understanding the long-term impacts of this ongoing event on the manatee population. The FWC continues to work with partners to respond to manatees in distress and to determine causes of death, in addition to its ongoing red tide monitoring activities.

The FWC is also investigating elevated manatee deaths in Brevard County. From Jul. 25, 2012 to Mar. 11, 2013, researchers suspect at least 55 manatee deaths in the county are due to a common, but unknown cause. These cases increased recently: From Feb. 9 to Mar. 11, FWC documented 25 of the 55 deaths. Biologists suspect that these manatee deaths are related to a dietary change resulting from localized environmental changes, including reduced availability of seagrass, the manatee's primary food in the area. However, the specific cause of death has not yet been determined. The FWC and partners continue to investigate and respond to distressed and dead manatees in the area.

Fate of discarded soft plastic baits into lakes and rivers -- Around the country concerns over the environmental fate of discarded soft plastic baits into lakes and rivers are being raised. FWC's Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management (DFFM), Florida B.A.S.S., and *TrophyCatch*sm media partners are working to increase awareness and promote a new litter-reduction and recycling program called "ReBaits". Developed by Florida B.A.S.S. Conservation Director Eamon Bolton, ReBaits has grown internationally and has attracted sponsorships. Similar to recycling programs for fishing line, ReBaits encourages and enables anglers to be better stewards of the environment.

In the News

FWC investigation stops illegal sale of historic artifacts -- The FWC recently completed a two-year undercover investigation successfully stopping lucrative illegal businesses dealing in historic artifacts taken from state lands and waters. FWC investigators received numerous complaints of the illegal activity that was ultimately damaging the historical resources on Florida's state lands and waters. The Department of State (DOS) requested FWC's assistance in addressing these concerns. DOS also hosted a press conference at its Museum of Florida History so the message could be spread about the case and the damaging effects of looting.

Fourteen individuals throughout the state – from the Keys to the panhandle – were arrested on over 400 felony violations. In conjunction with these arrests, officers executed six search warrants on homes to collect the contraband. The charges included criminal conspiracy, dealing in stolen property, looting artifacts and offering them for sale. Some items were priced at as much as \$100,000 and were

offered for sale online, at trade shows and through the black market. This was a criminal commercial network of looters and dealers. Investigators did not target the casual collector or family out hiking that finds an arrowhead or other artifact that they want to take home. They addressed violators whose crimes posed serious environmental, economic and cultural consequences.

The partnerships with the DOS Division of Historical Resources, Native American tribes, various archaeological and anthropological societies and the anthropology departments of several Florida universities helped underscore the importance of this case. Artifacts are a finite, non-renewable resource. When looters remove them, it takes them out of context and they are virtually unusable for professional archaeologists. Some of these archaeological sites have been completely decimated, and everything lost to looters.

The FWC also worked closely with the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecutor and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources on this case.

Panther Release – FWC's conservation efforts for the Florida panther primarily focus on the population level but occasionally circumstances occur where we have reason to intervene to assist individual animals. That happened back in September 2011 when two 5-month-old panther kittens were orphaned following the death of their radio-collared mother. We determined that the kittens were too young to survive in the wild on their own. FWC's panther team successfully trapped them so they could be raised in captivity with the goal of returning them back to the wild. The kittens were transported to the White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee, FL, a facility with an excellent record of raising orphaned panther kittens and conditioning them for an eventual return to the wild.

On January 31, 2013, the female panther was released into the Picayune Strand State Forest in Collier County. FWC panther biologists coordinated with the Florida Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the panther's release. Biologists chose the Picayune Strand State Forest for the release of the female panther after they evaluated the home ranges of other females in the region and found available space between them. The female panther was fitted with a radio collar and has been closely monitored. She appears to be establishing a normal home range and successfully killing prey. At the release, which Commissioner Priddy attended, FWC videographers used several cameras to capture the moment. The MyFWC Flickr photo gallery of the panther's release shows a sleek, healthy, long-tailed cat exiting its travel container and leaping and bounding through the high grass. A press release on the female panther's return to the wild was sent out on February 1, 2013. <http://myfwc.com/news/news-releases/2013/february/01/panther-released/>

On April 3, the male panther of this pair was released in western Palm Beach County in the Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area near the borders of Broward and Hendry counties. The location was chosen by FWC biologists because it is part of the species' known range and should provide ample undeveloped area for the panther to acclimate into the wild. FWC biologists determined the male panther is healthy and has grown to a size that should prepare him for life in the wild. Young male panthers face the additional survival challenge of potential confrontations with older males, but this release site was chosen to minimize the risk of such encounters. Commissioner Bergeron attended the release of the panther, along with approximately 30 reporters from Associated Press, the Miami Herald and Sun Sentinel newspapers, all the Miami TV stations and the "Wild Kratts" PBS kids show. The panther calmly exited its transportation crate, trotted and then picked up speed as it bounded down the limerock road before heading into the brush and disappearing. The FWC sent out a press release that evening with a Flickr photo gallery and the resulting media coverage was extensive. FWC also promoted the panther release on Twitter and Facebook. <http://myfwc.com/news/news-releases/2013/april/03/panther-released/>

2013 National Archery (NASP) Florida State Tournament -- The 2013 National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) Florida State Tournament concluded with the live competition at the Easton Newberry Archery Park on February 23. Over 230 students took part in the event, with almost 500 more shooting the virtual component from their schools. Scores were then compared and winners were awarded trophies and medals in three different age groups - elementary, middle school and high school.

The sixth annual tournament started out with a presentation of the 2012 Sportsmanship Award to Connor Hampton of Belle Terre Elementary School by Jake Kaminski, Olympic archery team member and silver medal winner. The live event consisted of seven flights of 34 archers in each flight. While the scores were finalized, teachers from each school competed for the Coaches Cup while the packed house of students and parents cheered loudly for their school. Finally, the individual and team awards were presented. Two of the male shooters finished tied with a score of 295 out of 300, each shooting 25 bulls eyes. These are Florida's highest scores ever, affirming that we are now becoming nationally competitive.

The annual tournament is administered by FWC's Division of Hunting and Game Management Hunter Safety Section, with assistance from law enforcement officers and non-sworn staff from the North Central Region. This year the Florida Youth Conservation Center Network (FYCCN) staff was on hand working as lane judges and promoting their programs among the students and parents. The seventh annual tournament will take place on February 22, 2014 in Newberry, Florida.

Recent Stakeholder Communication on the Section 6 Agreement between USFWS and FWC

A recent 60-day notice of intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) filed by the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and the Center for Biological Diversity has resulted in some press releases, newspaper articles, and editorials. The intent to sue is about the U.S. Endangered Species Act Section 6 Agreement between the USFWS and FWC that was updated and executed on May 14, 2012.

Section 6 of the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) calls for the Secretary of Interior to cooperate with each state to the maximum extent practicable in carrying out programs authorized by the ESA. Further, this section of the ESA authorizes a cooperative agreement between USFWS and each state to outline, in Florida's case, how the FWC will cooperate with the USFWS to improve the conservation of federally listed species. This agreement is commonly called a "Section 6 Agreement" and serves as an important link in conserving Florida's endangered fish and wildlife. Core components include creating a mechanism for federal funding to augment state programs that protect and conserve endangered species; allowing for joint state and federal law enforcement of endangered species rules and regulations; coordinating research and management needs for endangered species; and authorizing state personnel to handle endangered species for conservation purposes. This Section 6 Agreement has been a fundamental part of FWC's determined efforts to protect Florida's endangered species since 1976 and continues to play an integral role today.

The FWC has renewed its Section 6 Agreement with the USFWS annually since 1976 and has updated it twice: once in 2001 and again in 2012. Each of these updates has strengthened cooperation between FWC and the USFWS and improved conservation of endangered species. The enhancements to Florida's Section 6 Agreement are a key part of FWC's recently approved endangered species listing rules and program, which are aimed at increasing conservation and protection of state and federally listed species in the most effective and balanced way possible. The updates to FWC's listing rules and program were carried out in an open and transparent manner that included significant involvement of partners and stakeholders. FWC went through many public hearings and meetings, along with an extensive effort to work with stakeholders. Additionally, there was a public-comment period associated with the environmental assessment that the USFWS performed on the updated Section 6 Agreement. This updated Section 6 Agreement serves as a framework for developing future cooperative projects, not an authorization of any specific action. The new Section 6 Agreement does not delegate any federal authority to the FWC and by itself does not authorize the FWC to issue any permits for federally listed species.

Recently, FWC Executive Director Nick Wiley sent an email correspondence to stakeholders and interested parties over a broad range of interest groups providing some facts and information related to the Section 6 Agreement. This correspondence contained the information listed above as well as some recent

examples of FWC's successes in conserving listed species. The Section 6 Agreement can be accessed by visiting <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/imperiled/links/>.

Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act -- In February, FWC investigators filed charges with the State Attorney's Office regarding a violation of the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act. A Ft. Pierce man allegedly approached a manatee calf in Taylor Creek in St. Lucie County in January. FWC investigators received a tip from a citizen regarding pictures the man had posted on Face book. The pictures show him and two young children petting a manatee calf. They also show the man lifting the calf partially out of the water. One image even shows a child sitting on top of the manatee. The State Attorney agreed with the charges filed by FWC Investigators and subsequently a warrant was issued for the man's arrest. The pictures showed a young manatee which was likely still dependant on its mother for food and protection. According to FWC biologists, separating the two could have severe consequences for the calf. The calf also appeared to be experiencing manatee cold-stress syndrome, a condition that can lead to death in extreme cases. Taking the calf out of the water may have worsened its situation. The Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act stipulates that it is illegal to injure, harm, harass, capture or attempt to take a Florida manatee. An FWC news release generated national attention regarding this case and the need for manatee protection.

Save the Florida Panther Day -- Florida Governor Rick Scott issued a proclamation declaring March 16, 2013, as 'Save the Florida Panther Day'. In the proclamation, Governor Scott noted, "It is proper and fitting for all Floridians to pause and reflect on the plight of the Florida panther and the task of preserving this rare component of Florida's diverse natural resources as a legacy to generations of Floridians yet to come." The proclamation also said preservation of the Florida panther, which also is the state's official animal, "... is the will of the people and therefore a mission of their government ...". FWC partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on a press release announcing Governor Scott's proclamation of 'Save the Florida Panther Day.' The news release was picked up by the Associated Press and received widespread coverage with articles in outlets as far away as San Francisco.

Lake Istokpoga featured on the Outdoor Channel and NBC Outdoors -- Lake Istokpoga (Highlands County) is leading *TrophyCatch*sm submissions and will be featured in April on the Outdoor Channel and NBC Outdoors during airing of the Major League Fishing Challenge Tournament. This made-for-television format requires immediate release of bass and includes many new and exciting elements to competitive fishing. FWC programs to manage habitat and fisheries will be featured during the broadcasts.

Development of high school fishing program-- DFFM and the Student Angler Federation (SAF) are developing a high school fishing program with the goal to have fishing become a sanctioned sport in Florida high schools. FLW Outdoors and the Bass Federation created SAF to incorporate fishing and boating safety into science and physical education curricula. Currently a club sport in over 60 Florida schools, the 2013 Florida State SAF Championship was held recently on the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. The State Champion Team from Bartow High school will advance to the regional tournament and are planning to attend the June Commission meeting in Lakeland to be recognized by the Commission.

Updates

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary comprehensive review -- The comprehensive regulatory review of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary has moved into the stakeholder working group phase. Three stakeholder-driven working groups, the Coral Reef Ecosystem Restoration Working Group, the Shallow Water Wildlife and Habitat Protection Working Group, and the Ecosystem Protection: Ecological Reserves/Preservation Areas and Wildlife Protection Working Group, have been formed. FWC remains involved in the process, with biologists from the South Florida Regional Lab of FWRI attending all working group meetings. Staff will be coordinating FWC's scientific input and will also report the status of working group progress to FWRI and Division of Marine Fisheries Management (DMFF) leadership.

Python Challenge -- The 2013 Python Challenge™ competition concluded at midnight, February 10, 2013. A total of 68 Burmese pythons were harvested, 42 by the Python Permit Holders and 26 by the General Competitors. Nearly 1,600 people from 38 states registered for the competitive, month-long harvesting of Burmese pythons. By the close of the event, more than 80 million television viewers from across the nation had seen a report about the 2013 Python Challenge™.

On February 16 the Awareness and Awards Event was held at Zoo Miami to recognize the winners of the competition. Grand prizes of \$1,500 for harvesting the most Burmese pythons were awarded to winners of both the General Competition and the Python Permit Holders Competition, with additional \$1,000 prizes for the longest Burmese python harvested for both the Python Permit Holders and the General Competitors. Second prizes were awarded for longest pythons and most pythons harvested. Prizes were funded by 2013 Python Challenge™ sponsors and registration fees. The Python Challenge raised public awareness and generated research data that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of an incentive-based model to help reduce the Burmese python population in the Everglades ecosystem. Currently, data collected during the event are being analyzed by the University of Florida (UF). UF staff is also conducting follow up surveys of participants and those that attended the public events to help determine the effectiveness of the event

from an educational and public awareness perspective. Information collected will contribute to ongoing research and management efforts by FWC and its partners.

Apalachicola Oyster Status Update -- The Apalachicola River has finally risen, dropping the salinities in the Bay to more normal levels (5-10 parts per thousand) by the end of February. However, the sudden high flows in the Bay have necessitated most of the Bay to be closed by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to oyster harvesting because of high bacteria levels. Preliminary landings data from December 2012 and January 2013 indicate that oyster harvest is less than 20% of what it has been for the past five years for the same months. Staff met with DACS and the National Marine Fisheries Service to discuss the data analysis needed to document the fishery disaster request made by Governor Scott. Staff will be preparing a report that will be done in April when February landings data are more complete.

Comprehensive review of black bass regulations -- DFFM is currently conducting a series of open houses around the state to hear public opinion as part of a comprehensive review of black bass regulations. Internet and mail-surveys will also be used to evaluate social factors along with biological evaluations of existing regulations. Rule modifications will integrate social and biological data to simplify regulations and remove barriers to participation while ensuring sustainable quality fisheries and higher catches of trophy bass.

TrophyCatchsm update -- **TrophyCatchsm** is gaining a strong statewide and international following with more than 2,500 registered anglers who are eligible for a Phoenix bass boat, powered by Mercury, that will be drawn this fall. Social media has been extremely effective in promoting this exciting conservation program. Over 200 trophy bass have been caught-documented-and-released. This included a timely catch of an 11.5 pound bass by DFFM Director Tom Champeau while on a tour of the upper St. Johns River restoration project with Johnny Morris (Founder of Bass Pro Shops) and Tony Stewart (Champion NASCAR Driver).

Partnerships

NW Florida Artificial Reef Workshop -- FWC's DMFM artificial reef subsection attended the Northwest Florida Artificial Reef Workshop Feb. 19 and 20 in Niceville. The workshop was sponsored by FWC in cooperation with Florida Sea Grant. This regional meeting brought together more than 100 reef managers, scientists and stakeholders to talk about artificial reef related issues and concerns and reef fish management. FWC staff conducted several presentations including an overview of artificial reef activities statewide and nationally, the status of the Ships to Reefs

program and the role of fishery management in artificial reefs. Stakeholders were very thankful for the timely workshop.

Partnering for removal of abandoned fishing net from an artificial reef --

FWC and partners worked together to successfully remove an abandoned fishing net from an artificial reef in South Florida. The large monofilament fishing net posed a serious threat to marine life in and around the Tenneco Towers artificial reef, located in state waters approximately two miles offshore and east of the Miami-Dade/Broward county line. The nearly 1,000 pound net was approximately 30 feet high and 200 feet long. The net extended from the top of the artificial reef, down to the ocean floor, causing a hazard for both divers and marine life. At least one sea turtle died after becoming entangled in the net. The removal of the net would not have been possible without the support of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Covanta Energy, Miami-Dade County Environmental Resources Management, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the National Save the Sea Turtle Foundation, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Navy and the Wildlife Foundation of Florida.

Lake Worth Lagoon restoration -- FWC and partners are working on a project to restore a section of the Lake Worth Lagoon in Palm Beach County. Partners for this project include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Management, West Palm Beach Fishing Club and Marine Industries Association of Palm Beach County. The Grassy Flats project in Lake Worth Lagoon, which will begin this fall, will restore marine habitat in an urban environment. FWC will work with partners to restore appropriate habitat types in this estuary that are currently altered and degraded by adding the appropriate type and amount of sand and natural structure to support seagrass beds, salt marsh, oysters and mangroves. Once the habitat is restored, the natural ecosystem will function, the fish and wildlife will return and people can enjoy these revitalized natural resources. The Grassy Flats project will restore 10.5 acres of seagrass, enhance 9.3 acres of seagrass and restore another 2 acres of estuary habitat.

Celebration for the opening of the new Tamiami Trail Bridge -- On March 19, U.S. Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar and Assistant Secretary of the Army Jo-Ellen Darcy joined the celebration for the opening of the new Tamiami Trail Bridge. This bridge will help restore water flow and support recovery of wildlife in the Everglades ecosystem. The one-mile bridge portion of the Tamiami Trail will allow water to flow under the Tamiami Trail for the first time since the road was constructed in the 1920s. The bridge is the first step in a series of actions that will allow additional water to flow into Everglades National park, nourishing thousands of acres of wetland and estuarine systems. The bridge will also help alleviate high water

conditions in the FWC managed Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area.

Enhancing habitat and fisheries at Lake Apopka -- DFFM and the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation (HSC) are working with the St. Johns River Water Management District, Department of Environmental Protection, Orange County, Lake County, Lake County Water Authority, University of Florida, Friends of Apopka, the Harris Chain Bassmasters, and Mosquito Creek Outdoors to enhance habitat and fisheries at Lake Apopka (Lake/Orange counties). Work has begun to construct 35 fish attractors to concentrate sport fish and enhance angling opportunities. Dredging, aquatic plant translocation and innovative projects to improve water quality and reduce the effects of organic sediments are also underway.

2013 Black Bass Diversity Symposium -- DFFM, FWRI, and HSC biologists participated in the *2013 Black Bass Diversity Symposium* at the Southern Division meeting of the American Fisheries Society. Many black bass populations have conservation issues related to genetic integrity and habitat degradation and this symposium provided a forum for scientific collaboration. Work on the Chipola River in north Florida was presented that led to the Chipola's nomination to the National Fish Habitat Partnership 2013 "10 Waters to Watch." FWC is part of the NFHP's Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership that includes USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, West Florida Resource Conservation and Development Council, and the Native Black Bass Initiative. Objectives of this partnership are conservation of native Shoal Bass and enhancement of their required riverine habitats.

Events

First Nature Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival -- FWC held the first Nature Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival March 22-24. The event was planned and implemented in cooperation with the tourism development organizations of Hernando, Pasco and Citrus counties, Audubon Florida, Visit Florida and the Citrus, Hernando and West Pasco County Audubon chapters. The festival offered 15 tours in the three counties and a full day of programs at FWC's Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area. Programs highlighted many of the wildlife species that inhabit this Sandhill region - gopher tortoises, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and many others as well as management activities like prescribed burning and actions participants could take to enhance habitat at their homes.

Approximately 400 people participated in the festival. Attendees came from 12 counties, six states and four countries, including Australia, bringing a welcome positive economic impact to the region. Festival attendees donated \$350 to support FWC's Southeastern American Kestrel volunteer monitoring project. The kestrel, in decline throughout its range, was the "star" of the festival highlighted on an attractive poster produced to promote the festival.

2013 Florida Scrub-Jay Festival -- The 2013 Florida Scrub-Jay Festival was held on March 2, at Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Martin County. This is the first time the event had been in southeast Florida. While this is the fourth annual Scrub-Jay Festival, its location moves around the state from year to year. The festival celebrates the only bird species unique to Florida and its interesting habitat. The largest amount of protected scrub-jay habitat in southeast Florida is inside the park. The free, family-friendly Florida Scrub-Jay festival included guided walks, a Scrub-Jay Q&A with a panel of experts, hay rides, kids' activities, entertainment and presentations.

Lionfish photo contest --FWC hosted a live Twitter chat about the invasive lionfish issue March 28 and announced to the public a month-long, social media driven lionfish photo contest. This was the first time the agency has conducted a Twitter chat and the event was very successful. The message of lionfish control reached more than 24,297 Twitter accounts. Lionfish are a nonnative invasive species that negatively impact Florida's fish and wildlife.

The hour-long chat started at 1 p.m. with posts staff introductions, quick facts about lionfish and the negative impact they have on Florida fish and wildlife, and asking questions to the public such as, "When and where did you last see a lionfish?" During the chat, participants were offered the chance to win a free "Lionfish Control Team" t-shirt for answering trivia questions such as, "What year was the first lionfish reported in Florida waters?" The answer is 1985 off Dania Beach. At the end of the chat, a lionfish photo contest was revealed.

To enter, contestants send a photo of their lionfish catch via the social media platforms Twitter or Instagram with #FWCLionfish. In turn, they will receive a "Lionfish Control Team" t-shirt. The contest will end April 30 or when 150 t-shirts have been given out. As of April 3, 15 photos have been received. Press from across Florida and the nation have picked up on the story. The contest and the Twitter chat are helping draw important attention to the lionfish issue in Florida waters. By becoming a member of the FWC's Lionfish Control Team, participants are helping spread the word about the lionfish issue while they help control the lionfish population.