

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners  
FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director  
DATE: February 11, 2013  
SUBJECT: February 2013 Executive Director's Report

**Awards and Accomplishments**

**FWC captain receives Coast Guard award for boating safety efforts --**

Captain Richard Moore of FWC's Boating and Waterways section has served nine years on the National Boating Safety Advisory Council (NBSAC). Upon completing his service in November 2012, he was awarded the U.S. Coast Guard's Meritorious Public Service Award. The NBSAC takes up important issues and provides advice to the Coast Guard on a wide variety of recreational boating safety issues, many of which affect Florida boaters.

Captain Moore has been involved with numerous efforts including the distribution of non-profit grant funds, increasing accountability for grant recipients, improving boating accident reporting across the country, expanding approvals for inflatable life jackets and establishing a strategic plan for a national boating safety program. All of his efforts have kept in mind a main purpose – allowing boaters to safely enjoy Florida's beautiful waterways.

**In the News**

**Kick off for development of Florida conservation and technology park -- -**

Chairman Kenneth Wright represented FWC on January 10 at a historic groundbreaking -- or, more accurately, ground planting – ceremony with the Florida Aquarium, and Tampa Electric (TECO) to kick off the development of a Florida conservation and technology park. The ceremony was held in a park near Tampa Electric's existing Manatee Viewing Center in Apollo Beach at the future location of The Florida Aquarium's Center for Conservation. The event incorporated a unique ceremonial planting of more than 3,000 native wetland plants by approximately 50 children from Dowdell Middle School.

Some of the highlights of the park include:

- TECO Energy Technology Center
- Center for Conservation
- Animal Rescue, Research and Holding Facility
- Saltwater Fish Hatchery
- Interpretive Trails
- Catch and Release Fishing Programs

### **Officer saves man's life after witnessing violent crash on the water --**

While patrolling the waters off Miami Beach, FWC Officer Nathanael Martir-Negron witnessed a boat crash into a navigational marker. As Officer Martir-Negron approached the scene, the boat passengers began frantically yelling for help for their friend that had been thrown overboard.

The officer immediately searched the water surrounding the boat and located their friend floating in the water. The officer threw him a floatation device and pulled him to safety. Once aboard the patrol boat, he observed that the man had an open head wound and was disoriented. The accident victim did not know how he had fallen into the water or why he was bleeding. Since he was in need of immediate medical attention, Officer Martir-Negron took the man to a dock so that EMS could transport him to the hospital.

**Python Challenge™** -- On January 12, FWC kicked off the 2013 Python Challenge™ in Broward County at the University of Florida's Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center. The kick-off began with a news conference highlighting awareness and understanding about the invasive **Burmese python's** impacts on the Everglades ecosystem.

As of February 6, 1,559 people were registered for the month-long competition from 38 different states including three people from Alaska and one person from Canada. Fifty Burmese pythons had been turned in by this date. About 24 million people nationally viewed television stories on the Python Challenge™, including 4.6 million in Florida. FWC social media experienced a boost in activity with 27,000 people watching the **Python Challenge™**, video on YouTube and 10,000 people viewing **Python Challenge™ photos on MyFWC Flickr. Florida's elected officials have** also expressed interest in this event and many in fact have registered to take part in the Challenge.

FWC Commissioner Ron Bergeron has been very active and supportive in taking a number of state and federal elected officials and media out to search for pythons. He has utilized this opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of invasive exotics and other key Everglades restoration issues.

Following the close of the month-long competition, there will be an awareness and awards Event at Zoo Miami. Grand prizes of \$1,500 for harvesting the most Burmese pythons will be 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 in both categories. Prizes are funded through **2013 Python Challenge™ sponsors and money from registration. The Python Challenge™** will raise awareness, generate data and will evaluate the effectiveness of using an incentive-based model as one tool to help reduce the Burmese python population in the Everglades ecosystem. It also will generate data that will

contribute to ongoing research and management efforts by the FWC and its partners. More information on the program is available at [www.PythonChallenge.org](http://www.PythonChallenge.org).

**Escaped grizzly bear captured** -- On January 15 a grizzly bear cub escaped from a facility in northeast Naples. Units from the FWC, Collier County Sheriff's Office, and local residents attempted to locate the bear cub for three days. On January 18 the bear was located and tranquilized by FWC biologist Tad Bartareau. The bear cub was safely returned to its facility in the Golden Gate Estates area in Naples.

## **Updates**

**Deepwater Horizon** – FWC is one of two natural resource agencies, along with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), representing Florida as a trustee for the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) process governed by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. In December 2012, the state and federal natural resource Trustees and British Petroleum finalized agreements for a second phase of early restoration projects. This second phase is comprised of two multi-trustee projects that will start restoration of beach-nesting bird and marine turtle habitat injured by oil spill response activities. Florida is heavily engaged in both projects.

One project provides funding totaling \$4,420,320 for the reduction of disturbance to nesting and foraging habitat for beach nesting birds. Trustees for the State of Florida will receive \$2,835,000 of the total to implement the project in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Gulf, and Franklin Counties. Project actions include placing symbolic fencing (signs and posts connected with rope) around sensitive nesting sites of beach nesting birds; increasing predator control to reduce loss of eggs, chicks, and adult beach nesting birds at nesting sites; and increasing surveillance and monitoring of posted nesting sites to minimize disturbance to nesting habitat in posted areas. The project will be five years in duration and begins with the 2013 nesting season.

The other project provides funding in the amount of \$4,321,165 to reduce disturbance to nesting habitat for marine turtles. State of Florida Trustees will receive \$3,496,165 to conduct site-specific surveys of existing light sources for each targeted beach; coordinate with site managers on development of plans to eliminate, retrofit, or replace existing light fixtures on the property or to otherwise decrease the amount of light reaching the loggerhead sea turtle nesting beach; assist local governments on efforts to ensure compliance with local lighting ordinances; and institute a public awareness campaign concerning the impact of artificial lighting on marine turtles. In Florida, the project will be implemented in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Gulf, and Franklin Counties over the course of four years starting with the 2013 nesting season. Additionally, through this project the U.S. Department of Interior is receiving funding to retrofit lights along Via De Luna and the Casino Beach parking lot in Pensacola Beach.

FWC and DEP are cooperating on the issuance of Requests for Proposals to **implement the state's** projects. FWC staff from HSC was instrumental in the development, negotiation, and planning for the Phase II projects. Other staff from FWRI, DLE, and OED supported those activities and participated in the public meeting held to receive comment on the draft Phase II plan. The next phase of early restoration is currently being planned by the Trustees.

### **Apalachicola**

**Oyster status update --** In Aug. 2012, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) released the 2012 Oyster Resource Assessment Report for Apalachicola Bay, which indicated oyster populations were depleted over most of the reef areas sampled and that surviving oyster populations were severely stressed. Since then, FWC staff has been working with a variety of state and local agencies to help monitor conditions, mitigate impacts and support the local oyster harvesting population.

Preliminary Apalachicola Bay oyster commercial sales reports by wholesale dealers through the month of September indicate that harvest was a little over half of what it was last year. While reporting is not complete for October, it appears that these numbers will continue to show severe decline.

Staff continues to coordinate with the Gulf Coast Workforce Board and DACS on the **Board's grant**-funded shelling and relaying projects. These projects are expected to commence in early February. Staff also is continuing to work with NOAA Fisheries to **provide appropriate data to support the Governor's request for a declaration of a commercial disaster**. FWC, DACS and NOAA will meet Feb. 19 on this issue. Also, staff continues to work with the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers (ACF) stakeholder group through the Apalachicola Riverkeeper.

**Apalachicola Bay --**There has been a lot of attention paid to Apalachicola Bay since the **Commission's December 2012 meeting**. Two Senate committees – Agriculture, and Environmental Preservation & Conservation – conducted hearings on the Bay. They focused on the condition of the Apalachicola River and the **condition of oysters in the Bay**. **Jessica McCawley, FWC's Marine Fisheries Management Division Director**, made a presentation to the **Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee on the status of oysters, the Governor's request for a disaster declaration, FWC's current management strategies, and the roles and collaboration of other agencies including the DACS to find solutions and assist the Apalachicola community**. There have been briefings with House members as well.

FWC staff has been coordinating with DEP, the Northwest Florida Water Management District, and other experts to suggest an alternative for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operations of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) Rivers and the update to the Corps ACF Water Control Manual (WCM). Agency staff provided additional information to DEP on the fish and wildlife habitat needs and the detrimental effects of the current and proposed operations to the fish and

wildlife and habitat of the Apalachicola River, Floodplain, and Apalachicola Bay. **Florida's comments highlight the disparity in the Corps keeping** reservoirs high at the expense of river flows and ecological functions of the Apalachicola River and Bay.

Last week, the Governor came out with his budget recommendations for the 2013-2014 Fiscal Year and has recommended \$3 million be directed to the Northwest Florida Water Management District for water quality improvement projects for Apalachicola Bay.

**Endangered Species State-Federal Joint Task Force** -- FWC, in partnership with the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), hosted a meeting of the Endangered Species State-Federal Joint Task Force on February 7 at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge near Tallahassee. Executive Director Nick Wiley serves as a co-chair of this joint task force that represents all 50 state fish and wildlife agencies in an effort to improve implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in partnership with the USFWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Directors from the states of Alaska, California, Arizona, Hawaii, New York, Michigan, Kentucky and Florida are represented on the joint task force. Leadership from the USFWS and NMFS are co-chairing, and USFWS Director Dan Ashe is directly involved as a co-chair and participated in our meeting in Florida.

## **Partnerships**

**Florida Shorebird Alliance** -- FWC has received an \$81,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's *Shell Marine Habitat Program* to continue its leadership role in the Florida Shorebird Alliance (FSA). Through this grant and others, FWC will continue to lead the FSA in statewide shorebird conservation and monitoring efforts. This new grant award brings national recognition of **Florida's** efforts to protect wildlife through effective partnerships. The FSA partnership is continuing to grow, with two new local partnerships formed on the Atlantic Coast within the last year, and a growing membership of partners statewide (964 individuals to date).

**Operation Mermaid** -- The FWC joined the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office (PBSO) along with other state and local law enforcement agencies to conduct **"Operation Mermaid" on December 8 and 9. The countywide operation was** designed to remind boaters to slow down for migrating manatees. In addition to the FWC and PBSO, law enforcement agencies from Tequesta, Jupiter, West Palm Beach, Riviera Beach, Lantana and Boynton Beach participated in the operation. Some police departments in Miami-Dade County also joined the effort. This was the **first of several "Operation Mermaid" efforts that will be conducted during manatee** season. More operations are planned in January, February and March.

**Everglades Coalition Annual Conference** -- On January 11th, Commissioner Ron Bergeron and Executive Director Nick Wiley participated in the 28th Annual Conference of the Everglades Coalition in Miami. Executive Director Wiley represented FWC on a panel discussion regarding how well Everglades restoration is addressing fish and wildlife conservation. Commissioner Bergeron had an opportunity to visit with outgoing Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar and many other state and federal partners involved in Everglades restoration.

## **Events**

**National Archery in the Schools Program State Tournament** -- FWC is hosting Florida's Sixth Annual National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) State Tournament. The 2013 NASP State Tournament will once again be conducted as a live competition on Saturday, February 23 at the Easton Newberry Archery Center of Excellence in Newberry, Florida. NASP is designed to teach International style target archery in 4th-12th grade physical education classes and is a cooperative effort between the FWC and Florida's Department of Education. The program promotes student education, physical education and participation in the sport of Archery. Over 330 schools in the state have been trained to implement this program in their physical education curriculum.

**The FGA/FWC Spirit of Tarpon DNA Sampling Challenge** -- In 2012, the Florida Guides Association (FGA) and the FWC joined ranks to promote The FGA/FWC Spirit of Tarpon DNA Sampling Challenge. The challenge encourages anglers to participate in the tarpon genetic re-capture study being conducted by the **FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) and Mote Marine Laboratory**. Anyone was eligible to participate and the rules were simple: the most tarpon DNA samples returned to FWRI by any angler wins. The ongoing study since 2005 uses DNA fingerprinting techniques as a way to track individual tarpon through capture events. Volunteer tarpon anglers have submitted more than 16,500 of the nearly **18,000 samples inventoried in the study's database. Anglers submitted 4,726 samples in 2012, exceeding the project's annual goal of 4,000.**

We are pleased to announce the "2012 Grand Champion" John Mallory, a recreational angler from Merritt Island, who returned 975 DNA samples. John will receive a Certificate of Recognition signed by Chairman Wright and the President of the FGA, Captain Pat Kelly. The three regional award winners are: Gulf Coast – Captain Robert McCue (216 samples), Florida Keys – **Captain Paul D'Antoni (118 samples)**, and Atlantic Coast – Captain Carl Ball (94 samples). We look forward to awarding the 2013 FGA/FWC Spirit of Tarpon DNA Sampling Challenge.