



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Commission Meeting
February 13-14, 2013
Orlando, FL
Minutes

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held their regular meeting February 13-14, 2013, at SeaWorld Park, located 7007 SeaWorld Drive, Orlando, FL. Chairman Kenneth Wright called the meeting to order with the following members in attendance.

Kathy Barco, Vice Chairman, Jacksonville
Brian Yablonski, Tallahassee
Chuck Roberts, Tallahassee

Ronald A. Bergeron, Ft. Lauderdale
Aliese Priddy, Immokalee, FL
Richard A. Corbett, Tampa, FL

Staff:

Nick Wiley	Executive Director
Greg Holder	Assistant Executive Director
Bud Vielhauer	General Counsel
Colonel Jim Brown	Director, Division of Law Enforcement
Chuck Collins	Director, South Region
Louie Roberson	Director, Northwest Region
Shannon Wright	Director, Northeast Region
Chris Wynn	Director, Southwest Region
Eric Sutton	Director, Habitat and Species Conservation
Diane Eggeman	Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management
Tom Champeau	Director, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management
Jessica McCawley	Director, Division of Marine Fisheries
Doc Kokol	Director, Community Relations
Carly Canion	Analyst, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Martha Bademan	Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Dr. Don Coyner	Section Leader, Division of Hunting and Game Management
Curtis Brown	Major, Division of Law Enforcement
Cory Morea	Deer Management Program Coordinator
Dr. Brad Gruver	Biological Administrator III, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Gil McRae	Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

There were 64 individuals registered to speak to the Commission during the two-day meeting.

Meeting Opening,

Chairman Wright called the February 2013, meeting to order at 8:43 a.m. and welcomed the Commissioners, staff, and public to the SeaWorld Park in Orlando, Florida.

Chairman Wright invited Tom Champeau, Division Director, Freshwater Fisheries Management, to give the invocation, followed by Commissioner Priddy, who led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Chairman Wright introduced and thanked Terry Prather, President of SeaWorld, for hosting the FWC meeting. Mr. Prather welcomed the Agency to SeaWorld and talked about the private public partnership and then introduced his team members; Brad Andrews, the Chief Zoological Officer; Mike Boos, Vice President of Zoo Operations, and Jeff Andrews, Vice President of Zoo Operations in Tampa. He said this is the ultimate private/public partnership between SeaWorld and the FWC and collectively we have done an incredible job to continue to educate the citizens of Florida about wildlife.

Chairman Wright also recognized Jay Galbraith, who he is proud to serve on the Hubbs SeaWorld Board with, which highlights the research and history that SeaWorld and Hubbs SeaWorld Institute have brought to wildlife fisheries and management. He further noted that Shannon Wright was instrumental in facilitating a joint meeting of our top management for a round table discussion between FWC and SeaWorld.

Commissioner Corbett asked how many people come through SeaWorld. Mr. Prather responded that they entertain 20 million people a year across the park system and their mission is to inspire and inform their guests about what they can do to make a big difference to help protect our natural resources.

Chairman Wright welcomed Melissa Thompson, Aide to Congressman Steve Southerland and Trisha Hall from Representative Steve Precourt's office.

Special Introduction — Author, Randy Wayne White

Chairman Wright welcomed bestselling author, Randy Wayne White. He heartily endorsed his books about a character named Doc Ford, a marine biologist, whose suspenseful adventures take place in south Florida.

Mr. White recognized what a joy and at the same time, what a burden the Commissioners have in the decisions they have to make to save wildlife. He added he is aware that the first casualty of a failed economy is the environment and tries to keep that in mind when he writes.

Chairman Wright discussed a book about how tarpon fishing started in Florida. Mr. White gave a brief history of how tarpon fishing opened up the west coast for fishing to the world.

A plaque was presented to Mr. White and a photo was taken with the Commissioners.

Employee Introductions

Chairman Wright asked Executive Director Wiley to introduce FWC Employees to the Commission. Director Wiley introduced the following.

- Officer Steve McDaniel
- Duty Officer Chip Paoletti
- Cheryl Pinkerton
- Ben Shepherd
- Alice Mason
- Patrick Delaney
- Dustin Everitt

- KP Clements

Adoption of Minutes

Chairman Wright asked for a motion to approve the December 5-6, 2012, Commission meeting minutes. Upon a motion by Commissioner Bergeron, and seconded by Commissioner Roberts, the minutes were approved as written.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

Chairman Wright asked for a motion to approve the meeting Agenda. A motion to approve the Agenda was made by Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Commissioner Corbett, and the motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Chairman Wright asked for approval of the Consent Agenda, which the Commissioners have already been briefed on.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Yablonski, and seconded by Commissioner Corbett, the motion carried and the Commission approved the February 13-14, 2013, Consent Agenda.

Executive Director's Report

Chairman Wright asked Executive Director Nick Wiley to present the Executive Director's report. Director Wiley discussed the following:

Awards and Accomplishments

FWC captain receives Coast Guard award for boating safety efforts — Director Wiley noted that 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.

In the News

Kick off for development of Florida Conservation and Technology Park — Chairman Wright represented FWC on January 10 at a historic groundbreaking 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. Chairman Wright noted this event highlighted the partnership the Agency has with the Florida Aquarium, which is a good example of a public/private partnership. We are anticipating the relocation of our hatchery from Port Manatee to be located there, where FWC will be able to run a hatchery operation, as well as have an educational component.

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 he was approaching the scene, the boat passengers began yelling for help for their friend that had been thrown overboard. Officer Nartir-Negron immediately searched the water surrounding the boat and was able to locate the man floating in the water. He threw a floatation device and pulled him to safety. The accident victim was injured but did not know how he had fallen into the water or why he was bleeding. Since he was in need of 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. A news conference highlighting awareness and understanding about the invasive Burmese python's impact on the Everglades ecosystem was held at the University of Florida, Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center in Broward County. Chairman Wright, Commissioner Bergeron and Commissioner Priddy were in attendance.

Commissioner Bergeron said he felt that this was an extremely important event that received worldwide coverage.

Commissioner Yablonski said the event became a huge media event and then noted the aquatic equivalent of the python is the lionfish.

Director Wiley noted that as of February 6, 2013, a total of 1,559 people, including many elected officials, had registered for the month-long competition from 38 different states including Alaska and Canada. Also that 50 pythons had been turned in so far, and about 24 million people nationally viewed television stories on the challenge, including 4.6 million in Florida. Commissioner Bergeron has been very involved in taking a number of state and federal elected officials and media out to search for pythons, and in doing so has used this opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of invasive exotics and other key Everglades restoration issues. Director Wiley announced that following the close of the completion, there will be an Awareness and Awards Event at Zoo Miami, where grand prizes for the most harvested and the longest pythons will be awarded. Prizes are being funded through sponsors and money from registration. Lastly, the challenge will raise awareness, generate data, and evaluate the effectiveness of using an incentive-based model as one tool to help reduce the python population in the Everglades ecosystem, as well as contribute to ongoing research and management efforts by the FWC and its partners.

Commissioner Bergeron talked about his expeditions with Senator Bill Nelson and Commissioner Patrick Diaz, along with several others. He noted the important thing is it is not always about the quantity as much as the information we get from the research. He felt in order to have a successful hunt there needed to be a cold front that would draw the pythons out to sun...unfortunately there wasn't one.

Updates

Deepwater Horizon — Director Wiley explained that 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 (BP) finalized agreements for a second phase of early restoration projects. Director Wiley discussed the second phase that is comprised of two multi-trust projects that will start restoration of beach-nesting bird and marine turtle habitat injured by oil spill response activities. One project provided funded \$4,420,320 for the reduction of disturbance to nesting and foraging habitat for beach nesting birds. Further, 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 around sensitive nesting sites of 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; to improve lighting conditions on the beaches and make it more conducive to sea turtle nesting. He also discussed three areas where funding is starting to flow; the Natural Research Damage Act (NRDA); the Restore Act, with focus on communities and resources that were impacted by the oil spill; and lastly, the Department of Justice through a settlement agreement with BP defined that some of the criminal fine money will be administered by a non- profit association called the Natural Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Apalachicola Bay and Oyster status update - In August 2012, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) released the Oyster Resource Assessment Report for Apalachicola Bay. The report indicated the 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. Staff continues to coordinate with the Gulf Coast Workforce Board and DACS on the Board's grant funding shelling and relaying projects. Staff is also continuing to work with NOAA Fisheries to provide appropriate data to support the Governor's request for a declaration of a commercial disaster. They will also continue to work with the Apalachicola Chattahoochee Flint Rivers stakeholders group through the Apalachicola Riverkeepers.

Commissioner Corbett asked if we have gotten any rain, and asked if it had made a difference. Director Wiley responded that he has received a positive email from staff that the rain we have recently received had resulted in the release of more water; now is the time we should be getting high water flows...near flood stage. If the drought breaks it would make a big difference, but we would still need to work on the water distribution from Georgia. Governor Scott has been very focused on keeping the attention on getting the water right. FWC is trying to collect data on the economic value of the harvest to show that it is way down from last year and this will be the basis on whether they declare a fishery disaster and whether Congress can take action to provide funding relief.

Commissioner Corbett asked who has influence with Georgia and how can we increase the water. Director Wiley replied the Corp of Engineers controls the faucet and they are revisiting their water schedules. Also, FWC staff is very engaged in being at the table and advocating what is best for Florida.

Chairman Wright clarified that Apalachicola Bay survives because it has a consistent flow of fresh water, otherwise salinity can get so high it adversely impacts the oysters.

Commissioner Bergeron asked if the lack of water was from drought or combined with the need of water being cut off. Director Wiley responded it is a bit of both; the water is shared by many interests from a limited watershed.

Events

The FGA/FWC Spirit of Tarpon DNA Sampling Challenge — Director Wiley highlighted the joint venture between FWC and the Florida Guides Association. He explained that in 2012 they joined ranks to promote the FGA/FWC Spirit of Tarpon DNA Sampling Challenge. The challenge encouraged 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. He noted that 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.

Chairman Wright announced the "2012 Grand Champion, John Mallory, a recreational angler from Merritt Island who returned 975 tarpon DNA samples. Mr. Mallory commented he felt this was an important program and through the process he has learned much more about tarpon.

Chairman Wright thanked Captain Pat Kelly and the Florida Guides Association for their partnership and hopefully we can learn more about this iconic fish. A photo was taken with the Commissioners.

Captain Pat Kelly said it was great working with the Agency and the challenge is on for 2013.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC)

Chairman Wright asked Martha Bademan, Section Leader with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management to present the Gulf Council Issues. Ms. Bademan reviewed the issues that were discussed at the January 7-8, 2013 Reef Fish Committee (Committee) meeting concerning red snapper in Tampa, and issues that were discussed at the February 5-8 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council meeting in Mobile, AL. Issues included:

- 2013 federal recreational red snapper season, including the possibility of a supplemental season
- An Emergency Rule that was approved by the Council for 2013 federal red snapper season
- Future recreational red snapper seasons
- Red snapper regional management
- Red snapper allocation
- Projected recreational red snapper seam lengths under different allocation scenarios
- Other long-term options for recreational harvest of red snapper, including a "Days at Sea" program for charter boats, inter-sector trading between the commercial and recreational sectors, shifting the state date or end date of the season, changing the size limit or establishing a slot limit, or implementing effort limitations like a harvest tag or red snapper permit
- The 2013 recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters
- Other state season considerations
- Other final Council actions
- Other final Council actions including setting the vermilion snapper and yellowtail snapper ACLs, reducing the recreational vermilion snapper bag limit to 10 fish in federal waters, removing the requirement to carry and use venting tools when fishing for reef fish in Gulf federal waters, and finalizing Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan rule language.

Ms. Bademan said that staff requested direction from the Commission on the 2013 recreational season for Gulf state waters. Staff also requested direction on when the Commission would prefer to have a supplemental red snapper season in 2013 should there be quota available. Staff suggested fall weekends. Staff also requested direction on long-term management options for the red snapper recreational fishery. Ms. Bademan informed the Commission that the Council will consider a range of management tools that could be used to manage harvest in this fishery. Some of these options could result in longer red snapper seasons, while other approaches could provide more flexibility in planning future seasons. Staff welcomed direction on any other Council items and noted that the next Council meeting will be held in Gulfport, MS from April 15-19, 2013, which is the same week as the April Commission meeting.

Vice Chairman Barco asked if the new data showing that the stocks are doing better could hurt us. She further asked can the red snapper assessment show that the fish are getting larger at a faster pace, and cause the season lengths to get shorter in the immediate future due to larger snapper in the population.

Mr. Gil McRae, Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, explained that the Council is obligated to plan ahead with the last available stock assessment and project future seasons based upon the last stock assessment. When staff sees that the stock is rebuilding at an increasing rate, and if the stock assessment shows that, the Council will adjust the quotas and the higher quotas should lead to more fishing days.

Vice Chairman Barco noted that we have higher quotas and less fishing days, so a good stock assessment is not going to help us.

Mr. McRae clarified that the increase in the quota that resulted in fewer days is because we are between benchmark assessments; as the fish get bigger you catch fewer fish to get to the quota, and that resulted in fewer days. The new assessment is a complete fresh look at the entire stock. Also, the tweak that resulted in a higher quota with fewer days tied to the bigger fish will not happen again; it will be a complete management rework. It should make a difference. If the assessment shows that we are getting closer to meeting the spawning stock biomass benchmarks, the quota will go up as well as the days, even with bigger fish.

Commissioner Corbett asked if we will know more at the meeting in April. Mr. McRae responded that we will know the results of the assessment that is out for review at the workshop at the end of April. If that assessment holds, we will have a better understanding of the situation.

Public Comment

Bob Gill (Organized Fishermen of Florida) commented that the opportunity is right for the Commission to show leadership in red snapper management. They agree there are huge problems in red snapper and some say a social failure, though biologically a success. Florida has a large portion of the fishery and can carry some influence. If FWC helped to define the goals and objectives for what the fishery is going to be like in 10 years, then define the path on getting there, by doing so the Agency would become leaders in management of red snapper. The standard approach to fisheries management is not going to work; effort constraints will likely be needed, and an allocation shift won't help. A regional management system with all five Gulf States coming together and that complies with the Magnuson Stevens Act constraints may be a good solution, but not what Louisiana is currently doing.

Commissioner Corbett asked Mr. McRae if he did not agree with the entire approach. Mr. McRae replied that the only things that make sense are harvest tags or permits, or other ideas. The current management system does not work. He further stated there is an Ad Hoc Recreational Red Snapper Data Collection Advisory Panel meeting on February 26, in Tampa and they will address the subject. They will be exploring different, new ideas.

Special Recognitions

Chairman Wright welcomed and thanked the following guests.

- Dan Rodgers, Legislative Assistant to Senator Geraldine Thompson
- Dana Rutledge, District Secretary to Representative Linda Stewart

Public Comment Continued

Buddy Bradham (St. Petersburg Charterboat Captain) commented that the regional approach will make it very confusing and states that open early and big might cut off any fishing in other states. He added that the cost of monitoring for a "Days at Sea" pilot program would be too high for charter boat captains, many who are not willing to put a vessel monitoring system (VMS) on their boat. Also, fewer days to fish in exchange for flexibility was also not a good option and the IFQ will not work because no one wants to pay to buy catch shares. Lastly, he noted that no one he talked to was in favor of inter-sector trading.

Dennis O'Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) commented that red snapper are more abundant than they have been in the past 25 years; habitat has been created and the fish have responded. The quota numbers are set very conservatively and juvenile recruitment has been low for the past two years, which he believes is a natural biological response for a stock. He added that we need more data from anglers. He also noted that four years after we were supposed to have universal angler registration, it's still not a reality. Further, he felt that someone is stealing our piece of the pie, we are not yet getting the fish we should. Lastly, Mr. O'Hern noted that Dr. Roy Crabtree said that the "Days at Sea" program will require sector separation.

Warren Hunt (Hogs Dive Club) talked about the regions and said that there are not many red snapper in state waters off the west coast of Florida; they are closer to the shore in the Panhandle but off Pinellas it takes a 40 minute boat ride, so any regional management plan should include different areas in Florida. He added that he felt permits are ok, but tags are not. Also, he did not think IFQs would work; why should the guy with the IFQ have the advantage and make money off of quota shares when he's not even fishing.

Pam Anderson (PCBA, NACO, Member Govt. Affairs/Bay County Chamber of Commerce) commented that they need a two fish bag limit with as many days as possible and in the summer they need as many consecutive days as possible. The needs of the recreational sector have increased due to increases in population and tourism and those needs should be considered in allocation decisions made by the Gulf Council. Also they would like the fall season to be as soon as possible and ending October 31. She also stated that vermilion is not overfished so there is no need to set the ACL at a level that might be exceeded and cause accountability measures to kick in which would decrease next year's ACL. Further, the "Days at Sea" will reduce number of days to fish for charter

fishermen and is just catch shares in another form. She also felt that fish tags are also another foot in the door to catch shares. Regional management will be accepted as helping the recreational fishery if Amendment 30B was no longer in place. She noted that the regions should have the obligation to monitor and regulate their fishery and to have the right to set their price structure accordingly. In Florida, we need to create a data collection system to include private angler catch, and participation data, as well as log books, for for-hire boats. As for inter-sector trading, the excess commercial quota needs to be transferred to the recreational sector's allocation and not sold to them because all the fish belong to all the stakeholders. Congress has placed these fish in a public trust and the Gulf Council is responsible to supply the fish to the rest of the nation where needed. The intent is to manage the resource so it is available to the public and not to become brokers of the resource. She asked the Commission to please discourage inter-sector trading. Electronic logbooks have been requested from the for hire industry for years, however a VMS requirement attached to the program is an unnecessary expense. Further, she felt everything that can be done to stop the demolition of idle rigs that have become reefs will help this fishery and also the endangered species that are killed in the process. She asked FWC to do what is best for Florida as a whole, even if it means going non-compliant. She also asked the Agency to help fight against amendment 30B; to work with stakeholders to set up robust artificial reefs within the state waters, and set up a data collection program for private anglers to provide data on reef anglers, and use that database for reef fish anglers. Lastly, they asked the FWC to look at ways to get offshore boat counts because she believes the counts by NMFS are not correct.

Chairman Wright noted that the Agency strongly advocates for artificial reefs.

B.J. Burkett (Panama City Florida Charterboat Owner) noted he is a federal permit holder and cannot fish even if state waters are open and federal waters are closed. He felt the state really needs to go compliant or he will not be able to fish. He supports a reef fish endorsement to get a true accounting of the catch effort and that it should cost money. He would like FWC to help get the federal prohibition to fish in state waters (Amendment 30B) lifted.

Vice Chairman Barco noted that the only way you can test the law is if you have an injured party, but nobody is willing to call the threat, and look what it has done to this industry.

Mr. Bud Vielhauer, General Council, responded that he would have to look up federal law to see if someone could still fish in federal waters if they were in a court case involving a federal permit.

Chairman Wright added that we might be able to intervene, and suggested it would take the industry getting together and choose an aggrieved person and then back that person. He also noted that whatever action the Board takes today will only be a draft rule and will not be final until April.

Mark Kelly (Charter Boat-Lady Kelley) asked, as an IFQ permit holder, the Commission go along with the federal season for one more year on red snapper, until we find out what the stock assessment is going to be. They were told at a Gulf Council meeting that 60 days is the best we will ever get out of the snapper season even with full recovery into 2032. Also, we need state pressure to help with 30B, which needs to go away because it punishes federal charter boats for hire. Lastly, he noted that Martha has been doing a phenomenal job representing Florida on the Gulf Council.

Chairman Wright stated that his previous suggestion about challenging Amendment 30B in court is a potential scenario only. Mr. Kelly responded that he is booking out 27 days now, and if the Commission changes and loses days, he will lose business.

Chairman Wright asked staff to send the link for the Gulf and Atlantic Councils meetings to the Commissioners so they can audit the meeting.

Commissioner Roberts asked at what point in time the permit becomes not worth the sacrifice. Mr. Kelly responded they catch other fish, and will adapt.

Trip Aukeman (CCA Florida) agrees with Mr. Bob Gill, that something needs to be done differently. There is no clear indication that the management options for red snapper are the right ones. They would like to work something out with other stakeholders. Also, they felt that what is being done today is a band-aid and not good for the future. They would like to work on 30B because many charter guys are members of CCA. They feel that regional management is a great tool if done correctly and also felt the state can do a much better job managing the fisheries. They thanked Martha for doing a wonderful job at the Council. CCA is also very concerned about the "Days At Sea" program that was voted down in the committee but brought back to the full Council; CCA sees this as another sector separation. Lastly, they would love to get better data for the recreational fishermen.

T.J. Marshall (Ocean Conservancy) apologized for not articulating his thoughts well at the last Commission meeting. He then noted that the Louisiana regional approach to regional management has issues. He agrees that there are some innovative ways that are ripe for exploration; they want to try different ways of limiting catch rates. The "Days At Sea" program does not give assurance that you will always be able to use all the days. He would like to pull stakeholder groups together with various sectors representatives to figure out what to do. His organization would help facilitate or sponsor this.

Capt. Pat Kelly (Florida Guides Association) noted that FGA has charter boats, guide boats, and head boats, and the Amendment 30B issue prohibiting federally-permitted boats from fishing in state waters has got to be worked out. He stated red snapper is messed up and they don't need to make the fishing experience any more complex than it already is. He asked the Commission to please help with this.

Matt McCloud (Pensacola) has a federally permitted charter boat and a charter business in Pensacola. He does not want to have to explain to his son about the loss of a fishing opportunity. He would like to tell him that democracy won through the strength of the citizens and state government of the Gulf. He asked the state to go non-compliant with federal regulations. He felt this action would mean destroying the management plan for the Gulf. He added that to change the Magnuson Stevens Act is difficult, but must be done. He thought that out of the box ideas may be able to satisfy it; we need to fundamentally change this, not just treat symptoms. He felt it will take bold action on the part of the Agency and the fisherman; that we have a lot to risk, but much to gain.

Benjamin Kelly (Panama City Beach) is a federal permit holder and is waiting and hoping for more days from the stock assessment; the 27 days they get now just keeps them afloat. He felt the state should go inconsistent with the feds for one more year to see if the season can get back to 50 days, or something they can survive on. He agreed to stay with the two red snapper, two gag, and two trigger bag limit per person. He also asked the Commission to consider a recreational reef fish stamp to find out who is participating in the red snapper program, but charge money for it. Lastly he said it is time to challenge the federal noose with 30B. He has challenged it before and lost, but it is not fair to spend 30 years of your life doing something and now he is looking at nothing if the state does not comply. He would like to see stakeholder meetings arranged to discuss this.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Wright noted that the Board needs to give very specific direction to staff.

Commissioner Yablonski said the outlook for this fishery is a healthy rebounding fishery. If catch rates and the average weight of red snapper continue to increase, catch rates would continue to shorten, which does not make any sense; by the time the fishery rebounds, there will be no more fishermen. He stated that we can manage for abundance. We already have 40 days and felt the Commission should propose 41 days to start the process moving forward.

A motion was made by Commissioner Yablonski to go inconsistent with the recreational red snapper season and have a fishing season in the Gulf starting June 1 and running 41 days. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Roberts.

Chairman Wright commented the Agency should allow the fishery to come back, but at a rate that sustains those who depend on it for economic well being.

Vice Chairman Barco said we are all working under a model from an old stock assessment with interim data being interjected that does not give the full picture. In the real world, business would go ahead and make changes based on feelings of data rather than waiting on proof. We know what the constraints are, but we have to make a decision based on what is best for the fishery and the state. Texas has been inconsistent but there have been no consequences. She agreed that the state needs to go its own way, which will be painful for many. Also she understands change in this case is not even possible given the way the feds have decided they need to go. Federal permit holders have been backed into a box; and now the states are backed in too.

Commissioner Roberts asked to consider amending the motion to 44 days which would end the season on Sunday. This was accepted by Commissioner Yablonski and seconded by Commissioner Corbett.

Commissioner Bergeron asked if we would have an accurate stock assessment in April to look at.

Ms. Bademan said the final assessment workshop will be at the meeting at the end of April and beginning of May. The Gulf Council meeting will be the same week of the Commission meeting and the Council will likely consider an emergency rule to increase the quota based upon what the new assessment says. The wheels will be turning but we won't have the full picture in front of us.

Commissioner Priddy asked if all the states go inconsistent, would that trigger some thought that the federal Management process for red snapper is broken and change is needed

Ms. Bademan responded that Texas has been inconsistent for years and Louisiana is probably watching what we do.

Chairman Wright and Vice Chairman Barco said we have sent this message before by going inconsistent.

Commissioner Priddy felt it should bring a higher level of scrutiny because it is on the back of the charter fisherman.

Chairman Wright noted we never had a management plan that reflected the reality of more fish and bigger fish allowed to be caught and still be allowing stock to rebuild.

Commissioner Yablonski questioned at what point are we going to say enough is enough. The model has failed because the stock assessment workshops do show the fishery is in better shape, but the feds won't use that to change the underlying reason.

Chairman Wright and Commissioner Corbett asked if we find out the fishery was in serious decline, what our reaction would be at that point.

Ms. Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management Division, responded you would have the option to change your decision; we've been through two assessment workshops that indicate the fishery is in recovery.

Commissioner Bergeron noted we make these decisions based on science and stock assessment.

The friendly amended motion passed unanimously.

Ms. McCawley asked for direction on a supplemental red snapper season if additional quota is available. Staff suggested fall weekends.

Vice Chairman Barco said she is in favor of the staff suggestion of fall weekends.

Ms. McCawley asked for direction on long-term management options.

Vice Chairman Barco discussed the following:

- Regional management needs a long haul discussion to deal with all the moving parts, including budgetary issues.
- Allocation shift is only adding three or four days and not much benefit.
- The "Days At Sea" program is rejected by public and fishers in general.
- Inter-sector trading is heading in the wrong direction of where the Agency wants the fishery to be.
- Shift seasons start date — The Agency is already flexible to our stakeholders needs.
- Slot limit - she noted that she had not received feedback from stakeholders on this issue.
- Harvest tags or permits — that will get the Agency better data collection from the recreational sector but it would require a fee of \$5 -\$10 and legislative approval. She is not sure where it gets us in the end result.

Chairman Wright asked if there has ever been a meeting of stakeholders and states outside of the Gulf Council setting to discuss options for some of the issues. Ms. McCawley responded no, but state reps have gotten together as a group through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and talked about what they would like to see at Council meetings. Chairman Wright asked if there is any productive reason to do this.

Director Wiley said there are a lot of reasons for the states to come together and discuss issues, and then reach out and get stakeholder involvement. It is important to have close dialogue with our fellow states and with our stakeholders. There is a major fishery conference in May that might be a good opportunity.

Director Wiley also suggested getting the states together before the April meeting and report back at the April meeting.

Vice Chairman Barco recommended working with the states independent of any federal council. Chairman Wright and Commissioner Bergeron agreed with this approach.

Commissioner Yablonski asked if a limited number of tags were issued, either free or purchased, how you would allocate them. Vice Chairman Barco responded it is very cumbersome for the fishermen, but there could also be a reef fish permit that shows who is targeting reef fish. The permit would give you data collection for reef fish and red snapper. Commissioner Barco noted that a Legislature would need to bring this idea forward and the FWC would only endorse it or not endorse it. We have been voting against fee increases.

Commissioner Yablonski asked if you have a tag program, would the seasons go away. Vice Chairman Barco responded that now you have the weight issue.

Commissioner Roberts asked that when staff meets with stakeholders would they get information on the slot size to see if there is any value in having a slot size, and is there a point where you need to leave the big fish.

Director Wiley would like thoughts on regional management and what the posture would be, to leave it on the table and work through it, or take it off the table. They are not sure that it is a good idea, but other states want to see it move forward.

Ms. McCawley replied that there are some pros and cons. The red snapper population has been expanding, largely off Florida and southwest Florida. Regional management requires a percentage of the quota to be set for each state, so this would be a static number. If our share of the stock is expanding over time, we might not be able to get at those fish with a static regional allocation. Also, just because we have regional management, does not mean that we would have more fishing days or quota. The season for federal waters would be set in response to the data and input received. The benefit would be that we would have the flexibility to change when the season would be and the size and slot limits in federal waters.

Chairman Wright clarified the negative is that the fishery is moving our direction and we could benefit by having more fish, but if we lock into regional management, we could get an allocation of the total fishery that might not be representative of the total number of fish we have. The advantage to regional management is that we would be able to control our own destiny with what we do have.

Vice Chairman Barco commented there are not enough details to say yet.

Chairman Wright said the FWC should proceed cautiously and we need to consider at the Commission level the value of the trade off. Director Wiley would not want this decision to be made at staff level. Chairman Wright agreed

Chairman Wright said he was troubled by the commercial sector selling to the recreational side. A lengthy discussion ensued about trading shares, selling shares and allocation. They concurred to take inter-sector trading, "Days At Sea" program, and sector separation off the table.

Gulf Gag Grouper Season

Chairman Wright asked Jessica McCawley to present the proposed final rule for the Gulf of Mexico recreational gag grouper season. Ms. McCawley explained that staff recommended approving the proposed rule to modify the recreational harvest season for gag grouper in the Gulf of Mexico. This would establish an April 1 — June 30 harvest season for the Big Bend (Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, and Taylor counties, Indian Pass, Apalachicola Bay, and the Steinhatchee River) and open the recreational harvest season beginning July 1 for the remainder of Gulf state waters, excluding Monroe County. Staff also requested direction on how the rule describing the season for Gulf state waters outside the Big Bend should be worded. The first option is to keep the wording from the advertised rule language, which states that state waters close to recreational harvest when federal waters close. This language was prepared before the estimate for the federal season ending date was available, so it does not include a specific ending date. The second option is to revise the advertised language via a Notice of Change to include a specific date that the state season would close. If this option is chosen, staff recommended closing state waters on December 3. Ms. McCawley explained that the federal season is currently projected to end between November 11 and December 3. Based on preliminary landing estimates, the 2012 Gulf-wide recreational gag grouper harvest was just below the annual catch target (ACT) of 1.031 million pounds. If the Act was not met in 2012, the federal season is expected to end around December 3. If the Commission chooses to close state waters on December 3, staff would publish a Notice of Change to revise the proposed rule language accordingly. Ms. McCawley also explained that if the Commission chooses to keep the general language in the first option, the recreational harvest season for gag grouper that opens July 1 would be automatically consistent with future federal harvest seasons unless the Commission took action. If the Commission chooses the second option and inserts a closure date of December 3, the Commission would likely need to revisit the state season closing date yearly if they intend to consider consistency with future federal seasons. This rule would become effective by April 1, 2013. Staff has evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, F.A.C., and found them to be in compliance.

Public Comment

Dennis O'Hern (Fishing Rights Alliance) recommended the Commission set December 3 as the closing date. He noted that he has never seen gag like he is seeing; he has commercial hook and line friends that are catching 1,000 pounds of grouper in 30 feet of water because there is no pressure from the recreational sector. He urged the Commissioners to please consider along the same lines as what you are looking at with red snapper.

Warren Hunt (Hog Spearing Club) concurred with Mr. O'Hern. He commented that when he is diving and collecting marine life, he is seeing a lot of fish that are 30 to 35 inches. He believes the fish are out there.

Pam Anderson (PCBA, NACO, Member Govt. Affairs/Bay County Chamber of Commerce) commented they are agreeable with staff recommendations and felt there are many more gag grouper than people realize. She also

clarified that she endorsed the endorsement on a Florida state recreational saltwater fishing license, not a tag program. The fish are getting heavier so that creates problems. A problem they are running into every year with the annual catch limit (ACL) is that recreational harvesters are being told that recreational harvesters overfished their quota because of the increasing weight of red snapper, and she feels this will happen with tags.

Vice Chairman Barco asked her if she would like to end when the federal season ends, or set for December

3. Ms. Anderson responded they do not have a comment.

Sharon McBreen (PEW Charitable Trust) encouraged the Commission to go consistent with the federal regulations for Gulf gag grouper and gray trigger fish. Gag has been overfished since 2009. The recovery plan to rebuild the gag population began just 2 years ago when they were at about 40 percent of a healthy population level, and it is anticipated it will take another five years to rebuild. She noted that a recovered population would mean a longer fishing season in future years. When the Commission does not go consistent with the federal season it threatens to undermine the progress towards recovery because so many gag are caught in state waters. If the Commission moves forward with the Big Bend mini-season, NOAA Fisheries must account for the additional harvest in state waters, which means the season elsewhere in the state will be shortened. They also support staff recommendations for consistent state rules with gray triggerfish regulations because they are over fished and not recovering as expected. They have a unique mating behavior that leaves the eggs vulnerable to predation if individual triggerfish are removed; this may have contributed to the continued low population abundance; consistent regulations should allow the population to recover.

Dave Markett (Florida Guides Association) encouraged the Commission to look long term at gag grouper like reef fish and adopt a multi faceted program where Florida data drives Florida management decisions. They are being charged with high rates of dead discards and many of the conservation methods adopted by fishers (such as circle hooks and venting tools) have not been accounted for in the federal numbers. This is such a valuable resource to Florida and it is critical to keeping the marinas and others in the fishing industry open. Gag grouper should be a primary target to argue the validity of our numbers vs. the federal numbers.

TJ Marshall (Ocean Conservancy) suggested the Commission follow the draft rule that was advertised, otherwise an overage could occur. He talked about gag being a rock star fish that attracts people here. However, fishing is good right now for many other species, and logic tells you when you bring pressure off the species they multiply. The goal is to create a higher spawning potential ration (SPR) when looking at a long-term vision for a fishery. He further added that gag is a Florida fishery and the Council defers to Florida. If you go to a December 3 closing instead of when the federal season closes, it will affect next year's season and it may shrink next year's season further.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Yablonski recalled the conversation from Apalachicola; that the Big Bend carve-out season then was estimated to cause 10% increase in the catch, and now we are estimated to not meet the quota. He asked staff what had changed.

Ms. McCawley responded that because they recently got additional numbers they were able to see how close they were to the ACT level. She added that at this time they are only missing head boat and Texas data, and without that the state is at about 82 percent of the ACT. If harvest looks like 2011, we will be under the ACT.

Commissioner Corbett asked what the spread would be between the end of the federal season and December 3.

Ms. McCawley responded that NOAA does not think the state went over the ACT, and the range of days they are considering ending the season is somewhere between November 11 and December 3, and since we likely did not go over the ACT, staff recommends the December 3 closure date, which would help southwest Florida.

A motion was made by Commissioner Corbett to approve the proposed rule and revise the advertised date to a December 3 closing date. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Roberts, and approved unanimously.

South Atlantic Council Issues

Chairman Wright asked Jessica McCawley to present the South Atlantic Council Meeting Issues. Ms. McCawley reviewed the issues that were discussed at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's December 3-7, 2012, meeting in Wilmington, NC as well as issues that are scheduled to be discussed at the Council's March 4-8, 2013 meeting in St. Simons Island, GA. The issues from the December Council meeting include the following:

- Final action to allow for 2013 recreational and commercial seasons for red snapper
- Final action to increase the annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper
- Final action to make adjustments to Management Targets for Un-assessed Species
 - Possible Closed Areas for Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind
- Dolphin-wahoo issues approved for public scoping
- Possible changes to data collection

March Expected Actions and Discussion included:

- Possible expansion of deepwater coral protection areas with an allowance for deepwater shrimpers to transit through the closed areas
- A joint-Council committee meeting regarding king and Spanish mackerel and cobia m management issues, such as permits, recreational sale and quotas
- Snapper grouper management options
- Golden crab management options, including catch shares.

No Commission direction was requested, however, staff welcomed Commission direction on any Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in St. Simons Island, GA the week of March 4-8, 2013.

Vice Chairman Barco asked for clarification on the expansion of the deepwater coral protected areas and deepwater shrimpers; will they tweak the closed areas to be more on the reefs than into the flat bottom.

Ms. Bademan responded that the Council will be reviewing data from VMS and the fishermen in March to address this issue.

Public Comment

Bob Gill (Organized Fishermen of Florida) talked about a program called Marine Resource Education Program (MREP), Southeast. MREP is a program designed by fishermen for recreational and commercial fishermen in the Southeast Fisheries Regions (MREP) intended to educate folks about science and management of fisheries. The program will educate participants about fisheries and the process so that they can be more effective and communicate about these issues with others.

Sharon McBreen (PEW Environment Group) noted that all harvest of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper has been prohibited in federal waters of the South Atlantic since 2009, but not closed to harvest in state waters. Scientific studies have found these two populations are severely depleted in South Atlantic waters and subject to overfishing because of bycatch mortalities. She encouraged the Commission to work with staff to address consistent regulations. Additionally, the Council is considering reconfiguring and adding sites to an existing network of deepwater protected areas, where bottom fishing is prohibited but trolling is still allowed. Fishing community leaders and scientists recently met to develop recommendations for how this network could be reconfigured to provide more conservation efforts while minimizing the impact on fishermen. She encouraged the Commission to support these efforts as they develop to prohibit harvest of these species in state waters.

Trip Aukeman (Coastal Conservation Association) informed the Commission that a motion was made at the Council to transfer unused catch ACL from recreational to the commercial fishery. He felt that strict recreational regulations were not allowing recreational harvesters to meet their ACL. He also felt this is the wrong time to move forward with this idea, as there should be more access to the fishery, not less, to give them a chance to catch and fill their ACLs.

Bill Kelly (Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association) informed the Commissioners that the Golden Crab Advisory Panel agreed to table all the additional items in Amendment 6 including catch shares. They also made adjustments in the Advisory Panel that better reflect the industry. Secondly, the yellow-tail snapper stock is doing well and they urged the Council to increase the ACL to the highest possible numbers for the next season. They would like the FWC support for changing federal rules in the Gulf of Mexico on circle hooks for snapper and allow use of J hooks south of 28 degrees north as in the South Atlantic. Lastly, the Council will consider landing sites for king mackerel. Right now king mackerel can only be landed in three locations in southwest Florida, and they would like approval to land outside the open region in Ft. Myers Beach (Lee County) because this is significantly closer to where the fish were caught. He asked the Commission to consider allowing transit from the open area into Lee County.

Commission Discussion:

Chairman Wright noted that Ms. Bademan and McCawley were not given guidance to weigh in on an allocation shift from recreational to commercial. He asked the Commissioners to give guidance so they could vote.

Ms. Bademan explained that for gag and black grouper since the recreational sector has been under the quota, the idea is to transfer the extra quota to commercial harvesters to utilize. She welcomed direction from the Commissioners.

Chairman Wright replied that he would want to know how it works and at this point could not support the idea. He asked if there needed to be any direction with regard to J hooks vs. circle hooks.

Ms. McCawley explained the south Florida committee will meet in two weeks and will be looking at various issues, including yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper. She felt that the J hook issue would be something this committee could explore. Also, they would like direction on the landing sites issue for king mackerel in Lee County. Ms. McCawley further explained that what the fishermen want is to transit into an area that is closed; they are asking to transit one more county north of the open area. She noted that she would like direction because the joint mackerel committee is meeting at the next council meeting and they are looking to see what the state does before they make a move.

Chairman Wright asked Colonel Jim Brown if there are enforcement issues.

Colonel Jim Brown explained the line in federal waters is at the Lee/Collier County line. He noted that we do have enforcement concerns due to illegal netting in the area, but if we set specific limits for larger boats, these boats are not likely to be involved in the illegal netting.

Chairman Wright asked Ms. McCawley to look at a boat draft category to exclude small boats that could be netting illegally.

Saltwater Game Fish and Sport Fish Designations

Chairman Wright asked Ms. McCawley to present a final rule summarizing the saltwater game fish and sport fish designation for Florida. Ms. McCawley presented the components as modified by the Commission and a summary of public input. She explained the designations would be placed in a new rule: 68B-2.010, Florida Administrative Code (FAC), Saltwater Game Fish and Sport Fish Designations. She discussed how Florida waters offer premier fishing opportunities and the benefits of the game fish and sport fish designations and the

intent and components. Ms. McCawley then reviewed the proposed rule's overall intent, and suggested edits for the rule language addressing the FWC's intent for both game fish and sport fish. Staff recommendation is to approve the proposed rule and proposed edits to rule language creating game fish and sport fish designations. The new rule subsection would clearly define the intent of the designations. Both the game fish and sport fish designations would include a prohibition on commercial harvest and possession as well as sale. The sport fish designation would also prohibit recreational harvest and possession, making sport fish species catch and release only. If approved, staff recommended making the rule effective May 1, 2013. The proposed edits would be advertised via Notice of Change. Staff has evaluated the rule under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found it to be in compliance.

Chairman Wright clarified that we are considering a rule that would set up these two designations, not determining what fish will go into those designations; that will be set for future meetings after public input.

Public Comment

Captain Pat Kelly (Florida Guides Assn.) most members are in favor of a game fish designation, but there is a lot of concern about the sport fish designation. Anglers need to be able to pursue world records. Some of the species talked about previously do not seem to fit these categories (i.e. fish that are commonly eaten in the sport fish category). The one thing the FGA hopes is that the Commission stays dedicated to science. They support the effort and hope it will benefit the fish and the resources of Florida.

Philip O'Bannon (Executive Director, MOTE Marine Office in Boca Grande) has been guiding in Florida for over 40 years, and Feels the sport fish and game fish designation will be a huge step in preserving the fishery. He encouraged the Commission to approve these designations.

Rhett Morris has been a full time fishing guide in Charlotte Harbor for 17 years. He felt economic growth is directly related to good decisions about natural resources and added that Florida, which is designated as one of the worlds' greatest fishing capitals, may be behind the times, compared to other states. Lastly, he felt the designations are a vital step to ensure Florida's economy and strongly urged the Commission to take this very important step forward.

Bob Gill (Organized Fishermen of Florida) recommended different wording from what is there currently, which makes them nervous. It also raises the anxiety level for species that may be coming in.

Bob Harris (Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA)) asked what the criteria is the Commission will look at to determine which species become a sport fish, and how will that be noticed; also what will the public input process be. Currently there are 28 species prohibited from harvest by spear fishing, when the 29th species will be added; the decisions based on science and good management plans should be what this agency is about. Florida is the number one diving destination in the world, and they would like to keep it that way. He invited all to the DEMA show in October, a worldwide trade show for scuba diving, which comes to Florida every two years. Seventy percent of the show now is dive travel related and everyone is trying to get people to leave Florida, so every time the Commission removes a fish from the list that divers can take it is another blow that makes it harder to keep Florida number one. Please don't do it in the future on the backs of scuba divers.

Janie Thomas (Shrimp Producers Assoc.) stated that commercial fishing and the seafood industry is very important economically to the State of Florida. It will damage Florida jobs if people cannot catch and eat Florida seafood; catch and consume is better than catch and release. FWC should promote catch and consume. They feel that there is room for anglers and seafood providers, while some groups want all the fish. They say no to endorsement of all saltwater species sport fish and other game fish, to do so would phase out the fishery. Sea trout is fine and healthy at this point; please don't cut off the commercial fishermen by putting this fish on the list, it is in great shape. Also, she would like increased opportunity for commercial harvest of seatrout, not less. Michael Adams (Shrimp Producers Assoc.) is a commercial shrimper and is against taking these fish out of the commercial harvest. The commercial fishermen provide fish for restaurants and other folks that can't fish.

Robert Alexander, Jr. (Shrimp Producers Assoc.) owns a seafood market and said it is hard now to get fish in Florida; now you need a lawyer to go fishing. Customers are turning their boats in because they claim they can't keep anything; they would like to keep all the fish.

Buddy Bradham (St. Petersburg) believes FWC is putting the cart before the horse. He would like to have staff put together a list of what fish will go to sport fish and those that will go to game fish and bring it all to one meeting; it will save those of us having to travel to several of these meetings.

Bryan Anderson (President, St. Petersburg Underwater Club) said they have been involved with cooperative research projects with FWRI and feels they are not just a diving club, but are involved with management of the fisheries, and are stewards of the ocean. He urged the Commission to develop criteria to bring discussion to the table on how these fish are going to be designated. He would also like language added that a unanimous vote be required by the Commission to add any fish to either designation. He added these designations will attract more people fishing, which may cause decline due to more pressure. Why not tap into the Sport Fish Restoration Program in order to increase the marketability of our fisheries, instead of these designations. He found it interesting that though he has been involved with this discussion for the past three years, he has never heard of the survey that was referred to. It is his opinion that the sport fish designation with the language of catch and release violates Florida Statute 379.104, the right to hunt and fish. These designations will reduce effort and revenue to the state. He noted that you have to land a fish to get an IGF record. In his opinion the resources would be better directed to dive flag awareness and the fisheries that are in trouble.

William Van Doman (Florida Skits Divers /Woe.) their group is very conservation focused, which is an important distinction to make with the consumptive groups and attitude. They support the intent of catch and release and the idea that we are trying to sustain the environment, however they don't support a precedent of eliminating consumptive fishing based on marketing strategies rather than managing for maximum opportunity and optimum sustainable yield based on the best available science. He feels the potential of catch and release designations open the door to future decisions, which could jeopardize consumptive business. A good example is the alligator and through proper management we have brought them back and can now harvest them. They believe the new rules are redundant to strict management rules already in place. By removing consumptive fishermen, the real danger is we leave out the all industry related to fishing. Their concern is this approach is based on policy rather than science, and opens the possibility for the feds to come in and shut everything down.

Matthew Brueckner (Recreational Fisherman/Diver) has been fishing and spear fishing in Florida for 30 years and feels that even our worst over-fished fish are more stable due to regulations, and he does not see value in creating more categories. Flats fishermen that target bonefish and those fishing for tarpon are basically self-regulating. His concern is that while there are obvious fish that fall into the sport fish category, when you usurp the science it opens up the possibility of other unintended consequences.

Dennis O'Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) was surprised by the online survey and he was not aware of it. He sent a letter out a day ago and over 200 people have sent in letters. He is concerned that the framework does not help with management and ignores all the biological need that the agency normally operates by. In this case it seems like there are different agendas among the sportsmen. The other states that have sport and game fish designations are fresh water only. They would support a game fish title, where you don't have to change the rules, but don't short shift any of our user groups.

Warren Hunt (Hogs Dive Club) speaking on behalf of the Boy Scouts of America said this designation would take away a merit badge because you have to be able to catch and clean a fish to earn the badge. By taking away fish that you can harvest and consume, you are hurting everyone.

Aaron Adams (Bonefish & Tarpon Trust) felt this is about the concept of sport fish and game fish, not the individual species. There are a lot of differences species in Florida and the discussion needs to be had on a species by species basis. There is no designation for a recreational fish in Florida; it's either commercial or no commercial sale in the salt water world. Though there is a game fish designation in the freshwater world. By

creating categories, you will allow biologist to get better assessments of these fisheries. He also noted, in other locations they are already taking steps; Belize and the Bahamas are managing for abundance with their catch and release of bonefish which has a big economic impact. Other well known diving designations do not allow spear fishing and remain successful.

Tony Grogan (Owner of Spearboard.com) did not see the survey or he would have driven a lot of traffic to respond to it and he felt they would have said no. Consumptive diving is a huge part of Florida and has a large economic impact with a ripple effect, bringing a lot of money to the state through tourism and diving related spending. He felt the framework the Agency is creating is seriously flawed and will have a serious impact on diving; managing for abundance is not what this Commission should be doing. He also felt there are special interest groups that are pushing this agenda. He would like a motion to table this issue to seek more input; this is happening too fast.

Robert Murphy (Spearfishingplanet.com) stated that he also did not hear about the survey. He felt that this is more of a marketing attempt to cater to the few, while suffering the masses; it would drive more tourist and fishermen away, than it will attract. He suggested that permit is a good example of a fish that is abundant. He cautioned that even the suggestion of these designations is illegal under 379.104, which grants the right to harvest any species that is not threatened.

Dave Markett stated that the sport fish designation is not based on biology and there is not a demonstrated need; this is a deviation of what this Agency has stood for, for 50 years. Though the intent is good now, he fears future Commissioners may not have the same intent. Allow possession for measuring, pictures, and scientific sampling. He suggested moving forward on game fish, and very carefully moving forward on the sport fish designation. Hundreds of people come to Florida to dive also. Lastly, he conveyed that he subscribes to the one man, one fish rule.

Jim Williams (CCA-Florida) CCA supports both designations, but urged the Commission as they proceed to have a vigorous debate and a fair rule making process about each species.

Cappy Joiner (President Boca Grande Fishing Guides Assn) asked if we have designated certain fish into these categories. The debate of today should be delayed till the Agency decides which fish is going into which category; they support this 100 percent.

Director Wiley clarified that we are just adopting the framework right now.

Chairman Wright further explained that the designation would be established by May; the fish would come into it after that.

Bill Kelly (Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Assn.) urged caution for the selection process in regards to the sport fish designation. But there are many fish that are good for this designation. It has great benefits, but don't put any edible species in sport category.

Jim Casteel (supports the FRA), is concerned that we are not saying how the fish will be designated and why.

Thomas McLaughlin (Save the Tarpon, Inc.) is concerned by what fish can or can't be taken. He noted that there can be discussion about the species later, but we should be willing to take a look at this, to see how this might help. Not what we take but what we leave, you have the unanimous support of 12,000 members worldwide. This is a management decision, a new tool to help you further manage, not a marketing tool. He concluded by asking if there is room for a framework of how species are designated.

Van Hubbard (Fishing Guide) as a guide he totally supports the designations. As a recreational and commercial fisherman he is concerned about what fish will be designated. He felt there are many more folks in favor.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Barco asked what other states have this designation. Ms. McCawley responded that other states have game fish designations but not sport fish, though they are not as formalized.

Chairman Wright clarified that this is only a designation. He added the process of placing individual species into these designations is going to be well vetted; we need to get the designations first and then apply the species. There are some species that there may be exemptions, and it is good to follow the science. He noted an example; hook and line for commercial trout will continue for those with endorsement. Further, there is nothing in this Commission's carrying out its constitutional mandate to conserve fish and wildlife resources, that we be limited to some scientific quantification. We have mainly heard from two user groups speaking out, divers and commercial fishermen; we need to strike a balance between the users groups, but this does not speak to diminishing the value of creating these two categories. The commercial fishing industry is very important to Florida, as is the recreational fishery; there are millions of dollars that come into this state based on the recreational fishery. These designations will go a long way towards protecting that fishery. Further, recreational anglers know they can bring the fish alongside the boat to get a length and girth measurement, then apply a formula to get the weight, and take a photo for IFGA purposes, or DNA sampling, and it is not considered possession. For example, permit has already been segregated in terms of their management. This is an opportunity for Florida to lead, and he urged each Commissioner to consider adopting these two designations, and then ferret out a means to elevate these fish and protect the cultural and economic benefit to the angler.

Commissioner Corbett thanked Chairman Wright and staff for taking the time to carefully review this.

Commissioner Bergeron emphasized to be careful to not adversely affect the fishing industry, and divers.

Commissioner Roberts felt that both categories have considerable value; however he is concerned that the perception from the stakeholders is the Agency is not doing what is best for the industry. He felt this potentially could be a real benefit, but would like more information as well as more support to move forward successfully.

Vice Chairman Barco felt that any designations made should apply without exception. It is too confusing to establish criteria and then create exceptions. Right now the language talks about the designation only; however, her concern is that there is a big disconnect with the public. Because this came on fast, she understands their fear in not understanding what this designation does; irrelevant of what fish go into this. She added that these are public resources and we are supposed to take care of them, but if with our management plan, we are not just trying to sustain, but manage for abundance, like snook and redfish, then when we meet our goals, the public gets the fish. Ultimately, she noted she is uncomfortable with public distrust.

Commissioner Priddy echoed Commissioner's Barco and Roberts's concern. She is not convinced the designations give the fish any extra layer of protection. FWC has the power to put into place whatever protections are needed without assigning certain designations, and she would feel more comfortable if the fish were designated at the time. She also appreciates the public's concern and she is not comfortable with this approach; she would feel more comfortable regulating by the individual fish, not by a designation. She emphasized that we can already brag about being the Fishing Capital of the World.

Commissioner Yablonski said the intent has never been to take away from the commercial fishery. We should do everything possible to protect the ability to put fish on the plate. He is an advocate of catch and consume. He is not opposed to these particular designations, though extraordinary, perhaps through a unanimous vote.

Chairman Wright commented that while he favors the designations, he knows it is all about the perception; there were a number of discussions about protecting the "rock star" status of some of these fish; he feels this is an opportunity for Florida to lead, dealing with each of these species as they come into these designations. He would like to see the designations pass; if you defer the process you will basically have the same arguments later.

Commissioner Roberts suggested postponing the decision, until April or June, at staff's discretion, to allow stakeholders to comment on this, and give them the opportunity to understand what the Agency is doing. There is

value in game fish and sport fish, but he is not sure this is the right time, or this is the way it needs to be done. This was put into a motion.

Vice Chairman Barco seconded this.

Commissioner Priddy suggested it might be useful to have staff bring back specific species with discussion to illustrate how this would work.

Chairman Wright said it would be hard to take an individual fish and consider to be placed into a designation but he would not want to see any means of dealing with all these species to be put into a time warp where other consideration cannot be given them.

Commissioner Corbett said he prefers to create a motion to defer this and take the time to listen to all the reservations.

Chairman Wright said to defer this until the April Commission meeting, in one of two ways, by creating a metric for each category that would establish some basis for the fish to go in it, or, to designate a possible roster of proposed fish for designation.

Vice Chairman Barco suggested deferring this by sending staff active direction to leave the survey on the website, to get more information out to the public about what these designations means. Then set the criteria of what each game or sport fish designation would be, and also that it has to be a unanimous vote by the Commission.

Chairman Wright noted an absence of consensus. He does not want to waste staff's time because there will be a number of constituents who will still oppose various species for inclusion; he does not want to create broad designations for only two or three species. He felt we would be better off abandoning the whole thing and direct staff to come back on specific recommendations on fish that may be catch and release.

Vice Chairman Barco agreed with Chairman Wright.

Commissioner Roberts asked if there can be a staff update at the April meeting, and put off voting on the proposed rule till June. He would like to make sure they have it right; if it has value, make sure we understand the value as we move forward.

Commissioner Roberts amended his motion to table rather than postpone or defer game fish and sport fish designations, seconded by Vice Chairman Barco, the motion passed.

Chairman Wright asked staff to come back in April with recommendations on a draft rule on tarpon and bonefish as catch and release only, with protection for those who are trying to harvest for a world record.

Ms. McCawley asked for clarification if the Commission wants workshops between now and April, because there is not very much time to notice.

Chairman Wright suggested one workshop unless there is pushback for more.

Rule Cleanup and Reorganization — Draft Rule deferred to April Commission meeting

Recreational Gray Triggerfish Season — Gulf of Mexico

Chairman Wright asked Martha Bademan to present a summary of a proposed rule to adopt federal standards for Gulf of Mexico gray triggerfish. Ms. Bademan summarized that this action would make state recreational gray triggerfish regulations in the Gulf of Mexico consistent with federal action that is expected to 1) establish an annual recreational closed season from June 1 to July 31 (during peak spawning), and 2) establish a two-fish

recreational bag limit for the species. She discussed the 2011 SEDAR stock assessment update results, and the Council-approved long-term management for gray triggerfish. She further explained the current state regulations for recreational and commercial harvest for the Gulf and the proposed recreational gray triggerfish rules that would make state rules consistent with proposed federal rules. She noted there are no changes needed to state commercial regulations because commercial harvesters fishing for gray triggerfish in state waters are already required to follow federal triggerfish regulations. She requested Commission approval for staff recommendations to adopt federal standards under Chapter 120.54(6), Florida Statutes. She also noted that these proposed rules would only be filed for state waters if they are also approved by the Secretary of Commerce and implemented in federal waters by NOAA Fisheries Service. If the Commission approved the proposed rule, this rule would be filed without further public hearing and would become effective as soon as possible. Staff evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, F.A.C., and found them to be in compliance.

Public Comment

TJ Marshall (Ocean Conservancy) encouraged the Commission to follow the recommendations of staff.

Commission Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Roberts to approve staff recommendations, and seconded by Commissioner Priddy. The motion was unanimously approved.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Barbara Gudge (Friends of Crooked Creek) explained to the Commissioners that the proposed site for a new boat ramp on the Crooked Creek is located on a 25 foot high elevated bank. There have been no studies conducted regarding the impacts to the creek and it is not a part of Florida's sector plan. She emphasized that it would do environmental harm. She would like the FWC to review the appropriateness of this location for a boat ramp, and intervene. She stated it was their position that experts know there are appropriate sites for boat ramps, and Crooked Creek is not one of them. She was directed by Chairman Wright to speak with Colonel Brown.

Special Presentations

Chairman Wright introduced and welcomed Secretary Herschel Vinyard, who was appointed as Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) by Governor Scott in 2011. He noted that Secretary Vinyard spearheads the lead agency in state government for environmental management and stewardship and also helps to create economic development in Florida.

Secretary Herschel thanked the Commission for their leadership in partnering with DEP for protecting the state's resources and wildlife. He talked about how the agencies work together on many environmental issues for the state. He also felt the parks are safer now because of the law enforcement merger between the agencies. He further talked about the Governor's 2013 initiatives including; Florida Families First, Everglades Restoration, and Florida Forever.

Director Wiley said that DEP and Secretary Vinyard's leadership has exemplified the team work philosophy and thanked him for his support and leadership.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked him for everything he did for the Everglades Restoration.

Chairman Wright introduced Melissa Meeker, as Executive Director of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) since June 2011. Ms. Meeker introduced SFWMD Board Members; Chairman Joe Collins, Dan O'Keefe, Tommy Strowd, and Carolyn Ansay.

Ms. Meeker highlighted shared challenges, solutions and successes worked on by both agencies to include; the Corbett Wildlife Management Area, Water Conservation Areas, and Land Management Partnerships. Additionally, she presented an overview of the Agencies' flood control operations when extreme conditions exist. She also discussed tropical storm Isaac, which presented a huge problem to western Palm Beach County. She noted our two agencies formed a very strong bond; our staff worked side by side to attack the problem, and managed it with creative solutions that included the repair of an outdated levee. Lastly, she talked about 500 thousand acres that are jointly managed with FWC, including storm water treatment areas and joint land management areas. They are committed to a continuing partnership with the FWC.

Director Wiley highlighted the primitive alligator hunt on SFWMD STAs, which is a perfect example of our staff working together with the district staff and creating a popular hunting opportunity. Under Ms. Meeker's leadership the partnership just keeps getting better.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked her personally for addressing the environment immediately and stressed how great it has been working with her and her team.

Chairman Wright recognized Chuck Drake, a governing board member of St. John's Water Management District.

Commissioner Exchange

Chairman Wright deferred Commissioner Exchange to Thursday's meeting.

Recess Wednesday's Portion of the Meeting

Chairman Wright recessed the meeting at 5:05 p.m., to reconvene at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, February 14.

Thursday, February 14, Reconvene

Chairman Wright opened the meeting at 8:35 a.m.

Special Recognition

Chairman Wright asked Commissioner Yablonski to introduce Mr. Whit Fosburgh. Commissioner Yablonski introduced Mr. Fosburgh, President and CEO of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), which is a voice that represents the interests of hunting and fishing organizations in Washington, D. C.

Mr. Fosburgh discussed how the organization came together for the express purpose of representing the hunting and fishing community on the federal policy issues. He emphasized the United States has the best managed fish and wildlife system in the world. This is buttressed by a user pay system, of which much is located within state agencies, like the FWC, for over 600 million acres of state and federal lands open to the public to hunt, fish, recreate, and enjoy. He gave a brief overview of how TRCP developed over the years, as well as how different conservation groups have moved things forward from general conservation, to species specific conservation. Today there are 33 different partner groups that come together to formulate a common voice on issues that affect everyone. These include: energy policy; public lands; agriculture and private lands; access; conservation funding; marine fisheries; and a water program that deals with important regional issues like the Everglades. They also make the case that conservation equals jobs and is not just a luxury. He further discussed other issues they are facing in 2013 including: conservation funding; the Sportsman Act; the Farm Bill, energy policy; and Gulf restoration. Next, he discussed a series of workshops they are putting together to help define what sportsmen want in terms of a well managed recreational fisheries. This will provide a framework for how we deal with recreational fisheries and the Magnuson Act reauthorization. It will also help anglers speak as a common voice about what they want. Lastly, he noted TRCP hosts media summits every year, and announced the next one is a salt water summit and will take place in Islamorada.

Commissioner Yablonski talked about Mr. Fosburg's access to key people in Washington, D. C., and said he felt it will be great to work with TRCP on these important issues. In addition, going forward he felt it would be important to get a Washington perspective once a year.

Chairman Wright encouraged the Commissioners to take any opportunity to go to Washington, D. C., to get a perspective of what goes on there.

Commissioner Corbett asked about getting more access and conservation easements. The private land owners are willing, but IRS is fighting against us.

Mr. Fosburg responded the future of hunting is on private lands. Also, there is a need to expand the private landowner programs and encourage good conservation practice. He also discussed the Open Fields Program, but fear of liability is a deterrent, however, they are working on a liability waiver.

Director Wiley said the Open Fields Program is not a good fit for Florida; we already have landowner liability legislation in Florida. We also have leased lands, which provide access in its own way.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked Mr. Fosburg for coming to the Commission meeting and reiterated that there needs to be sustainable access for youth; protect the environment, but have access.

Vice Chairman Barco also thanked Mr. Fosburg for coming to speak. She stated the presentation was extremely informative and helped pull the information together. She urged him go to the other state commissions as well.

Director Wiley said he would commit to helping him connect with other state agencies. He felt the FWC has a presence in D. C. because of the strong relationship and partnership.

Commissioner Bergeron asked if Congressmen and Senators recognized how limited access is on public federal land.

Mr. Fosburg responded we have a much more urban congress and any opportunity to get them into the Everglades to show them what it really is about, is worth more than a million bucks.

A photo was taken with the Commissioners.

Bluefish

Chairman Wright asked Carly Canion, Section Leader, Marine Fisheries Management Division, to present the draft rule on bluefish. Ms. Canion summarized a draft rule that would update the Commission's Bluefish Rule 6813-43, Florida Administrative Code (FAC), by removing several outdated provisions, clarifying that the size limit and recreational bag limit extend into federal waters, and reformatting the rule to conform to the new style developed under the FWC 68B rule cleanup process. She explained that staff is seeking approval for the proposed draft rule to remove gear specification for the bluefish fishery, which are inconsistent with statewide gear regulations, the Florida Constitution, and the federal fisheries net gear in which bluefish are taken as bycatch. Staff also recommended removing the 877,000-pound quota in order to allow the fishery to remain open until the annual quota set by the MAFMC and NOAA Fisheries is met and clarifying that the size limit, landed in whole condition requirement, and recreational bag limit extend into federal waters. Staff recommended the Commission also grant staff permission to advertise the rule in the new format developed for Division 68B, FAC, under the rule cleanup process. If directed, staff recommended returning for a final public hearing at the June 2013 Commission meeting.

No public Comment

Commission Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Corbett to approve staff recommendations, and seconded by Commissioner Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.

Falconry

Chairman Wright asked Major Curtis Brown to present the Falconry. Major Brown explained that at the September 2012 Commission meeting, the Commission directed staff to continue to work with stakeholders concerning the addition of a species of raptor for apprentice class falconers, specifically the Merlin, and then proceed to a final public hearing with proposed rule changes at the February 2013 Commission meeting. The proposed rule changes included changes to rules 68A-9.005, 68A-9.006 and 68A-4.008, FAC. He explained the proposed rules represent **and** address the interests of stakeholders and other interested parties, as well as FWC staff. He noted that staff seeks approval of the proposed rules as advertised with an effective date of July 1, 2013.

Major Brown thanked the falconers for their expertise, and also thanked the staff

Public Comment

Eric Edwards (FL Falconers Assoc./North American Falconers Assoc.) Thanked staff for their work and supports the rule. These changes will benefit and advance the sport; he invited the Commissioners or anyone to come out and try this sport; there are about 100 falconers in the whole state and fewer than 5,000 in the whole country.

George Wise (Florida Falconers Assoc./Florida Hawking Fraternity) said that falconry is the most highly regulated sport in the country. He thanked staff.

Lee Lauderback said that he has been a falconer for over 15 years; he thanked everyone for the attention to this sport that traditionally goes back 5,000 years. The government involvement that continues to advance the sport and preserve the heritage is great.

Christian Miller (Environmental Management & Design/Florida Hawking Fraternity) said that falconry is one of the most beneficial activities he's ever been engaged in. He thanked the Commission and staff for the tremendous amount of work they put into this and the help they provided.

Rick Foley noted that as a falconer, it was great to be asked for their input, and also that it was well received.

Chairman Barco asked it was that got him interested.

Mr. Foley responded that he had did research and then had to apprentice with an existing falconer.

Chairman Wright thanked Curtis and staff for a great job working with stakeholders.

Commission Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Corbett to accept staff recommendations, and seconded by Commissioner Bergeron. The motion passed unanimously.

Major Proposed Rule Changes on FWC-Managed Areas

Vice Chairman Barco asked Diane Eggeman, Director, Hunting and Game Management Division, to present the proposed rule changes on FWC-managed areas. Ms. Eggeman summarized the major proposal rule changes on FWC-managed areas. She explained that staff had received approximately 275 requests for changes from the public, staff, and cooperating agencies. Some of these ideas were proposals for change to publications, policies, or other non-rulemaking issues. Staff is recommending approximately 170 of the ideas for rule changes. Further, the public has had an opportunity to directly submit comments to staff over the interact prior to the December and

February Commission meetings. She discussed statewide rule changes that would allow steel trap use without a permit for moles and pocket gophers; and air guns to take rabbits and gray squirrels. It would also make a minor adjustment to the boundary between hunting zones C and D; define wild hogs as game on Commission managed lands for the purpose of license requirements; and allow for provisions in camping permits that will provide more camping opportunities. Ms. Eggeman further discussed two new areas in the Southwest Region, the Lower Hillsborough WMA, and Weekiwatchee WMA. She detailed specific area rules that would expand the allowed use of horses on 13 areas; increase deer or spring turkey bag limits to better accommodate guest hunters on 39 areas; and prohibit use of dogs for hunting hogs during season not intended to be hog-dog hunts on eight areas; Further, area rules would provide new hunting opportunity in 30 areas and reduce hunting opportunity in five areas; revise rules concerning roads, vehicles, access, check stations or camping on 16 areas; adjust hunt types and dates on four areas; expand area where cast nets may be use on one area; and change the name of one area. Lastly, changes would amend 68A.9004 to require written authorization for special events. Staff is seeking approval to file a "Notice of Change" to advise the public of the change to the language in 68A-1.004 (38) as described in this presentation which would be to withdraw the change to define wild hog as game on Commission managed lands.

Public Comment

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida/Future of Hunting in Florida) commended staff for a great job on the expansion of hunting opportunities.

Bill George commented that he is a lifetime license holder and has two children that also hunt. He referenced 68A-15.061 and talked about specific changes detailed about the deer hunting time frame. He also suggested a different "horse open" time on Green Swamp West; he recommended to allow horse riders access at all times, except the highly sought after hunt, and suggested they have to check into and out of the check stations during the hunting periods. Lastly, he commented that usage data should be tracked and a survey used to evaluate all active participants experience.

Chairman Wright thanked him for his lifetime memberships and commitment to FWC and wildlife. He encouraged him to talk to Ms. Eggeman and Dr. Coyner to work on some of his ideas.

Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen Conservation Assoc./Everglades Coordinating Council) said they support the new rule changes. He thanked staff for working with them on access for three-wheelers in conservation areas during small game hunting season.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Barco asked if we could implement the horse check in at Green Swamp. It would seem practical that all user groups check in so everyone knows who is out there. Mr. Hallman said he is looking for use data too.

Ms. Eggeman responded that they collect use data on a number of our areas, not every day, or every area, but they have a good feel for how the user groups break down. They will take a look at this.

Commissioner Priddy suggested 170 out of 270 suggestions is an exceptional showing of how responsive the Agency is to stakeholders.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked staff for all the hunting opportunities given to stakeholders. He also asked about follow up for ATV use during small game hunts.

Ms. Eggeman responded staff and stakeholders worked together to find a way to access, and still find protection for the resources; there is a long history of abuse. They will continue to work on it over the months and try to find a solution and bring it in next year's package.

Commissioner Bergeron asked to be kept posted on progress; he is concerned about abuses.

A motion was made by Commissioner Yablonski to accept staff recommendations for the rule changes, and seconded by Commissioner Bergeron. The motion passed unanimously.

Special Recognition

Chairman Wright asked Commissioner Priddy to introduce the song "Waitin on Tom," written by FWC's Tony Young.

Commissioner Priddy said that Tony Young, an FWC employee who is also the author of FWC's "Outta the Woods" column, is currently at the National Wild Turkey Federation Conference in Nashville performing the song because they are using it in some of their media. She noted that FWC hands out certificates for youth's first turkey and talked about five youth that had this great opportunity and got recognized. Also, Florida is the only place where the Osceola subspecies of wild turkey can be found; she further talked about the economic benefit of turkey hunting to the state.

Quota Hunt Program

Chairman Wright asked Dr. Don Coyner to present changes to the Quota Hunt Program. Dr. Coyner reviewed the final rule amendments and other changes to help improve the FWC quota hunt program. He discussed the positive outcomes of the 2009 changes, including guest permits. He then reviewed recommendations for improvements to the program, which included allowing a different guest on different days of the hunt, improving how permits are returned and reissued, and making the system easier to use and understand. He also reviewed non-regulatory improvements to the system, which included web site content, simplifying quota instructions, introducing the quota program in hunter education classes, providing more reminders of application dates, and allow permit transactions from home. Lastly, he summarized the proposed rule amendments to 68A-15.005, which would allow the permit holder to take a different guest each day of the hunt and allow the host to provide guest information on the guest permit. It also would improve the process for returning quota permits for re-issuance and repeal the sunset provision in the rule. He thanked the stakeholders that have worked with FWC throughout the process. Staff asked for approval of rule amendment to 68A-15.005 as advertised.

Both Commissioner Bergeron and Chairman Wright complimented staff on the flexibility in the quota hunt program.

Public Comment

Lyle McCandless (Big Cypress Sportsmen Alliance) thanked Diane and staff for making these improvements and supports the changes. He felt allowing a different guest is a tremendous thing, and it will be a great plus in getting younger people out doors.

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida/Future of Hunting in Florida) supports the changes to the quota hunt program, noting the guest program is critical. He requested that duck hunters be allowed to use ATVs during duck season in the Holey Land and Rotenberger WMA's. Duck hunters pay a minimum of \$70 to get into the hunt, and they would really like to see an exemption made for duck hunters to get back into the holes that are too far to walk and carry equipment. They are asking for one-year, one-season to try it out; if it does not work then revoke it.

Commissioner Bergeron does not have a problem with staff looking into this. He was more concerned with small game season and the impact it would have on the environment.

Byron Maharrey (Everglades Coordinating Council) commended staff, and suggested the Commission consider adding additional hunts, which will let more people pull permits, and take a guest; it will allow the harvest of a few more deer, and make many hunters happier.

Chuck Echenique (United Waterfowlers) stated he supports the recommended changes, which will increase take for guest permit, and will increase satisfaction, especially during turkey season. He appreciated being a part of this process.

Gina Sauber stated she supports the changes. She noted that she especially liked the simplification of the website content and application process, and also introducing the quota hunt program in hunter education classes. In addition she appreciated more reminders for application dates, and also that you can apply for the permit from home. Lastly, she thanked staff for all their hard work.

Commission Action

A motion was made by Vice Chairman Barco to approve staff recommendations, and seconded by Commissioner Corbett. The motion passed unanimously.

Critical Wildlife Areas

Chairman Wright asked Dr. Brad Gruver to present his report on Critical Wildlife Areas (CWA). Dr. Gruver summarized the CWA program, which are specific sites designated by the FWC to protect places where wildlife congregates to nest, roost, and feed. The areas are designated through establishment orders where these important wildlife areas can be impacted by human-related activities. He reviewed the criteria for CWAs which include: landowner concurrence, significant concentration of wildlife, distinct manageable area, and subject to disturbance. He further discussed the informational approaches to management before CWAs are established, then reviewed how CWAs work. He talked about the current established CWAs that occurred on private, state and federal lands, and who our partners are. Additionally, he detailed the primary species that are protected and detailed the duties of a newly hired CWA coordinator, initially provided through a grant. Lastly, Dr. Gruver discussed the types of changes that occur in the CWA system: re-establishments with no or minor changes, re-establishments with changes, disestablishments, and new establishments. Staff recommended the Executive Director be authorized to approve CWA re-establishments with no or minor changes and disestablishments, and minor modifications to boundaries, dates, and other technical aspects of the areas.

Public Comment

Lyle McCandless (President, Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance) questioned if the term "area of critical concern" does not refer to the Big Cypress, which has such a designation. Chairman Wright replied this is a different designation.

Commission Action

A motion was made by Commissioner Corbett to approve staff recommendations, and was seconded by Commissioner Roberts. The motion passed unanimously.

Black Bass Management Plan

Chairman Wright asked Tom Champeau, Director Division of Freshwater Fishery Management, to give an update of the Black Bass Management Plan (BBMP). Mr. Champeau presented a progress report for the 2010-2030 Plan, which is a long-term science based and citizen guided program, to ensure Florida as the "Bass Fishing Capital of the World." He emphasized as Florida's most sought after fish, the largemouth bass is the official freshwater state fish. He discussed the ecological, economic and social benefits the bass fisheries provide to Florida. He then explained the four principles the BBMP is founded on; good science, public involvement, adaptive approach in management, (try, learn, and adjust), and promotion of these factors to gain public support. Next, he discussed the primary goals of the plan to manage aquatic habitat to sustain healthy fisheries. This means working with partners to ensure water quality and quantity are managed with fish community needs in mind, and to retain and recruit anglers to maintain a strong stakeholder base as well as tourism. Mr. Champeau then focused on the

accomplishments over the past 20 months which included; public engagement in hydrilla management on Kissimmee Chain and other lakes, a largemouth bass regulation review, Medard Fish Management Area establishment, shoal bass conservation on the Chipola River, Upper St. Johns River Reservoir restoration and Lake Apopka restoration. Additionally, he discussed how staff is working with bass tournament organizations to reduce conflicts and promote their economic benefits, and gave an overview of the TrophyCatch Program. He explained that the website has been up and running for four months and then talked about the Osceola challenge in Kissimmee. Further, he talked about the Angler Education Program under the umbrella of the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, the Angler Education Programs throughout the state and the growth of the Fish Camp Program. In addition to his presentation, Mr. Champeau thanked the TrophyCatch Partners who have collectively contributed more than \$400,000 in media support, product incentives, and funding. Staff will be working with the partners to form an assistance group that will give feedback after the first year of the program to improve operational and marketing elements.

Commissioner Corbett asked how freshwater fishing participation has changed during the past few years.

Mr. Champeau responded that despite a 15 percent drop in freshwater fishing license sales since 2006, total angler days in freshwater has increased. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service survey, Florida had a six percent increase in freshwater angler participation, and we still lead the nation in the number of total fresh-water fishing days. License sales and participation for saltwater anglers are up and it appears that some anglers are choosing to fish more in saltwater due to the quality and promotion of these fisheries. One goal of TrophyCatch is to raise awareness about the convenience of freshwater fishing and document that anglers are catching trophy bass in all kinds of lakes, ponds, rivers, and canals from all over the state.

Chairman Wright applauded the coordination with the St. Johns River Water Management District, noting it was successfully turned into a good fishing resource. He would like thought given to having a meeting in the Kissimmee area for a future Commission meeting location. In addition, he suggested coordinating with IGFA for a summer program for tarpon or bonefish, using the TrophyCatch concept of catch-photograph-document-and-release.

Strategic Plan for Deer Management in Florida

Chairman Wright asked Cory Morea, with the Division of Hunting and Game Management's Deer Management Program, to update the Strategic Plan for Deer Management in Florida. Mr. Morea discussed the progress to date on the implementation of the 10-year plan that runs through 2018. He reviewed how the strategic plan was developed, the goals and objectives identified in the plan, progress made so far in accomplishing priority objectives, and how staff is planning to accomplish more of the objective in the plan in the future. Lastly, he outlined upcoming priority strategies for the Deer Management Program to accomplish.

Commissioner Priddy asked how many Deer Management Units (DMUs) they see the Agency ending up with, what kind of progress is being made, and the proposed timeline. Mr. Morea responded the proposed model has 11 DMUs, they are forming a stakeholder technical assistance group for Zone D now, and they expect a report from them by the end of March. At that time they will evaluate how the process went, and lay out a time line for the remaining units; they anticipate finishing with all the units by the end of next year. Commissioner Priddy asked if efforts to obtain stakeholder preferences would be done in all units, Mr. Morea responded they should be finished with stakeholder input by January 1, 2015. It is likely that they will initiate rule making for Zone D's DMUs in 2013, and any rules/policy changes supported by the Commission would be implemented for the 2014-2015 season, and the other zones for the 2015-2016 season. Commissioner Priddy asked if the process could be sped up so that all the DMUs are in place by January 2015. Mr. Morea explained the extensive public outreach timeframe for all the units, and expressed that doing two units at a time is working out well. He explained the rules proposed now would be for 2014-2015 season and to get to the final stage is a process, but they are looking to move this forward as fast as possible. Commissioner Priddy asked if the process could be condensed. Mr. Morea responded that the technical assistant groups make the recommendations, and to be able to include that

information draws out the timeframe. Commissioner Priddy asked if there is there any possible way to include Zones B and A, which would be three DMUs. Mr. Morea responded that would be feasible.

Public Comment

Lyle McCandless (President, Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance) as an FWC DMU-TAG Committee team member, he is concerned that their input is being properly considered and applied. He is afraid of politics putting Commissioners in a box; he asked the Commissioners **to vote** with their heart where possible.

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers of Florida/Future of Hunting in Florida) felt that forming local DMU-TAG Committees is very important to the implementation of the plan. The key is listening to the local people.

Bryon Maharrey (Everglades Coordinating Council) urged the Commission to give more weight to stakeholders in regards to the DMUTAG Committee. He is concerned stakeholders are not being listened to.

Chuck Echenique speaking on his own behalf, and as a member of the DMU-TAG Committee, has concerns specific to Zone A. He felt some of the votes about the lines had unanimous support, but it seems like some of the issues have changed since the votes were taken. As an advisory board, the DMU-TAG Committee needs to be listened to, but they need to give deference to the science behind the issues; staff knows better about accomplishing goals being set forth on the DMU level. The group is not in harmony with staff's vision, and staff should be listened too equally; staff has it right.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Priddy questioned if concerns expressed by the majority of DMU-TAG Committee members vs. staff, was an issue of communication or a disagreement about positions.

Chairman Wright explained the Sunshine Law and those recommending and advisory bodies' whose opinions and votes have a persuasive effect also must operate in the "Sunshine." DMU-TAG is a deer management technical assistance group, and they are not under the Sunshine Laws.

Commissioner Priddy questioned why DMU-TAG recommendations were not embraced and was this communicated back to the committee. Mr. Morea explained they are a technical assistance group; as such staff tries to get a feel from each of the attendees, but they do not get a vote. Staff often makes changes based on their input, but sometimes there is not a compelling reason to incorporate their input; this information is communicated back to the group.

Private Lands Deer Management Permits Draft Rule

Chairman Wright asked Cory Morea to explain the draft rule for Private Lands Deer Management Permits. Mr. Morea talked about the voluntary Private Lands Deer Management Permit program for landowners or their leases, which would provide greater flexibility in deer herd and harvest management, and also would promote habitat conservation and hunting heritage efforts. He discussed the background, goals, benefits of participation, and program requirements. He then talked about the staff review and public input and the results of a survey of antlerless deer permittees. In addition, he explained the advantages of the program, as well as stakeholder concerns. Staff is seeking approval of staff recommendations to advertise the proposed rule to establish a voluntary Private Lands Deer Management Permit program that would promote conservation practices on private lands 10,000 acres or more in size, by providing incentives to landowners for hunt clubs that develop and implement wildlife management plans, and gather and provide deer population and harvest data. Staff will continue to work with stakeholders to refine and develop the proposal for final consideration at the April meeting.

Discussion

Vice Chairman Barco commented on the current public input and requested that staff do more public outreach with the draft.

Commissioner Bergeron asked if they will require tags, and when the tags are filled, will there be no more private hunting on that property for that year. Mr. Morea responded tags would be required, and when filled, there would be no more take of deer. Commissioner Bergeron asked if you can hunt with the method of your choice, and what is the timeline on the season. Mr. Morea responded that any legal method of take for deer would be allowed to take deer during the zonal season. Commissioner Bergeron asked if unlimited take on private land to a limited take provides a conservation value. Mr. Morea responded yes.

Chairman Wright clarified that a management plan must be approved, it is a voluntary program and the disparity between the zones and seasons is for private landowners; this is also why we may not be seeing general public comment.

Commissioner Corbett suggested getting more public input and taking more time, April may be too soon. He also felt 10,000 acres is a deterrent, and recommended cutting the requirement back to 5,000 acres.

Commissioner Roberts asked about multiple land owners, and what is considered contiguous; how do roads affect this, or crossing the state line. He asked if three or four owners could combine their properties to reach the minimum acreage requirement.

Mr. Morea responded they envisioned neighboring properties, even if cut by a road or river, would be considered contiguous, but they would have to look into crossing state lines; though they felt this program should be specific for lands in Florida. Commissioner Roberts felt multiple states should be considered, and asked if one management plan and one application would cover all the property if three or four landowners combine their properties. Mr. Morea said this is how they envision this working.

Public Comment

Lyle McCandless (President, Big Cypress Sportsman's Alliance) said he got very enthusiastic about a tag and reporting system, especially since private land owner objection previously had been one of the reasons for not doing the Deer Plan task of a statewide tag. He urged the Commissioners to consider that DMUTAGs unanimous opinion was that tag and reporting was a critically needed item. Now, it seems that private landowners are saying they no longer oppose the tag and reporting system. He hopes this is a possible opportunity to bring tag and reporting back on the table sooner than later. In his opinion the public needs to have substantial input because the private land abuts the public lands.

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida/Future of Hunting in Florida) said he fights for the little guy. He also noted he felt the concern with the proposal is about the edges, which may cause hunter conflict. He felt the program has a lot of merit, but stated there needs to be a statewide tag program; it would provide up-to-date data.

Commissioner Roberts asked Mr. Cook if he was talking about tags for public and private lands. Mr. Cook responded yes, it would be a system that would be easy to report.

Chairman Wright clarified that staff and Commission had been behind the tagging program, and the reason it did not pass was that the average hunter did not want another layer of obligation on their hunting experience. Mr. Cook said that most deer hunters understand and comply with that system in other states without problems.

Bryon Maharrey (EEC) said he felt the majority of folks supported the tag and reporting program. He also commented that private landowners do a good job managing their land because they have the incentive to do so, as well as the revenue due to hunt leases. Their position is, while they are not against it, they feel it is moving very fast and there may be unintended consequences. Also the size requirement of the property might

disenfranchise smaller land owners; do not preclude smaller landowners from the opportunity to do this. Lastly, he felt this is about economics; if hunters can, they will pay more for a well managed hunt lease.

Edwin Henry as a young man saw overharvest of animals, now as a landowner he has a little over 7,000 acres of prime property for the purpose of wildlife conservation management; it is a dream come true. The wildlife was stressed on the property, but has been greatly improved through their management techniques. He would like to see the amount of acreage reduced; it depends on the quality of the habitat.

Chairman Wright noted that Mr. Henry is a great steward of his property and a provider of youth hunts; there has been a continuing attempt to find the acreage sweet spot.

Toll Hallman said landowners do a good job in deer management so they can sell more leases; the public is at a disadvantage because deer cross fences and public lands are adjacent. It is going way too fast and is dividing the public with landowners.

Chuck Echenique is strongly in favor of this program, he sees the benefit potential, but is concerned by the arbitrary land size, especially if a certified wildlife biologist signs off on a management plan, he asked why they can't create a plan for any size landowner that wants to apply. If you are going to require a minimum size he suggested looking at the Doe Tag program which is 640 acres. If you don't pit one group against another, the benefits will start to outweigh the negatives; the logistics will work out if we entrust the biologist to write the plans accordingly.

Wayne Zahn (Lykes Brothers Inc.) said the positive aspect is to allow more flexibility which would equal more chances for getting kids out. The benefit for them and the state would be having an enforceable tag on every deer; which will also supply more data to help manage deer. He compared it to an established alligator hunt program on private lands vs. public lands.

Charles Lykes (Lykes Brothers, Inc.) thanked staff for their effort and consideration into designing the program, and also the outreach to the public. He also thanked the DMUTAG folks for their contribution and noted their recommendations have been listened to by staff; it is starting to come together well. He further commented that the Lykes have done a lot to enhance their lands, and now have many nice trophy bucks. One way to get more people out is to improve the hunting experience and this program gives them some flexibility. He feels it is also important to reach out to the youth to pass down this heritage. He added they are only interested in fair chase deer hunting on the Lykes Ranch, and this program fits well; they support the program entirely, and encouraged the Commissioners to pass the program in April so Florida can start benefiting from the conservation requirements, and improve hunter satisfaction in the state.

Lane Stephens (Executive Director, Allied Sportsman's Association of Florida) said that anytime there is any controversy on a sports related issue, his email goes off the chart. He has not received any negative email regarding this and felt the concept of allowing private land-owners who are the best conservationist, make those decisions is a good idea. They support the program.

Brigham Mason (Desert Ranch) stated he has been on many technical assistance groups; he values the opportunity and felt the input given to staff is well considered, although sometimes they don't agree with our recommendations, they usually communicate the reasons why. He stated this idea is not new; the DMUTAG have previously discussed a private lands deer management program since 2007. From their perspective it is about customer satisfaction, from the public perspective it is about conservation. Reducing the land size is a good idea and will allow more land to be used in conservation; this is one way for the FWC to improve customer satisfaction. He is concerned about the archery harvest, they don't want to harvest more deer, but reduce the pressure on younger deer, and put the focus on older deer. He noted they are having limited success because the current zonal season does not match when they would like to hunt the rut; they have a lot of data that shows their rut peaks in the first week of October, and it is known that pre-rut, and rut bucks are more susceptible. They are

supportive of the rule, but ask staff to look at zones or consider allowing program participants to add days outside of the zonal season.

Frank Eidson (private landowner/hunter) is in favor of the rule. They don't seem to be able to harvest older bucks when they are allowed to hunt them. They would like to be able to get the older deer for a year or two, and felt it would help the process. He hoped the Commission seriously considers adopting the plan.

Bill Gulianno (Professor of Wildlife Management, University of Florida/State Wildlife Extension Specialist) expressed his support of the program. In his experience these programs greatly enhance the ability to manage wildlife; deer management could be better, and this will be one way to accomplish that. He argued against going with lower property acreage and felt that 10,000 acres is not big enough if the goal is to manage the resource; he is against going lower. He suggested the Commission consider, with a plan and sound science; allow harvest outside of the zonal dates. Lastly, he asked the Commission to think of them more as Deer Management Units; if they have the science behind them, collected harvest data will help better manage deer. He supports staff recommendations.

Billy Bishop (landowner) grew up hunting in central Florida, and is in support of this plan. They have a good game management program, and he felt that if this program passes it would have positive effect. Also, he spends a lot of time with kids in the woods, and felt this program would make hunting more available to kids. He is a big supporter of this program.

Danny Brantley (Kissimmee River Valley Sportsmen Association) is not in favor of the program. He stated that FWC already has the opportunity for data collection from large land-owners. He is concerned this is going too fast and the normal public has not had an opportunity to speak. He also thanked the Commission for pulling the hog rule. He urged the Commission to slow down on this program and get more public input.

Bill George gave the example of the decision on Lake Okeechobee as an example of how hard it is to manage edges. He felt that if you have larger blocks of land it will be easier to regulate. If you are hunting in bow season and you hear a gun next to you, it will be confusing.

Commission Discussion

Chairman Wright asked Mr. Morea to discuss the data from the Antlerless Deer Program. Mr. Morea explained the breakdown of property sizes enrolled in FWC's Antlerless Deer Program. Commissioner Corbett asked what kind of impact reducing the acreage number to 6,000 acres. Mr. Morea responded it would double the potential participants. Vice Chairman Barco asked if this number is manageable and how many landowners would participate. Mr. Morea responded the number is manageable and he anticipates about half of those that are interested in the program would participate.

Commissioner Corbett made a motion to approved staff recommendations, but if lesser acreage can be managed, he suggested reducing the land to 6,000 acres. This was seconded by Commissioner Yablonski for discussion.

Commissioner Priddy asked if large landowners are currently required to tag and report deer harvested. Mr. Morea responded no. She also asked if the program would require buying a permit for archery or muzzleloader even if using a rifle. In addition, she questioned if the Agency could do wounded warrior hunts, as well as youth hunts? Mr. Morea responded yes, they would need to have season permits, even though they are using a different method of take; stakeholders were supportive of this concept. The wounded warrior hunts was discussed by staff, but they decided on focusing on youth because of the importance of youth hunting in the state. Further, Commissioner Priddy is greatly concerned about the expense to do an annual survey for deer. She requested that the requirement be removed, or amended to every five years.

Chairman Wright asked if a landowner came into the program, how would the number of deer he proposed to take be established. Mr. Morea replied the certified wildlife biologist and the management plan would set goals.

Commissioner Priddy felt this should be modeled after the antlerless program, less is more.

Commissioner Roberts suggested reporting at the end of the year would be just as valuable.

Director Wiley clarified that the Agency took landowner proposals to create the concept. Tagging is an important component of this program, and harvest reporting is critical for accountability. We did not envision telling landowners how many deer they can take; rather we would let them tell us their desired harvest level, relative to their harvest goals.

Commissioner Priddy clarified that she is not questioning tagging or reporting requirement, however, if they choose to do this for their own annual survey, this is fine, but the Agency should not require an annual survey as part of the program.

Director Wiley said tagging is an important piece of the program, if landowners want to do this.

Commissioner Priddy would feel more comfortable if the requirement was not in the program. She would also like to give landowners prior notification when Commission personal accesses their property to check for compliance, unless there is illegal activity suspected. Mr. Morea responded this is the same language that is in the Antlerless Deer Program and there has never been a problem, because staff is not in the practice of visiting properties unannounced. Commissioner Priddy would like to see this in writing.

Commissioner Bergeron sees this as strictly a voluntary program, and felt there are many benefits to the conservation aspect of this. However, some property owners might not want to do this because of the requirements. The tag system is valuable and will give the Agency data that has been needed for a long time to help manage the deer population, and the surveys would be beneficial. The surveys done on his property for alligator hunting, was not that expensive and gave him knowledge about his property; property owners are great stewards of the land and manage wildlife for longevity. It would also benefit the public side by allowing them to harvest two deer a day from private land. Also, the youth hunt component is valuable to the future. Lastly, he would like the Commission to consider 5,000 acres as opposed to 6,000.

Vice Chairman Barco said she appreciated Mr. Stephens's comments about the public, and would like to see even more public comment. She noted that she is not opposed to the annual survey; this is a voluntary program, and you do this to get a number, because you are getting a privilege. We do it for the alligator hunt, so we know how many we can harvest. Lastly, she would like the acreage dropped to 5,000 or 6,000 acres.

Commissioner Priddy noted they want as many volunteers as possible so we can gather information from private property that we have not had before. As a compromise she suggested a survey every other year.

Commissioner Roberts noted that this is voluntary and just a draft proposal, and we can modify the proposal prior to finalization. He felt, the biggest challenge is that hunters can hunt with a firearm any time, even during bow season. He suggested moving forward and amending the acreage and survey requirements depending on input from stakeholders.

Commissioner Yablonski amended his second to the motion to use 5,000 acres as the size, and require a survey every other year, which was accepted by Commissioner Corbett. The amended motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida! Future Hunting in Florida) reported on STA's statistics of 2,500 to 3,000 duck hunters, and over 44,000 ducks with over 11,000 hunt days. He thanked the Commission for what they did, as well as the water management district; the duck hunting program is a very big success. He further noted his concern about SB584 in legislature this year, dealing with the purchase of conservation land in Florida. Finally he noted they still oppose the Land of Legacy Agreement.

Lane Stephens updated the Commissioners on the Florida virtual school approved program that will teach hunter safety and boating education at no cost; it will give students a half credit hour in school, their boater card, and a much broader hunter education coverage. He also informed the Commission that he is working with FWC staff on an abbreviated field day activity component where students can get hands on experience with firearms, equipment, etc. Because more kids are signing up for boating safety, he felt that by offering a combined course students will be exposed to hunter safety too.

Chairman Wright noted this combined course translates to firearm safety.

Randal Raney is concerned about Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and requested the Agency do everything it can do to prevent it from getting into Florida. He suggested closing the borders, as well as putting this issue on the agenda; there is no comprehensive way of testing live animals that cross the border. He noted that Dr. Holt, from the Department of Agriculture said they would take a back seat and let the Commission handle this. He provided Ms. Eggeman with a lot of documentation and has more information to give her.

Chairman Wright responded that the Agency is aware of the issue and are in the process of developing a strategy. He asked Mr. Raney to stay in close communication with Ms. Eggeman, who will keep him posted as events happen, and also see where Mr. Raney can become involved.

Don Ashley (Apalachicola Riverkeepers) thanked the Commission for all their efforts since the December 2012 Commission meeting regarding the Apalachicola Bay. He thanked Director Wiley and staff for their participation in Senate hearings. He encouraged the Commission to continue to support the efforts in the Governor's Budget, and then reminded them that through the ACF stakeholders group, private donations of more than a million dollars have already started these inflow stream assessments for affected rivers. He would like to stay in touch on key issues, and will be back at the April meeting.

Chairman Wright said they will continue to monitor this and appreciated the updates provided by Mr. Ashley. He asked Commissioner Yablonski to touch base with Mr. Fosburg, from the Theodore Conservation Partnership, to see what their thoughts are on this.

Lyle McCandless (President, Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance) requested FWC help to get information from the feds on problems with ORV trails in Big Cypress. Specifically, how they went from 1,500 miles of trails for ORV use to 400 miles. Due to an out-of-court settlement, the park service agreed to implement a system of designated ORV trails. He also discussed a meeting at the Panther Refuge, where their support was requested on acquisition of additional refuge areas. Lastly, he discussed the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Commissioner Bergeron thanked Mr. McCandless for all he does for the sportsman.

Commissioner Exchange

Commissioner Yablonski said everything has been said and he waived his time.

Commissioner Roberts said he appreciates how the Commission works through the challenges they are presented with and the rock stars are the staff.

Commissioner Priddy said it was a great meeting and thanked staff. She also hoped that the public observed how much the Commissioners care about the public and protecting the state's resources.

Commissioner Bergeron thanked Chairman Wright for the unique SeaWorld event he hosted, as well as the entire staff. He also thanked Ms. Eggeman for the great meetings with the alligator trappers, which is producing positive results. He further complimented staff on their visions with the python challenge and noted he will be at the culmination event at Metro Zoo on Saturday. Further, he is honored to be the point Commissioner on the Everglades restoration plan, which is a 20 year plan that is working to save a natural wonder. Next he informed

the Commissioners about a successful law suit that allows for access of 138 miles of sustainable ORV trails. Next, he thanked Regional Directors Collins, Wynn and Wright for a great meeting. Lastly he thanked stakeholders and fellow Commissioners.

Commissioner Corbett thanked Chairman Wright for the SeaWorld venue, as well as inviting the SFWMD board members; it made for a very unique and well done meeting. He also thanked Commissioner Yablonski for reaching out to Washington and to Whit Fosburg For a great presentation. He asked Director Wiley to reach out to other states to help introduce Mr. Fosburg to other state directors.

Vice Chairman Barco thanked Commissioner Wright for the SeaWorld event and thanked SeaWorld for a great venue.

Chairman Wright said he is constantly impressed with the Commissioner's ability to arrive at a consensus as a collegial body. He received several comments from folks on how the Commission conducts itself. Further, he thanked all staff, particularly Shannon for a flawless meeting. He thanked Ms. McCawley, Ms. Bademan for handling some tough issues, and Ms. Eggeman and Dr. Coyner for always looking for more hunting opportunities. Lastly, he thanked Terry Prather and Jay Galbaith for hosting the FWC at SeaWorld.

Commission Administrative Matters

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for April 17-18, in Havana.

Adjournment

Chairman Wright adjourned the meeting at 2:31 p.m.

Kenneth W. Wright
Chairman

Nick Wiley
Executive Director

Respectfully submitted:

Robin Stetler
Commission Administrative Assistant