

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners  
FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director  
DATE: November 12, 2013  
SUBJECT: November 2013 Executive Director's Report

**Awards and Accomplishments**

**Former FWC Colonel Receives National Award for Boating Safety Efforts-**

FWC's recently retired Colonel Jim Brown received the Bonner Award at the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) conference. This national award recognizes a state or federal boating official who exemplifies the leadership qualities displayed by former Congressman Herbert C. Bonner, author of the Federal Boating Safety Act of 1958. NASBLA recognized Jim's passion and incredible track record of success in the field of recreational boating safety. He was recognized for leading many initiatives which have created a safer boating experience for generations of Florida's boaters as well as multitudes of people from around the U.S., ultimately resulting in many recreational boaters who are alive today as a result of Jim's passion and leadership.

**Bill Coleman Awarded 2013 Biologist of the Year** - Bill Coleman was honored with the 2013 Fisheries Biologist of the Year Award from the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Bill has worked for the FWC for more than 39 years as a dedicated, passionate conservationist involved in many different aspects of freshwater fisheries. He pioneered successful management and research techniques and programs still used today by agency biologists. His long list of accomplishments includes: Developing a technique to determine the age of largemouth bass, participating in some of the first draw-downs to achieve lake habitat restorations, overseeing the first freshwater fisheries genetics projects at FWC, being the first to use electro-fishing gear to estimate largemouth bass populations, and planning Black Bass Symposiums in 1987 and 1992 to educate outdoor writers and stakeholders about the species. He supervised and mentored many fellow biologists. In recent years, Bill has been responsible for managing projects to restore Florida lakes, rivers and streams as leader of the Aquatic Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Subsection within FWC's Division of Habitat and Species Conservation. He retired from the agency at the end of October, a milestone marking an outstanding FWC career.

**Christopher Wynn Awarded 2013 Mark J. Reef Memorial Award -**

Christopher C. Wynn, FWC Southwest Region Director, was honored on Sept. 10, by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) at its annual meeting in Portland Oregon - with the 2013 Mark J. Reef Memorial Award.

The Reeff award is given annually to a young wildlife professional for outstanding service in conservation and for overcoming difficult challenges through creative personal initiative.

Wynn was a key member of the team that developed the FWC's Landowner Assistance Program (LAP), a cooperative, voluntary effort between private landowners, the FWC and many other partners. LAP improves habitat conditions for fish and wildlife by providing financial incentives, technical assistance, recognition and education to participating landowners.

"I'd like to thank my parents who provided me with a love of the outdoors, the incentive to follow my dreams and to the many members of my FWC family who share equally in this award," Wynn said. "It is my sincerest hope to continue in that same vein – to help encourage and motivate the next generation that cares for the importance of fish and wildlife conservation on Florida's private lands."

**Ocala Outdoor Adventure Camp Receives National Accreditation** – The American Camp Association granted national accreditation to FWC's Outdoor Adventure Camp on September 22, 2013. This accreditation came after several years of planning by FWC's camp staff, followed by extensive inspections and evaluations. Coordinator Greg Workman and his staff have worked diligently to achieve these accreditation standards, demonstrating their personal dedication to providing excellent programs, opportunities, and experiences in the outdoors for Florida's youth. This accreditation helps FWC and the Florida Youth Conservation Center Network to showcase the integrity and credibility of the camp, ultimately building on its 50+ years of success in "hooking" kids on fish and wildlife related outdoor adventures.

**Missing Hunter Found** - FWC Officer Caitlyn Kirkland and her K-9 partner Zeus found a missing hunter in the John G. and Susan H. Dupuis Jr. Wildlife Management Area. The FWC had received some information on his location provided by the hunter before his cell phone went dead. The K-9 team walked a over a mile into the woods before they found fresh foot signs in the area. Zeus was able to pick up the hunter's track and take Officer Kirkland straight to him. The hunter had been missing for hours by the time he was rescued by the FWC team.

**Relocation of Red-Cockaded Woodpecker to Increase Population** - Working with other federal, state and private partners the FWC is helping to increase populations of the federally protected red-cockaded woodpecker. These birds, which receive their name due to the tiny red patch or "cockade" behind the eye of the males, are very rare because they require open stands of old-growth pine a habitat that is no longer common in Florida. In an effort to boost smaller, less established populations, biologists captured nine pairs of birds in the Osceola National Forest, an area where the species is well established. The birds were transported to Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) in South Florida where they will help to increase the population.

## **In the News**

**News Conference on Bear Activity-** On Oct. 2, the FWC held a news conference at the Naples Zoo to explain to media and the public that bears are more active this time of year. Biologists and law enforcement delivered the message that bears are programmed to consume extra calories before winter and can smell food a mile away, but are less likely to linger in neighborhoods if people don't provide them access to food. The FWC's new bear sightings web page also was launched that day, with the request that hunters, hikers, anglers and wildlife viewers report to [www.MyFWC.com/bearsightings](http://www.MyFWC.com/bearsightings) when they see bears in the wild, especially a mother and cubs. The press conference and associated news release were picked up by multiple TV stations and newspapers in the Naples media market and throughout the state. In the first week of the bear sightings web page, more than 1,000 black bear sightings by the public were reported. As of October 23, the reported bear sightings total was 1,327.

**Public Hearings on Wildlife Management Areas -** FWC public hearings provide a chance for people to help plan the future of our Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). At recent public hearings, staff in the Wildlife and Habitat Management Section of FWC's Division of Habitat and Species Conservation presented draft 10-year land management plans for FWC-managed portions of J.W. Corbett WMA in Palm Beach County, Tosohatchee in Orange County and Suwannee Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area in Hamilton County. This WMA is also a popular place for fishing and hunting. The press releases announcing the public hearings included links to photos on MyFWC Flickr showing wildlife and habitat at the WMAs.

**FWC, Partners Target Illegal Internet Sales of Protected Wildlife -** FWC recently concluded a joint operation with federal and state agencies on statewide wildlife law violations. "Operation Wild Web" targeted those intentionally buying and selling fish and wildlife illegally online. The five-day detail last month detected violations across the state. Cases involved the unlawful sale of certain species, such as fresh and saltwater fish, lobster, snakes, birds and other animals; businesses operating without licenses; and illegal fishing and hunting violations. Legitimate businesses that follow wildlife laws are safe for the public and the environment. However, the FWC has uncovered many individuals and businesses operating illegally throughout the state. These illegal virtual businesses not only compete with the legitimate companies, they are also damaging to our valuable fish and wildlife populations. The teamwork among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission contributed to the success of this operation.

**Modification of Hunting Season at Big Cypress National Preserve-** The FWC partnered with the National Park Service (NPS) at Big Cypress National Preserve to cooperatively modify the hunting seasons within the Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area (WMA). This modification was made to help make up for hunting days missed due to the recent federal government shutdown. The shutdown, from

Oct. 1-16, reduced the archery season by six days and the muzzleloading season by five days. After consultation with the NPS, the FWC issued an executive order that extended the archery and muzzleloading gun hunts in the WMA. The order, issued Friday, Oct. 18, added an additional six days of archery hunting and five days of muzzleloading gun hunting. The archery hunt ran from Oct. 31 through Nov. 5 in all units of the WMA. The muzzleloading gun hunt ran from Nov. 6 through Nov. 10 in all units except Deep Lake.

**Closure of Black Market Monkey Operation** - After two months of investigation, the FWC closed down a black-market monkey operation in northwest Miami. Jorge A. Garcia had been operating a business breeding and selling several species of monkeys. Twenty-eight monkeys, as well as other wildlife, were seized and placed in licensed facilities. The business was selling the monkeys without a license, and selling them to unlicensed individuals. Therefore, people were receiving these animals without the proper training and knowledge to care for them. Anyone wishing to possess, exhibit or sell monkeys in Florida must be properly licensed. This ensures that the animals are treated humanely and kept in healthy conditions, and that all humans interacting with the animals remain safe. The people running the operation face charges of possession of wildlife without a permit, sale of wildlife without a permit, sale or transfer of wildlife to an unlicensed person, caging violations and records-keeping violations. These could lead to fines and/or jail time.

## **Updates**

**Apalachicola Oyster Status** – As expected, reports indicate winter landings are very poor. Last month, Governor Scott and Attorney General Bondi announced that Florida has filed suit against Georgia in the U.S. Supreme Court to stop Georgia's unchecked and growing consumption of water. Low water flow continues to negatively impact the families of Northwest Florida, including the commercial oyster industries. FWC staff has worked with staff from the Governor's office, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity to determine the estimated funding needs relative to this commercial oyster fishery failure. Congress could consider appropriating funds to provide economic assistance to fishing businesses and communities affected by the disaster and to support other activities addressing the disaster. Congressional funding would be through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service and requires the State of Florida to match 25 percent funds unless otherwise exempted by Congress.

**TrophyCatch** - The first year of TrophyCatch ended on Sep. 30. Over 4,000 anglers registered this first year, and 132 Lunker Club bass (8-9.9 lbs) and 58 Trophy Club bass (10-12.9 lbs) were documented.

We are preparing to give away the first TrophyCatch championship ring this December, to Bob Williams of Alloway, N.J., who caught a 13-pound, 14-ounce largemouth on Rodman Reservoir last February. A special \$10,000 prize will be

presented by Experience Kissimmee on Nov. 26 at the Bass Pro Shop in Orlando to the angler who caught the biggest bass in Osceola County. And, the winner of the 2013 Phoenix 619 bass boat, powered by Mercury, will be announced following a random drawing in the near future, the five finalists were announced were announced on Facebook and YouTube earlier this month.

For the second year, which began Oct. 1, the only required photo, for all three club levels, should show the entire bass on a scale, with the weight visible. This will encourage more entries and quicker release of the bass. Improvements to the website and an App are expected early next year as the program continues to expand and attract more anglers and business partners.

**Data Center Consolidation** – Within the month of October, FWC successfully completed the data center consolidation to the Northwood Shared Resource Center (NSRC). This consolidation was mandated by Florida Statute and required to be completed by October 30. It consisted of physically moving the entire data center infrastructure and applications from the Bryant headquarters building to the NSRC (i.e. hardware, Email, intranet portal (SharePoint)).

The two-phase move took place on October 2<sup>nd</sup> for equipment pertaining to the Division of Law Enforcement, and the weekend of October 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> for the balance of the agency's equipment.

The excellent work by our Office of Information Technology (OIT) team, allowed for a smooth and relatively seamless transition, with minimal service downtime to the agency's 2700 users, ahead of schedule, and within budget.

**Panther Sightings Website** - The public has reported hundreds of sightings of Florida panthers to [www.MyFWC.com/PantherSightings](http://www.MyFWC.com/PantherSightings), an FWC website launched in August 2012 where people can record when and where they saw a panther or its tracks. The 790 reported panther sightings in the first year will help the agency plan and manage for the expected expansion of the panther's range in Florida. An August 15 press release thanked the public for being part of this citizen-science venture and introduced the new "E-Z guide to identify panther tracks" available at [www.PantherNet.org](http://www.PantherNet.org). Twelve percent of the reports included a photograph and could be evaluated by FWC biologists. The majority were confirmed as panthers. When it was not a panther, most often the reported animal or tracks belonged to a bobcat. Other animals identified in the photos were foxes, coyotes, dogs, house cats and even a monkey. Verified panther reports were largely confined to southwest Florida, the well-documented breeding range for this endangered species, though a few verified sightings were in south central Florida.

## **Partnerships**

**FWC Lionfish Summit** – FWC hosted a Lionfish Summit Oct. 22-24 in Cocoa Beach, bringing together leaders in the lionfish issue in an effort to determine research and management gaps, as well as solutions. Lionfish are an invasive

species that can negatively impact our native wildlife and habitats. More than 100 people attended including representatives from the business community such as dive charter operators and lionfish removal device retailers; commercial fishermen; nonprofits; special interest groups; local and state governmental agencies; interested members of the public and the event was broadcasted live via social media platform Twitter, as well as on YouTube and on the Florida Channel. The three-day event began with presentations on the history and current state of the lionfish issue, a discussion on the desired future conditions of the lionfish issue, and an evening poster session.

The event was sponsored by the Guy Harvey Foundation, the Wildlife Foundation of Florida and Florida Sea Grant. Information from the summit will be used to help further manage lionfish in Florida waters in an effort to limit negative impacts on native fish and wildlife, to determine what research gaps can be filled. Staff is creating a summary from the meeting that will be shared with all attendees. This summary will focus on what was learned and how we hope to move forward.

**Florida/Georgia Quail Coalition** – FWC recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources-Wildlife Resources Division, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever and Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy. The agreement formalizes a partnership to establish, fund and promote the Florida/Georgia Quail Coalition. Through the coalition, the partners will join forces to enhance, promote and conserve quality habitat for northern bobwhite quail and to promote and support youth shooting sports programs and education. This new partnership represents an exciting opportunity for the partners, by working together, to contribute even more to on-the-ground quail habitat and hunting opportunities on public lands and to increase youth participation in shooting sports through community-supported and school-based programs.

**New Partnerships Support for FWC Wildlife Viewing Programs** – FWC's Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services has developed two new private sector partnerships to support FWC wildlife viewing programs.

Opticron USA, manufacturer of a range of high quality optics, will donate a portion of sales of their Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (Trail) approved binoculars to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida to benefit the Trail. The InterContinental Hotels Group, which owns Holiday Inn Express and a variety of other hotels, is also joining our private sector partners. Five percent of each stay booked thru our internet-based affiliate's link will be donated to the Foundation on behalf of the Trail.

Wildlife viewers have another way to support their pastime by downloading the latest East Section Trail Guide to their Kindle, nook or tablet. This first agency eBook is now ready for purchase on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). At \$4.99, the electronic guide is a bargain for Floridians and visitors alike. The three additional Trail section guides will be available as eBooks over the next few months.

These partnerships, including links to purchase the binoculars, download the eBook and book a stay at an IHG hotel, can be found at [www.wildlifefoundationofflorida.com/birding](http://www.wildlifefoundationofflorida.com/birding). Funds raised through these various sources are used to support the trail infrastructure and volunteer-based wildlife conservation projects.

**FWC receives a \$25,000 grant from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund** - FWC has received a \$25,000 grant from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund to restore 20 acres of scrub habitat in the Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA) in Highlands and Polk counties. The three-year project will restore part of the scrub ecosystem that occurs in patches throughout the state but is concentrated along the central spine of peninsular Florida in these two counties. Sandy scrub habitat supports many native species, including endangered and threatened wildlife such as the Florida scrub-jay, gopher tortoise and Southeastern American kestrel. The work at Lake Wales Ridge WEA will be managed by FWC and involve removing invasive exotic plants and re-establishing native plants such as saw palmetto, scrub palmetto and scrub holly. The project will involve the local community through the volunteer efforts of the FWC's Ridge Rangers program.

### **Events:**

**Exotic Pet Amnesty Day** - On September 21, an Exotic Pet Amnesty Day was hosted by the Sawgrass Nature Center in Coral Springs. The FWC worked with the Nature Center to offer this opportunity for the public to turn in their animals, rather than releasing them into the wild where they can threaten native wildlife and habitats. At these events, exotic pet owners can turn in pets they no longer want or no longer can care for, without facing penalties or fees. The animals receive a health check from veterinarians and then can be adopted by qualified pet adopters who applied in advance to the FWC. More than 70 animals were surrendered at this event.

**Florida Black Bear and Wildlife Conservation Festival in Umatilla** - On October 12, the 2013 Florida Black Bear and Wildlife Conservation Festival in Umatilla, Lake County, brought wildlife conservation information and hands-on outdoor experiences to more than 2,000 people, a large crowd for this rural area. With central Florida boasting the highest density of bears in the state, the FWC Bear Program and Community Relations staff and volunteers did their best to help people at the festival learn how to live with bears and other wildlife. There were field trips into the Ocala National Forest with biologists talking about bear biology and behavior, including the importance of stowing garbage out of bears' reach. The "Come Be a Bear" activity was popular with kids. And for the first time, this event broadened its focus beyond the Florida black bear to all native wildlife. Learning how to cast a fishing rod or shoot a bow and arrow were fun activities for children and adults.

**Biscayne Bay Patrol for Columbus Day Celebrations** - FWC officers in Miami joined partner agencies including the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Park Service, the Miami/Dade Police Department, the Key Biscayne Police Department and other law enforcement agencies to patrol waters of Biscayne Bay during the annual Columbus Day celebration. Each year, thousands of boaters turn out for this event. As a direct result of the large law enforcement presence, there were no fatalities. Over 100 boating safety citations were issued.

**"Evening for Conservation"** - FWC's partnership with Bass Pro Shops continues to grow as 50% of the proceeds from the Port. St Lucie October 23 Grand Opening Event "Evening for Conservation" was donated to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida (WFF) for the support of the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, TrophyCatch, and other programs. Governor Scott and Chairman Corbett spoke at the event that was attended by thousands of enthusiastic patrons. Another Grand Opening scheduled for December 4 in Palm Bay will also donate half of the evening's proceeds to the WFF.