

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners  
FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director  
DATE: September 1, 2013  
SUBJECT: September 2013 Executive Director's Report

**Employee Introduction:**

**New Director of Information Technology** - The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission is pleased to announce that we have selected Ignacio "Nacho" Sanchez as the Director of Information Technology. Since graduating from the University of Florida, Nacho has worked as an IT professional for 26 plus years. His IT work experience is diverse, and he is well respected among his peers for his ability to build consensus on challenging issues. He served for over two decades as the IT Director for the State Attorney's 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit in Ocala, and recently served as the Data Center Director for the Office of Legislative Information Technology Services. He is a long-term member of the CIO Council representing the Florida Prosecutors. Nacho is an avid sports fan and enjoys hobbies such as soccer, golf, saltwater fishing, SCUBA, lobster harvesting, boating and biking. He has two kids (boy and girl twins, juniors in High School). We are excited about Nacho joining our team.

**Gubernatorial Fellow Terrence Williams** - Terrence S. Williams has selected FWC to serve as a member of the Gubernatorial Fellow Class IX which started in August and will end in May 2014. Terrence is a recent graduate of the Florida State University where he earned a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Social Science, concentrating in Public Administration and two certificates in Emergency Management and Urban and Regional Planning. Terrence spent the last two years of his academic career studying public administration in the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy as a combined degrees student.

As a Gubernatorial Fellow, he continues his academic pursuits to finish a master's degree in Public Administration at FSU. Terrence is from "Imperial" Polk County and is particularly interested in intergovernmental relations and local government administration. He aspires to be a city or county manager and hopes to strengthen his skills and gain more in-depth knowledge of the policy making process while serving at FWC. Terrence looks forward to gaining skills in rule development and efficiency improvement methodologies for captive wildlife licensing and permitting in the Division of Law Enforcement.

## **Awards and Accomplishments**

**Public safety communicators honor FWC officer** - FWC Officer Jorge Pino is the public information officer (PIO) for the agency's South Region-B and was chosen as the 2013 PIO of the Year by the Florida Law Enforcement Public Information Officers Association. The statewide organization includes representatives from local, state and federal law enforcement and public safety organizations

**FWC Recognized for Communications Excellence** - The FWC received six awards in four categories for communications excellence during 2012 from the Association for Conservation Information (ACI), a national organization of conservation communication professionals. The awards were presented at ACI's recent conference in Midway, Utah.

The FWC picked up two awards in the News Release category, taking 2<sup>nd</sup> place for a news release about the resurgence of the bald eagle in Florida and 3<sup>rd</sup> place for a news release about relaxed license requirements for harvesting lionfish. This marks the second straight year that the FWC has received at least two awards in this category.

The FWC also won two awards for Television Public Service Announcements (PSA). A PSA about the TrophyCatch program, featuring fishing celebrities Roland Martin, Jimmy Houston and Bill Dance, took 1<sup>st</sup> place; a spot promoting a Pet Amnesty Day event won 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

In addition, MyFWC.com won 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Website category, and the communication plan for MarineQuest 2012 won 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Communication Campaign category.

**Monument dedication honoring Johnny and Mariana Jones at the John C. and Mariana Jones Hungryland Wildlife and Environmental Area** - On June 29, FWC Commissioner Bergeron and FWC staff attended the monument dedication honoring Johnny and Mariana Jones at the John C. and Mariana Jones Hungryland Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA). Located in northern Palm Beach and southern Martin counties, the WEA consists of 16,645 acres. John Jones became the first full-time executive director for the Florida Wildlife Federation beginning in 1971. Along with his wife Mariana, Jones is credited with pushing through dozens of conservation bills, which helped restore the Kissimmee River. This helped create the Conservation and Recreational Lands of Florida Act, and the precursors to the Florida Forever land-buying program that has provided over 3,000,000 acres of land for all recreational users. A monument was placed at the front gate of the John C. and Mariana Jones/Hungryland WEA so visitors will recognize their legacy for generations to come.

**Jacksonville Fishing Clinics reach 60,000 youth** - The Jacksonville Youth Summer Fishing Clinic has surpassed the 60,000 mark for teaching local youth about recreational fishing and conservation. Led by high school teachers Mike Lesso and Dave Morse since 1997, these summer camps teach conservation values, fishing techniques, and environmental stewardship. FWC provide equipment and camps are held on our managed ponds. A Fish Florida Foundation grant provides fishing equipment.

**TrophyCatch video wins ACI award** - The Legends video featuring Bill Dance, Jimmy Houston and Roland Martin promoting the TrophyCatch program was awarded first place by the Association for Conservation Information for a video public service announcement. Bob Wattendorf (Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management), AnnMarie Tavares, Gus Holzer and Mike Hunter (all with Community Relations) developed a 30-second PSA that aired on NBC Outdoors all over the nation and is posted on the TrophyCatch YouTube Channel.

### **Emerging Issues**

**Department of Environmental Protection Identifying Potential Surplus Lands** - The Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Lands currently is leading an effort to evaluate lands owned by the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (BOT) in order to identify land that may qualify for surplus. This effort is guided by the 2013 General Appropriations Act (SB 1500), which provides up to \$50,000,000 from the proceeds of surplus lands identified by this assessment and determined to no longer be needed for conservation purposes by the BOT. The focus for the new land purchases will be on military base buffering, springs protection or water resource protection, for conservation easements or with partnerships where the state's portion of the acquisition cost is no more than 50%.

The FWC, along with other agencies that manage state land, have been participating on a Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which DEP is utilizing to coordinate the review of potential surplus lands among partners. Initially, 319 sites totaling 10,362 acres were identified for further review. After review by state agencies, the list was reduced to 169 sites totaling 5,331 acres. The DEP has communicated that this is a preliminary list and that there is considerable due diligence left in identifying lands for surplus, including numerous opportunities for stakeholder and public input. DEP will hold several public workshops around the state in the very near future and FWC staff will continue to work closely with DEP and we will keep the Commission apprised of the progress.

**Giant Salvinia found in two lakes in Bay County** - A rapid response was initiated after giant salvinia, a highly invasive floating water plant, was found in two small adjoining lakes in Bay County. On June 12, staff with the Invasive Plant Management Section of FWC's Habitat and Species Conservation Division treated the lakes covering four acres near Bayhead Landing and close to Deer Point Lake with an EPA-registered herbicide to kill the salvinia and prevent its spread. Giant

salvinia grows rapidly, producing a canopy that shades out beneficial native vegetation. Its dense surface mats impede boating, fishing and swimming and clog water intakes and drainages. What caused the current infestation is unknown. Giant salvinia has been found and treated in other parts of Florida and is established in states such as Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Hawaii. Its possession is prohibited under state and federal law, although it is sometimes offered for sale over the Internet. People dumping out aquariums or plants escaping from backyard ponds are common ways for this invasive plant species to spread. FWC sent out a June 13 press release asking the public in this area to report any sightings of this invasive aquatic plant, and photos were posted on MyFWC Flickr so people could identify the plant.

### **In the News**

**Lobster mini-season** - The FWC's annual two-day spiny lobster sport season, commonly called the "mini season," brings thousands of visitors to South Florida. The Division of Law Enforcement is tasked with providing a safe and enjoyable outdoor experience for all. From the high activity spots in the Keys up to Cape Canaveral in the northeast region and even some limited locations around towards Tampa, nearly half the state is involved in those activities in some way.

Many law enforcement agencies also assist including local municipal and county agencies, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, US Customs and Border Protection and the US Coast Guard. The focus is boating safety, resource protection and public safety. In the Keys, a large meeting is held with all involved agencies as well as local State Attorneys. This year, Sheriff Rick Ramsay was able to attend.

Officers responded to numerous calls for service, checked hundreds of users and issued some citations as well. FWC K-9s were also used to sniff out lobsters that violators may have hidden on their boats.

Criminal cases included undersized lobsters, over the bag limit, egg-bearing lobsters and sanctuary violations. Infractions were written for no fishing license, no lobster endorsement, boating safety, navigation lights, etc. Officers worked to educate the public on many things, including dive flag safety.

Our efforts – including media events, participation with partner organizations in the lobster informational booth, support from marine fisheries management staff, targeted law enforcement on the water and efficient dispatch – helped ensure that Florida's residents and visitors could enjoy as safe an experience as possible.

**FWC law enforcement arrest two men for poaching spiny lobsters** - FWC law enforcement officers arrested two men June 2 for poaching spiny lobsters in Miami-Dade County. The men illegally possessed 468 wrung lobster tails. Officers arrested the two men for a multitude of misdemeanor charges, including possession of lobster tails out of season. They grossly exceeded the daily bag limit

of six lobsters per person per day, which is in effect during the regular lobster season: Aug. 6 through March 31. Also, lobster must remain in whole condition. Separating the tail from the body before bringing the lobster ashore is prohibited. Of the illegally harvested lobsters, 283 were also undersized, and one was an egg-bearing female. Egg-bearing female lobsters are always illegal to harvest in Florida. The men also possessed one undersized stone crab claw and one queen conch. It was not stone crab season and queen conch are illegal to possess in state waters. The FWC received information from a local law enforcement agency regarding two men acting suspiciously while loading a boat onto a trailer at the Watson Island boat ramp. When the officers investigated further, they discovered a garbage bag full of lobster tails. FWC officers responded to the scene and conducted a fisheries inspection. They discovered more grocery bags full of spiny lobster tails stowed in various compartments on the vessel. This incident demonstrates how strong working relationships with other law enforcement agencies can help the FWC protect our natural resources.

**Bay scallop season opened two days early** - After receiving a request from Governor Rick Scott, FWC opened the bay scallop season two days early to allow for harvest starting on a weekend instead of a Monday. The season was originally set to open July 1, but instead opened Saturday, June 29. The extension to the season provided additional recreational opportunities to Florida's residents and visitors while recognizing the importance of economic benefits to coastal communities where this activity occurs.

**Temporary restriction in mid July of public access to Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Holey Land and Rotenberger Wildlife Management Areas-** In mid July, high water levels prompted the FWC to issue an executive order temporarily restricting public access to Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Holey Land and Rotenberger Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). This action was necessary because high water levels force area wildlife to take refuge on tree islands and levees, resulting in high levels of stress for these animals. The order prohibits vehicle, airboat, all-terrain vehicle and other public access to the Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Holey Land and Rotenberger WMAs. These three areas are in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties. Access to Conservation Area 2A from the L-35B levee north to the east-west airboat trail is still permitted. The order also prohibits the taking of game. This order, however, does not apply to people permitted to participate in the statewide alligator and migratory bird hunts, to frogging, or to people operating boats while fishing within the established canal systems. A minimum distance of 100 yards from any tree island or levee must be maintained to minimize disturbance to upland wildlife. These special regulations remain in effect until rescinded by a subsequent executive order.

**FWC law enforcement educating the public on sea turtles** - The weekend of June 14, FWC law enforcement officers in Palm Beach County had a special detail focusing on sea turtles. Officers patrolled the beaches in an effort to educate the public on how people can help protect Florida's nesting sea turtles. They explained the unintended consequences that can occur when nesting turtles are disturbed by

beachgoers. They also explained the laws in place to protect these turtles. Officers conducted this detail because this year there appears to be a higher than average number of reported false crawls on the area's beaches. A false crawl is when a turtle comes onto the beach with the intention of laying eggs but returns to the water without nesting. False crawls can be caused by a variety of reasons. However, human interaction, including the use of bright lights, is often a cause. The Marine Turtle Protection Act stipulates that it is illegal to injure, harm, harass, capture or attempt to capture any marine turtles, eggs or nests. Any person committing such an offense can be facing a third-degree felony charge. The FWC recommends that people interested in watching a turtle nest on the beach attend a permitted public sea turtle watch.

**FWC officers respond to serious boating accident in Miami-Dade County -**

FWC officers responded to a serious boating accident that happened in Miami-Dade County on Sunday June 9. Two vessels collided near Sands Cut in South Biscayne Bay. As a result of the collision 16 people were thrown into the water. One person suffered serious injuries that warranted him being airlifted to a local hospital. Eight other people were transported to a local hospital via ambulance. FWC officers investigated the accident and concluded that the operator of the boat did not give way to the other vessel. FWC officers wrote a citation for the infraction.

**FWC officers investigate fatal boating accident in Collier County -**

FWC officers also investigated a fatal boating accident in Collier County. The vessel was travelling northbound in Dollar Bay near the City of Naples when it collided with a green channel marker. The operator and both occupants were ejected from the boat. One passenger was pronounced dead at the scene. The operator and the other passenger were transported to Naples Community Hospital and were treated for non-life threatening injuries. Once the investigation is completed, charges will be filed as appropriate.

**Manatee and sea turtle decals celebrate the 500-year anniversary of Juan Ponce de Leon's arrival on Florida Shores -**

FWC's new manatee and sea turtle decals celebrate the 500-year anniversary of Juan Ponce de Leon's arrival on Florida shores and contributed to the Florida Department of State's Viva Florida 500 initiative promoting the state's history and culture. Floridians can donate \$5 to receive one of the new decals, which went on sale July 1, when registering a vehicle or vessel and when renewing a registration. The decals also can be purchased online at MyFWC.com. Decal sales support FWC's conservation of these endangered and threatened species. The decals were designed by FWC staff.

**MyFWC Facebook celebrates Endangered Species Day -**

In the week leading up to May 17 Endangered Species Day, MyFWC Facebook celebrated the successes of conserving Florida's endangered and threatened species. Featured were the Florida panther, bald eagle, Key deer, loggerhead turtle, manatee and brown pelican, including their conservation histories, current status and on-going challenges of protecting these species. More than 73,000 Facebook visitors saw the MyFWC Facebook posts during the week.

## **Updates**

**Rescued Panther** - An adult female panther rescued as a kitten, rehabilitated and then released on January 31 into Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park in southwest Florida, has been documented to have given birth. The adult female panther's distinctive history -- orphaned at five months and rehabilitated with her brother at White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee before being released back into the wild -- is an example of the exceptional work being done by the FWC's panther team and our partners to conserve an endangered species. The female kitten was discovered in June by FWC biologists and appeared to be healthy. The MyFWC Facebook post featuring the story and photos of the mother panther and her kitten drew a large audience of 895 "likes" and 366 "shares."

**Apalachicola Oyster Status** - As projected, preliminary winter landings data continued to decline. FWC staff prepared and submitted a report to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric (NOAA) Fisheries Service in support of Governor Scott's request for a commercial oyster fishery failure. The report concluded that the fishery failure was caused by significant decreases in freshwater flow into estuaries as the result of low river flow and extended drought. After review by NOAA Fisheries Service, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce declared a commercial fishery failure, making it possible for Congress to appropriate funds to provide economic assistance to fishing businesses and communities affected by the disaster and to support other activities addressing the disaster.

The \$2.7 million National Emergency Grant from the United States Department of Labor, which provided temporary employment for dislocated oyster fishers, has ended. This project had 230 individual participants from February 13 through August 31.

FWC staffs are working with staff from the Governor's office, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Department of Economic Opportunity to estimate funding needs relative to this disaster.

**FWC provided testimony on Gulf red snapper at federal oversight hearing** - Division of Marine Fisheries Management Director Jessica McCawley testified before the U.S. Committee on Natural Resources on June 27 during an oversight hearing on the management of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. McCawley provided both written and oral testimony along with other Gulf state and federal marine fisheries leaders and fishing interests. McCawley noted the Gulf red snapper population is improving but that the Magnuson-Stevens Act may need modifications as the Gulf Council works through regional management of red snapper. She also noted that

Florida looks forward to changes that help recognize the differences between recreational and commercial fisheries and how they should be managed.

**Black Bass Rules Review** - The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management completed a major outreach project to determine public opinions about current black bass management regulations. In collaboration with human dimension scientists with the University of Florida, an online survey, mail-in survey, and ten open-house events around the state were used. FWC received 4,272 responses to the online survey, 1,672 responses to the paper survey, and had more than 150 attendees at the open house events. We are currently reviewing public input and combining it with biological information to determine what, if any, changes will be proposed for bass regulations.

**FWC makes adjustments to commercial menhaden harvest** - In December 2012, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) approved Amendment 2 to the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery Management Plan to rebuild the declining fishery. In Florida, menhaden are used for bait in other fisheries. Among other things, Amendment 2 provided for state quotas for Atlantic menhaden. After quotas are met, the states are required to close their menhaden fishery, and only allow for up to 6,000 pounds of bycatch. State quotas were based on a 20% reduction of historical reported landings. Since passage of Amendment 2, it has been discovered that some of Florida's menhaden dealers were unaware of the required reporting requirements. Therefore, Florida's quota under Amendment 2 may not have been calculated correctly based on historic landings information. In order to attempt to protect Florida's menhaden fishermen in 2013, three executive orders have been executed to comply with our quota requirements. Staff will work with the industry and the ASMFC to adjust the quota for 2014 for Florida's Atlantic coast to comply with the goal of the Amendment, while protecting Florida's fishermen from overly burdensome reductions. Additional executive orders may be necessary before staff is ready to bring a rule change proposal to the Commission for consideration.

## **Partnerships**

**FWC participates in lionfish summit and research dive** - FWC staff were guest participants and invited speakers at a deepwater manned submersible expedition to assess reef fish diversity and lionfish densities at artificial reefs located at depths of 265 feet (below depths typically visited by SCUBA divers, typically limited to 130 feet depth or less) July 27-29. Revisiting the Bill Boyd artificial reef on June 28, 2013, FWC biologist Keith Mille documented approximately 11-15 lionfish per 400 square feet of reef. On June 29, FWC biologists Keith Mille, Dan Ellinor and John Hunt, together with representatives from federal, academic and NGO organizations (e.g., NOAA, RSMAS, OSU, NOVA, REEF, etc.) participated in a half-day symposium attended by over 60 people representing media, divers, local government representatives and other academics interested in understanding the extent of deepwater lionfish densities, options for lionfish management, and implications on native reef fish populations. Results of the expedition and symposium increased

FWC knowledge of deepwater lionfish populations and valuable research results and concepts were exchanged toward lionfish management. More information can be found visiting the project website:

<http://www.oceangate.com/expeditions/expedition-lionfish.html>

### **Events:**

**Public meeting on deer management** - The FWC hosted a series of public meetings in July to help shape the future of deer management in south Florida. The meetings were held in an effort to gather input on deer management and establish deer management units (DMUs) throughout Florida. The agency is moving to a new model of deer management in the state in which hunters and other stakeholders will have a greater impact on deer management decisions. DMUs will, where needed, divide the state into smaller geographic areas where deer population characteristics are similar. Right now, the state is divided into four management zones that are used to set hunting season dates based on deer breeding chronology. The new DMUs are intended to allow the FWC more flexibility with deer management based upon the deer population, habitat conditions and public preference within each of the units. Two meetings were held in the FWC's South Region. One was held on July 15, at the International Game Fish Association in Dania Beach and the other was held on July 16 at the John Boy Auditorium in Clewiston.

**Women's Fishing Clinic** - On June 22, the FWC held a Women's Fishing Clinic at John D. MacArthur Beach State Park. Participants learned the basics of environmental stewardship, fishing ethics, angling skills, safety and the vulnerability of Florida's marine ecosystems in a fun, laid-back atmosphere. They received lessons on knot tying, cast netting, rod and reel rigging, boating safety, how to be a responsible marine resource steward, marine fish and habitat identification, catch-and-release techniques and more.