



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Commission Meeting
February 12-13, 2014
Tampa, FL
Minutes

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held its regular meeting February 12-13, 2014, at the Doubletree Hotel, located at 4500 West Cypress Street, Tampa. Chairman Richard A. Corbett called the meeting to order with the following members in attendance.

Brian Yablonski, Vice Chairman, Tallahassee
Ronald A. Bergeron, Ft. Lauderdale
Chuck Roberts, Tallahassee
Bo Rivard, Panama City
Aliese Priddy, Immokalee

Senior and Presenting Staff:

Nick Wiley	Executive Director
Eric Sutton	Assistant Executive Director
Bud Vielhauer	General Counsel
Colonel Calvin Adams	Director, Division of Law Enforcement
Chuck Collins	Director, South Region
Thomas Graef	Director, Southwest Region
Louie Roberson	Director, Northwest Region
Steve Shea	Director, Northwest Region
Shannon Wright	Director, Northeast Region
Chris Wynn	Director, North Central Region
Scott Sanders	Director, Conservation Planning Services
Diane Eggeman	Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management
Tom Champeau	Director, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management
Jessica McCawley	Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Gil McRae	Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
Melissa Recks	Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Martha Bademan	Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Dr. Thomas Eason	Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Susan Smith	Assistant Director, Community Relations
Jackie Fauls	Legislative Affairs Director
Ignacio Sanchez	Director of Information Technology
Cory Morea	Deer Management Program Coordinator

There were 62 individuals registered to speak to the Commission during the two-day meeting.

Meeting Opening

Chairman Corbett called the February 2014 meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and welcomed the Commissioners, staff and public to the Doubletree Hotel, in Tampa.

Moment of Silence

Executive Director Nick Wiley said a few words about the passing of FWC employees Nancy Brock and Courtney Tye, and a moment of silence was held in their honor.

Recognition

Ms. Rae Waddell, Director of the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, introduced the FWC's new partnership with partners from the Florida Aquarium, Director Thom Stork, as well as Tom Hernandez, Vice President of Supply Energy, with Tampa Electric Company (TECO). Both spoke a few words, and a photo was taken with the Commissioners.

Jamie Adams, former FWC Commissioner, talked about his tenure with the Commission, and then in honor of the current Commission, presented a photograph called "The Chief." A photo was taken with the Commissioners.

Executive Director Wiley recognized Regional Director Louie Roberson for his long and accomplished career with the FWC. Mr. Roberson thanked Executive Director Wiley, Assistant Executive Director Sutton, other regional directors, senior leadership and the Northwest Regional staff, and noted that it was his privilege to be able to work with such a great team. Each Commissioner thanked Mr. Roberson for his dedication and common sense. A photo was taken with the Commissioners.

Adoption of Minutes

Chairman Corbett asked for a motion to approve the November 2013, Commission meeting minutes.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Rivard, seconded by Commissioner Priddy and carried, the minutes were approved as written.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

Chairman Corbett asked for a motion to approve the amended agenda with item 4E – Sea Cucumber changed from final adoption to publish of draft rule without hearing unless requested.

A motion was made by Vice Chairman Yablonski, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried to adopt the February 2014 Commission Meeting Amended Agenda.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Chairman Corbett asked for approval of the Consent Agenda items, which the Commissioners had already been briefed on. Upon a motion by Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Commissioner Bergeron, and carried, the Feb. 12-13, 2014, Consent Agenda was approved.

Special Recognitions

Vice Chairman Yablonski introduced and welcomed Digna Alvarez, Regional Director for the Tampa Area, with U.S. Senator Bill Nelson's office.

Executive Director Wiley introduced and welcomed representatives from the Southwest Florida Water Management District: Ken Frink, Director, Operations Maintenance and Construction; Jason Hop, Operations Bureau Chief, Operations & Land Management; Carmen Sanders, Land Management Manager, Operations & Land Management

Executive Director Wiley introduced and welcomed new Wildlife Foundation member of Florida, Connie S. Parker.

Chairman's Report and Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Wiley introduced the new Regional Directors, Steve Shea, Northwest Region, and Tom Graef, Southwest Region, and then highlighted the following items from the printed report:

- Black Bear Longwood Incident Update
- Apalachicola Oyster Status Update
- FWC staff attends Biscayne National Park meetings and prepares comments on Supplemental Draft General Management Plan.
- Manatee Status

Focal Area Discussion

Chairman Corbett engaged the Commission in a discussion centered on Commission strategic focal areas and announced that the day's two presentations will be on conservation policy scanning.

Assistant Executive Director Sutton presented a review of the three focal areas scheduled for the following Commission meetings:

- April 15 - Future of Fish and Wildlife Conservation
- April 16 - Habitat Protection
- June 18 - Management Tools

Chairman Corbett discussed the value of identifying one or more Commissioners who would like to serve as Commission liaisons for staff and asked the following Commissioners to consider becoming more involved in the specific areas outlined below:

- Vice Chairman Yablonski and Commissioner Priddy - Human and Wildlife Interaction
- Commissioner Bergeron and Commissioner Priddy - Habitat Management
- Commissioner Roberts - Marine Fisheries Management Tools
- Commissioner Priddy, Vice Chairman Yablonski and Commissioner Rivard - Management Tools with regards to Private Land Stewardship Efforts

Executive Director Wiley noted it is really helpful for staff to have Commissioners to engage with on these items.

Vice Chairman Yablonski added that one of the benefits is these issues are upon us now, and they are also emerging issues for the next 15 to 20 years. It is important to get ahead of the issues and then continue to sustain them through the years, for example conflict issues. It is important to find innovative ways to do things, rather than "chasing birds."

Commissioner Bergeron noted that as Florida grows, there is a need to look at a master plan that will expand opportunities to protect the environment and also protect wildlife. In addition, he felt they needed to identify key properties that can be used as conservation easement for the protection of species, and will also provide landowners with incentives to not alter their land.

Commissioner Roberts noted that he appreciated Chairman Corbett taking the lead on this and felt that the focus should be on conservation moving forward as a whole. The tools being put in place now will go far beyond the

current Commission, and will provide a road map of how to move forward and continue with policy that is important. He also felt that social media is a great way to get our message out; it is the youth's main way of communicating, and it is important that there is a process in place to take advantage of this opportunity to reach the youth.

Commissioner Priddy commented that she supported the concept of conservation easements, and also felt they need to continue to stress landowner assistance, as FWC staff can help private land owners.

Executive Director Wiley noted that building trust and helping private land owners was a priority for the Agency.

Commissioner Rivard added that the youth movement is key for looking to the future. He also felt that successful wildlife conflict resolution is critically important.

Executive Director Wiley introduced and welcomed Mr. Whit Fosburgh, from the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) to speak on national issues relating to fish and wildlife. Mr. Fosburgh discussed the following topics from the Federal Conservation Agenda:

- The Farm Bill
- Budget
- The Sportsmen's Act
- Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA)
- Clean Water Act
- Public Lands

In regards to Big Cypress Preserve and Everglades National Park, Commissioner Priddy asked about litigation that would limit public access for traditional activities such as swamp buggies and ATVs. She explained that access is a continual battle that the hunting and fishing community felt it is not winning, and she asked if the Sportsmen's Act will help to preserve this type of access.

Mr. Fosburgh responded that although he is not familiar with those specific areas, most areas are open to allow hunting and fishing, except where it does not make sense, and they are closed for legitimate reasons. They need to be determined on a place-by-place basis.

Executive Director Wiley discussed the FWC membership with American Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), originally established in 1902 and noted their next conference will be in September in St. Louis.

He then introduced Mrs. Jen Mock Schaeffer, Government Affairs Director for AFWA. Ms. Schaeffer explained that AFWA is the voice of all 50 fish and wildlife agencies on the national front, and then she discussed the following topics:

- 2014 Farm Bill
- Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) and expected modifications
- Endangered Species Act (ESA)
- Sportsmen's Package
- State Wildlife Grants
- Budget Sequestration
- Lacey Act
- Invasive Species

Executive Director Wiley explained that there are critical points in the grant funding process, and from time to time funds are approved for staff to advocate with a presence in Washington D.C.

Executive Director Wiley also noted that the Lacey Act is a very strong wildlife conservation tool; it gives the Agency a lot of teeth for conservation and enforcement that it did not have before. Though he cautioned that it can be used to go too far though and provide more regulation than they are comfortable with.

Public Comment

Lyle McCandless (President, Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance) said that in the interest of the hunting community in south Florida; he felt that the Commission should have more hands-on management of the Big Cypress Preserve. The National Park Service has a tool known as adaptive management, which he felt should be used for hunting and off-road vehicle (ORV) use in the Big Cypress Preserve, but it is not being implemented. He added there is no evidence anywhere that shows the ORV or hunting communities have a negative impact on the flora and fauna in the Preserve; the NPS uses restricting ORV use as a tool to restrict access.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Yablonski discussed the origins of TRCP and its partnership with wildlife and conservation agencies, and noted they are a voice to Congress. He also suggested that based on what the FWC does, he felt there are three areas they need to focus on: Senate Bill 170 and open access; the MSA; and ESA reform.

Mr. Fosburgh suggested that FWC should be involved in all issues because they have a great reputation nationally and would lend credibility.

Chairman Corbett also commented on the issue of access to public lands.

Commissioner Bergeron said he is concerned about the unequal partnership with the federal government in south Florida preserves and parks. Further, they need to be careful not to move into closures without good science and suggested they look to the past to make sure they don't repeat agreements where they cannot follow the FWC's mission and goal of sustainable access with protection for the environment, for the present and future.

Commissioner Priddy noted that it boiled down to challenges from the state perspective, and how they want to implement management on federal lands. She felt the FWC is being asked to dedicate a lot of resources to ESA, access, and hunting issues on behalf of the federal government. Further, she was hopeful that the ESA update will allow the Agency to be more effective, rather than used as a tool to throw up road blocks. She added that Florida has a proven track record on how it manages endangered species, and felt there needed to be more recognition from the federal government of input from professional and scientific resources. Lastly, she felt the path of less public access, in response to a small but very vocal minority, is the wrong direction.

Mr. Fosburgh responded to the notion of preservation versus conservation, that he felt that over time it was Roosevelt's model that prevailed, provided that it was grounded in sound science. He added that it is important for everyone to remember that as with Sage Grouse in western states, the federal government would be happy to take a back seat to the expertise of the states. There are some players in the system now that may have a more receptive ear to state engagement.

Ms. Schaeffer noted that agency change is hard, but cultural change is even harder; turning things around takes time, and even some agency employees are frustrated with the federal system. Though in her experience, there has been a lack of coordination with the states.

Chairman Corbett noted this goes back to the issue of states' right and asked Ms. Schaeffer if she saw any improvement.

Ms. Schaeffer replied that they are seeing forward progress and more interest from federal leaders to work with states. They are working with many federal agencies to bring the states in early and often to have input on important decisions.

Vice Chairman Yablonski explained that states are laboratories of democracy and there is an opportunity for us to play offense.

Chairman Corbett asked what incentives are needed to get private land-owners to provide conservation.

Mr. Fosburgh responded that the system works well, but there is a need to make sure folks think about water and land conservation as an investment in recreation. At the end of the day they need to make sure they have well managed public lands, with good science, that underscores the entire system.

Chairman Corbett noted that there was a big shift regarding restrictions for hunters, and he asked Mr. Fosburgh what the federal view on the idea of government and hunting is.

Mr. Fosburgh noted the swing of the pendulum is coming back to the side of the sportsmen. He added for example, that in Washington people are starting to see the role hunters play in controlling white-tailed deer. He also noted, back country hunts and the primitive experience is becoming “cool” again (there is a 10-percent increase in hunting nationwide), and it is also getting kids outdoors.

Ms. Schaeffer noted special access for outdoor experience for youth is critical to reconnect them with the outdoors; scientific and psychological evidence shows it is very healthy for youth. Though access to lands remains the biggest challenge; the provisions in the Sportsmen’s package will increase agencies’ flexibility to acquire land for development of shooting ranges. This will provide more flexibility for states to look at their shooting ranges and decide how to best proceed forward.

More discussion ensued with the Commissioners, Mr. Fosburgh, and Ms. Schaeffer regarding youth hunting and fishing opportunities, shooting centers, state management of public lands that are federally owned, building stakeholder trust, and working cooperatively to address ESA issues. There was further discussion regarding creating innovative ways to pursue productive relationships with federal agencies that will help ensure Florida gets its share of available money to help with landowner incentives.

Vice Chairman Yablonski asked if Ms. Fauls could interface with Mr. Fosburgh and Ms. Schaeffer to obtain a quarterly report that will help the Commission stay engaged with ongoing issues. He would also like to see this information presented yearly.

Chairman Corbett thanked both Ms. Schaeffer and Mr. Fosburgh for their valuable presentations on national issues and said he thought that continuing communication would be beneficial to the Agency.

J. W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area

Commissioners heard a presentation by Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, in which they were asked to consider multiple land conveyances within and adjacent to Corbett Wildlife Management Area (WMA). These land conveyances will: aid in the refurbishment of the M-O Canal and Levee for flood prevention; provide a site for development of a public shooting park on the Mecca Farms Tract; and restore hydrology on a large portion of the WMA known as the Leon Moss tract. He discussed the importance of the J.W. Corbett WMA and its public-use data and associated economic analysis that reveal that Corbett WMA provides substantial economic, conservation and public wildlife-based recreation benefits to the state. Dr. Eason further discussed the benefits of taking action in partnership with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and Palm Beach County will facilitate aiding flood prevention capacity for the local area adjacent to J.W. Corbett WMA. It will also provide a much needed site for an FWC Palm Beach County Shooting park that will enhance hunter safety education and training in this area of Florida. He also discussed the importance of the M-O canal reinforcement to meet current engineering standards for future flood protection. Dr. Eason discussed other related easements that would need to be created or modified. Lastly, to aid in accomplishing each of these proposed land conveyances, he explained the Memorandum of Agreement with the SFWMD and discussed the local support by SFWMD, Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners,

the Indian Trails Improvement District, and stakeholders. Lastly, he recommended that there be a delegation of authority to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to approve and execute the land conveyances outlined in this presentation, contingent upon approval by the Acquisition and Restoration Council, Board of Trustees, the USFWS and all the required due diligence.

Public Comment

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers of Florida, DMTAG, Future of Hunting in Florida, SFWMD Advisory Board Member) said previous testimony at the Palm Beach County Commission five years ago on this issue was very controversial, but his most recent experience has been very positive because environmental stakeholders now supported the idea. He felt Dr. Thomas Eason, presented a well organized report of a very complex land conveyance process, and said he supported staff recommendations.

Byron Maharrey (Everglades Coordinating Council) noted Corbett WMA is one of the hardest used areas in the WMA system; access to much of this area is from off-road vehicles and it has not been proven to destroy the environment. He said he supported staff recommendations.

Preston Robertson (Florida Wildlife Federation) congratulated staff for working so hard to make this happen. He said he was originally concerned that this would mean a loss of wetlands in Corbett, but it is now down to a smaller number of wetlands impacted, plus there is the rewetting of the Leon Moss area. Also, the shooting area will allow the recycle of lead pellets. He supported staff recommendations.

Lyle McCandless (Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance, DMTAG member) totally supported the proposal and encouraged Commissioners to approve staff recommendations as presented.

Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association) said it has been a long time since the promise was made to provide such a shooting range. He supported staff recommendations and thanked Mr. Bill Cline for his hard work.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Bergeron complimented staff for connecting the dots. He asked if the flowage easement on the Leon Moss tract will result in water levels compatible with wildlife and end species.

Dr. Eason clarified the flowage easement would include a restoration and water management plan that would need to be approved by the FWC.

Commissioner Bergeron reiterated that there would be approval for water levels that would be compatible with the environment

Executive Director Wiley confirmed that the FWC will have control of the water levels.

Dr. Eason clarified that the FWC will retain the right to approve the flowage easement and the right water levels, as well as approve whatever the restoration actions are for the Leon Moss tract.

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bergeron, seconded by Commissioner Roberts and carried, the Commission unanimously approved the staff recommendations for J.W. Corbett WMA Flood Control and Mecca Farms Public Shooting Park Projects.

St. Johns River Boating Restricted Areas

Commissioners heard a presentation by Major Richard Moore, Law Enforcement – Boating and Waterways Section, on a proposed rule amendment that would repeal duplicate regulations in two tributaries on the St. John’s River; the South Moon and Jungle Den Canal. It would also extend three boating safety zones to match the legal zone boundary to the historical location of the regulatory waterway markers at State Road 40 (Astor) Bridge, State Road 44 (Whitehair) Bridge, and Lake Monroe (I-4) Bridge. This will help to ensure public safety and protect maritime infrastructure. Additionally, the proposed rule would modify the geographic description for five existing zones to more clearly describe the zone boundaries. The proposed rule would also increase the speed in the year-round boating safety zones from “Idle Speed No Wake” to “Slow Speed Minimum Wake.” Furthermore, the proposed rule would remove the authority for Lake, Seminole and Volusia counties to mark the year-round boating safety zones. Lastly, the proposed rule would update all the rule maps and make minor changes to the geographic descriptions. Rule language would change to exclude canals, creeks, boat basins, etc. that fall outside the main body of the river and that local governments can already regulate according to Florida Statute. Major Moore recommended the Commission approve staff’s recommendation to approve publishing the Notice of Proposed Rule in the Florida Administrative Register. Staff also requested that as a result of the public support for the rule amendments, another public meeting be held prior to the April Commission meeting only if requested by a member of the public. If a meeting is not requested, staff requested approval to file the Final Rule for adoption with the Florida Department of State.

No Public Comment

Commission Action

Upon a motion by Commissioner Priddy, seconded by Commissioner Bergeron and carried, the Commission unanimously approved staff recommendations.

Proposed Hunting and Fishing Rule Changes for 2014-2015

Diane Eggeman, Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management, presented proposed hunting and fishing rule changes for 2014-2015 that would revise specific area regulations on Commission-managed hunting and freshwater fishing areas, and amend or clarify rules to better manage hunting, fishing and public use. She reviewed the rule development timeline from April 2013 to February 2014. She explained that this set of rule proposals would remove restrictions, increase opportunity, improve hunter satisfaction and find new ways to encourage people to hunt. Specifically, Ms. Eggeman reviewed statewide rule changes for wild turkey, zone boundary changes for deer hunting seasons to better align with time of deer breeding and address hunter desires, and extended bobcat hunting season to add opportunity. She then discussed area rule changes for new hunting opportunity on 29 areas, reduced hunting opportunity on 2 areas, and requested permission to withdraw the proposed amendment for L. Kirk Edwards WEA. Next, Ms. Eggeman went over specific area rule changes to revise rules concerning roads, vehicles, horses, access, check stations or camping, and to adjust hunt types and dates. Lastly, Ms. Eggeman requested the Commission approve staff’s recommendations to advertise withdrawing the change for L. Kirk Edwards WEA, approve the proposed rule amendments for hunting and fishing on FWC-managed areas as advertised and if approved, make rules effective on the dates advertised.

Public Comment

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida/Future of Hunting in Florida) noted he would like more pictures of hunting added to the web site. He then thanked staff for listening to stakeholders and adding more hunting opportunities. Lastly, he said he supported staff recommendations.

Lyle McCandless (Big Cypress Sportsmen’s Alliance, Member DMTAG) concurred with and supported staff recommendations.

Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsman’s Conservation Association) supported staff recommendations. He commented that private land-owners can still decide if they want to allow the turkey bag rule or not.

Chuck Echenique (United Waterfowlers, Member DMTAG) thanked staff and Commissioners for listening to stakeholders and adding more hunting opportunities. He felt the turkey bag increase to two per day is a good idea on private land. However, he felt that to allow private landowners to harvest hens during archery season would be a tremendous tool as they are inundated with hens in many areas, and it would help manage them.

Bill George discussed the turkey bag limit and requested the rule changes be clarified when moving from public to private or special quota hunts, on the same day. Special hunts used to be one turkey per permit on public lands and he thinks it should stay that way.

Upon a request from Ms. Eggeman, Mr. Don Coyner replied that intent of this rule is to not make any changes on wildlife management areas, and leave the bag limit on public areas to one turkey per day.

Chairman Corbett directed Mr. George to work with Ms. Eggeman regarding this issue as necessary.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Bergeron noted that additional hunting opportunities are great. He is okay with the two turkeys in some areas, but remains concerned about the extended bobcat hunting season in Zone A. He would like the season to remain the same as it is now, until there is more scientific basis.

Commissioner Priddy noted she is also part of Zone A, and she is getting more bobcats on her property. She suggested it should still be a personal preference zone-wide, and that Commissioner Bergeron might want to impose a rule on his land. She brought up a slide of Zone A that showed a high amount of public land, or urban areas, where this rule would not apply, and has very little hunting opportunity. She felt that an extra 30 days will not impact the bobcat population.

Ms. Eggeman responded that the 30 days is an extension for hunting only, not trapping. Most of the harvest on bobcat occurs through trapping. They expect the harvest to be very small.

Commissioner Bergeron made a motion to approve the package without the bobcat season extension in Zone A; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Roberts.

More Commission Discussion

Chairman Corbett felt that his area has an abundance of bobcats as well.

Ms. Eggeman confirmed this rule change was requested by Commissioner Priddy. Commissioner Priddy added that this was a result of a stakeholder request to her.

Ms. Eggeman responded that staff will have more harvest data on bobcat take in the future.

Commissioner Rivard expressed concern in the difference in conditions that may exist across the vast area and asked if Commission Bergeron had an opinion about that.

Commissioner Bergeron replied that he has been concerned about killing bobcats for five years, and he would prefer that they not be harvested at all. In his experiences across both private and public land, he sees very few bobcats.

Commission Action

Commissioner Bergeron moved to accept staff recommendation but modified to remove the increase in hunting for bobcats. Commissioner Roberts seconded. Chairman Corbett called for a vote on the motion on the table. The vote failed with 4:2 vote, with Commission Bergeron and Commissioner Roberts voting in favor of the

motion, and Commission Rivard, Commissioner Priddy, Chairman Corbett and Vice Chairman Yablonski voting against.

A motion to approve staff recommendations was made by Commissioner Priddy, seconded by Vice Chairman Yablonski.

During discussion Director Wiley stated that we will conduct additional surveys to develop better information on bobcats and then we can restudy the issue.

Commission Action

The second motion to approve staff recommendation was approved with Commissioner Bergeron voting no.

Sea Cucumbers

Melissa Recks, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management, summarized a draft rule amendment for sea cucumbers, which are regulated under the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Marine Life Rule. She noted that staff is recommending regulatory changes requested by the commercial marine life fishery that would implement a commercial trip limit for sea cucumbers in response to concerns that the development of a food export market may lead to over exploitation. The draft rule amendment would create a commercial daily trip limit and vessel limit of 200 sea cucumbers. If approved, the rule will be noticed and filed without further hearing unless requested and made effective on April 1, 2014.

Commissioner Priddy questioned if this species can be farmed.

Ms. Recks responded that it can be done, and that the commercial processor who is interested in exporting them as a food product has acquired an aquaculture permit and is interested in trying to do so.

Public Comment

Eric Lee (Florida Sea Cucumber Corp.) expressed that he would like the daily limits increased to between 500 and 800. He explained that the new China government policies have greatly devalued the sea cucumber for food consumption and that he is the only FDA and DACS permitted processing center on the east coast, with the only other center in California. Competition from other global markets has further undercut prices. Further, high-pound catches have a high percentage of damaged sea cucumbers (up to 30-40 percent) which makes them unfit for processing and sale. He passed out examples of sea cucumbers and explained they are used for joint pain in Chinese medicine. He explained they have applied for an aquaculture permit and are willing to "put back" what they take and to work with the FWC as needed. Lastly, he explained the long and difficult process to dry them out, in which they have to be monitored hourly to ensure they keep their shape.

Commissioner Yablonski asked staff to consider whether 500-800 was a reasonable number from a biological standpoint.

Leo Ihu (Ramrod Key Commercial Fishing Village) discussed that he finds sea cucumbers when he is walking the shoreline and decided to try them for his joint pain; he felt it would be an easy way to get the gelatin he needs in his diet and also the essential amino acids they provide. He explained that he typically eats two or three a week, eating the young ones to also get the growth enzymes they provide. He noted that he knows 10 people who harvest them, and the only one making a living from his harvest brings in 400 -500 pounds. A trip limit of 200 would not be enough. Lastly, he stated that sea cucumbers are at the bottom of the food chain and therefore should be able to sustain greater harvest. Because only a limited number of individuals can collect them, he felt that 400-500 would be appropriate.

Jeffrey Turner (President, Florida Marine Life Association) supported the staff recommendation of a commercial daily trip limit and vessel limit of 200 individual sea cucumbers. He stated that most harvesters would not collect

more than 50 per trip. Sea cucumbers are important species for the marine aquaria industry, and will not be sustainable at a harvest of 500 or more a day. They are slow-growing and slow-moving and could easily be overfished with higher limits. Mr. Turner also expressed that the intent of the marine life rule is to maintain the species alive for marine aquaria.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Priddy questioned how many commercial fishers are interested in the food trade versus live collection trade and how they are harvested. She also asked what level of harvest staff believes is sustainable.

Ms. Recks responded that there are 140 to 160 individuals, who hold marine life endorsements and any of them are eligible to collect sea cucumbers, but mostly their interest is in the live market and that staff is currently aware of only 2-3 individuals who are interested in supplying sea cucumber for the food fisher. They are usually harvested by hand or dip net. She added that they don't know what the population numbers are for Florida, but from stock assessments on similar species in other areas, the maximum sustainable yield tends to be 5 to 13 percent of the unfished population, so we know that they cannot sustain a high level of harvest. In addition, there are already fishers in the waters taking them who are expressing concern of overfishing, and they are taking the advice of the industry for lack of additional information.

Ms. Recks added that marine life harvesters typically collect a variety of species on the same trip when harvesting for the aquarium trade to make the trip more profitable.

Commissioner Priddy asked if harvesters were collecting for consumption purposes, would the sea cucumber need to be landed alive. Ms. Recks responded that landing sea cucumbers alive is still required by the marine life rule, and once dead the value of the product drops considerably for the food trade.

Chairman Corbett asked if the commercial trip limit of 200 was passed, could it be changed at a later time after staff has studied the fishery. Ms. Recks responded that yes, it could always be changed at a later time and that staff would monitor the landings.

Vice Chairman Yablonski questioned if this is the right management tool. If the goal is a sustainable fishery, and the recommended trip limit is particularly conservative because of concern that other vessels will jump into the market and start collecting, than this may not be the right management tool. In other fisheries where we can capture the landings on an annual basis and there is a known number that results in a sustainable fishery, then we use a quota system to set a cap on the total number taken and ensure that landings will not go past that threshold.

Commissioner Rivard asked if in that situation it would matter whether one entity or another harvested all of the sea cucumbers, as long as the total landings were not exceeded.

Commissioner Yablonski responded that individual permits or individual fishing quotas could be used to ensure fairness, so that one entity could not harvest the entire quota.

Ms. Recks clarified they are not recommending that for now and that the staff recommendation was for no further public hearing unless requested.

Commission Action

Chairman Corbett asked for a vote, and staff recommendations were approved unanimously.

Proposed Changes to Deer Hunting Regulations in Zone D

Mr. Cory Morea, Deer Management Program Coordinator, presented the proposed changes to deer hunting regulations in Zone D. He explained that staff implemented a public outreach and input process during the first

three months of 2013 in management Zone D, in the Florida Panhandle, west of Tallahassee, for the two proposed DMUs located in Zone D (DMU D-1), south of Interstate-10 and (DMU D-2), north of Interstate-10. As a result of this outreach process, the FWC is considering rule proposals that would implement greater antler regulations and change the number and timing of the antlerless deer days (doe days) for Zone D. Staff has worked with the Deer Management Technical Assistance Group (DMTAG), composed of stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for deer management to guide staff in their efforts in managing deer from 2008 to 2018. At the core, is the idea of managing deer at a more local level using DMUs in consultation with stakeholders to meet deer management plan goals. A localized approach to deer management is needed to meet goals and objectives, and a Deer Management Unit approach to managing deer harvest was identified by FWC staff and stakeholders (DMTAG) as the most important strategy in the Deer Management Plan. Mr. Morea summarized the results of the phone and online survey that asked stakeholders how they would like the deer population managed for the next five years. He then reviewed the goals and objectives developed by the Zone D TAG, and provided background on antlerless deer management, current harvest regulations, antlerless deer season, and harvest management for bucks in Florida. Mr. Morea further reviewed antler point regulations (APRs) and noted they can be used for manipulating population size, age structure and to improve the buck-to-doe ratios. He added that hunters communicated they wanted to see more bucks and have a better chance to harvest larger bucks; they also wanted to improve the buck-to-doe ratio. Mr. Morea then discussed the results from an online poll, which indicated a high level of support among respondents (mostly hunters) for the proposed APRs in both DMUs. Lastly, Mr. Morea requested that the Commission approve staff's draft rule proposals for advertising and final public hearing at the April 2014 Commission meeting. If adopted, the proposed rules would apply to the 2014-2015 season.

Commissioner Roberts asked if the proposed four days of antlerless deer season in DMU D1 was the same as the first four days of the proposed antlerless deer season in DMU D2.

Mr. Morea indicated that the first two days would be the same in each DMU (the Saturday and Sunday after Thanksgiving), but the last two days of the antlerless deer season in DMU D1 would occur on the fourth weekend of antlerless deer season in DMU D2 (the first consecutive Saturday and Sunday after Christmas).

Commissioner Priddy asked if the antlerless deer days would apply on public and private lands.

Mr. Morea clarified that the antlerless deer days apply to private lands only, not WMAs.

Public Comment

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida/Future of Hunting in Florida) thanked staff and noted that DMTAG has looked long and hard at this, and though they sympathized with dog hunters, in the end the rules have to be made for the majority. He supported staff recommendations.

Brad Willnecker (South Eastern Dog Hunters Association) thanked staff for their hard work. He noted they have 750 members and they are in full support of the forked-horn rule, and want to meet a buck aged harvest approach.

James Coleman donated time to Brad Willnecker

Byran Maharrey (Everglades Coordinating Council) appreciated staff's efforts for the fine tuning. He asked for clarification that the proposal applies to public and private lands. Mr. Morea responded that antler regulations are both public and private lands; antlerless seasons are private lands only. Mr. Maharrey continued and expressed concern that the DMU is too large for making decisions on a smaller scale, and felt that Zone A should have different DMUs because of the diversity of flora and fauna.

Preston Robertson (Florida Wildlife Federation) thanked all involved, especially Mr. Morea, and he felt the numbers of support are great. He supported staff recommendations and hoped this will stop the flow of hunters to Georgia and Alabama that have had antler restrictions for over 10 years. Lastly, he felt a seasonal bag limit should be considered in the future, which would increase the value of deer.

Lyle McCandless (President, Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance/member FWC DMTAG) as a representative of the DMTAG in the south, noted this process helped them establish what is reasonable for Zone A. The south zone is the most diverse and their input was a recommendation for 3 separate DMUs, but at a future meeting they showed only one zone. For the record, he stated he will participate in the process for the south zone, but expressed concern that their previous input was not listened to.

Brigham Mason, a wildlife biologist for a large private landowner, noted the DMTAG was a great outreach effort that gathered a lot of feedback. He explained that the goal of the antler restriction is to protect at least 80 percent of the 1 1/2 year old bucks. He felt the forked antler rule north of I-10 would protect only approximately 70 percent and could result in high grading of bucks (removing the larger antlered young bucks and leaving lesser antlered bucks).

Chuck Echenique clarified that the DMTAG meetings had some contention within their multiple discussions regarding the issue that three DMU's were not adequate in size for Zone A in south Florida, and would not be enough of a sample size for hunters, so they went from three DMUs to two, and eventually from two to one. However, he explained the majority of the rest of the members were in agreement with staff. He expressed concern that the DMU in the Blackwater area has more doe depredation permits than any other area in Florida; that harvest may complicate achieving the goals.

Commissioner Roberts asked if State Road 80 as a boundary line added value to data collection.

Mr. Morea noted that prior feedback indicated the hunters did not want State Road 80 as the boundary line, so the model was adjusted back to State Road 70. He added they are now changing the zone line because there is good consensus from hunters on the northern line and staff conducted research that supported the change. Further, Mr. Morea noted there needed to be a minimal sample size of hunters in the annual harvest survey used to determine deer harvest levels in each DMU, so they had to adjust the DMU lines to increase their ability to detect changes in harvest over time. Going to multiple units within Zone A would not be beneficial because they could not get the sample size needed to obtain the harvest estimate.

Commissioner Roberts questioned if there are other methods of achieving the same results, like main beam length.

Mr. Morea said to protect the year-and-a-half age class in DMU-D2, north of I-10 you would need 3 points on a side, or a 10-inch main beam as an additional measure, which was supported by hunters.

Commissioner Roberts asked if there is concern about the number of does taken off Backwater and its impact on DMU-D2.

Mr. Morea said the Blackwater doe harvest is confined to archery and family hunts. The antlerless deer season would be on private land not Blackwater.

Commissioner Roberts asked if before the final rule, would there be more discussion with hunters in DMU-D2 to see if a 10-inch main beam would be sufficient to help their concerns, rather than just going with 3 points on one side.

Mr. Morea said continued dialogue would be a good idea, especially with the hunter reps that specifically expressed concerns about that regulation amendment.

Commissioner Roberts asked how this affects what we do moving forward, and is today just an update.

Mr. Morea responded yes, and welcomed direction from the Commissioners to help clarify the rule amendment more.

Executive Director Wiley asked for clarity, and to get it finalized for advertising prior to the April meeting.

Ms. Eggeman felt this direction is very positive and would be a win-win, and if this is the direction the Commissioners want to go, they will advertise this way.

Executive Director Wiley asked if the direction from Commissioners was to modify the proposal to include a second criterion of a 10-inch beam for DMU-D2.

General Counsel Vielhauer noted the change could be made.

Vice Chairman Yablonski clarified that they moved the final vote to the April meeting in Tallahassee to give folks in the affected area more time to discuss and comment on the rule. This was meant to be an update to allow people to speak. However, this is a perfect time to amend the rule.

Commission Action

Commissioner Roberts made a motion to give staff direction to include the 10-inch main beam criterion, or 3 points on one side option for DMU-D2, seconded by Rivard and carried.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Roberts would like continued dialogue about moving the zone and DMU lines around a bit more.

Commissioner Priddy asked Mr. Robertson what a bag limit for deer should be and what would be the basis, especially in light of the Time Magazine article regarding deer overpopulation.

Mr. Robertson responded that he would support any lesser season bag limit to help place more social value on Florida's deer among hunters.

Sea Cucumber Agenda Item – Reconsider/Clarification

Executive Director Wiley explained that staff needed a procedural clarification. There was a vote on the sea cucumber item; however, a motion and a second was required. Also, he clarified that stakeholders affected by this can request another hearing or the Commission can ask to bring it back. He asked the Chairman to call for a motion and a second to make sure.

Commissioner Roberts commented that any commercial limit established today is a starting place and that if we determined over a period of time that the limit needs to be modified, can we then take the appropriate corrective action.

Commissioner Roberts made a motion to accept staff's recommended draft rule to establish a daily and vessel limit of 200 sea cucumbers.

Vice Chairman Yablonski suggested bringing it back for another hearing, and still vote on the 200 limit, but asked staff to look at other possible alternative management mechanisms out there.

General Counsel Vielhauer suggested they do the motion on the draft rule first, and then do a second vote on whether to bring it back.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Roberts to approve a draft rule and then if they get additional information, amend the rule prior to the next meeting, seconded by Bergeron and carried.

Commissioner Roberts then made a motion to bring it back at the next meeting, seconded by Vice Chairman Yablonski and carried.

Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network (FYCCN) Update

Rae Waddell, Director of the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, updated the Commissioners on the following FYCCN programs and recently awarded grants.

- Mosaic Company awarded FYCCN a \$150,000 grant for youth conservation programming to students in the Hardee County public school system.
- Archery Trade Association and Easton Foundation provided a \$65,000 grant for archery expansion.
- Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation provided a grant of \$50,000 for 2013-2014 Saltwater Fishing Camp programs.
- \$2,000,000 in FCO spending authority from the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund has been received to construct an 8,000-square-foot facility to provide conservation education and outdoor skills programs for youth in Apollo Beach.
- Hispanic Outreach for Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation by Walt Disney
- Wildlife Foundation of Florida (WFF) administers funds from outside sources of \$1,670,000 in grants and donations since December 2011.
- FYCCN Partner Growth and Partner Sites
- FWC Outdoor Hubs

Chairman Corbett talked about the enormous impact the FYCCN program has on the state's economy. He complimented Ms. Waddell and her team on her tremendous efforts and success with taking the program from one youth center to 250 member/partners in the last five years.

Ms. Waddell said the reason that they have been able to be successful with just a few employees is because the program has received agency-wide support.

Public Comment

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida/ Future of Hunting in Florida) reminded the Commission that they are willing to offer seminars on duck hunting and duck hunting ethics at youth centers across the state.

Lyle McCandless (President, Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance) complimented staff on the job they are doing. He also talked about the next big kids event in the Big Cypress Preserve with Bass Pro Shops. He hoped that down the road they will get help and participation from the FWC for this ongoing event. He commended the Commission for inspiring these great efforts for the kids.

Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association) thanked Ms. Waddell, staff and Chairman Corbett for the hard work putting this program together. He then updated the Commissioners on their annual youth day event and thanked Bill Cline for organizing the shooting range events for the day.

Chuck Echenique (United Waterfowlers) congratulated staff on their successes, and noted he was proud to be a small part of the program. He then informed the Commissioners about the upcoming Florida Youth Outdoor Experience that will be held at the Ocala Youth Camp on May 31 this year. The participation has increased this year to 350 children, and they have plans to expand the program even more. He reminded everyone that the program is totally free to the children and their families through donations.

Chairman Corbett would like to open this event up to as many children as possible. He suggested giving the information on the youth event to Commission Administrative Assistant, Robin Stetler to send out the Agency.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Chuck Echenique would like to see the alligator hunting season opened up 24 hours a day. Also, he would like to open turkey hens in the fall season on private lands. In addition, he asked to protect wild turkeys more from out-of-state hunters by increasing the price of the non-resident tag, and only allow the take of one turkey.

Lyle McCandless (Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance) noted they are taking the position that management of the Big Cypress Preserve should be removed from the National Park Service and put in the hands of a Florida-based agency. He does not see any chance of changes under the current management philosophy which grossly ignores the original intent of the Act establishing the area. For example, there are fewer ORV trails, delays in public access for hunting and catering to special interest groups. Also, the Park Service has designated 80 percent of additional lands as wilderness, which is not consistent with historical use. Lastly, he informed the Commissioners about a swamp buggy and airboat show that took place in Ft. Myers, and they are making plans to host the event again in 2015.

Bill George noted the increase of bear-to-human contact and asked the Commission to consider using hunting as a means to control the bear population in high-conflict areas. He also would like extended alligator hunting hours.

Bill Kelly (Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association) discussed concerns about the closings that the Biscayne National Park Management Plan and the Fishery Management Plan indicate. He felt it would be very disruptive to commercial fishing, charters, etc. He further felt the Fishery Management Plan as it is now would eliminate 40 percent of the trapping available area in the Miami River and Upper Keys. It would also negatively impact 13 shrimpers who provide live and bait shrimp to Florida coastal areas, and would extend the fishing pressure most likely to the Florida Keys. He felt they are closing down large amounts of territory to protect fish that don't need protecting. He asked if a special recreational fishing zone could be established to accommodate recreational fishermen. Lastly, he extended an invitation to the Commissioners and staff to go on fishing trips offered by the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association.

Executive Director Wiley explained that the FWC is on board with many of his arguments and wanted to make sure he knew that the comment period is open until later this month. He added that the comments will go to the National Park Service; that the FWC has already finalized and provided comments.

Commissioner Bergeron referenced the two national parks they are constantly talking with about closures and no access. He noted the Agency needs to be careful about controlling public access with future agreements.

Byron Maharrey (Everglades Coordinating Council) noted he is glad goliath grouper studies are being pursued. He felt that goliath grouper are eating many lobster, and would like the Commission to consider opening up the fishery. Lastly, regarding CWD, he felt the door was left open a crack with the allowance of the importation of body fluids and he would like that door closed; CWD in Florida would end deer hunting as we know it.

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers Florida/Future of Hunting Florida) thanked FWC staff for their help in putting on the wounded warrior hunt at STA-1West. Next, he informed the Commissioners about an annual youth hunt they recently hosted that attracted about 150 people. He noted that one in five Florida duck hunters will visit the STAs and the harvest ratio is approximately 4.3 ducks per person. Further, Mr. Cook explained their opposition to the SpaceX launch pad in Brevard County. He thanked the FWC Law Enforcement for catching the four culprits that slaughtered deer and alligators out on Dupuis, Hungryland and Allapata WMAs. Lastly he discussed the Public Land and Legacy Constitution Amendment where the money is going to be used for toilets on the beach, in facilities like nature centers. He felt the money should buy and maintain natural lands and that it is a very dangerous amendment.

James Coleman (South Eastern Dog Hunters Association) thanked staff for working with them on the Antler Point Restrictions.

Todd Hallman (FSCA) discussed the incident in which four suspects who have been arrested, burned down a check station, and illegally killed alligators, hogs and deer. He said he asked the prosecutors to have the

associated fines go to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Youth Hunt Program. He would like to continue to work closely with prosecutors to get all fines on wildlife violations deposited into a fish and wildlife fund. Lastly, he told the Commissioners that the FSCA has put up \$1,000 reward money to catch violators.

Preston Robertson (Florida Wildlife Federation) shared a copy of Florida Wildlife Federation's *Amicus Brief* in support of the agency in Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission v. Wakulla Fishermen's Association, Inc., et al, Case No. 1D13-5115, 1st DCA, Florida. He also shared a letter from Manley Fuller on behalf of the Florida Wildlife Federation that stated they look forward to working with the Commission to ensure forage fish species continue to thrive in Florida's waters..

Joseph Alvarez (Tampa) commented that he is an avid outdoorsman and avowed conservationist, and noted there are zero opportunities to hunt ducks in the Tampa area. He would like to see the management plan for the Rock Pond Ecosystem Project include hunting.

Executive Director Wiley agreed and noted that FWC staff is pushing for this and asked him to give his contact information to Ms. Eggeman.

Captain Dave Markett commented that south Florida is experiencing a healthy repopulation of hybrid cats, that he does not consider them Florida panthers, and his concern is based on the large area they require, and the number they think are out there, that access will be lost to hunters. They would like to see a plan developed to allow for the control of the population of this hybrid species that is protected under the ESA; they can't do anything on land that is controlled by the feds when it is saturated with alpha predators.

Director Wiley clarified that by law the panther is not considered a hybrid; it is classified as a sub-species, and endangered. He also noted that Captain Markett's points are valid about public perception and landowners. However, the FWC is putting emphasis to ensure land does not get locked up because of this, it is a real issue and they have to be smart about how they tackle it.

Vice Chairman Yablonski noted this is part of long-term planning.

Commissioner Bergeron commented that the population of panther is somewhat controlled by their nature, as two males will fight to the death. Because of that, he does not feel panther can get overpopulated. He also felt that sustainable access does not affect the panther.

Commissioner Exchange

Dave Onorato, with the FWC panther team, presented an update on the Florida Panther Research Team and the process for panther capture work. He explained that panther capture data obtained by 226 radio collared panthers and 405 marked kittens allows for assessing progress towards recovery.

A video was shown highlighting the panther capture work with Chairman Corbett and Commissioner Bergeron with the panther team.

Commissioner Bergeron commented that the FWC's panther team is one of the best in the world. In addition, he noted that youth camps are so important to the future because they give children an opportunity for a primitive experience in nature. Further, he commented that the Corbett Area/Mecca shooting range is going to be a very positive thing because they are cooperating with flood protection for a lot of private lands and at the same time giving improvements rehydrating other areas. Next, he added that the FWC should be on the forefront of management plans for Biscayne Bay. Lastly, he asked Mr. Vielhauer to give an update on the Big Cypress lawsuit status.

Mr. Vielhauer responded the magistrate has ruled in favor of the Park Service and the intervener's finding the "general management plan" was a valid plan. The order has now gone to Judge Steele for final approval, and there is no reason to believe that he will go in a different direction.

Commissioner Priddy, noted her goal is to make sure the information they are gathering and sharing is reflective of panther activity on private lands as well as public lands. She asked Mr. Onorato how many days they have been out on panther capture, and how many cats were collared.

Mr. Onorato replied that they were out for about 30 days and they collared four cats.

Commissioner Priddy commented that on her property they found nine panthers in seven days, including kittens. She felt that one of the historical problems has been getting good data from private lands on panthers and to have a complete and accurate picture of the panther population, she felt other private landowners need to cooperate. She expressed the panther is a success story and recovery is faster than anticipated.

Chairman Corbett noted that a full report will be given on panther in June.

Recess Wednesday's Portion of the Meeting

Chairman Corbett recessed the meeting at 6:05 p.m., to reconvene at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, February 13.

Thursday, February 13, Reconvene

Chairman Corbett opened the meeting at 8:42 a.m.

Special Recognition

Vice Chairman Yablonski introduced and welcomed Melissa Thompson, Deputy Director with Congressman Steve Southerland's office.

Reef Fish – Atlantic Ocean

Jessica McCawley, Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries Management, reviewed a proposed rule to adopt federal standards that would allow for-hire captains and crew to retain recreational bag limits of vermilion snapper, groupers, and golden tilefish in state waters of the Atlantic Ocean (including Monroe County for grouper species and golden tilefish). This action would make state regulations in the Atlantic consistent with federal action that eliminated rules prohibiting captains and crew of for-hire vessels from retaining recreational bag limits of vermilion snapper, groupers and tilefish in federal waters of the South Atlantic (effective Jan. 27, 2014). Staff recommended adopting consistent state regulations for Atlantic reef fish and using the process of adopting federal standards under Chapter 120.54(6), Florida Statutes. Staff also recommended making a technical change to a federal rule referenced in this rule. If the Commission approved the proposed rule amendment, it would be advertised and then filed without further public hearing and become effective as soon as possible.

Public Comment

Dennis O'Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) commented that this was a job well done. He stated that people supported the staff recommendations and would like to see for-hire captain and crew in the Gulf be able to keep recreational bag limits of all snapper and grouper as well.

Commission Action

Upon a motion of Commissioner Roberts, seconded by Vice Chairman Yablonski and carried, the Commission unanimously approved staff recommendations.

Red Snapper – Gulf of Mexico

Martha Bademan, with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management, summarized a draft rule for Gulf of Mexico red snapper. This action would set the recreational red snapper season in Gulf of Mexico state waters to be the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10. Staff recommended approving the proposed rule that would open the recreational red snapper season in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10. If approved and directed, staff also recommended returning to the Commission for a final public hearing at the April Commission meeting in Tallahassee.

Chairman Corbett commented about the dramatic drop-off in the number of fishing days in the red snapper season since 1996. He asked if they had any information about fishing pressure and the number of fishermen during this time period.

Ms. Bademan responded that staff can modify the graph in the presentation and add the recreational quota for each year when staff returns to the Commission in April.

Commissioner Roberts asked if the assessment done in 2013 justified shortening the 2014 federal season by two days.

Ms. Bademan responded the assessment was positive, but the 2013 federal season was 28 days plus the 14-day supplemental season in the fall. Fall fishing days are typically associated with less fishing effort so you get more bang for the buck with fall days. If the red snapper season was held primarily in the fall, you could likely have more fishing days than in a summer season. The shortening of the federal season goes back to higher fishing effort, bigger red snapper and longer state seasons. The 40-day federal season announced by NOAA Fisheries for 2014 could still be modified based on the length of state seasons in Florida and other Gulf states.

Chairman Corbett asked what the assessment showed about the recovery of the entire stock.

Ms. Bademan responded the assessment shows red snapper are rebuilding ahead of schedule.

Chairman Corbett asked how accurate the information is regarding the abundance of red snapper.

Mr. Gil McRae, Director, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, responded that the information for the red snapper stock assessment comes from the fishery itself. However, the fish that are caught or harvested are just a very small part of the data, and the data from the recreational fishery is always reported after the fact. A more proactive assessment for red snapper would use fisheries independent data, which FWC scientists will now be able to collect using grant money from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Until more proactive data collection begins, fishery managers will always be reacting to what the fishery does rather than planning for what the population will look like, and tailoring the fishery to those attributes.

Public Comment

Captain Mike Eller (Destin Charter Boat Association) stated that an inconsistent season is a bad idea and creates social and economic disparity. An inconsistent season only benefits Panhandle fishermen who own boats or have friends who own boats. It also puts extra pressure on red snapper in state waters, unfairly shortens the federal red snapper season, and creates an environment to break the law. People fishing in the Big Bend area and south receive no benefit from a longer state season for red snapper. He felt recreational fishermen are on the cusp of getting better data collection and this throws a wrench on the whole thing. Lastly, he noted the red snapper population is recovering.

Commissioner Roberts asked if the Destin Charter Boat Association would feel the same way if “30B” was eliminated so that federally permitted boats could fish in state waters during that time.

Captain Eller responded that it would likely shorten the federal season, but federally-permitted for-hire boats would then be able to fish on a fair and level playing ground with everyone else. However, the red snapper fishery in state waters would suffer.

Vice Chairman Yablonski confirmed that 97 percent of the recreational red snapper landings are from the Florida Panhandle with only 3 percent of landings coming from outside of the the Panhandle.

Pam Anderson (PCBA, NACO Member Government Affairs and Bay County Chamber of Commerce) noted programs that increase habitat, resolve a lack of data for red snapper and get people back on the water, are the best solutions. She felt that NOAA is wasting tax-payer dollars on federal red snapper programs that will only hurt in the long run. She felt that 30B is a scheme devised to harm the for-hire industry in hopes it will make the states enact rules that are consistent with federal law. She requested that the Commission send a letter to the Secretary of Commerce requesting Amendment 30B be rescinded as requested by the Council, and also send a letter requesting the support of Gov. Scott on the 30B issue. In addition she discussed the implementation of the exempted fishing permit (EFP) head boat pilot program and noted that overfishing is occurring under this permit. She felt that if the headboats are overfishing, there is a probability of the rest of the recreational ACL in the Gulf being decreased. She felt the headboat (EFP) is an overreach by NOAA Fisheries and is causing contention because it gives an unfair advantage to a select group of headboats, causing winners and losers in the fishery. She noted a headboat in Panama City that is not part of the pilot program has lost business due to this program. Lastly, she noted the state season proposal is a good thing to provide opportunity for Florida anglers, but only if “30B” is rescinded.

Executive Director Wiley agreed that the letters to the Secretary of Commerce and the Governor are a good thing, and if directed by the Commission, they will prepare letters for the Chairman’s signature.

Dennis O’Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) asked felt that the data showing fishermen are catching the same amount of fish in 40 days that used to be caught in 160 days is because of “compression of effort,” in which fishermen will attempt to fish the same number of days in whatever period they have the chance to fish. He stated that NOAA estimates the number of trips targeting red snapper is increasing. He related that Dr. Bob Shipp testified to Congress that right now the red snapper population could support a six month, three-fish-a-day season and still continue to grow. He disagreed with the previous commenter who said inconsistency causes social disparity and that state waters won’t have fish after 40 days. He felt that areas inside state waters will be hit hard, but there will still be fish there. He mentioned the unfair nature of the EFP that gave fish to a select group of headboat captains. Lastly, he stated that a permit or registry to define the universe of anglers is a good idea to determine who is fishing.

Bob Gill (Crystal River) noted that longer state seasons mean a shorter federal season. He noted that the Commission supported the removal of 30B but wants longer state seasons so the Commission seems to be sending mixed messages. He asked the Commission about the management goal for red snapper. He felt that each Gulf state is trying to get whatever they can in terms of red snapper fishing days. He suggested the Commission stop the cycle of shortening federal seasons and urged them not to follow staff recommendation, and stick with a 40 day season that matches the federal season for 2014.

Commissioner Roberts asked why the information the Gulf Council uses to set the recreational red snapper season in federal waters has led them to a season of 40 days. Why not 50 or 60 days? Based on the data that is available, if there are more red snapper, why can’t they be caught?

Mr. Gill responded that the federal government is operating under the rules established in the Magnuson Act that says they must end overfishing immediately. When the determination is made that the over-fishing limit is

reached, they cannot allow recreational anglers to continue harvesting. They use the best information they have to determine how long it will be before the recreational sector catches the quota.

Vice Chairman Yablonski noted that it sounds like a problem with the federal law not having flexibility, and because the state has flexibility, it is getting penalized.

Mr. Gill commented that if the Commission would like to see changes to the Magnuson Act they should weigh in on the discussions that are going on now.

Commissioner Bergeron noted that there is doubt about areas being overfished, and he is hearing from stakeholders that there are a lot of fish out there. He asked whether the distinction that red snapper is overfished is a science-based decision.

Mr. Gill stated that the science determines what the acceptable biological catch is for red snapper. This information helps determine the federal seasons. Stock assessments are based on previous year's data but are the best information the Council has.

Commissioner Bergeron noted there is a perception that decisions are based on flawed science and not based in reality, and fishermen think there are more fish out there.

T.J. Marshall (Ocean Conservancy) stated he sees no scientific underpinning for staff's recommendation for the state season. He stated that the FWC is a science-based management organization and noted that more fish will be caught if the state opens state waters for a longer time period and if 30B is removed. He also felt that the red snapper stock is declining based on the recent assessment.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Roberts asked what the science showed in the last stock assessments.

Mr. McRae responded that the assessment generally shows the stock is still in a recovery mode. There were a few years associated with lower recruitment around the time of the BP oil spill, but recruitment has come back up to higher levels. There is also some uncertainty in the assessment data with catch-and-release mortality estimates.

Vice Chairman Yablonski asked if it would be fair to state that we are all relying on the same science, but interpretation of that science may be slightly different.

Mr. McRae responded the science develops a quota and it is up to the regulatory agencies to determine how to catch the quota and that's where the issue of fishing days comes into play. Part of the recovery process for red snapper is that we need older fish in the population and they are not yet present.

Chairman Corbett asked if between now and April will we get any movement from the federal government and will we learn any more if we signal to the federal government that Florida may go inconsistent.

Executive Director Wiley noted that staff will gather more public input and hear from stakeholders between now and April. We may hear more information regarding 30B and can make a decision with more information on the table.

Commissioner Bergeron recalled when the agency went inconsistent once before for stakeholders, they came back later and asked us to go back to being consistent. Even without 30B removed there will still be fishing pressure in state waters; the key is that the red snapper stock needs to be rebuilt.

Commissioner Roberts asked Ms. Bademan to explain the increase in quota from last year.

Ms. Bademan explained the 2013 season was set based on an original quota of around 8 million pounds. Then, the new assessment came out and was positive and indicated the quota could be raised, but there was not enough time to add the new quota to the 2013 summer season. The Council set the supplemental season in the fall using the additional quota gained from the results of the stock assessment.

Commissioner Rivard stated the assessment is clearly positive and the stock is recovering, but we may be headed for the shortest federal recreational season ever for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. If the recommendations coming to us from the federal government were more reasonable, staying consistent with the federal government would make more sense. The science is good news, and he felt that the Commission's duty is to control what they can control in state waters. He hears the comments from people on the front lines and has concerns about the Council process in regards to the 30B vote not being approved by NOAA and the Secretary of Commerce. He stated that he is comfortable with staff's recommendation at this time based on what the Commission now knows.

Commissioner Roberts noted they cannot fix the social or economic disparity that Rule 30B causes, but they are doing the best they can to protect the resource based on the information staff has provided. In the past, there were more days to fish. The opportunity to fish on weekends gives recreational fishermen more weekend days to fish. He stated that the headboat pilot program going on right now is unfair. He stated that he would like to approve the staff recommendation, but add an additional four days, which would end the season on July 14 instead of July 10. He stated that the Commission will make the best decision for the resource while providing fishing opportunities to the public.

Commission Action

Commissioner Roberts moved to open the Gulf recreational red snapper harvest season the Saturday before Memorial Day and run through July 14. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rivard and carried.

Commissioner Roberts stated that this is about providing the best opportunities to fish for more recreational fishermen, not necessarily about sending a message to the federal government.

Commissioner Bergeron asked what other years Florida had a state red snapper season inconsistent with the federal season.

Ms. Bademan responded the state first went inconsistent in 2008.

Chairman Corbett noted that in April the Commission will receive a lot more feedback and information from stakeholders.

Commissioner Rivard clarified this Commission did not create nor does it control 30B, and felt the state should continue to take the position that the 30B requirement should go away.

The motion unanimously passed.

Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit

Mr. McRae discussed a proposal to develop and implement a Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit in support of more accurate, precise and timely catch-and-release effort estimates for offshore recreational fisheries off Florida's Gulf coast. He discussed NOAA's Fisheries Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and the survey techniques used for onsite surveys and phone surveys. He also discussed the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant of \$24 million to be used over five years, which will address all of the sectors of the fisheries.

Chairman Corbett asked how the money will be spent over the five-year period.

Mr. McRae responded that they will allocate 3 million a year for the first two years, and then it will jump to a higher number and will be divided between fishery-dependent monitoring and scientific surveys that will be done in cooperation with partners. He felt that after year three they will get good calibration information; that data will help.

Chairman Corbett asked where most of the information is coming from.

Mr. McRae responded that MRIP is doing a good job with shoreline anglers. However, more information needs to be collected on offshore harvest and effort. There are 24 million saltwater angling trips taken a year in Florida, which is far more than any other state or region in the country. The percentage of data received is less than 1 percent, though they can get a handle on certain fisheries if they target for those attributes of the fishery.

Mr. McRae continued and outlined the FWC's goals to improve the quality of fisheries data being used for stock assessment and fisheries management, enhance current recreational harvest and effort data collection, and establish a Gulf offshore recreational fishing permit at no cost to the angler, to better identify the universe of offshore reef fish anglers. If this permit works well they will extend it beyond the five years and also geographically to cover the whole state. Staff sought Commission direction on whether to proceed with the development and implementation of the permit and associated fisheries surveys.

Chairman Corbett asked how many fishermen will reach out to help provide information to the FWC.

Mr. McRae responded that if they make it mandatory, but at no cost, they will get good numbers. He clarified that they will be coordinating this effort with MRIP.

Mr. McRae continued and asked for Commission direction. He explained that staff would also like to hold public workshops in March 2014 to get public input on the proposed permit structure. They would like to come back to the April 2014 Commission meeting with a draft rule. They would like folks to be able to add this endorsement to their license when they normally renew, as soon as possible.

Public Comment

Captain Mike Eller (Destin Charter Boat Association) stated they are finally starting the process of getting better data collection, and asked the Commissioners to support this; they are 100-percent in favor.

Tripp Aukeman (Coastal Conservation Association) stated that CCA fully supported this proposal.

Justin Grubich (The Pew Charitable Trusts) encouraged the Commission to implement this permit because it is an important first step to help get new data on targeted species.

Pam Anderson (PCBA, NACO, Member Government Affairs, Bay County Chamber of Commerce) commented that the proposal today is a right next step. More independent fishery data is needed, and they are glad the funding is going to be provided.

Dennis O'Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) suggested not calling it a permit, but perhaps call it a "registry" which may help with stakeholder buy-in. This way everyone would get covered, such as the 65-and-older population.

T.J. Marshall (Ocean Conservancy) said the source of these funds (\$356 million over five years) is Florida's allocation of the criminal side of the BP and Transocean oil spill settlement; FWC has already received \$100 million of those funds. He encouraged the Commission to give staff the recommendation to bring in more fisheries grant proposals like this because this grant has very narrow guidelines. This program will provide scientific data to better support appropriate decisions for red snapper. Mr. Marshall also discussed Louisiana's

enhanced monitoring at docks from their own funding and he suggested that they model their program closely to Louisiana's.

Bob Bryant noted he is working with Ms. Anderson's group as an actuary. He commented that the Agency needed to stop relying on the coastal household telephone survey, which he felt is not a valid research approach. The concept they have started to put together has the potential to create the most valuable effort/participation survey in modern fishery management. This should not become a stepping stone to limited-access fishery or market-based management.

Chairman Corbett asked him if he has reviewed how staff is doing this.

Mr. Bryant responded yes, and he felt they can build something that will "wow" the fishery world by providing the best data.

Executive Director Wiley said he appreciated Ms. Anderson's hard work helping to put this together. He also appreciated Fish and Wildlife Foundation support. He expressed that this is one of the best examples of funds coming back to the states and being used for critical, important programs.

Commissioner Roberts asked to have a workshop in Destin and also in either Franklin or Wakulla counties because of the large number of boats in those locations.

Ms. McCawley responded they would prefer to shift the workshops and also noted a planned Web based-workshop.

Vice Chairman Yablonski asked if there is a method of catching data that can be deployed as in the hunting license process in Georgia.

Executive Director Wiley responded we need to be careful and make it easier on the customers and those selling the license.

No Commission Action

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Issues (Council)

Ms. Bademan summarized the actions and discussions for the Council's February meeting. The Council took final action removing the requirement for federally-permitted for-hire vessels to follow federal rules when fishing in state waters (commonly referred to as the "30B rule"). Based on past Commission direction, the FWC representative on the Council supported this action. This action is now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. She reported that the Council also discussed several important red snapper issues. Regional management has been placed on hold by the Council until the five Gulf states can agree on how to divide the total quota. The Council will hold public hearings on sector reallocation in the near future and is planning a special Council meeting at the end of May to take final action on this item. The Council also discussed splitting the recreational sector into two components (private recreational and for-hire) and using slot limits as a tool to extend the red snapper season. Finally, the Council took final action on a king and Spanish mackerel and cobia amendment jointly-developed with the South Atlantic Council. The South Atlantic Council will consider final action at its March meeting. No direction was requested at this time, but staff welcomed Commissioner input.

Chairman Corbett asked the Commissioners if they would like to provide guidance for the letter Ms. Bademan will write to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce on the removal of the 30B rule.

Vice Chairman Yablonski noted that there seemed to be a lack of confidence in the federal process. To him, it seemed like NOAA approves the Council's vote on management decisions if NOAA likes the outcome, but does not approve the Council vote if they do not like the outcome. If that is the case, what is the Council's purpose?

Executive Director Wiley said that while the federal process might seem this way, he suggested that the letter be framed positively and highlight that we want folks to have confidence in the process.

The Commissioners and Executive Director Wiley then discussed the role of the Council in federal fishery management.

Commissioner Rivard asked for more detail and why NOAA staff believed the request to remove the 30B rule will not be approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Ms. Bademan responded that NOAA staff felt it may conflict with current laws and that it didn't line up with the objectives of the reef fish management plan. NOAA staff generally felt there was not compelling arguments to remove the 30B rule.

Public Comment

Captain Mike Eller (Destin Charter Boat Association) thanked the Commission for supporting getting rid of 30B. He commented that the rule is a very divisive issue in the Destin Charter Boat Association. He continued saying that the reasoning for sector separation is to get 1,300 charter-boats into a better position on monitoring and data accounting for their catch by forcing the federal government to implement a new data-collection system for the charter sector. Sector separation has moved forward because the federal government has done nothing. He stated that the for-hire boats want to be a part of the solution, but unless the recreational sector is divided, the charter boats will still be in the MRIP data system.

Bill Kelly (Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association) explained that the Gulf Council originally approved a trip limit increase of 3,000 pounds in the commercial king mackerel fishery southern subzone off Florida. He stated that during discussions, the commercial fishermen he represents agreed to compromise to a 2,000-pound trip limit, but because five individuals from Collier County said it would hurt them economically the Gulf Council reversed its decision. He felt that a modest trip limit increase of 750 pounds up to 2,000 pounds would help off-set fuel and operating costs for fishermen. He would like the Commission to urge Council members to try to get this trip limit increase approved to assist fishermen in Monroe County.

Pam Anderson (PCBA, NACO, Member Government Affairs, Bay County Chamber of Commerce) explained that Dr. Crabtree stated that neither catch shares nor sector separation is needed to implement electronic data reporting for the for-hire industry. She felt pushing for electronic reporting will give the entire recreational sector more days to fish for red snapper in the long run. She further explained that many have requested charter log-book reporting for over 20 years, yet the for-hire industry still has not received it. Also, Ms. Anderson stated she would like the state for-hire boats to be included in the Gulf offshore recreational reef fish permit. In addition, she asked that the Commission oppose sector separation, noting there are 250 businesses that could be phased out of work because NOAA is not counting the fish right. Lastly, she discussed "dude" fishing, which is a commercial fishing practice that may be starting in Florida (currently happening in Texas). It involves recreational anglers signing up as "crew" on commercial boats and harvesting red snapper, which is then sold to a market, who gives it to the individual anglers at a prearranged price. She asked that the Commission look into the legality of "dude" fishing.

Dennis O'Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) felt that the governors of the Gulf states need to challenge NOAA on the Gulf Council member-selection process because only people who agree with NOAA are selected. He also commented that sector separation is not good because it starts the process of giving fish to only a few. He felt that a universal angler registration and random surveys are the answer to getting better data in the recreational sector, not sector separation. He mentioned that right now in Tarpon Springs, a boat is taking people out to get four red snapper per trip. It is unfair and he would like the Commission to put a stop to it. Lastly, he felt that a red snapper slot limit won't work because the release-mortality numbers used to determine the validity of the red snapper slot limit option are flawed and the concept offers no benefit to the recreational sector.

Bob Gill (OFF) commented that sector reallocation with the Council's current preferred alternative would shift 500,000 pounds from the commercial sector to the recreational sector, which would have negative consequences on restaurants and consumers. The restaurant associations have sent a letter recommending status quo for sector allocation. Further, merely shifting red snapper allocation only gives recreational anglers a couple more days of fishing a year. He felt that there is a need to look at the management scheme for recreational red snapper and develop something that works better than what they have today. He recommended the Commission not support the Council's current preferred alternative for sector reallocation. Also, he commented that he is in favor of looking into a recreational slot limit and that there is a lot to be said for rebuilding the stock and getting the age structure better. Next, Mr. Gill discussed Amendment 24 (king and Spanish mackerel reallocation) and stated the overall king mackerel quota has on average over 2 million pounds unharvested, primarily from the recreational sector. He recommended giving the additional fish to the commercial sector, tournaments and some to back science. Lastly, he announced the Marine Resource Education Program science workshop scheduled for April 22-24 in collaboration with FWRI and noted that all expenses will be paid for the participants.

T.J. Marshall (Ocean Conservancy) commented that an easy way to get rid of "30B" is regional management. The issue in regional management is what quota to allocate to each state. Staying within the quota and determining many how many fish you can take out of the stock and maintain the growth and recovery is what the red snapper rebuilding plan is all about. The "30B" rule was put into place based on a fishery management need, and the Council did not provide any justification for removing it. Lastly, he discussed the recreational slot limit and the potential discard-mortality rate. He felt that more research on new descending devices will help with survival and could make a slot limit for red snapper more effective.

Mike Colby (Headboat, Charter Operator/President, Clearwater Commercial Marine Association) commented that at the last Council meeting the vote to remove the "30B" rule passed with a 9-to-8 vote, and was not an overwhelming consensus. During public comment 9 out of 10 federally permitted fishermen wanted the 30B rule rescinded. He stated that originally the 30B rule was thrust upon the states and fishermen and had an immediate impact on those charter vessels that are federally permitted. Lastly Mr. Colby commented that sector separation and enhanced data collection are not issues that are tied together. Sector separation simply secures an allocation based on historical landings.

Commission Discussion

Vice Chairman Yablonski asked if the Commission needed to provide direction on the mackerel reallocation issue.

Ms. Bademan responded that both the Gulf and South Atlantic councils are planning to start an amendment to reallocate mackerel after the new king mackerel assessment comes out later this year. Staff will keep the Commissioners apprised on any developments.

No Commission action required

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)

Ms. McCawley reviewed the following actions and discussions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council meeting held Dec. 2-6, 2013, in Wilmington, NC. The Council is postponing any action on bottom-fishing closed areas to protect Warsaw grouper and speckled hind until August. Emergency action was taken for blueline tilefish to reduce the 2014 annual catch limit due to a recent stock assessment that concluded blueline tilefish is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The Council continued discussion on an amendment that would allow recreational anglers to bring dolphin and wahoo caught in the Bahamas back to the U.S. through federal waters as fillets. Ms. McCawley noted that the red snapper assessment is scheduled to be completed in spring 2015, and a potential tag program for species with low recreational catch limits was put on hold. Other Council discussions included a possible reconfiguration of a deepwater coral protected area (Oculina Bank) boundary based on input from deepwater shrimp fishermen; scoping meetings and public hearing on management changes

for snapper, grouper, king and Spanish mackerel, and dolphin and wahoo; and an update on the joint-council committees on South Florida management and goliath grouper issues.

Ms. McCawley commented that no specific direction on Council issues is requested at this time, but staff welcomed Commission direction on any Council issues.

Chairman Corbett asked that the results of the next Council meeting in Savannah be circulated to the Commissioners.

No Commission Action Beyond the Direction Given to Staff

Public Comment

Dennis O'Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) noted that goliath grouper have been off the harvest list for over 20 years, which has resulted in a great resurgence in the population. He cautioned that there is not enough biological information to know the status of the fishery and that FWC scientists need to harvest some amount of goliath grouper to learn important biological information.

Future Agenda Items

Assistant Executive Director Sutton reviewed the agenda items for the April 2014 Commission Meeting in Tallahassee.

Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Captain Mike Eller (Destin Charter Boat Association) commented that collecting data from the average private recreational angler is a challenge; they want to give the data, but they don't have a good mechanism. He stated that we have the opportunity to collect real-time data from the for-hire industry as well as the private recreational angler.

Chairman Corbett said the Commission has been struggling with this lack of information for a long time and asked Captain Eller where he thinks data collection is going in the future.

Captain Eller responded that technology is finally catching up with the desire to collect better data. Now the Council wants to do something. He felt that things like phone applications or electronic reporting will make it easier to collect data from the thousands of recreational anglers that go on for-hire vessels.

Commissioner Roberts asked Captain Eller if he had an opinion on the slot size limit for red snapper and if the Destin Charter Boat Association would support a slot limit.

Captain Eller responded they work very hard to vent the fish and that he would be in favor of a slot limit if it gives the recreational sector more fishing days. He noted that there will be increased bycatch mortality of the over-slot red snappers, but there is already a bycatch mortality issue in the fishery. He also stated that the Destin Charter Boat Association would support a slot limit if it gave them more days to harvest red snapper.

Commissioner Bergeron asked as the slot limit goes up in size, does this increase the mortality of the released fish.

Captain Eller responded that there is bycatch mortality every day in the red snapper fishery and the fishery continues to rebuild.

Manley Fuller (Florida Wildlife Federation) said a healthy population of forage or bait fish should be part of a long-term strategy because of their significant role in the recovery of recreational and commercial fish stock and

their basis for providing food for the species that feed on them. They are also critical as shore-bird food. Next, he noted if Conservation Amendment 1 is passed, they want to work closely with the Agency on implementation of that Land Amendment so it can have the most benefit possible to the resources. In addition, they felt that the Space X Launch Pad site at the Merritt Island National Wildlife refuge is the wrong site because of the recreational value of the resources there. Lastly, he commented that they appreciated the actions taken by the Commission on chronic wasting disease; many states are following Florida's lead.

Pam Anderson (PCBA, NACO, Member Government Affairs, Bay County Chamber of Commerce) asked if the Commission could monitor the headboat EFP harvest data and the amount of red snapper harvested by these vessels as the pilot program moves forward. Next, she discussed possible data-collection solutions for the recreational sector, including catch cards and reporting landings at marina sites or boat ramps for the private sector. Also, she discussed that creating a random pool side-by-side with a volunteer pool would give a good comparison on reported recreational angler data. Next she stated that lionfish are increasing exponentially in waters off of Bay County. They are trying to plan another lionfish dive tournament for Memorial Day weekend and would like guidelines for such a program.

Vice Chairman Yablonski suggested talking with Ms. McCawley about the lionfish issue.

Dennis O'Hern (Executive Director, Fishing Rights Alliance) discussed voting accountability at the Council level and mentioned that he likes the idea of having voice votes. He disagreed that private anglers don't give honest data, and he stated that he stops fishing when he reaches his bag limits. He felt that federal fisheries management was better under maximum sustainable yield than annual catch limits. Lastly, he mentioned the value of random data reporting in the recreational sector and its value over voluntary reporting.

Bill George commented that Boca Grande Pass gear restrictions went into effect Nov. 1 and noted that there is no definition in rule for the term "weight." He felt that staff's use of the term "intent" did not align with the past rules for Boca Grande. He asked the Commission to have staff create an avenue for gear to be critiqued by staff and approved in a timely manner. He felt this would allow for vetting outside of the courtroom.

Chairman Corbett suggested he speak with Ms. McCawley about this issue.

William Van Deman (President, Florida Skin Divers Association) explained the Florida Skin Divers Association is a 300-member association and divers would like to support getting the right data for the recreational sector and support the proposed Gulf Offshore Recreational Permit. He noted that his association is against sector separation which unfairly privatizes the resource. Lastly, as a free-diving instructor he cautioned about discard mortality when looking at slot limits for offshore species. He felt that scientists need to take into consideration predation by goliath grouper and bull sharks, and the longer it takes to get a fish to the surface, the more at risk hooked fish are. He said that he would rather see a bigger size limit so that younger fish stay in the water for a few extra years to spawn.

Commissioner Exchange

Executive Director Wiley provided further comment on the "restricted" fishing opportunity that NOAA has approved. Would the Commissioners like for staff to address the issue in the same letter as will be addressing the 30B rule repeal?

Commissioner Roberts said he felt it is important that this should be included when they send the letter opposing 30B. He thanked staff for providing them with good information and professional presentations, and also the stakeholders for their participation, as it helps them make decisions so they can represent Florida in the best way.

Commissioner Bergeron felt the success on youth camps was enlightening and thanked Chairman Corbett for being the leader in getting the youth camp project off the ground, the children are the future. He also complimented staff for connecting the many dots on the Corbett area issue.

Executive Director Wiley noted that information hot off the press indicated that the South Florida Water Management District just approved the Corbett item also.

Commissioner Bergeron said he would like any scientific data staff has on bobcats presented at the June meeting.

Vice Chairman Yablonski thanked Jen Mock Schaffer and Whit Fosburgh and noted their Washington D.C. briefings were very helpful. Lastly, he thanked Chairman Corbett for his implementation of the strategic planning initiative.

Commissioner Rivard thanked all stakeholders, staff and especially Ms. Bademan for dealing with council issues. He also congratulated Northwest Regional Director Louie Roberson on his upcoming retirement.

Chairman Corbett He noted that as they move forward and are looking at populations changes and land changes, it helped to have Mr. Fosburgh and Ms. Mock Schaffer provide us with a national perspective.

Commission Administrative Matters

Chairman Corbett announced the next regular Commission Meeting is scheduled for April 15-17, 2014 in Tallahassee, commencing at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 15.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

Richard A. Corbett
Chairman

Nick Wiley
Executive Director

Respectfully submitted:

Robin Stetler
Commission Administrative Assistant