

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Nick Wiley, Executive Director

DATE: June 17, 2014

SUBJECT: June 2014 Executive Director's Report

In Memoriam

John "Big John" Barlow - John Barlow began his career with the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission (GFC) in 1972 at Avon Park Bombing Range, Fisheating Creek, and Myakka State Park trapping hogs and working hunts. He visited the Cecil Webb Wildlife Management Area (WMA) off and on between 1972 and 1975 assisting the local Biologist, Larry Campbell. In 1975, the first Wildlife Technician position opened and John moved, with his wife Anna, to Cecil Webb where he continued to work for the next 39 years. While at the Webb, he and his wife had three sons. John was 65 years old when he passed away. Anna has requested that any contributions made in his name be made to the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network. Donations can be sent to Denise Baniak (Administrative Assistant at Babcock Webb WMA) or made via credit card on the [FYCCN website](#) (*In Memory of John Barlow*). Checks sent to Denise should be made out to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida.

Investigator Paul Graham - Law Enforcement (LE) Investigator Paul Graham died unexpectedly Saturday, April 26th. Paul was hired by the GFC in January 1990. Upon graduation from the GFC academy, he was assigned to Palm Beach County. In October of 1997, Paul was promoted to LE Investigator in Duval County. Paul served as a LE Lieutenant for five years until he moved into Resource Investigations. Paul was assigned to the North Central region at the time of his passing. Paul is survived by his wife Teresa and son Jacob. A trust has been established to assist with the special needs of Paul and Teresa's 12 year old son, Jacob. (Please contact Shawn Boston for trust account information for contributions, Shawn.Boston@MyFWC.com).

Lovett Williams - Former FWC biologist Lovett Williams passed away in April of this year following a prolonged illness. Lovett was a world authority on wild turkeys and a true icon in the sport of turkey hunting. Although he was an accomplished scientist with a PhD in Wildlife Ecology, his down-to-earth manner and passion for conservation endeared him to hunters and colleagues alike. Lovett was a biologist with the GFC for 24 years, eventually rising to Chief of the Bureau of Wildlife Research. Within the Commission, he was a respected voice for conservation and a driving force behind the establishment of the Wildlife Research Lab in Gainesville which helped form the foundation of science-based management that is the hallmark of FWC today. He authored a number of books that are essential reading

for any turkey hunter including the *The Art and Science of Wild Turkey Hunting* and *The Book of the Wild Turkey*. In honor of his work, staff is proposing to add his name to the Gainesville Wildlife Research Lab. A formal request to accomplish this will be brought to the Commission at the September meeting.

Accomplishment/Awards

Philip Manor wins Jim Stevenson Natural Resource Manager of the Year Award - The Jim Stevenson Natural Resource Manager of the Year Award, established by the Florida Department of Environment Protection (DEP), is one of Florida's highest environmental honors. The award, which recognizes state employees who made significant progress in stewardship of state lands, was given to Philip Manor, FWC district biologist in the northwest region. Phil enthusiastically leads and assists efforts to restore and enhance wildlife habitat on FWC lead-managed and partnership lands.

Dr. Ann Meylan honored with Lifetime Achievement Award - Dr. Anne Meylan, one of FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) biologists, accepted a Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Sea Turtle Society's 34th annual meeting this past April. This annual award honors an individual(s) who has had a significant impact on sea turtle biology and conservation throughout the course of their career. Meylan was nominated from a candidate pool of over 1,000 colleagues for her international contributions to sea turtle research, management, and conservation.

FWC Python Team receives Award of Distinction, Public Service category, for 2013 Python Challenge™ public relations program - The Florida Public Relations Association, Capital Chapter, made the presentation at its annual [Image Awards ceremony](#) in April. The goal of the Python Challenge, which combined a competitive harvest of Burmese pythons with two public awareness events in south Florida, was to raise public awareness about invasive Burmese pythons and their threat to the Everglades ecosystem. It drew media audiences of more than 80 million nationally and in Florida. Congratulations to the entire team who made this possible.

FWC Officer Recognized by Congress - Lieutenant Tom Ware with the Division of Law Enforcement, recently received a special honor from the Congress of the United States House of Representatives. Lt. Ware was selected as the recipient of the 16th District Congressional Law Enforcement Career Service Award. Tom was honored at an awards ceremony in May for his 29 plus years of dedicated service to protecting public safety and Florida's natural resources.

FWC staff protects hatchery against storm damage - Bill Arnold and Randy Simmons are two long-term FWC hatchery staff stationed at the Blackwater Fisheries Research and Development Center, near Holt. During the recent flooding event, they were "marooned" at the facility due to significant bridge and road damage. Their hard work helped protect the hatchery facilities during and after the

storm and allowed them to begin repairing the damage rapidly to restore public access and production capabilities.

In the News

Bay scallop season lengthened – Based upon a request by the Governor and Chairman, an executive order was issued on May 16, 2014 opening the 2014 bay scallop season three days early. The season, which usually opens July 1, will open Saturday, June 28, 2014. Opening the season early and on a weekend will create additional recreational opportunities for Florida residents and visitors while recognizing the importance of economic benefits to coastal communities where this activity occurs. This change is not expected to negatively affect the scallop population. The recreational season will open in Gulf of Mexico state waters (shore to 9 nautical miles) from the Pasco-Hernando county line to the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County. The season will remain open through Sept. 24, with the first day of the closure on Sept. 25. All other regulations, including bag and vessel limits, apply.

FWC seeks public input on new bass rule - A proposal to change the statewide black bass rule is being discussed at public workshops around the state. The proposed change will provide a five-bass daily bag limit, only one of which may be 16 inches in total length or longer. The proposed changes will provide better harvest opportunities while allowing fisheries greater potential to produce trophy bass. The rule is scheduled to be brought in front of the Commission in 2015. For more information go to MyFWC.com/Fishing -- select the "Speak out on bass rules!" link under the bass image near the middle of the page.

FWC officers provide rescues in severely flooded areas - FWC officers assisted with the serious flooding at the end of April in northwest Florida, In Santa Rosa County, they put their unique skills and equipment to work rescuing over 100 people from Forest Creek Apartments in Gulf Breeze. In Escambia County, officers helped evacuate residents near Bristol Creek. They launched their boats from the roadway to search homes, fighting the swift current and navigating very carefully to avoid hitting submerged vehicles and mailboxes. During this mission, officers were able to rescue five people and four dogs, taking them back to the command post where EMS personnel waited to examine them and evacuate them to an emergency shelter. Officers also rescued three patients from a stranded ambulance.

Undercover investigation targets charter dive operators illegally feeding sharks - Investigators with the FWC have filed charges against four men linked to the illegal feeding of sharks and fish within state waters. The investigation started after the FWC received several complaints that shark feeding was taking place off the coast of Palm Beach County during dive charter trips.

Beach-nesting shorebirds need peace, quiet to survive - The FWC is conducting outreach through news releases and social media to remind beachgoers to be on the lookout and avoid disturbing bird nurseries on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida. During spring and summer on Florida beaches, shorebirds build

nests out of sand and shells that are well-camouflaged. They can easily be inadvertently harmed unless people know to watch out for them. Among the state's beach-nesting shorebirds facing conservation challenges are the least tern, black skimmer, American oystercatcher and Wilson's plover. By taking a few simple steps, people can enjoy the beach without disturbing beach-nesting shorebirds and their chicks, which increases the birds' chances of survival. For more information see <http://myfwc.com/news/news-releases/2014/march/24/shorebirds-nesting/>.

Updates

Comprehensive black bear management strategies and efforts to curb human-bear conflict –FWC has been active in several areas to address growing human-bear conflict issues. We continue to implement our bear management plan and look for new opportunities and ways to advance solutions toward these human-wildlife conflicts. Listed below are a few highlights of activity since the last Commission meeting:

- **Stakeholder engagement**

Three of seven Bear Management Units (West Panhandle, Central, and most recently East Panhandle) have been launched, allowing the agency to manage bears based on characteristics of both bear and people in the area with input from local stakeholder groups. This implements a key component of the FWC's 2012 Florida Black Bear Management Plan. As of mid-May the FWC held 16 public workshops with over 600 participants sharing ideas on how bears should be managed in their local area in Florida.

- **Outreach**

An April 12 statewide press release through traditional and social media outlets reminded the public to be aware that bears are on the move in the spring as they leave their winter dens, and to take important steps to reduce negative interactions with the state's largest land mammal.

- **Partnerships**

In Collier County, FWC staff partnered with local Boy Scout volunteers to build and install bear-resistant wooden trash can sheds for residents of two East Naples mobile home parks, who have no other way to keep their garbage away from bears. The FWC received a grant from the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, using proceeds from the [Conserve Wildlife license plate](#), to build these sheds. To see the press release, go to <http://myfwc.com/news/news-releases/2014/april/12/bears-moving/>.

To keep bears out of garbage in Leon County, the FWC in partnership with Leon County and Waste Pro offered free bear-resistant garbage cans for three months to the first 100 county residents who sign up for the areas experiencing human-bear conflicts. The project was funded by The Wildlife Foundation of Florida using proceeds from sales of the Conserve Wildlife license plate. Currently residents in eight Florida counties - Franklin,

Gadsden, Leon, Okaloosa, Orange, Santa Rosa, Volusia and Wakulla – have access to bear-resistant garbage cans from their waste service providers. The press release was sent on April 9: <http://myfwc.com/news/news-releases/2014/april/09/bear-cans-leon/>

- **Policy**

A cross-divisional FWC team continues review of existing internal agency policies regarding managing human-bear conflicts.

The Legislature funded FWC's Legislative Budget Request to assist the agency in responding to conflicts, take proactive measures to prevent conflicts, and decrease the time it will take to update statewide bear population estimates.

TrophyCatch - Half way into year two, TrophyCatch is experiencing rapid growth and public awareness. Designed to promote fishing and conservation, encourage catch-document-release of trophy bass, and generate valuable data using citizen science, this public/private partnership has well over 7,000 registrants compared to just less than 2,000 after the first season. Trophy bass submitted through May total 583 compared to 180 after year one. A new website hosted by Brandt, our Recreational License Information System vendor, will launch in June.

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill –FWC is one of the natural resource Trustees for the State of Florida (DEP is the other). FWC staff continues working with other state and federal Trustees to produce an overall damage assessment of the 2010 discharge and an overall restoration plan for the natural systems damaged by the event. Additionally, FWC staff has been involved in implementation of early restoration projects to accelerate the needed restoration for the Gulf in advance of completing the full assessment of damaged resources.

The next step in the early restoration process will be the finalization of the Phase III projects which includes, among others, the hatchery project in Pensacola. The Final Programmatic and Phase III Early Restoration Plan and Final Early Restoration Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Final Phase III ERP/PEIS) was made available by the Trustees earlier this month. The Trustees prepared this document following review of thousands of public comments submitted in response to the draft plan which was released late in 2013. The next step is the development of the Record of Decision which will provide and explain the Trustees' final decision on the Phase III plan. This will be made publicly available this summer.

Previous reports to the Commission detailed the framework for possible additional funding from civil and criminal cases. Last November the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) issued grants from the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund totaling \$15.7 million for six projects in Florida that will benefit natural resources that were impacted by the oil spill. These projects, which are just getting underway, include enhanced assessments of Gulf of Mexico fisheries, oyster habitat restoration in Apalachicola Bay, beachfront lighting retrofits to benefit sea turtle nesting areas,

coastal bird conservation activities, management and restoration of Escribano Point, and water quality improvements for Pensacola Bay.

The State of Florida, through FWC and DEP, submitted another fifteen projects totaling approximately \$62.5 million of pre-proposals to NFWF for funding consideration in 2014. These pre-proposals range from seagrass and benthic habitat mapping, coastal dune lake restoration, enhancement of the marine mammal response network, oyster restoration, to various water quality projects and continuation of two of the 2013 projects. Selected pre-proposals will have full proposals submitted in July and final grant awards will be announced in November. All of these projects are being funded through settlement funds resolving the criminal cases against BP and Transocean.

Future funding resulting from resolution of the civil penalties against BP will be allocated through the formula specified by the Congress in the RESTORE Act (Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast Act of 2012). FWC staff is engaged in planning efforts that would guide fish and wildlife conservation and restoration when these funds become available.

Apalachicola Oyster Status Update – According to reports, landings on the winter oyster reefs were very poor this year. Landings in the summer oyster reefs are expected to be somewhat higher because the summer oyster reefs, although much smaller compared with the winter reefs and only open three months, are located near the river mouth and continue to receive fresh water. Based on the impacts to the oyster populations due to low river flow for several years, it was necessary to execute a series of temporary management changes on the Apalachicola oyster harvest. During the winter season, FWC executed an Executive Order that would trigger closure of several areas based on water quality standards. For the 2014 summer areas and season, FWC restricted commercial and recreational harvest by lowering the commercial and recreational bag limits, closed harvest on Fridays and Saturdays and closed the area commonly known as East Hole. FWC staff continues to provide technical support for the Florida lawsuit against Georgia in the U.S. Supreme Court. FWC also continues to develop a research plan for a five-year oyster restoration research project. And finally, FWC continues to work with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the FDACS and the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity to provide a spending plan for the \$6.3 million funding to the Department of Commerce to mitigate the commercial oyster failure.

Freshwater Fish Stocking - The two state freshwater fish hatcheries stocked 3.5 million fish in public waters in 2013-14 and are on schedule to stock more than an additional 3 million this fiscal year. These include largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, black crappie, sunshine bass, Gulf-strain striped bass and channel catfish.

Use of Suppressors for Hunting – FWC staff, in response to requests from the public, plans to bring a proposed rule to the Commission for discussion at the September meeting. Current law prohibits the use of suppressors on guns used for

hunting game animals. More than 30 states currently allow the use of suppressors for hunting, and FWC staff believes that removing the prohibition would not present a resource concern. The ownership of suppressors is regulated by the federal government, and persons must apply, pay a tax, and undergo a background check in order to register to lawfully own suppressors.

Partnerships

Biscayne National Park - Biscayne National Park released its Fishery Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement May 28. The plan aims to improve fishery resource conditions, increase abundance and size of fish commonly targeted by anglers, and provide better fishing experiences for future generations. The National Park Service and FWC collaborated on this plan, which is more than 10 years in the making. In developing the plan, five alternatives were presented that addressed concerns about the status and long-term conservation of park fishery resources. The preferred alternative seeks to rebuild and conserve these resources. It also aims to increase the abundance and average size of targeted fish and invertebrate species by at least 20% over current conditions. To achieve these goals over the next five to 10 years, the park and partnering agencies will work together to implement a wide range of plan recommendations. This will include working with the FWC on regulatory changes necessary for the park to meet its goals. Public input will be welcome on any future regulation proposals and the opportunity to comment will be widely announced, including on the websites for the park and the FWC.

Increasing Hispanic Boating Outreach Efforts - The FWC is working with the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) to encourage participation in boating and fishing among the rapidly-growing Hispanic population. Texas Parks and Wildlife is the other state involved with RBFF in a similar five-year pilot effort. RBFF has engaged Radio Disney and Lopez Negrete Communications to assist in this effort. Year-one campaign kick-off events are being attended by FWC and Brandt (our license vendors who developed a universal-Spanish web site for Florida fishing/hunting license sales) in Miami, Orlando, and Tampa Bay.

Hundreds of volunteers collecting, potting acorns to restore Florida scrub habitat - Approximately 800 volunteers have gathered and potted thousands of acorns to help restore scrub habitat at the FWC's Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA) in Highlands and Polk counties. "Project Acorn" started with a \$25,000 grant from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund. Bill Parken and Nicole Ranalli, FWC staff, enlisted the Ridge Rangers, the established volunteer corps there, to begin collecting acorns. Thanks to this project 20 acres of scrub at the Lake Wales Ridge WEA will be restored. This project will be featured in a Conserved Forested Ecosystems Outreach and Research newsletter and the FWC's Florida Wildlife magazine.

Listening Sessions and Focus Groups to Help Connect Youth Shooting Sports and Hunting - Over the past few months, the Hunter Safety and Public Shooting Ranges Section hosted a series of listening sessions and focus groups to

help staff understand the needs of shooting ranges and shooting sports programs for youth. This series ended on May 10th with a focus group of youth from the Trail-Glades Jr. Rifle Club in Miami. Lessons learned from these sessions will help FWC and other major stakeholders in connecting youth involved in shooting sports to hunting, as well as connecting youth from FWC's hunter safety program to youth shooting sports programs hosted at private ranges throughout the state.

Successes

Better use of technology improves shorebird monitoring, saves over \$500,000 - Creating and using a web-based central data repository to record and retrieve shorebird monitoring data, and sharing this online data function with more than 350 partners across Florida, has achieved a total savings of \$500,000. This was accomplished by in-house agency resources to develop the web-based data repository. Training on using the database was accomplished through webinars and shared with partners. Partners then contributed significant efforts toward collecting and accessing shorebird information for the new online database, amounting to more than 10,000 donated hours. Another important outcome of the project: FWC staff has been able to focus more of its time and resources on the data analysis and management necessary to conserve Florida's shorebird species. Information on the Florida Shorebird Alliance and its monitoring efforts is at www.flshorebirdalliance.org.

"HuntFlorida" Facebook page launched - In an effort to promote Florida hunting and to enhance its social media presence, the FWC launched a Facebook page called "HuntFlorida" on March 10. HuntFlorida has been well received by the hunting community and our stakeholders. HuntFlorida received 5,000 "likes" in just less than two months and became the second largest Facebook page (behind the FWC flagship page) the agency offers. The page has over 6,400 "likes," and staff continues to build support for the page, engaging its followers on a daily basis. We encourage anyone who is on Facebook to visit HuntFlorida and "like" the page to keep abreast of hunting information and more. The address for HuntFlorida is <https://www.facebook.com/HGM.FWC>.

Events

Hunter Safety Annual Continuing Education Training - FWC's Hunter Safety and Public Shooting Ranges Section held its annual continuing education training in Ocala on May 19. The focus this year was introducing new training posters and lesson plans explaining the new Deer Management Units. The Division of Law Enforcement's Investigations Section demonstrated the advancements this team has made in investigating hunting incidents. Volunteers were recognized for their exemplary service as well as years of service with the program – two for 40 years of service. During 2013, hunter safety volunteers set a 20-year high record by holding 683 classes and graduating 15,165 students.

International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades – The International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST) is the world's largest sportfishing

trade show annually hosting 10,000 members of the global recreational fishing industry. It will be held at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, July 16-18, 2014. Cross-division planning is underway to promote Florida as the Fishing and Boating Capital and engage corporate partners in FWC activities, while highlighting the benefits of the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration program to Florida anglers, boaters, business communities and tourism. In addition to a 30-foot tradeshow booth with both saltwater and freshwater aquaria, we will have an entry area display with the TrophyCatch boat and highlight boating safety and boating access with a Law Enforcement boat. FWC will also host a media-event to promote the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network and agency angler recognition programs, including a new roll-out by the Division of Marine Fisheries Management and update on the freshwater TrophyCatch program.