

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Nick Wiley

DATE: November 13, 2014

SUBJECT: November 2014 Executive Director's Report

### **Accomplishments/Awards**

**FWC officer named national officer of the year** - The 2014 FWC Officer of the Year, Lee Lawshe, received national recognition when he was named Officer of the Year by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). Lawshe was selected among conservation officers from around the country for his work, which included a lifesaving rescue, involvement in a man-hunt, outreach efforts and addressing various natural resource issues.

**Invasive plant management biologist honored** – FWC Employee Jeff Schardt was recently presented with a Lifetime Honorary Membership Award by the Florida Aquatic Plant Management Society at the society's annual meeting in Daytona Beach. Earlier this year Jeff also received recognition for a lifetime of achievement in cooperative interagency efforts to manage invasive plants in Florida by the National Aquatic Plant Management Society.

**FWC investigator receives national hunting safety award** - Investigator Drew Nelson received the 2014 Homer Moe Award from the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA). This award is presented to conservation officers for excellence in basic hunter education curriculum efforts and outstanding outreach to all hunters. His passionate efforts to investigate hunting accidents and educate the public about safe hunting practices stood out among conservation officers around the country.

**FWC receives United Safe Boating Institute award** - Major Richard Moore, who leads FWC's Boating and Waterways Section, received the United Safe Boating Institute's Schooner Award at the recent National Association of State Boating Law Administrators meeting. This award recognizes an individual or group who has demonstrated outstanding leadership, support, and initiative over many years in the field of recreational boating safety. Major Moore was selected for his significant contributions to recreational boating safety throughout the nation.

### **Partnerships**

**FWC continues parasailing education efforts** - New commercial parasailing laws passed this year by the Legislature became effective October 1, 2014. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, FWC law enforcement staff worked with the Water Sports Industry Association, US Coast Guard, National Transportation Safety Board, and the Federal

Aviation Administration to hold a one-day officer training event. The training provided FWC officers, our marine law enforcement partners, and the parasail industry an opportunity to understand the complexities of the law and what is now expected of parasail operators while ensuring consistency and accuracy in education and enforcement.

**Wild game processing: From field to table** - Staff from University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension program and FWC provided an educational workshop at UF's Meat Processing Lab in Gainesville on Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>. This was a unique opportunity to extend hunter recruitment and retention efforts to adults and young people interested in local foods. Participants enjoyed demonstrations on wild game food safety, field dressing, and meat processing techniques. FWC staff discussed connections between local foods, conservation, and hunting. Television chef Randal White prepared wild game dishes for lunch and gave cooking demonstrations. Participating local businesses donated prizes for a free raffle.

**Bay County shooting range opens pistol and rifle ranges** - Hunters now have a place to sight-in their hunting rifles in Bay County thanks to the FWC/Bay County/National Rifle Association partnership to build a public shooting range. The goal for the first phase of the project was to complete the pistol range and two rifle ranges. These ranges were opened to the public on October 10<sup>th</sup>. The second phase of construction is now underway and will consist of a hunter education classroom, 5-stand sporting clays, and 15-station sporting clays course.

**Volunteers recruited for shorebird conservation in north Florida** - The FWC is seeking volunteers to assist with shorebird conservation on the Gulf Coast of north Florida, an area supporting a diversity of shorebird species. Volunteer opportunities include assisting biologists with surveys, helping install signs to protect shorebirds and their habitat, and becoming a "bird steward" to interact with the public when recreational use coincides with nesting season. FWC biologists are collaborating with Audubon Florida, the Florida Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Department of Defense to help minimize threats to shorebirds in this area, which have experienced loss of habitat and are vulnerable to human disturbance and animal predators. Those interested in volunteering can contact the FWC's Northwest Regional Office at (850)265-3676 if they want to join this citizen-scientist effort.

## **Events**

**Exotic Pet Amnesty Days** - On October 4<sup>th</sup>, FWC coordinated an Exotic Pet Amnesty Day event held in Palm Beach County at Dreher Park. The public was invited to relinquish exotic animals they had been keeping as pets, with no penalties or questions asked. 101 exotic pets were received that day. After animals were checked by a veterinarian, they were made available for adoption to experienced pet owners pre-approved by the FWC. The free Exotic Pet Amnesty Day was hosted by the FWC, the Palm Beach Zoo & Conservation Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management

Area. The goal of the Exotic Pet Amnesty Program is to reduce the number of nonnative species released into the wild by pet owners and foster responsible pet ownership through outreach and education. Additional Exotic Pet Amnesty Days are being held on November 15<sup>th</sup> in Naples and April 11<sup>th</sup> in Melbourne.

**Florida Black Bear & Wildlife Conservation Festival draws a crowd** – The 15<sup>th</sup> annual Florida Black Bear & Wildlife Conservation Festival held on October 11<sup>th</sup> in Lake County was well-attended. The free family-oriented festival in Umatilla featured activities such as field trips in the Ocala National Forest with FWC bear biologists, talks on living safely in bear country by an FWC bear biologist, presentations on living with wildlife such as coyotes, panthers and snakes, and fun activities for kids. At the festival, the FWC's Bear Management Program made bear-resistant trash cans available to residents of certain counties at half cost (\$100.00 off), thanks to a grant from the Wildlife Foundation of Florida. The festival was presented by FWC, the Defenders of Wildlife, the U.S. Forest Service, the City of Umatilla, Lake County, Black Bear Scenic Byway, and the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce. The Ocala National Forest near Umatilla is home to the largest subpopulation of Florida black bears.

**FWC Hosts SEAFWA Conference** - FWC hosted this year's Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 68<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Destin this past October. The theme of the event was "Managing for Resilience and Adaptability." Registration numbers rose to over 700, setting the record for conference attendance. Attendees included state and federal partners, students, and industry sponsors and vendors. A distinguished list of plenary speakers from all over the country discussed the history and future of conservation. Technical sessions highlighted current topics. Posters, displays, and presentations showcased FWC programs. The tremendous success of the conference was a tribute to outstanding teamwork from FWC staff and other partners.

## **Updates**

**FWC to host captive wildlife rule review workshops** – FWC's Captive Wildlife staff will host a series of public workshops from December 2014 through March 2015 to help shape captive wildlife regulations in Florida. These workshops will give the public the opportunity to provide feedback on current captive wildlife rules and recommendations for regulations. The main topics for discussion will be Administration, Husbandry/Experience, and Caging and Licensing. Workshops will be held in the following cities: Tampa on December 16<sup>th</sup>, Fort Myers on December 17<sup>th</sup>, Palm Beach Gardens on January 13<sup>th</sup>, Miami on January 14<sup>th</sup>, Panama City on February 10<sup>th</sup>, Orange Park on March 11<sup>th</sup>, Orlando on March 12<sup>th</sup>, and Ocala on March 30<sup>th</sup>.

**FWC hosts anchoring and mooring meetings** – FWC's Boating and Waterways Section held three public meetings in Tallahassee, Vero Beach, and Bradenton. These meetings are intended to gather public input about anchoring regulation concepts. This effort is in support of the Anchoring and Mooring Pilot Program which was extended another three years during the 2014 Legislative

Session. Additional public comments will soon be gathered through an online survey and the resulting data will be considered for future anchoring laws.

**Red Tide Update** –An expansive red tide that covered the Northeast Gulf of Mexico and Big Bend between July and October 2014 appears to have dissipated. FWC has not detected bloom concentrations of *K. brevis* offshore or near shore of Franklin, Wakulla, Taylor, Dixie, or Levy counties since early October 2014. The last fish kill associated with this bloom was offshore of Franklin County during the first week of October. In mid-October, a separate red tide was detected in southwest Florida. Bloom patches are present offshore and alongshore of Lee and Collier counties, as well as in Pine Island Sound. This week, Collier County staff received reports of respiratory irritation in the bloom area and also notified FWC of fish kills at Lowdermill Park. The bloom will continue to be monitored by FWC, and updates will be posted at [myfWC.com/RedTideStatus](http://myfWC.com/RedTideStatus).

**Apalachicola Oyster Status Update** –FWC is working with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to evaluate the Apalachicola oyster population as harvests from the winter reefs continue to be low. FWC staff is also working closely with the Department of Economic Opportunity, DACS, and the local oyster industry to locate suitable sites in the Bay for oyster fishermen to start conducting shelling. The shelling program is expected to start this month and is being funded through disaster relief from the United States Department of Commerce. In response to requests from the industry, FWC Law Enforcement has increased their patrols in the Bay. The Supreme Court has accepted and will hear the lawsuit Florida filed against Georgia pertaining to harm to Florida's resources.

**Public workshops for input on managing bears in North Florida, South Central Florida** - FWC hosted five public workshops between September and October to discuss management of black bears in north and south central Florida. Under the FWC's Florida Black Bear Management Plan, seven bear management units (BMUs) were established throughout the state. The BMU approach allows FWC to manage bears based on the characteristics of bears, people, and habitat in different parts of Florida. The workshops offered the public a chance to provide input on local bear issues and allowed interested individuals to sign up to be active members of local Bear Stakeholder Groups:

- The North BMU workshops held in Macclenny and Lake City had a total of 60 participants. The North BMU contains the bear subpopulation in the Osceola National Forest and surrounding areas, including Baker, Columbia, Duval, Hamilton, Nassau, Suwannee, and Union counties.
- The South Central BMU workshops held in Sebring, Lakeland, and Punta Gorda had a total of 37 participants. The South Central BMU contains the bear subpopulation on the Lake Wales Ridge and surrounding areas, including Charlotte, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, Indian River, Manatee, Martin, Okeechobee, Osceola, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota, and St. Lucie counties.

With six of the seven BMUs now initiated, the FWC's Bear Management Program is in the process of planning the final BMU in the Big Bend.

**TrophyCatch update** - Season-two of TrophyCatch ended on September 30, 2014, and Season-three immediately launched. The popularity of this program among anglers, the media, and the business community continues to expand exponentially. Trophy-sized bass submitted into the program grew from 185 in Season-one to 993 in Season-two. At the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) conference, researchers with FWRI presented preliminary results of how data generated by the program is filling critical gaps in fisheries science that is informing our management. Over 14,000 anglers from across the nation have registered for TrophyCatch. Registrants can now serve in the role of citizen scientists, allowing us to learn more about angler's opinions, desires, and behaviors.

**Sportsman's Licenses available for Florida youth at reduced cost** - Recently Governor Rick Scott signed an executive order authorizing FWC to offer Lifetime Sportsman's Licenses for Florida children and young adults at a greatly reduced cost. The license normally costs up to \$1000 but from November 24 through December 31, 2014, the price will be reduced to \$500 for Florida residents who are 21-years-old and younger. The lifetime license covers saltwater and freshwater recreational fishing, hunting and most associated permits. This is a great opportunity for a holiday gift that will last a lifetime and provide our youth the opportunity to become true stewards of Florida's native wildlife and habitat, and be a part of the long-term conservation of Florida's natural resources.

**Biscayne National Park** - FWC staff attended three public workshops hosted by Biscayne National Park in Southeast Florida this September. These workshops were held to gather additional public input on the Biscayne General Management Plan which will establish a long-term management philosophy about visitor use and activities in the park. There are currently seven management proposals listed in the General Management Plan. These workshops specifically focused on proposals 4, 6, and 7. FWC also submitted a letter withdrawing support for the current preferred proposal (6) after stakeholders voiced concerns about its implementation. The FWC expressed its continued objection to any zone that prohibits fishing all together and its preference for a special recreation zone of a reduced size with only a seasonal fishing closure. The NPS has not yet determined whether or not it will select a new preferred proposal.

The National Park Service has also been working with FWC on a timeline for rulemaking in support of the Fishery Management Plan. This will guide fisheries management decisions for the next five to 10 years. To achieve the Park's goals, it is likely that a suite of regulation changes will need to be made by FWC. FWC and the Park are still discussing what regulation changes will be proposed to the Commission. Proposed rule changes will likely be brought before the Commission in September 2015.