

Potential Reductions for the 2015 Legislative Session Schedule VIII B

September 10, 2014
as of August 28, 2014

In preparation for the 2015 Legislative Session, the Governor, House, and Senate instructed state agencies to prepare a list of potential reductions equal to 5% of the adjusted recurring budget for next year. The full extent of what may be needed for budget reductions next year, if any, is not yet known. It is intended that this list will provide lawmakers with enough options to allow them to be selective in the event budget reductions are necessary.

The following list contains the staff recommendations for the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. In developing this list, agency directors carefully reviewed all activities within divisions and offices and made every effort to minimize jobs losses, conserve long term program investments, minimize impacts to existing programs' abilities to effectively operate, maximize use of federal grants, continue work in progress, delay work not yet started, and identify least critical functions. It should be noted, however, that these issues are all very important and valuable to agency services.

The 5% list totals \$10,791,965 of which \$1,214,788 is from General Revenue and \$9,577,177 is from trust funds. Also, because so much of the agency budget is used as State match for grants, an additional \$60,000 in grant funding would be lost if the matching budget included in some of these issues is cut.

Staff Recommendation

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

Reduce Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring and Research (\$839,879) GR

This proposal represents a 50% reduction in the annual General Revenue (GR) operating budget for the Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) group and will severely reduce or eliminate scientific sampling that monitors state waters for dozens of species of harmful algae including: 1) red tide, which causes widespread die offs of fish, manatees, dolphins, and sea turtles and poses risks to public health through consumption of contaminated shellfish; 2) saxitoxin-producing species that pose lethal risks to public health from toxic pufferfish and contaminated shellfish; 3) cyanobacteria (blue green algae) that cause large numbers of fish kills in fresh and saltwater each year, and 4) the assemblage of harmful algal species that are implicated in the "superblooms" and the degradation of the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) including mass mortalities of manatees, birds and dolphins. With this reduction, the current investigation into the IRL die-offs and their links to harmful algal blooms and water quality degradation would be severely curtailed or eliminated. This reduction would also dramatically reduce the collaborative research and monitoring efforts between Mote Marine Laboratory and FWC to monitor waters for red tide in support of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACCS) shellfish safety regulations and to minimize the impacts on FL residents through timely bloom tracking and providing information to state and local entities who report on beach conditions for visitors.

Recent budget reductions of more than 60% to FWC's HAB Program have already narrowed red tide response capability from statewide to primarily focused on Southwest Florida. However, red tides in the panhandle have caused several prolonged closures of oyster beds in Apalachicola Bay in the past, and in June 2013, an emerging HAB species caused an

unprecedented closure of shellfish harvesting in St. Joseph Bay. Responding to red tide and new HAB threats in this area is challenging and will be increasingly difficult with additional loss of funds. In Southwest Florida, shellfish harvest was closed for seven months in 2012-2013 due to red tide, and the clam farming business of more than 30 lease-holders was affected. FWC provides technical support through seafood testing during red tide closures so that the aquaculture industry can continue to sell its product. This reduction would severely limit the support FWC could provide to keep clam farmers in business during annual red tides. Loss of staff from this reduction would also hinder the ability to provide timely information to the public and DACS on current red tide conditions, eliminate diagnostic testing for HAB exposure in sick or dead marine wildlife, and discontinue research aimed at understanding the biological and environmental conditions that influence red tide and other HAB bloom formation.

Eliminate Oceanaria Reimbursements for Manatee Rehabilitation (\$854,000) MRCTF

FWC has managed the Oceanaria Reimbursement Assistance Program for rescued, rehabilitated, and released Florida manatees since 1991. Since July, 2000, \$1.15 million annually has been available to reimburse the three contracted and federally permitted manatee rehabilitation facilities in Florida: Lowry Park Zoo, Miami Seaquarium, and Sea World Florida. This amount was reduced to \$854,000 in FY 11-12. These specialized, federally permitted, facilities are the only institutions available for acute-care, veterinarian-based rehabilitation of manatees. This reduction would reduce or eliminate this service to the state of Florida at a time when the number of manatees killed and injured annually is at record levels. Presently, the oceanaria are reimbursed for only about 50% of qualified expenses.

Reduce Marine Fisheries Assessment (\$350,000) MRCTF

This reduction will reduce marine fisheries monitoring and assessment efforts that support science-based management of valuable commercial and recreational fisheries. Saltwater fishing in Florida generates over \$5 billion in economic impact and supports over 50,000 jobs. Scientists in this program monitor the abundance of recreational and commercial fishes in six estuaries around the state and conduct detailed studies offshore which inform management actions such as size limits and closed seasons. This information is critical to evaluating the effects of current fishery regulations and predicting future stock levels. This reduction would create a significant data gap for statewide fisheries assessments for species such as snook, seatrout, red drum, red snapper and gag grouper.

Defer Maintenance at FWRI Headquarters and Field Laboratories (\$250,000) Trust Funds: (\$200,000) MRCTF; (\$25,000) NGWTF; (\$25,000) SGTF

FWRI headquarters in St. Petersburg consists of 132,000 ft² of specialized laboratories, hazardous waste storage and research facilities. Several smaller laboratories located in Cedar Key, Gainesville, and Tequesta have similar capabilities. FWRI has historically kept maintenance costs well below those for comparable private sector facilities through an aggressive program of preventative maintenance. This reduction would eliminate or severely curtail preventative maintenance activities associated with our scientific support facilities potentially increasing costs in the long term associated with costly repairs. Critical life safety functions would be maintained.

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Reduce Recreational Saltwater Outreach and Aquatic Education (\$20,000) MRCTF

This proposal would reduce state matching operational funds by 8.5% used for Outreach and Aquatic Education programs under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Grant. Funds for this program support the education of recreational anglers on the importance of

personal stewardship and fishery conservation and management actions that can be taken by the individual angler. This proposal would reduce long-term support and recruitment of anglers in Florida. Loss of these state match dollars will result in the loss of \$60,000 of federal grant dollars that would no longer be available to the agency. The recreational saltwater outreach and aquatic education program supports kids' fishing clinics, adult clinics and outreach training, marine fisheries education for Florida teachers, and a large number of public outreach events and publications in partnership with private, local, state, and federal organizations. Therefore, recreational saltwater outreach and aquatic education program activities currently conducted with the \$80,000 funds (\$20,000/state and \$60,000/federal) would be reduced.

Reduce Commercial Saltwater Blue Crab Outreach (\$4,000) MRCTF

This proposal would reduce by one half the number of commercial blue crab outreach education programs undertaken by the Marine Fisheries Services Section. These programs include education regarding new commercial blue crab regulations; publication of SEASTATS (a brochure that discusses the blue crab, and includes information on appearance, including how to distinguish males from females, distribution and habitat, reproduction, molting, feeding, parasites and diseases, and similar species found in Florida waters); and, produces signage to be posted at boat ramps indicating that it is a felony to molest commercial blue crab traps. Reduction of these funds would reduce the ability of the Division to disseminate this information to the stakeholders.

Reduce Trap Retrieval Program (\$89,765) MRCTF

This proposal would reduce by 54.5% the statewide retrieval of lost or abandoned commercial spiny lobster, stone crab, and blue crab traps using competitively-bid, contractual services. Currently \$25 of the commercial license fee for these three fisheries is specified by the Legislature to be spent on trap retrieval of lost or abandoned traps during closed seasons [sec. 379.367(2)(b), sec. 379.365(1)(a) and sec. 379.366(3)(a), F.S., respectively]. This program is designed to ensure that commercial fishing gear does not remain in the marine environment longer than necessary and reduces potential impacts on marine fisheries and their habitat. The elimination of these funds would reduce the efficiency of the Trap Retrieval Program which is authorized in s. 379.2424, F.S.

Division of Hunting & Game Management

Reduce Public-Information Related to Game Wildlife (\$60,000) SGTF/CARLTF

This reduction would eliminate informational materials that describe public hunting opportunities as well as public service announcements pertaining to alligator safety and mallard/mottled duck hybridization. These materials summarize public hunting opportunities, namely special-opportunity and spring turkey hunts. The televised public service announcements are designed to (1) increase public awareness and cooperation to conserve Florida's unique duck species, Florida's mottled duck, and (2) promote public safety and increase awareness concerning Florida's alligator population. The proposed reduction in outreach would decrease our efforts to inform the public, potentially would reduce public safety related to alligators, would compromise conservation efforts for Florida's mottled duck, and may result in lowered public satisfaction.

Small-Game Management Program (\$163,454) SGTF/CARLTF

This proposal would significantly reduce the agency's ability to provide small-game (i.e., quail, squirrel, rabbit, dove, rail, snipe, and woodcock) management, including technical assistance for small-game habitat management to federal, state, and private landowners. It would eliminate cooperative partnership efforts with other management agencies and organizations for mourning doves and bobwhite quail. The reduction would reduce the agency's ability to provide small-game hunting opportunities. The two full time equivalent

positions currently dedicated to small-game management would be shifted to other programs within the Division.

Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management

Reduce Freshwater Fisheries Operations (\$161,704) SGTF

This proposal would reduce the Division's ability to spend potential proceeds generated from the lands it manages by 46%. Past use of this appropriation has been to spend revenue from the sale of sand at Tenoroc Fish Management Area on Tenoroc land management activities as required by statute. Management activities include, but are not limited to, improving pond access, maintenance of boat ramps, fishing platforms and fish feeders, mowing of grounds, parking areas, and recreational fishing areas, fence and road maintenance and repair, and control of exotic plant communities. Section 259.032(11)(d), Florida Statutes, requires revenue received through leases, sales, and contracts be used to supplement land management operations. This reduction would leave the Division with a total of \$188,296 remaining in this category for this purpose.

Executive Direction

Reduce Public Services and Public Access

Eliminate Communication Partnerships with Stakeholders (\$20,000) MRCTF

The Community Relations Office partners with stakeholder organizations to leverage our messaging to the media and other interested parties. If these funds were eliminated (1.6% of total budget), FWC would seek alternative means to bring our message to these groups. (OCR)

Eliminate Remote Video Support (\$7,000) SGTF

The FWC has a still and video production team located in Tallahassee. These limited funds provide our team with additional professional videographers to provide support services when needed, as well as the ability to react to unique events in the central and south Florida regions on very short notice. (OCR)

Reduce Operational Support Costs

Reduce Replacement Equipment (\$12,800) MRCTF/ATF

This reduction would cause the office to extend the operational lifecycle of computers, video and graphics equipment and could reduce our service ability to the Divisions and Regions we support. (\$2,800 OCR; \$10,000 FBO)

Reduce Operating Expenses (\$165,381) ATF

A variety of strategies could be implemented to reduce expenditures in the Expense category. This may include reducing office supplies, maintenance, telecommunications and other expenses for office operations. These reductions would affect office efficiencies and reduce the ability to adequately provide administrative and operational services for internal and external customers. (\$61,732 OED; \$102,267 FBO; \$1,382 OPA)

Reduce Regional Office Operations Expenses (\$40,969) ATF

This 2% reduction in overhead would be accomplished by eliminating service agreements (HVAC, pest control, reduced lawn service and janitorial services), cutting back on postage, copier contracts, office supplies and other "common area" maintenance expenses. These reductions would diminish the quality of the work environment in the regional offices and reduce the agency's ability to provide

services to staff and the public. The Commission's regional offices, located in West Palm Beach, Lakeland, Ocala, Lake City and Panama City, serve as the main point of contact for the public, both in person and via telephone. These offices serve as hubs for Commission support and middle management staff who in turn provide the administration, coordination and leadership necessary for the delivery of divisional projects and daily operations.

Reduce OPS Part-Time Staffing (\$25,920) ATF

This proposal would reduce the Office's ability to hire temporary help in times of peak workload and to meet needs for special projects. This .5% reduction would likely lead to delays in meeting deadlines or overtime costs for regular employees in lieu of hiring temporary help. (FBO)

Eliminate Application Development Services for the Commission's Smaller Divisions/Offices (\$120,000) ATF

Eliminate all funds to pay for programming, website development and license requirements for the smaller Offices in OED that currently have no dedicated budget for these services. This would include the elimination of many upcoming mapping enhancements to the website, as well as halting efforts to automate paper process into our document management system. (OIT)

Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Reduce Habitat Restoration Funding (\$148,993) LATF

This issue would reduce the agency's ability to contract with the private and public sectors to conduct prescribed burning and other habitat management/restoration techniques for Florida's gopher tortoises and other threatened species with the possibility of elimination in some key regions of the state. Habitat management is a primary tool for long term conservation of gopher tortoises and other threatened species as described in the agency's management plan. Prescribed burning provides the most cost-effective, efficient mechanism for improving threatened species habitat, while at the same time decreases fuel loads which reduces the risk of wildfires. This reduction is 5% of the total program funding.

Eliminate Transfer to Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services/IFAS/Invasive Exotic Plant Research funding (\$844,171) IPCTF

This proposal would eliminate the transfer to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to fund invasive exotic plant research at the quarantine lab in Ft. Pierce for insects that must be quarantined before being released. Currently, the agency pays \$844,171 on a recurring basis to help support this program. This reduction is 100% of the total program funding.

Reduce Lake Restoration Funding (\$639,211) SGTF

This proposal would decrease funding for aquatic habitat management and restoration projects. The impact would be significant since the program was reduced 50% in FY 2009-10 due to declines in documentary stamp revenues. An additional reduction in budget authority would limit maintenance operations that are needed to sustain habitat quality and protect investments previously made on lake restoration projects. Reduced funding would also result in fewer aquatic habitat enhancement projects in public waterways, and limit maintenance or repair of water management infrastructure on state owned lands. Engineering services for some lake and wetland projects would be delayed, as would start-up and planning for future restoration projects. Monitoring of aquatic plant and animal communities needed to evaluate present and future restoration activities would be reduced. A significant portion of the aquatic habitat enhancement projects are conducted by private

sector contractors and reduced funding would directly impact the economic situation of these private contractors. This reduction is 16% of the total program funding.

Reduce Invasive Plant Management Funding (\$3,643,855) IPCTF

This proposal would reduce the agency's ability to manage aquatic and terrestrial invasive plants. The impact would be significant. Although some funding recovery has recently occurred, past reductions due to declines in documentary (doc) stamp revenues still leaves the program at 20% below the FY 08/09 funding levels, a decrease of \$8.4 million. An additional reduction in funding would result in significantly fewer invasive aquatic plant control projects in public waterways and upland invasive plant control projects on public conservation lands. Delays or cancellation of plant control projects can cause geometric increases in growth of invasive plants. With the significant program funding reductions that have occurred over the last four years, the upland plant management program is not able to initiate any new projects, and is only able to keep a small percentage of previous project sites from becoming re-infested. Further cuts would result in fewer project sites being funded, ultimately resulting in additional sites becoming re-infested after having spent significant tax dollars getting the invasive plants under control. Increasing invasive plant populations can have adverse impacts on recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, boating, swimming, and ecotourism, as well as adversely impacting beneficial native habitat that is critical for the management of fish and wildlife. These impacts would adversely affect the economy of communities in close proximity to these resources. In addition, excessive invasive plant populations in public waterways can restrict water flow and cause flooding during critical periods resulting in danger to human health and safety. A significant portion of the invasive plant control projects are conducted by contractors in the private sector. Reduced funding would directly impact the economic situation of these private contractors. This reduction is 6% of the total program funding.

Division of Law Enforcement

Eliminate 7 Law Enforcement Officer Positions (\$ 374,909) GR

Eliminate 35 Law Enforcement Officer Positions (\$1,911,770) MRCTF

This reduction would eliminate law enforcement officer positions. The calculation is based on the officer class (8515). The actual number would vary as higher level positions are eliminated based on vacancies. The per-officer savings is \$54,622 including salaries & benefits, incentives, and human resource contract costs.

Out of the agency's \$26.3 million recurring General Revenue (GR) budget, \$23.1 million (87.8%) supports the Division of Law Enforcement. It is unavoidable to include some portion of law enforcement in any need to significantly reduce agency GR appropriations. Due to the Division of Law Enforcement's primary role of fish, wildlife, state parks, state forests, and boating safety law enforcement patrol, the vast majority of its appropriations are used for salaries of employees that provide or support the patrol function.

A reduction of 42 sworn law enforcement officer positions would significantly impede the ability of the Division of Law Enforcement to provide law enforcement services to the citizens of Florida, meet the constitutional charge to protect fish and wildlife resources, and provide disaster relief or homeland security services when needed. The reduction would result in fewer high-visibility patrols in manatee areas, panther areas, wildlife management areas, state parks, state forests, and popular boating and fishing areas, currently serving as a deterrent to illegal activities. The agency's ability to respond rapidly to calls for service from the public would be reduced, and remaining officers would have to cover larger patrol zones. Efforts to insure the health and safety of the public would be reduced if these positions were eliminated, reducing the agency's ability to adequately provide boating safety

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patrol, investigate boating accidents, and respond to critical incidents that have a direct impact on the safety of Florida's citizens and visitors. FWC's ability to respond to man-made and natural disasters would also be adversely impacted. Responding safely to major catastrophic events requires extensive training, preparations, logistics, and scheduling. Having fewer people to respond to such events presents additional workload and risk to those who do respond.

Abbreviations

(R) – Recurring Appropriation
(NR) – Non-Recurring Appropriation
CARL - Conservation & Recreation Lands Program
CARLTF – Conservation & Recreation Lands Program Trust Fund
DFFM – Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management
DHGM – Division of Hunting & Game Management
DHSC – Division of Habitat & Species Conservation
Dist - Distribution
DLE – Division of Law Enforcement
DMFM – Division of Marine Fisheries Management
FCO – Fixed Capital Outlay
FFTF – Florida Forever Trust Fund
FGTF – Federal Grants Trust Fund
FG/MR - Federal Grants Trust Fund and Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund
FPRMTF – Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund
FTE – Full Time Equivalent Employee Position
FWRI – Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
FWC – Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
FY – Fiscal Year
FYCCN – Florida Youth Conservation Center Network
GDTF – Grants and Donations Trust Fund
IPCTF – Invasive Plant Control Trust Fund
LATF – Land Acquisition Trust Fund
Maint - Maintenance
Mgmt – Management
MRCTF – Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund
OED – Office of Executive Director
NWTF – Nongame Wildlife Trust Fund
OPAWVS – Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing Services
OPS – Other Personal Services (includes part-time & temporary employment wages)
SG/MR – State Game Trust Fund and Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund
SGTF – State Game Trust Fund
TF –Trust Funds (various)
USFWS – United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WMA – Wildlife Management Area

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