

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Nick Wiley

DATE: January 28, 2015

SUBJECT: February 2015 Executive Director's Report

Announcements

FWC Announces new law enforcement director – FWC is pleased to announce that as of January 2nd, Curtis Brown is the new director of FWC law enforcement. After serving in the U.S. Air Force, Brown worked his way up within the FWC. He began as an officer in Hendry and Collier counties in 1991 then worked as an investigator, lieutenant, captain and major throughout the state. Colonel Brown brings a wealth of experience working with FWC teams and stakeholders to address complex conservation challenges. He succeeds Calvin Adams Jr., who served as director of law enforcement since May 2013 and is retiring.

Accomplishments/Awards

FWC completes reaccreditation assessment - In December 2014, the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation (CFA) conducted reaccreditation assessments that included examining compliance files in Tallahassee and inspecting facilities and interviewing staff in Pensacola, Lake City, Ft. Myers, West Palm Beach, and Miami. Assessors determined during this process that the FWC adheres to CFA standards and unanimously recommended that the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement be reaccredited. This recommendation will be reviewed by CFA Commissioners at the next CFA Commission meeting this February in Daytona Beach. This accomplishment validates the hard work FWC staff agency-wide that is put into serving the residents and visitors of Florida.

Marine Turtle Permit Program online for the first time – More than 200 Marine Turtle Permit Holders work with 2,000-plus volunteers to patrol beaches and monitor sea turtle nesting in Florida. They now have access to a new FWC online system to efficiently submit and track their permit applications and reports regarding their work to document sea turtles, their nests and hatchlings. FWC's sea turtle management program collaborated with information technology staff to develop and implement the online permitting system.

Gopher tortoise smartphone app gains recognition – The journal *Florida Scientist* accepted a paper for publication on the new free FWC smartphone app that allows the public to submit gopher tortoise sightings and locations to the agency. FWC gopher tortoise staff wrote about the app and its popularity. Successful use of this citizen science app yielded over 600 submissions of gopher

tortoise sightings in the first four months after the “Florida Gopher Tortoise” app became available.

Partnerships

Cold-stunned sea turtles from New England waters arrive in Florida -

Responding to a National Marine Fisheries Service request, the FWC facilitated transport of 193 cold-stunned, endangered Kemp’s ridley sea turtles from Boston’s New England Aquarium to Florida. On November 25th, the U.S. Coast Guard flew the sea turtles to Orlando where they were met by staff from the FWC, National Marine Fisheries Service, Pilots N Paws, and representatives from Florida facilities authorized by the FWC to hold and care for the animals. FWC staff worked with multiple facilities to find space for the cold-stressed sea turtles, which were sent to sites such as SeaWorld of Florida, Disney’s Living Seas, The Florida Aquarium, The Miami Seaquarium, The Turtle Hospital, Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, and Gulf World Marine Park. On December 4th, 35 transferred sea turtles were released into the Gulf of Mexico at St. George Island State Park; on December 15th, 22 turtles were released at Canaveral National Seashore.

FWC opens new archery park - FWC’s Klondike Archery Park formally opened in Escambia County with a ribbon cutting on December 10th. The park features a variety of lighted archery ranges, including ranges specifically for young shooters, traditional field archery ranges and an elevated archery platform – simulating shooting from a treestand. FWC partnered with Escambia County to develop the former Klondike Landfill into a beneficial reuse as an Archery Park. Escambia County Solid Waste supplied the land for the park, recycled trees from the cleared site into mulch, cleared debris, provided fill dirt, electricity and water connections. FWC provided funding for the construction of the park through the Wildlife Restoration program. FWC and Escambia County partnered with Panhandle Bowhunters and Archery Association to oversee the daily operation of the facility.

Mosquito Lagoon Marine Enhancement Center opens plant nursery and shoreline education area in northeast Florida

– On November 18th, the FWC held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the opening of the Mosquito Lagoon Marine Enhancement Center’s new marsh plant nursery, kayak launch, and shoreline education area in New Smyrna Beach. The project in Volusia County was implemented by the agency with help from volunteers. It is part of a long-term plan of estuarine habitat restoration in northeast Florida. The marsh features a shoreline stabilization demonstration area for visitors to learn about environmentally friendly stabilization techniques. The on-site partner, Marine Discovery Center, will expand its programs for all ages by using the marsh and a new kayak launch. Other project partners include the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, St. Johns Water Management District, Costa Del Mar Inc., New Smyrna Beach, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

New Regional Conservation Partnership Program to benefit Florida - Florida is receiving a portion of more than \$370 million being awarded to states as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), administered by the

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) under the 2014 Farm Bill. The outcome will be improved habitat for imperiled species, including the Florida panther, gopher tortoise, and Florida grasshopper sparrow, along with numerous other fish and wildlife species. On January 16th at a joint press conference held by the FWC and NRCS in Tallahassee, FWC Executive Director Nick Wiley announced this new public-private partnership opportunity, which builds on the agency's strong history of working with other agencies to assist private landowners with fish and wildlife conservation. Florida's regional conservation partnership project will be focused in Polk, Osceola, Okeechobee, Highlands, Hardee, Desoto, and Glades counties. FWC will work within this area with landowners interested in developing or enhancing wildlife habitat on their properties. Farm Bill conservation program funding provided through this RCPP grant will be utilized to purchase conservation easements and provide cost-shares for implementing important habitat management activities such as prescribed burning. The Conservation easements proposed within the project's focal area will be evaluated and prioritized based upon the extent that one or more of the target species and supporting habitat would be conserved. Florida also will benefit from multi-state RCPP partnerships, including the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Partnership and other partnerships to help restore native longleaf pine forests. Private landowners interested in participating in these partnerships can contact a regional biologist in the FWC's Landowner Assistance Program: <http://myfwc.com/conservation/special-initiatives/lap/>.

Camps for Champions Event - The Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition began their 70-day, 1000 mile trek at the Everglades headwaters near Orlando on January 10. They headed through the Green Swamp toward the coast and turned north. As we conduct the Commission meeting they are bicycling through the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area Tide Swamp and Hickory Mound units. The expedition team members will take a break near Tallahassee to participate in an event at the *Camps for Champions* conducted on Friday, February 6th, from 4:00 to 8:00 PM by FWC's Youth Conservation Center Network in cooperation with the Department of Children and Families. Expedition members will help lead youth through fishing, archery, and hiking activities. After dark there will be an outside screening of the Expedition team's award winning documentary film of their 2012 journey from the Everglades to the Okefenokee Swamp.

A series of "Trail Mixers" will be held to allow guests to meet and participate in corridor events. Upcoming mixers include the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Hike on February 7th, the Owl Creek Paddle in the Apalachicola National Forest on February 21st, the "Black Bear Affair" at the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center on March 7th, and the Blackwater River Paddle on March 14th.

Turkey Lake partnership with Bass Pro Shops - Thanks to a longstanding partnership between Bass Pro Shops Orlando and the City of Orlando, Turkey Lake continues to be a prime fishing destination for visitors from all over the country and the world. Angler surveys between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014 showed a record high catch rate for largemouth bass on Turkey Lake (1.04 bass/man-hr), which was 2-3 times higher than the state average. The lake is a Fish Orlando FAB FIVE water

body and is managed for a high-quality fishing experience. There is no public boat access on the lake due to deed restrictions, so a boat rental program was initiated in 2001. This program allows anglers to rent one of four Tracker Grizzly boats donated by Bass Pro Shops. To keep the angling experience at a high quality, boat fishing pressure is limited to 10 man-hours per acre per year, and the largemouth bass are protected by a catch-and-release regulation. Additionally, fisheries habitat has been maintained by numerous aquatic habitat restoration projects in partnership with the City of Orlando. Four brush fish attractors and five fishing piers round out the angler amenities that have caught the attention of local, state and national media, including a recent feature article in Florida Sportsman Magazine.

Events

George H. W. Bush Vamos A Pescar Miami Family Fishing Day - On Saturday, April 18, a family fishing festival will be held at Tropical Park in Miami. FWC is sponsoring the event in partnership with the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Miami-Dade County, Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), Bass Pro Shops, Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, Captain Diego Toiran, and many other organizations. The goal of the event is to introduce Miami residents, especially Hispanics and other minorities to fishing and boating. Music, games, interactive booths, food, celebrities, and fishing instruction will entertain attendees and encourage registration for summer family and youth camps offered through the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network. FWC is working with RBFF on their 5-year initiative to increase Hispanic participation in fishing and boating. Johnny Morris, founder of Bass Pro Shops, made the initial donation to the George H. W. Bush Vamos A Pescar ("Let's Go Fishing) Education Fund that will help support this event.

Bully net/Barracuda Workshops – FWC staff will host several workshops later this February on bully netting for lobster and on barracuda. These workshops come at the direction of the Commission at their November meeting. Bully netting workshops are scheduled for February 23 in Key West, February 24 in Key Colony Beach, and February 26 in Key Largo. At the bully netting workshops, staff will gather stakeholder input on creating an endorsement for commercial bully netters, a possible change to the commercial vessel limit, and more. A barracuda workshop is scheduled for February 25 in Key Colony Beach, with a second workshop in the Broward County area and a statewide webinar tentatively scheduled for early March. At these barracuda workshops, staff will gather input on the implementation of potential management measures such as size limits and bag limits.

BlueGreen event raises money for Florida's youth - FWC Commissioner, Alligator Ron Bergeron, hosted the third annual BlueGreen Event at his Green Glades Ranch on November 15th. The annual event, organized by the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, focuses on raising money to help connect today's youth with the outdoors and create the Next Generation That Cares™. Funds are raised through the sales of event sponsorships, donations, raffle auctions of donated items, and live auction items. Examples of live auction items include an authentic Louisiana BBQ meal for 6 cooked in your home by former Miami Dolphin

Mark Duper, and a deep sea fishing trip with Captain Rick Murphy from Sportsman's Adventures. This year's BlueGreen event helped to raise over \$800,000 for the cause. Among other things, funds from this event will be used to improve the existing Everglades Youth Conservation Camp at J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area. At the event, Florida's Agriculture Commissioner, Adam Putnam, was presented with the 2014 BlueGreen Award for Conservation Leadership in Florida.

Updates

New recreational fishing and hunting license app - Buying an FWC recreational fishing or hunting license has never been easier courtesy of the new Fish-Hunt-FL application for Android, Apple, and Windows smartphone devices. This interactive app gives the public easy access to purchasing any recreational fishing or hunting license offered by the FWC. Users can check out recent FWC news, look at the current sunrise/sunset time for their area, check the coastal waters forecasts, and look up hunting and fishing regulations. Licenses displayed electronically with this app serve the same purpose as paper licenses, so users can simply show their phone to an officer if needed. The app can be downloaded for free by searching FWC in the App Store or Google Play.

Florida Youth Sportsman Lifetime License Promotion Sales - On November 13th, Governor Scott signed Executive Order 14-2014 authorizing FWC to offer a reduced cost Lifetime Sportsman's license for Florida children and youth ages 5-21. This promotional period was valid from November 24th through December 31st and reduced the cost for this license from \$1000.00 to \$500.00. Additionally, during the same promotional period, FWC offered children and youth ages 5-21 who held a Lifetime Hunting, Freshwater, or Saltwater license to upgrade to the reduced cost Lifetime Sportsman's license by paying the difference in their original license cost and the discounted price. During this period 6,866 promotional Lifetime Sportsman's licenses were sold, 122 of which were upgrades. In comparison, we sold in 1,528 Lifetime Sportsman's licenses in Fiscal Year 13/14 and 1,385 in Fiscal Year 12/13 for all age groups.

FWC continues captive wildlife rule reviews - FWC staff are holding a series of public meetings around the state to let the public address captive wildlife staff regarding their concerns and provide comments as part of FWC's captive wildlife rule review process. The goal is to work with stakeholders to provide useful recommendations for improving captive wildlife regulations to protect the public and provide for animal welfare. Four meetings were already held, two in southwest Florida and two in south Florida. 50 members of the public attended the meeting in Tampa, 17 members of the public attended a meeting in Fort Myers, 33 members of the public attended the meeting in Palm Beach, and 10 members of the public attended the meeting in Miami. Staff collectively received over 55 recommendations from the four meetings including feedback regarding rules on documentation of experience for certain wildlife, conditional species, standard caging requirements, licensing for mobile exhibition, importation of non-native wildlife, and protected species. Recommendations have also been submitted through the mail, email, and using an online form on captive wildlife's website. Over 1,200 recommendations

have been received to date. After stakeholder engagement is complete, draft rule language will be developed as appropriate for further consideration by the Commission.

TrophyCatch Season-two finale - Season-two of TrophyCatch concluded on September 30, 2014. We are now into season-three, which promises to increase the outstanding growth and popularity of this citizen-science program. Among recent highlights was the presentation of the TrophyCatch champion's ring to Joseph "Brooks" Morrell from Hampton. Morrell caught, documented and released the winning 14-pound, 9-ounce bass at Kingsley Lake, in Clay County, last March. Tom Champeau, KP Clements, and partners from the American Outdoors Fund, Bass Pro Shops, and Mercury Marine were there for the presentation of the ring, which was donated by the American Outdoors Fund. Morrell actually had two Hall of Fame bass from which fiberglass replicas were created that were also presented to him at the ceremony. The other two Hall of Fame fish from the second season were landed by Len Andrews and Van Sole.

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 working closely with the Department of Economic Opportunity, DACS and the local oyster industry to identify suitable sites in the Bay. Oyster fishermen have started shelling which 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. Staff continues to provide expertise related to the lawsuit Florida filed against Georgia pertaining to harm to Florida's resources.

Eastpoint bear response update – On December 21st, FWC law enforcement officers and biologists immediately responded to the scene where a bear attacked a 15-year-old girl as she was walking her dog. The incident happened in Eastpoint, Franklin County. First and foremost the FWC has deep concern for Ms. Leah Reeder and her family. We have been in close communication with the family to provide support, listen and learn as much as possible about the attack, and share information with them as our response moves forward. The FWC Commission and staff sincerely wish Leah a speedy and full recovery. We trapped and removed six bears from the area. Four adult bears were euthanized and two cubs were relocated to the Osceola National Forest. We confirmed through genetic testing that one of the euthanized bears was responsible for attacking the teenager. Public safety is our most paramount concern, and FWC staff is continuing to work in Franklin County to identify and remove any bears that pose a public safety risk.