

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Nick Wiley

DATE: June 16, 2015

SUBJECT: June 2015 Executive Director's Report

Accomplishments/Awards

FWC Recognized as Agency of the Year - The Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) recognized the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as the "Agency of the Year" at their 2015 National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. QDMA cited and applauded FWC's years of hard work improving deer conservation and hunting in Florida through the development and implementation of a Strategic Plan for Deer Management. This award reflects a broad team effort involving scientific research, management, stakeholder participation, and strong support from Commissioners.

Events

License-Free Fishing Days – License-Free fishing days provide an excellent opportunity to introduce a friend to fishing without having to purchase a license. During license-free fishing days the recreational fishing license requirement is waived for residents and non-residents; however, all other bag limit, season, gear, and size restrictions apply. Two of the four license-free recreational saltwater fishing days occurred on June 6-7 and the second of two license-free recreational freshwater fishing weekends occurred on June 13-14 as part of this year's National Fishing and Boating Week.

Lionfish Removal and Awareness Day – FWC hosted a festival this past May in Pensacola to celebrate the first annual Lionfish Removal and Awareness Day. More than 3,000 people attended the two-day festival which was held in conjunction with a lionfish tournament sponsored by the Gulf Coast Lionfish Coalition. Activities included art and conservation booths, fillet demonstrations, celebrity chefs, kids' activities, and guest speakers Dr. Guy Harvey and Pensacola Mayor Ashton Hayward. FWC promoted several other lionfish removal events held across the state that same weekend. More than 2,000 lionfish were removed from Florida waters, including 704 lionfish collected at the month-long Northeast Lionfish Blast in Jacksonville. Staff will present the outcome of this event at the September Commission meeting.

Marine Fisheries Management Workshops – FWC will host several workshops across the state during the month of July to develop a better understanding of the public's views on marine fisheries management. Staff encourage anyone interested in marine fisheries management issues to participate. In preparation for the

workshops, FWC staff conducted a survey that was emailed to more than 400,000 people throughout the state to gather information about stakeholder values and marine fisheries concerns. At the workshops staff will present on current statewide and regional fisheries management issues, stakeholder concerns, and potential marine fisheries issues that were brought to their attention. Participants will be asked to let FWC staff know where they believe the Agency should focus its efforts related to marine fisheries management in the coming years. Workshops are from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM local time in the following cities: July 6: Key West and Naples; July 7: Islamorada and Punta Gorda; July 8: Coral Gables and St. Petersburg; July 9: Jupiter and Crystal River; July 13: Pensacola; July 14: Destin; July 15: Panama City; July 16: Steinhatchee; July 20: Stuart; July 21: Fort Pierce; July 22: Cocoa; July 23: Ormond Beach; July 27: Statewide Webinar; July 28: Carrabelle; and July 30: Jacksonville.

Partnerships

FWC and partners recognized by Palm Beach County Commission - The FWC along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Marine Industries of Palm Beach County, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) was recognized by the Palm Beach County Commission for the restoration of Grassy Flats, a portion of the Lake Worth Lagoon. The project restored Palm Beach County's largest estuary and revived its appeal to anglers, boaters, and wildlife enthusiasts as fish, oysters, and other wildlife returned to an area that was previously uninhabitable. The Grassy Flats project consisted of: placement of approximately 52,000 cubic yards of sand over 12 acres to cap muck sediment and create two islands; creation of 13 acres of valuable marine estuarine habitat, including seagrass, saltmarsh and artificial reef/oyster habitat; placement of about 2,800 tons of limestone to stabilize the islands; planting of about 2,900 red mangroves and 25,000 plugs of smooth cordgrass.

Emerging Issues

New strains of bird flu may impact Florida - Two highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses (HPAI-H5N8, H5N2) are causing extensive mortality in domestic poultry across the US. The viruses are believed to be maintained in wild waterfowl, and although some wild bird mortalities have been reported, the virus is having its greatest impact on poultry. The viruses are expected to be found in the Atlantic Flyway later this year. FWC is coordinating with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS), Florida Department of Health (DOH), US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and other fish and wildlife agencies in affected states to ensure that FWC is proactively preparing for the likely introduction of the virus. FWC staff are investigating wild bird mortality events, conducting necropsies, and testing for avian influenza. Staff are also collaborating with wildlife rehabilitators to test high risk birds at their facilities. Additional testing of wild birds in cooperation with USDA-Wildlife Services will begin this summer and surveillance in hunter-killed birds will be conducted by FWC this fall. At this time

both H5N8 and H5N2 are believed to pose little risk to humans and no human infections have been reported in North America.

Updates

Apalachicola Oyster Status – Overall harvests from the winter reefs continue to be low. FWC staff are working with the Department of Economic Opportunity, DACS, and the local oyster industry to identify suitable sites in the Bay for habitat improvements. Oyster fishermen have been placing shell on important commercial oyster harvesting bars. A small area of East Hole oyster reef received shell placed by oyster fishermen in 2013-14 and opened for commercial harvest for four days in May. Bag limits were rapidly achieved by 100-140 boats, demonstrating the importance of placing suitable oyster habit in the Bay. Oyster sampling to determine the status of the summer oyster reefs was completed and the oyster populations are not as high as the previous two years. Summer oyster reef regulations have been set and are similar to the changes made during the winter season including lowered bag limits, the closure of East Hole, and weekend closures. DACS recently established new requirements for oyster cooling, which reduces the daily time available for commercial harvesting. Staff continue to provide expertise related to the lawsuit Florida filed against Georgia pertaining to harm to Florida's resources.

Increase in Federal Duck Stamp - Beginning July 1, the price of the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp will increase by \$10.00, going from \$15.00 to \$25.00. This stamp is required of all waterfowl hunters ages 16 and older. This increase, which had very strong support from sportsmen and conservation groups, will provide additional funding for wetland protection and restoration. This stamp has one of the highest returns-on-investment of any federal program. Ninety-eight cents of every dollar generated goes directly to land conservation or on-the-ground efforts. Federal legislation stipulates that the additional \$10.00 will be limited to conservation easement programs.

Biscayne National Park – Biscayne National Park (BNP) selected a final option for its General Management Plan for visitor use and activities in the park. The final plan includes a Marine Reserve Zone that prohibits fishing altogether within that zone, despite FWC's objection to this closure. The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) is working with the National Park Service (NPS) to form a research team that will include staff from FWC, NOAA Fisheries, leading academic research institutions, and the NPS. This team will evaluate the current condition of the park's marine resources and measure the success of the General Management Plan. After research is completed by the team, FWC staff will work with BNP on consideration of implementing components of the Fishery Management Plan.

In Memoriam

Mariana Jones – Mariana B. Jones, 81, passed away at the end of May. Mariana and her husband Johnny were recognized as leaders in the environmental community. They were outdoor recreationalists, conservationists, and legislative

activists with an astonishing level of accomplishments. In 2002, FWC established the John and Mariana Jones/Hungryland Wildlife and Environmental Area in their honor. Marianna will be deeply missed by her friends and family, but never forgotten as a result of her tremendous accomplishments in conservation.