

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
Office of Legislative Affairs

September/2005 FWC Congressional Report

▪ **Transportation Bill**

The long awaited reauthorization of the federal transportation bill, which contained a number of provisions of interest to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, was recently passed by both the U.S. House and the Senate. This legislation, totaling \$286.5 billion, will direct all revenues from the 18.3 cents per gallon tax to the Sport fish Restoration Act's Aquatic Resources Trust Fund (ARTF). This will add an additional \$110 million to the trust fund which distributes more than \$450 million annually. Under the formula, it should also bring an additional \$3 million to Florida.

The ARTF is used for state-based boating safety, fisheries conservation and boating access programs as well as for support of coastal wetlands, and marine sanitation device facilities.

Previously, the federal government captured 4.8 cents of every gallon, and used these dollars for deficit reduction. With the successful inclusion of this provision in the bill, it ensures that the remaining expenditures by boaters and anglers on motor boat fuel flows back to the preservation and restoration of waterways.

Also adopted in this legislation were many other sportsmen friendly sections containing funding for recreational trails, refuge roads and culverts for fish passage.

▪ **State Wildlife Grants (SWG)**

One of the first bills through the Congressional appropriation process this year was the Interior Appropriation bill which funds the U.S. Department of Interior, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the EPA. Overall, the Interior budget was reduced by 2.5 percent.

A key component of this legislation is funding for State Wildlife Grants (SWG). This program provides funding to every state to support cost effective conservation aimed at keeping wildlife from becoming endangered. In Florida, it has helped us implement a number of important programs that benefit wildlife and their habitat.

Last year, Congress allocated \$69 million to this program. Although the overall Interior budget was significantly reduced, the coalition of states and conservation organizations managed to keep the allocation at \$68.5 million. This was a result of many organizations who are FWC stakeholders, contacting their Congressional Representatives and Senators to express support for sustained levels of funding for State Wildlife Grants program.

FWC, which last year received approximately \$2.6 million from this program, spent many hours personally talking to Florida Congressional members and staff about the importance of these funds, and also coordinated the grassroots effort to mobilize stakeholders.

- **Federal Appropriation Issues**

FWC worked with several members of the Florida Congressional delegation including the four members on the Appropriations Committee and our two Senators, to assist our efforts to secure earmarked appropriations in support of conservation programs. Among the requests that were made, were the following items:

- Florida Manatee Rescue and Necropsy Program (\$275,000)
- Vessel Replacement (\$3.0 million)
- Recreational Boating Characterization (\$400,000 per year for five years)
- Cooperative Reef Fish Research and Monitoring Initiative in the Gulf of Mexico (\$1,000,000 per year for three years for eastern Gulf of Mexico pilot study)
- Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (\$250,000 increase)

None of these requests made it to the final version of the Interior Appropriation bill.

- **Magnuson-Stevens**

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is the primary law dealing with fisheries resources and fishing activities in Federal waters which are defined as those waters extending from the edge of State waters to the 200 mile limit. The Act created eight Regional Fishery Management Councils. These councils are responsible for managing fishery resources for conservation purposes, and for allocating resources among various, and often competing interests.

This legislation is scheduled to be reauthorized by Congress, and is in fact several years overdue in being reauthorized. This process will shape fishery resources and shape the balance between science and economics for the rest of this decade. The FWC has begun to formulate a plan for how this important statute can be improved and made more representative of Florida's interests.

This plan will serve as the basis for discussions with the Florida Congressional delegation regarding support for specific changes, and also guide the development of coalitions with other states that would similarly benefit from these changes.

- **Coasts, Coral Reefs and Invasive Species**

Before Congress adjourned for their August break, legislation advanced in a Senate Commerce subcommittee on several important issues. The Ballast Water Management Act was approved to combat introduction of invasive species arriving in ships' ballast water. The bill would require ships entering American waters from foreign ports exchange their ballast water at least 200 nautical miles from the nearest point of land.

Under a reauthorized Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) authorized funding for the Coastal Zone Management Program would increase. As part of the enhancement grants program, the bill would allow states receiving additional monies to use a portion of it on non-point source control efforts. The bill would create a new grant program worth more than \$29 million to help communities address the impact of development and sprawl on coastal communities, and the impact of non-point source pollution.

S 1390 would reauthorize and strengthen the 2000 Coral Reef Conservation Act. The bill is intended to move federal efforts from monitoring to action to improve coral conservation. This legislation would increase annual authorizations, and give NOAA authority to respond to an emergency involving vessel groundings on coral reefs under circumstances not already covered under federal law.

- **Electronic Duck Stamp**

This legislation would direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a three year pilot program under which up to 15 states may issue electronic Federal migratory bird hunting stamps. It would not replace the traditional paper stamp, but instead is viewed as a way to simplify the process of purchasing a stamp and keep up with the electronic delivery of hunting licenses.

Congressional Sportsman's Caucus Co-Chair U.S. Representative Adam Putnam from Florida, recently sent a letter to the House Resource Committee expressing the full support of the Caucus for the Federal Electronic Duck Stamp. The 15 states that will be part of the pilot program, should the bill be adopted by Congress, are not identified in the legislation.