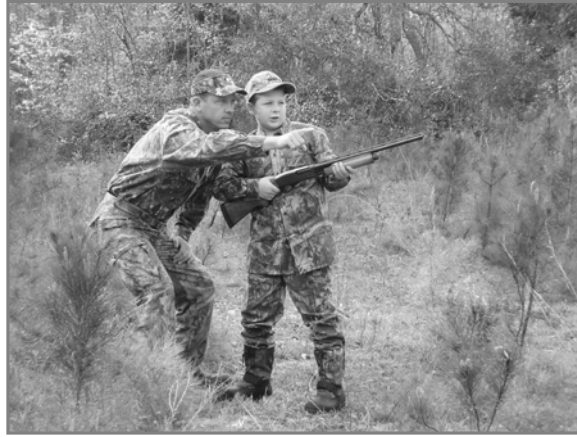


FUTURE OF HUNTING IN FLORIDA

December 2006 Update



2005 Florida Hunting Summit

Top 5 Issues for Action Plan:

- Building a unified and politically strong coalition of hunting organizations
- Recruiting and retaining hunters
- Increasing opportunities on public lands
- Increasing opportunities on private lands
- Ethics and conservation



Here are the top 5 issues for action identified at the 2005 Summit on the Future of Hunting in Florida. This presentation today will focus on increasing opportunities for hunting on public lands.

Top 3 Action Plan Items

Increasing Opportunities on Public Lands

- Review all state & federally owned lands that are currently closed to hunting.

One of the first steps in the Hunting Summit action plan under this general issue was to conduct an inventory of public lands that are closed to hunting. As many know by now, Florida's 2006 Legislature passed a bill that requires this inventory under the title of "No Net Loss of Hunting Lands". In fact, this new legislation requires much more than just an inventory of public lands closed to hunting. It also requires an inventory of lands open to hunting and mandates that the current acreage of public hunting lands be maintained for the future. There is a lot of interest in this new legislation, and I believe, given the importance of hunting opportunities to the future of hunting in Florida, that it would be appropriate to provide an overview of this new law and a summary of reports that have been submitted by various state agencies and water management districts.

New Legislation for 2006:

No Net Loss of Hunting Lands

- House Bill 265; Senate Bill 430
- Effective June 7, 2006; Section 372.0025, Florida Statutes
- Overview and Clarification/Interpretation
- Summary of First Reports

This legislation called “No Net Loss of Hunting Lands” was signed into law by Governor Jeb Bush as Section 372.0025, Florida Statutes on June 7, 2006. It requires certain lands owned, managed, or leased by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to be used for the purpose of hunting; requires the commission to support, promote, and enhance hunting opportunities; requires the commission to provide comparable acreage for any loss of existing hunting lands; provides requirements for location and use of replacement lands; requires state agencies and water management districts to allow certain lands to be used for the purpose of hunting; provides an exemption for lands within the state park system; authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection to make certain determinations relating to such lands; requires annual reports to the commission and Legislature.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (1): Definitions

Commission (FWC):

- *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*

Hunting:

- *lawful (or attempted) pursuit, trapping, shooting, capture, collection, or killing of wildlife.*

Commission-managed lands:

- lands owned by FWC;
- lands owned by the state where FWC has management authority;
- privately-owned lands leased or managed by FWC.

This statute provides the above definitions for key terms and references.

Clarification Points:

“Commission-managed lands”:

- to include all areas established and regulated for public hunting under FWC rules that are owned by the state, agencies of the state or private landowners.
- excluding all federally-owned lands (i.e. National Forests, National Preserves, Federal Military Installations, and National Wildlife Refuges).

Clarification Points:

Acreage of Lands in Florida's WMA system:

- 3.26 million acres of "Commission-managed" lands including:
 - 3.07 million acres owned by the State of Florida and;
 - 185,000 acres privately owned.

- 2.38 million acres of Federally-owned lands.

Under the definition of "commission managed" lands found in section 372.0025, F.S., as of June 7, 2006, the total acreage for commission managed lands was about 3.26 million acres. This figure includes about 2.88 million acres of lands owned by the State of Florida (1.1 million where FWC is landowner or lead manager). The 3.26 million acres of "commission managed" lands also includes about 360,000 acres of privately owned land. In addition to the "commission managed" lands, there are about 2.38 million acres of lands open for public hunting in the WMA system that is federally owned. The total acreage of state, private, and federal lands open for public hunting in the WMA system is about 5.6 million acres.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (2): Commission-managed lands shall be open for hunting except as limited:

- for public safety;
- for fish or wildlife management;
- for homeland security;
- or as otherwise limited by law.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (3): In exercising authority under the Constitution and statutes, the FWC shall:

- exercise authority consistent with subsection (2);
- in a manner that supports, promotes, and enhances hunting opportunities;
- to the extent authorized by state law.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (4):

FWC decisions and actions shall not result in ***any net loss*** of acreage available for hunting on ***commission-managed*** lands that *exist* on effective date; June 7, 2006.

FWC shall expeditiously find replacement acreage to compensate for closures of any ***existing hunting*** land.

Clarification Point:

What is meant by references to a “baseline” acreage for hunting lands?

- This would be the acreage of “Commission-managed” lands available for hunting that existed on June 7, 2006.
- This would be the threshold point where the requirement for finding “replacement” acreage would kick in.
- Existing “baseline” acres were “available” or open under FWC rules for hunting during the 2005/2006 hunting season.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (4) continued:

Replacement lands shall, to the greatest extent possible:

- be located within the same FWC administrative region (FWC has 5 administrative regions);
- be consistent with the hunting discipline that was allowed on the closed land.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (5): Any state agency or water management district (WMD):

- that owns or manages lands;
- shall assist, coordinate, and cooperate with FWC to allow hunting on such lands;
- if determined by FWC to be suitable for hunting;

Questions/Discussion Points:

How does FWC determine what is suitable for hunting?

- Must be compatible with established purposes for acquisition and management with concurrence of landowner or lead managing agency.
- Must have adequate presence of game species for sustainable hunting.
- Must be large enough to accommodate a minimum level of public hunting.
- Compatible with other uses of the property.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (5) continued: To ensure no net loss of land acreage available for hunting, state agencies and WMDs shall:

- cooperate with FWC to open new, additional hunting lands to replace lost hunting acreage;
- state parks excluded except as necessary for wildlife control or management as determined by DEP.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Subsection (6): By October 1 of each year, FWC Executive Director shall report regarding commission-managed lands:

- acres closed to hunting during the previous fiscal year (July – June);
- acres opened to compensate for closures of existing land pursuant to subsection (4).

FWC Report for 2005-2006 Fiscal Year

Acres closed to hunting during the previous fiscal year (July 2005 – June 2006)

851 acres removed - Econfina Creek WMA

Acres opened to compensate for closures of existing land pursuant to subsection (4).

1,271 acres added – Econfina Creek WMA

There was an exchange and purchase of properties associated with the Econfina Creek WMA that resulted in removing 851 acres and adding 1,271 acres which resulted in a net gain of 420 acres. The lead manager for this property is the Northwest Florida Water Management District.

Overview - 372.0025, F.S.

Provision (7): By October 1 of each year, any state agency or WMD that owns or manages lands shall submit:

- a list of properties that were open for hunting during the previous fiscal year (July – June);
- a list of properties that were not open for hunting during the previous fiscal year;
- acreage and county for each property;
- excluding right-of-way lands and parcels under 50 acres.

Report for 2005-2006 Fiscal Year

Summary of Properties Open for Hunting

143 Properties -- 5,633,000 acres.

This includes all state, private, and federal lands established as Wildlife Management Areas, Wildlife and Environmental Areas, Public Use Areas, Public Waterfowl Areas, Public Small Game Hunting Areas.

Report for 2005-2006 Fiscal Year

Summary of Properties Not Open for Hunting

35 Properties -- 55,085 acres.

This includes Critical Wildlife Areas, Small Game Hunting Areas, Wildlife and Environmental Areas, Wildlife Management Areas that were established but not open for hunting during the fiscal year.

Questions?