

MEMORANDUM

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Kenneth D. Haddad, Executive Director

DATE: August 4, 2006

SUBJECT: Executive Director's Report

Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management (FFM)

→On July 11, 2006, the Juniper Lake Fish Management Area drawdown valve was opened to begin partially dewatering this 665-acre impoundment in Florida's panhandle. The drawdown is designed to improve sport fish habitat by exposing rank stands of aquatic vegetation to freezing temperatures this winter. An engineering firm, funded by FWC's Aquatic Resource Enhancement Section, is measuring muck depths in the littoral zone of the lake to determine if muck removal is needed and practical. The 40+ year-old drawdown structure will also be rebuilt while the lake is dewatered.

→Smith Lake, located on the Washington/Holmes County border near Bonifay was re-opened to fishing on May 1, 2006, following aquatic habitat restoration. Because the 160-acre lake was dewatered completely, bluegill and shellcracker (redeer sunfish) were stocked in fall 2003 and largemouth bass and channel catfish were stocked the following spring. Beginning on opening day, an angler creel survey was conducted for six weeks. We estimate 1,811 channel catfish, 1,017 bluegill and 147 largemouth bass were caught during the survey. Before the restoration, the lake had degraded to the point where the fishery was almost nonexistent.

Division of Habitat and Species Conservation (HSC)

→The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Jacksonville District Engineer selected a tentative plan for the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study (LORSS) in June. Much time and effort have been invested by USACE, SFWMD, USEPA, USFWS, and FWC personnel since November 2005 to develop alternative water regulation schedules to replace current ones, and develop and review performance measures. Initial plans involved balancing ecological needs of Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie Estuary, Caloosahatchee Estuary, water conservation areas, and Everglades National Park. Ecological integrity of affected ecosystems, water supply, navigation, and public safety (Herbert Hoover Dike) were given equal weight in the initial evaluation process. The water regulation schedule selected by the District Engineer will result in a dramatic overall lower level, but promises to result in minimal downstream impacts, the greatest of which at this time appears to be to the Caloosahatchee Estuary. The proposed schedule will be presented to the public at a series of meetings. This is a general information dissemination

meeting; the formal review process is slated for initiation in early August. The selected plan is to be in place in January 2007 and continue through 2010 when a new schedule will be developed to take advantage of infrastructure implemented through the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project.

→In November 2005, the Lake Josephine Aquatic Habitat Enhancement Drawdown Project began with installation of two temporary dams and four pumps to dewater the central basin of this 1,236-acre lake in Highlands County. In May 2006, the last dam between the west and central basin was breached and removed to equalize water levels within the lake. During the project, 134 acres of shallow-water littoral habitat were enhanced by the removal of tussock and organic sediments that accumulated within these areas over the last 40 years. Since water level regulation was implemented on Lake Josephine in the late 1960s, the lake's aquatic habitat has undergone a dramatic change. Inability to flood the lake and its floodplain to historical levels, lack of sufficient seasonal and annual fluctuation, maintenance of a rigid water level regime (i.e., same water level during the same time of year on an annual basis), and inadequate management of invasive aquatic plants encouraged expansion of tussocks and accumulation of organic sediment during this period. In addition to enhancement through tussock removal, we have also planted over 150,000 native aquatic plants (bulrush, maidencane, knotgrass, and spikerush) and 385 bald cypress trees within these areas. This project enjoyed strong overall stakeholder support, especially from the Lake Josephine Association. Cost of the project was \$1.162 million.

→Kissimmee Chain-of-Lakes staff conducted a revegetation project in spring 2006 to expedite plant colonization and increase fish and wildlife habitat. Approximately 60 plots were identified and planted with bulrush, Egyptian paspalidium, and maidencane. Initial results indicate good plant growth and survival with wading bird foraging observed in some plots just a few weeks after planting. Additionally, 2,000 trees and shrubs comprised of six species were planted on five Lake Tohopekaliga spoil islands to increase wildlife habitat and utilization. The island revegetation project was developed by members of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Standing Team.

→About 509,000 hatchery largemouth bass (three to four inches) raised on natural food were stocked into Lake Talquin from 2000 to 2003 to enhance the adult population. A total of 111,000 (22%) largemouth bass fingerlings were marked with a small coded wire tag (CWT) for future identification. Survival and growth of hatchery bass were excellent as stocked fish made up 37% of all age-three largemouth bass by spring 2005. During spring 2004 and 2005, hatchery fish contributed an estimated 39% and 25% of the angler catch in local bass tournaments based on tag returns. New angler catch data from spring 2006 revealed that hatchery fish continued to contribute an estimated 20-25% of the catch in three local bass tournaments on Lake Talquin. Many of the three- to six-year-old hatchery fish are

contributing to the fishery today. One fortunate angler caught the largest known stocked hatchery fish to date, measuring 23.5 inches and weighing 8.5 pounds.

→Staff from the HSC Marine/Estuarine Subsection, Law Enforcement, and Marine Fisheries met with DEP staff and stakeholders to discuss small-vessel anchor damage to reefs. Based on stakeholder observations, substantial damages are occurring to hard and soft corals as a result of anchors placed directly on reefs of Broward, Palm Beach, and Martin counties. This issue will be brought before the Commission in the near future. Additionally, FWC and DEP, in conjunction with the dive industry, Reef Rescue (a non-profit organization), and the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative intend to promote awareness of the damage anchors can cause to reefs.

→Grant funds from the Wildlife Foundation of Florida are being used to place boundary and mooring buoys at St. Lucie Inlet Preserve State Park, Florida's northernmost coral reef. These efforts will promote public awareness of existing park regulations and further protect submerged resources. Ongoing (e.g., fish surveys) and new (e.g., algal nutrient enrichment, water quality monitoring, coral health) research along the reef tract will assist resource managers to understand the effects of land-based sources of pollution.

→Grant funds from the Coastal Zone Management program are currently being used to implement the Florida Statewide Seagrass Plan in Indian River Lagoon. DEP and FWC staff have worked cooperatively to develop a seagrass restoration plan for the Indian River Lagoon, focusing on areas with known historical seagrass populations which now have altered bathymetry. Contractors will assemble existing databases and create a GIS feasibility mapping and prioritization report. Engineering drawings for selected projects will be prepared for future efforts. Feasibility planning will be completed by December 2006.

→Hickory Mound Impoundment dike construction in Big Bend WMA has been completed. This was a cooperative project among the FWC, Ducks Unlimited, Taylor County, Anderson Columbia Co., Inc., the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council. Final construction cost was approximately \$1.6 million, including installation of five water-control structures, two emergency spillways, and nearly 13,000 tons of riprap. The dike is designed to withstand a 50-year storm, and will improve the area's capabilities for managing fish and wildlife habitats. It reopened to the public in June 2006 and is a popular attraction for crabbing, fishing, and birding.

→Ecological restoration projects are being conducted at the Lake Wales Ridge WEA (LWRWEA): A restoration project has begun on the Royce Unit of the LWRWEA which will restore hydrology to a 200-acre freshwater marsh and 700 acres of cutthroat seeps. The first phase (FY2006-2007) requires permitting, construction designs, and surveys. Royce Unit is also the site of

a scrub community restoration of native species of plants and animals to a 55-acre area that was cleared 15 years ago. Another restoration is a 40-acre sandhill community on the Silver Lake Tract which will require mechanical reduction of high fuel loads resulting from past fire suppression. Under such conditions, the sandhill community succeeds to xeric hammock, requiring restoration so that shade-intolerant species can survive or return to the area.

→In cooperation with SFWMD, the FWC is conducting one of the first reintroductions of the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) in the southeastern United States on the John G. and Susan H. Dupuis WEA, which lost its RCW population in the late 1980s. Reintroduction required development of the plan, extensive habitat analysis, installation of artificial nest boxes, and mechanical reduction of understory vegetation. This fall, six to ten birds will be relocated to this site from Camp Blanding WMA and other public lands, with more birds to be added annually until a stable population is achieved.

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI)

→The Ecosystem Assessment & Restoration (EAR)/Fish and Wildlife Forensics Program provided a three hour workshop for FWC Law Enforcement investigators to address the escalating expectations of courts and juries regarding evidence. This is attributed to the increase of investigative police television shows and dubbed "the CSI effect." The course covered management of gunshot residue, serological, and DNA evidence. FWC South Region investigators were the first law enforcement in the county to receive this training. The program is scheduled to be presented to all the regions within the next few months.

→EAR/Harmful Algal Bloom & Plankton Dynamics (HAB)—FWC staff met with other state agencies on June 20 to review all monitoring data available for an ongoing *Synechococcus* (a cyanobacterial algae species) bloom in Florida Bay and to discuss potential bloom causes. This bloom began in late August 2005, is still ongoing in northeastern Florida Bay and has recently spread into southern Biscayne Bay.

Division of Marine Fisheries Management (MFM)

→Under the authority of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Bluefish Fishery Management Plan, the FWC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management received requests from the states of North Carolina and New York to transfer 200,000 pounds and 125,000 pounds of Florida's commercial bluefish quota, respectively. The commercial quotas for each Atlantic coast state are based on catch statistics that precede Florida's 1995 net limitation amendment, and consequently Florida has a relatively high quota which it no longer meets since most of the harvest was by gill nets within state waters. The total Atlantic coast commercial bluefish quota has also not been

met. We have agreed to each of those requests and authorized the National Marine Fisheries Service to make the transfers.

→As a result of the impacts of Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita and Wilma, Congress has appropriated \$128 million in hurricane disaster relief funding for Gulf fisheries restoration and rehabilitation. NOAA will award the funds to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, which will issue sub-grants to the individual states. Funds are specifically dedicated to restoration of the oyster and shrimp fisheries and cooperative monitoring recovery of the fisheries. Florida's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Aquaculture, will receive \$3,808,300 to restore and refurbish oyster reefs in the Big Bend and Panhandle areas. FWRI will receive \$422,700 to examine geographic and oceanic factors that may contribute to destruction of oyster reefs during a hurricane. The objective is to identify areas best suited for reef survival and productivity to guide reef restoration/rehabilitation efforts with the goal of decreasing damage from future storm events.

Community Relations Office (CRO)

→CRO recently hosted the annual conference of the Association for Conservation Information (ACI). ACI is a professional organization of conservation communicators from state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Commissioner Huffman and Vic Heller spoke to the opening session, attended by over 110 persons.

Among the events at the conference is the presentation of awards for achievement in various fields of communication. FWC won first place in the "Video – Other" category for a recruitment video it produced for the Division of Law Enforcement.

Division of Law Enforcement (LE)

→At its annual awards luncheon, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) recognized three FWC officers for their efforts at detecting and apprehending impaired boat operators. Officers David Erdman (Bay County), Matt Webb (Okaloosa County) and Chris Mattson (Monroe County) each received an award as the officers with the highest number of BUI arrests in 2005. Officer Erdman again led the state with 28 arrests. These three officers were responsible for making 11 percent of the total statewide BUI arrests in 2005 and are to be commended for their effort at saving lives on the water.

→At the recent International Boating and Water Safety Summit held in Palm Harbor the National Safe Boating Council and U.S. Coast Guard presented an award to the FWC Boating and Waterways Section for their effort to develop a strong and original local campaign in Lee County that increased awareness

for safe boating. Captain Richard Moore and Brian Rehwinkel attended the Summit and received the award on behalf of the agency. The first-ever Pillars of Support award was presented to the agency based on the following criteria:

- *Developing an innovative and informative way of communicating the national safe boating campaign message
- *An ability to reach a widespread and diverse boating audience
- *Practicality of the message being communicated
- *Adaptability of the program to other areas, and
- *Commitment to continually promoting quality messages of safe boating awareness.

Also during the Summit, the National Safe Boating Council and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators presented an award to the FWC for their response efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The Boating Law Administrators from Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, and South Carolina made a joint presentation about their involvement in the rescue efforts as one of the general session topics. Captain Richard Moore received the award on behalf of the agency.

→The Hurricane Katrina Resource Management Matrix Team was recognized with a Davis Productivity Award Plaque at the DPA luncheon on June 7 at the Tallahassee Civic Center.

Captain Brad Williams was the FWC Law Enforcement representative on the team along with FDLE, DEP, and Harrison County Sheriff's office personnel that managed Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Resources responding to the Mississippi Gulf Coast after it was devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The team was responsible for development and implementation of a disaster specific resource management system, dubbed the "MATRIX" which was managed out of a small emergency response trailer at the Harrison County Jail in Gulfport, MS. The MATRIX managed the night and day briefing, support, and around-the-clock deployment of mutual aid law enforcement officers numbering in the hundreds, along with support resources such as food, water, ice, fuel, and even portable restroom facilities needed to keep the emergency law enforcement relief effort going. Additionally, the MATRIX was responsible for mission tasking of aviation helicopter assets from 5 different law enforcement agencies, providing airborne command and control, search and rescue, intelligence gathering, and remote area relief operations over the six southern counties of Mississippi.

→The Boating and Waterways Section is co-hosting a Forum titled "From Stem to Stern" November 1-3, in Cocoa Beach. Other sponsors include Florida Sea Grant College Program, University of Florida IFAS Extension, and the University's Levin College of Law's Center for Governmental Responsibility. The conference target audience is state, regional, county,

and local entities that are involved with waterway management issues. It will provide an opportunity to discuss boating and waterway management topics that face Florida and to develop strategies, timelines, and alliances in order to address those issues. It will provide the opportunity to showcase successful efforts in boating and waterway management.

→FWC will also host the States Organization for Boating Access (SOBA) 2006 Conference in Tampa at the Westin Harbor Island, September 23-26. The theme for this year's conference will be "Charting Boating Access in the Future" with an emphasis on the current boating access crisis. SOBA is a national organization that continues to encourage, promote and support federal and state programs that provide safe, high-quality and environmentally sound public recreational boat access to the waterways of the United States and its territories. More information on the conference and SOBA is at the Web site <http://www.sobaus.org/>.

→The 26th annual competition of the Florida Police and Fire Games took place in Jacksonville during the week of June 18-24. This is the second year the games have included firefighters as competitors. There are approximately 5,000 competitors representing more than 200 different agencies, competing in 45+ Olympic-style sporting events.

We would like to thank everyone who represented the FWC. There were 17 medals awarded to FWC employees which contributed 69 points to the State Law Enforcement team. Congratulations to all participants for a job well done!

Next year's games will be held in Sarasota during the third week of June, and we hope to see continued participation from as many as possible. For more information, visit www.lawgames.org

→A staff member in the FSU athletic department recently attended the National Association of College Athletic Directors Conference in New Orleans, where there were over 2,000 attendees. She advises the Governor of Mississippi spoke for 30 minutes, and recognized the FWC extensively for our response efforts there during the aftermath of Katrina.

→SEA personnel, along with Regional Director Chuck Collins, have been meeting with representatives of the National Park Service (NPS) regarding housing opportunities for FWC employees on Everglade National Park properties; as a result, two spots for mobile homes have been tentatively secured in Key Largo. We are awaiting a draft agreement from the NPS for FWC review, and are also in the process of completing an Environmental Screening/Project Description for the site. Future housing possibilities are also being explored on NPS properties.

→Changes in command personnel continue as people retire or change positions. Recent promotions include Major Dennis Post, and Captains Leo

Isambert (Tampa), Mark Hodges (Miami), Mary Sumner (Pensacola), Mike Edwards (Jacksonville), Rob Beaton (GHQ), and Craig Duval (Carrabelle).

→There has been an increase in manatee mortality rates in Lee County with 12 to date. Patrols have been stepped up to try and reverse the trend. Enforcement details targeting areas of concern have been implemented, utilizing officers from out of the area to assist.

EDR/Sept. 2006