

MEMORANDUM

To: Commissioners

From: Kenneth D. Haddad, Executive Director

Date: March 13, 2007

Subject: April 2007 Executive Director's Report

Division of Marine Fisheries Management (MFM)

→As part of the agency's efforts to work cooperatively with its stakeholders, MFM staff has conducted an extraordinary number of public workshops and stakeholder advisory board and workgroup meetings in the last few months. Beginning in late October and early November, MFM held public workshops on lobster management in Fort Myers, Pinellas Park, Orlando, Homestead, Marathon, Key Largo and Key West. In November and early December, workshops on red drum management were held in Fort Myers, St. Petersburg, Panama City, Tallahassee, Crystal River, Jacksonville, Cocoa, West Palm Beach, and Islamorada. Following a short holiday break, another red drum workshop was held in Tallahassee in January due to inclement weather at the first workshop. In January and February, staff hosted workshops on the future of saltwater fishing in Cocoa, St. Petersburg, Pensacola, Panama City, Jacksonville, Fort Lauderdale and Marathon, as well as a video teleconference connecting participants in Tallahassee, Panama City, Lake City, Ocala, Lakeland and West Palm Beach. Another string of workshops took place in Fort Myers, St. Petersburg, Fort Pierce, Dania Beach and Islamorada on snook management. In addition to these events, MFM staff conducted a two-day stakeholder workgroup meeting on marine life and another on snook in November, and advisory board/workgroup meetings on blue crab, red drum and spiny lobster in January. Staff has also scheduled another spiny lobster advisory board meeting and a snook workgroup meeting in March, and a series of red drum and snook public workshops will be scheduled this spring. MFM staff receives help during these events from regional public information and administrative staff, FWRI and LE. These events have greatly assisted the agency in crafting proposed regulations and identifying the issues and concerns that are important to our marine stakeholders.

→Bill Horn, a MFM artificial reef coordinator, was the keynote speaker at the annual "Dive into the Past" scuba and trade show sponsored by the non-profit organization, the "Great Lakes Shipwreck Preservation Society" in Minneapolis, Minnesota on February 17. Bill was asked to give a presentation about the Decommissioned-USS Oriskany Reef project. The 100-member society, a non-profit organization founded in 1996 based in Minneapolis, is interested in sinking a large vessel for an artificial reef and is

collecting information on the process and requirements. The society has its own research vessel the "Preservation" and a core group of avid technical divers that carry out several shipwreck assessment dives each year.

Division of Hunting and Game Management (HGM)

→At the February Commission meeting, we viewed a video about a field day conducted at Tall Timbers last fall to introduce youths and families to hunting and outdoor recreation. After the video, the Commission asked staff to pursue expansion of these programs to other regions of the state. We are please to report that there are 4 field day events of this type now scheduled across the state for this year:

1. FWC staff and volunteers are joining together with other conservation organizations such as the U.S. Sportsmens' Alliance to host three Trailblazer events across Florida. These Trailblazer events introduce kids and their families to outdoor recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, shooting and archery. A Trailblazer event is scheduled for April 21 at the Flaming Arrow Scout Reservation in Lake Wales.
2. A Trailblazer event is scheduled for August 4 at Camp La No Chi in Paisley.
3. On September 22 – National Hunting and Fishing Day – the FWC joins forces with the Big Bend Youth Foundation, Tall Timbers and other concerned conservation organizations to host the 2007 Youth Hunting Field Day at Tall Timbers in Tallahassee. As an added bonus to this year's event, youth will be able to complete their Hunter Safety certification at this field day.
4. A Trailblazer event is scheduled for October 6 at Camp Seminole in Davie.

→The FWC Ocala Outdoor Adventure Camp has action-packed summer adventures planned for six weeks of summer camp starting June 10. Each year this camp provides hundreds of campers the necessary skills and knowledge to become better sportsmen and women, while instilling an awareness of firearm safety and wildlife stewardship.

→The Youth Hunting Program of Florida wrapped up the 2006-07 season with turkey hunts in Hardee and Bradford counties in March. This program is based on volunteer landowners who graciously open their property to youth hunting, and other volunteers who plan and facilitate the hunts. Scheduled hunts are paired with youth who have not had the opportunity to harvest the game hunted. The youth hunter and his/her parent, then enjoy a safe, educational, mentored hunting experience designed to give him/her the skills and encouragement needed to continue the tradition of hunting together for years to come. The program exceeded its goals for the season in hosting twelve

youth hunts with 130 youth hunters and parents participating, and training over fifty volunteer Huntmasters.

→Bowhunter certification, a course needed by many Florida hunters who travel out of state to bow hunt, has now been streamlined to better meet the needs of the public. At a workshop held at the Ocala Conservation Center in February, volunteer bowhunter instructors from each region were certified to offer the National Bowhunter Education Foundation's Internet course. Even though the traditional course is still offered by the Commission, now for a nominal fee paid directly to the National Bowhunter Education Foundation, interested students can complete a full day's course work on the Internet at their leisure. Volunteer instructors can then complete the hands-on course requirements with the students in a one day training session. Volunteer instructors are currently scheduled to offer these bowhunter courses every month throughout the state.

→Everglades National Park (ENP) Turkey Restoration Project Update – A cooperative effort to restore turkeys to the Everglades National Park was initiated in 1999 and involved the FWC, the U.S. Park Service, and the National Wild Turkey Federation, as well as private landowners who provided access to conduct turkey trapping activities. The initial restoration attempt involved the capture and release of 29 turkeys in January 2000. Subsequent monitoring of these turkeys by ENP staff indicated that they were persisting but at a low population level. Consequently a supplemental stocking with 31 turkeys was conducted in January 2006 in an effort to boost the turkey population and bring it to a level that would ensure its continued viability. Continuous monitoring (camera surveys, radio-telemetry, and general observations) of the turkey population subsequent to the supplemental stocking indicated that significant reproduction occurred in 2006 (20 plus poults observed) and hopes are high that a self-sustaining turkey population will be established.

→Waterfowl Management Program staff is working with the Division of Law Enforcement to ensure that mallard ducks or ducklings sold this spring are not released into the wild. Retail outlets, such as feed-and-seed stores and flea market vendors, are required to have permits to sell these ducks, and by law, cannot sell mallards to anyone who does not have the proper permit. Law Enforcement Officers will be making routine visits to sellers of ducks, educating retailers on the rule and making sure of compliance. HGM staff also has arranged for a paid public service announcement to be aired on cable television this spring during the pre-Easter period, discouraging citizens from buying ducks.

→Alligator Management Program staff, with the assistance of a professional facilitator, are hosting a series of public meetings to gather additional input and garner feedback from the general public and stakeholders about possible ways to augment the current Alligator Management Program. A series of 14 meetings has been scheduled to be held at strategic locations throughout the

state during February and March. This "next step" in the Alligator Management Program review process will culminate in recommendations being formulated by the Alligator Management Standing Team and presented at the June 2007 Commission meeting.

Division of Habitat and Species Conservation (HSC)

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration Section:

→As part of an FWC long-term monitoring project in Kissimmee, spring electrofishing and creel surveys on Lakes Kissimmee, Tohopekaliga, and Alligator have begun. This project intensely monitors the fisheries on a select group of lakes throughout the state to determine trends in sportfish abundance, species composition, mortality, growth, size structure and utilization, and their habitats. Spring electrofishing surveys are also being conducted on other waterbodies within the Kissimmee and Alligator Chains of Lakes.

→At Lake Kissimmee (Osceola County) work continues on a restoration project on 30 acres of wetlands illegally filled in the 1970's. Permitting and construction specifications are nearly complete. Input from FWC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) nongame biologists was incorporated into the project to avoid possible disturbance to scrub jays and bald eagles, with construction anticipated to begin in March.

→At Lake Tohopekaliga (Osceola County), as part of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (KCOL) management plan, we are managing invasive exotic vegetation. Chinese tallow is one of the invasive exotics being managed and is listed as a Category I species by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council. Category I means displacement and alteration of native habitat is occurring. Chinese tallow has drastically altered natural lands around the shoreline of Lake Tohopekaliga, particularly cypress domes. Since 2004, the City of Kissimmee, FWC, and Osceola County have controlled approximately 170,000 Chinese tallow trees representing about 75% of the total infestation adjacent to Lake Tohopekaliga and Shingle Creek at a cost of approximately \$500,000. In addition, bid specifications and worksite preparations to harvest about 35 acres of knotweed (*Polygonum densiflorum*) tussocks was completed. This material, which is low-quality fish and wildlife habitat, will be disposed of on existing in-lake spoil islands. Natural colonization of desirable aquatic plant species will be evaluated and revegetation conducted as needed after the project ends. Osceola County and the City of Kissimmee will provide in-kind services.

→At Gant Lake (Sumter County), a consulting firm was selected to provide engineering design services for a 95-acre de-mucking project. Staff also coordinated with the Southwest Florida Water Management District on re-design of a water-control structure to provide an ecologically appropriate fluctuation schedule.

→The enhancement plan developed for the 10,000-acre Lake Jesup (Seminole County) will involve temporary impacts to adjacent wetlands. A mitigation plan was developed for the impacted wetlands, but the cost (>\$20,000,000) is prohibitive. Staff is currently working with the regulatory agency's staff to develop a financially feasible mitigation plan.

Moody Branch Mitigation Park (MBMP) (Manatee County) is managed by FWC for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of listed wildlife species and their habitats, and for compatible recreation. Moody Branch (a tributary to Little Manatee River originating near the northeast corner of MBMP and flowing south through the eastern half of the property for approximately one mile) has been impacted by a raised roadway crossing, roadside ditches, and a relic agricultural drainage ditch paralleling the eastern edge of the Moody Branch floodplain. This project will restore historic hydrology by replacing the raised roadway with a "low-water" crossing, and backfilling the roadside and agricultural ditches. Earth-moving work is scheduled to begin in FY 2007/08.

→A reimbursement contract and memorandum of agreement on Lowrie Brown Marsh (Lake Griffin, Lake County) were signed with St. Johns River Water Management District to reconnect Lowrie Brown Marsh with Lake Griffin and provide public access. Lowrie Brown is a wildlife management area of about 350 acres and part of Emerald Marsh (farmed until purchase by the District in the early 1990's). Reconnection consists of breaching berms in several locations to restore historic sheet flow of water from Haines Creek to Lake Griffin. Total project cost is estimated at \$650,000 with FWC contributing up to \$220,000. Construction start is scheduled for late spring 2007 with completion by summer 2007.

→At Lake Rowell (Bradford County), a hydraulic dredging project is being planned for the 364 acres in cooperation with the Suwannee River Water Management District and Bradford County. Approximately 1,500,000 cubic yards of unconsolidated sediments have collected in the lake due to storm-water and sewage inputs, mining operations, and excessive exotic plant growth. Engineering firm selection has begun and dredging is slated for 2008-2009. Re-creation of shoreline zones vegetated with native plants will provide the important fish and wildlife habitat absent for decades.

Terrestrial Habitat Conservation and Restoration Section:

→As Florida's human and black bear populations grow, so do the complaints FWC receives in the Northeast Region. In 2006, calls concerning bears totaled 1,456, an all-time high for the area. Total annual calls have increased 89% since 1999 and 5% since 2005. In 2006, approximately 1,100 callers were from outside the Ocala National Forest, indicating that urban areas are experiencing continued bear activity. All but three counties in the Northeast Region had an increase in bear calls. Seminole, Marion, and

Lake counties had the highest number of complaints, and calls from Brevard, Putnam, and Volusia counties continued to rise significantly.

Exotic Species Coordination Section:

→Each year an estimated 500,000 people pass through the FWC barn at the Florida State Fair. The fair represents an ideal opportunity to inform the public about our agency, wildlife issues, and what we are doing to address such concerns. This year the Non-native Species Subsection produced several exhibits for the fair. One display highlighted issues with monk parakeets, and included live birds on loan from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Research Center in Gainesville. The second display focused on green iguanas and Burmese pythons, including live animals on loan from a local wildlife rehabilitator and one python recently captured in the wild by the rehabilitator. A third exhibit was interactive, aimed at families and children, and included a giant poster of the "What's Wrong With This Picture" artwork from the *Invaders* newspaper insert produced by FWC employee Judy Gillan. Our interactive poster features flip-doors kids and families can open to read and learn about non-native species. The last exhibit centered on native versus non-native and invasive species: each was defined and illustrated with live animals that were either wild-caught or on loan from a variety of sources. They filled 12 aquariums.

Imperiled Species Management Section:

→Staff continued cooperative work with the National Park Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Collier County to provide information to the public regarding panthers. Two town hall-style meetings were held this winter in Collier County where the agencies were present to provide information about panthers and answer questions. In addition, jointly developed new brochures provide practical steps that homeowners and visitors can take to minimize risks associated with living and recreating in panther country.

→The FWC hosted the 10th Annual Sea Turtle Permit Holders Workshop at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute on January 26-27. Over 200 individuals who are permitted by FWC to assist with sea turtle research and beach monitoring around the state attended. This meeting is an opportunity for the agency to thank the many partners and volunteers who contribute so much to sea turtle conservation.

→HSC hosted Cornell University Professor Dan Decker, a nationally recognized expert in human-dimension aspects of wildlife management. Dr. Decker was initially contracted last year to work with FWC's bear management program. Human-dimension studies have become a central part of wildlife management and Dr. Decker is assisting FWC to develop strategies incorporating into all aspects of our agency culture the latest in human-dimension research and approaches.

Division of Law Enforcement (LE)

→On February 2 several tornados touched down in central Florida causing death, injury and widespread damage in Sumter, Lake, Marion and Volusia counties. As a result, the FWC deployed 38 in-region and out-of-region officers to respond. Initially, FWC assisted in search and rescue then primarily security to keep theft and crime at a minimum. FWC officers practiced the community-policing philosophy of helping their neighbors in a crisis.

→The FWC K-9 Academy is concluding its eighth week of detection training with certification and graduation planned for the first week in April.

→Operation "Clam-Up" is continuing statewide to target the illegal harvesting, transporting and selling of shellfish. In Franklin County, during the last two months, officers have issued 28 citations and written 197 warnings for various oyster violations.

→The Northwest Region, North Central Region, Special Enforcement Area/South Region and South Region Investigators have been issued laptop computers with wireless/vpn capabilities and have completed Aciss training which is an intelligence and documentation tracking system that has proven to be successful with other state law enforcement agencies to include Florida Department of Law Enforcement and Department of Agriculture Law Enforcement. All FWC investigators should be completed with training and on-line before May 2007.

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI)

→Tortugas Research Natural Area Monitoring Plan--FWC and National Park Service scientists assigned to develop the plan have met and developed an outline for the plan and defined those topic areas and activities we perceive to be essential to meet the information needs outlined by the MOU between the FWC and Everglades National Park. Assignments to flesh out a draft of the plan have been made. Our intent is to provide a draft of the plan to those participating in the first workshop as stipulated by the Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU). We anticipate that workshop will occur during late April or early May.

→Wildlife Disease Surveillance-Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance samples from 516 hunter-killed/road-killed deer were submitted to Southern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS), Athens, GA, or Kissimmee Animal Diagnostic Laboratory for analyses. CWD test results were negative for 175; results for the remaining 341 are pending. Eleven deer were submitted to the State Diagnostic Laboratories (Kissimmee or Live Oak) for complete necropsies. All eleven tested negative for CWD.

Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management (FFM)

→The division's five-year freshwater fishing license bonus program kicked off on March 1 for the tenth consecutive year. This promo provides extra incentive to freshwater anglers to upgrade to a 5-year license, which helps stabilize our license revenues. Five-year license fees are deposited into the State Game Trust Fund account and \$12 (the price of an annual license and one-fifth the price of a five year) is used each year for overall funding. The account also generates some additional revenue from interest for FWC programs.

The first 3,000 customers to upgrade to a 5-year freshwater fishing license after March 1 will not only save from \$6 to nearly \$20 in fees, but also receive via mail a FREE bonus package containing samples, magazines and coupons that are donated by fishing-related companies. These products do not cost the FWC anything and are a great opportunity for sponsors to reach our most avid freshwater anglers. Bottom line is this is a "win-win-win" for the FWC, our business partners, and the angler.

Prior to inception of the program in 1997, the previous three years an average of 702 five-year freshwater licenses were sold. The average for the last three years has been 5,677. This is an eight-fold increase that reflects not only the direct impact of the promotion but also the advertising and awareness value.

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EDR April 2007