

FishBusters

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Fisheries Biologists--

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For the past year I have referred to myself and other 'fisheries biologists' in this column. It has come to my attention that many readers don't understand the role of a state fisheries biologist. So my goal this month is to rectify that. . .



'Fisheries' is a term that refers to both the fish (either a species group or geographic area) and the people that use them, and 'biologists' are scientists that study living things. So "Fisheries Biologists' are professionals who are trained to know about all of the following, and much more:

- individual fish—their type and anatomy and how they function,
- fish populations—groups of fish, where totals and averages become important to anglers and more importantly to the species' ability to survive over time,
- fisheries habitats—the all important environment in which fish live, including factors like water quality and aquatic plants, forage and spawning areas,
- anglers—the most prominent users of the fisheries, and understanding what they want and need to enjoy safe and sustainable use of the resource, and
- other users—because fisheries don't exist in isolation and room has to be carved out to consider how drinking water needs, irrigation requirements, flood control, boating and riparian ownership issues all affect decision making that impact fisheries.



It takes a special person with a wide variety of talents to be a truly successful fisheries biologist, with an agency such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). A case-in-point is Mr. Phil Chapman. Chapman is a consummate

fisheries biologist who after 36 years of service to Florida's rich fisheries resources and diverse angling community will retire on October 31, 2006—an unfortunate Halloween 'trick' for those of us in freshwater fisheries management. But all Floridians can relish in the 'treats' that his commitment to our fisheries have generated. As a career fisheries biologist, Chapman's professionalism resulted in his being recognized in 2003 with the Louise Ireland Humphrey Award—the highest recognition given by the FWC to one of its employees.

Chapman began his career in 1970 as an assistant regional fisheries biologist in Lakeland. In 1971, he coordinated the evaluation of Florida's largest pollution-caused fish kill. His assessment of the destruction of 70 miles of the Peace River, led to the nation's first successful prosecution of a major environmental case involving fish and wildlife resources, with fines totaling over \$900,000.

Chapman was promoted to regional biologist in 1973 and led studies to pioneer techniques for artificially culturing and rearing striped bass, sunshine bass, and snook. His work on snook filled in informational gaps in their life history that provided valuable groundwork for spawning and rearing techniques.

Another of Chapman's significant contributions came from his investigation into biological impacts of bass tournaments. Though Chapman found that tournaments do not significantly impact the fishery as a whole, tournaments did impact trophy bass fisheries. The finding led to statewide harvest regulations to protect this hallmark resource.

In 1982, Chapman was instrumental in the state's acquisition of Tenoroc Fish Management Area, a 6,000-acre phosphate mine. This nationally recognized fishery provides high quality recreational opportunities to thousands of anglers annually.

Chapman's creative use and diligent research into restrictive harvest regulations and support for family fishing produced a unique approach to fisheries management at Tenoroc. Nearly a quarter century later that approach continues to be highly successful in sustaining and promoting this quality fishery.

Beginning in 1989, Phil took over the Aquatic Education Project and supervised the Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center in Midway, the Boca Raton Aquatic Program and the statewide Fisheries Outreach Program. Phil is widely known for his efforts to inform the public about resource issues, and for leadership in promoting catch-and-release fishing.

Subsequently, Phil became involved in the Special Projects Section and was instrumental in creation of numerous publications and posters and developed the most widely used archive of freshwater fishing photographs in the Division. His shots have graced several covers of the Florida Freshwater Fishing Regulations Summary and been prominent in the Education Series that included magazines about Florida Bass, Striped Bass and Catch-and-Release. Publications such as the Florida Bass brochure and poster, catch-and-release commandments and quarterly editing of the Web-based Florida fishing sites and forecasts, and annual top-ten lists for bass, bream, crappie, catfish and striper fishing destinations all resulted from his skill and commitment.

In his career, Chapman has received numerous awards for his work in conservation including: Water Conservationist of the Year (1985) from the Florida Wildlife Federation, the Diawa Youth Conservation Award, the Conservation Award from the Coastal Conservation Association, and the Warm Water Management Award from the National Federation of Fly Fishers. Moreover, he is the only member of the Florida Outdoor Writers Association to make a clean sweep of their major awards pertaining to conservation, lifetime achievement and service to media members.

The accomplishments described above for Mr. Phil Chapman demonstrate he is one of the most highly recognized and regarded fishery biologists not only in the FWC's short history but in the more than 50 years of Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission history.

Chapman has dealt with every new situation with a sense of purpose that is rooted in a personal commitment to Florida's aquatic resources. His expertise as a fisheries biologist, fly fisherman, part-time fishing guide, writer, photographer, editor and his interpersonal skills have consistently led to superlative outcomes that reflect great credit on both him and our organization.

At his recent retirement party, another group came forward to recognize these accomplishments. Captain Pat Kelly, Executive Director of the Florida Guides Associated (FGA) presented him with the first FGA Conservationist of the Year Award—an award that henceforward will be known as the Phil Chapman Conservationist of the Year award. It was a fitting tribute to a world-class example of what being a fisheries biologist is all about.

