

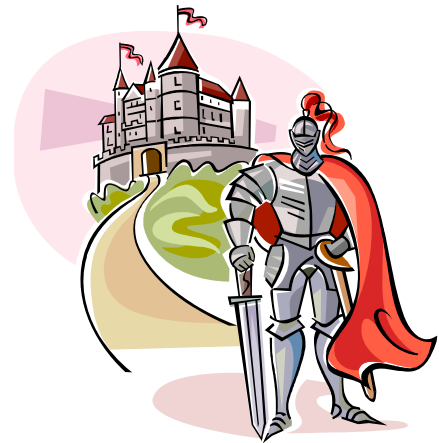
Florida Fish Busters

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Freshwater Fisheries Roundtable—The white-knights for Florida's future

By: Bob Wattendorf, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

King Arthur had his knights of the roundtable, and now Darrell Scovell, Director of the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management (Division), has his roundtable, too. The Arthurian legend shows the noble contributions of the knights, which still shines brightly today.



Among the characters in the legend, the enigmatic Fisher King suffered through great pain while protecting the Holy Grail and found relief in fishing—an all too clear analogy to the challenges growth is placing on Florida's hallowed fisheries. On Oct. 19, the Division leadership convened a roundtable using Group Solutions to moderate the event. The intent was to help identify key issues that may cause pain and suffering to Florida's freshwater fisheries and anglers and to create a vision for the future—our Holy Grail. In the meeting were outdoor writers, university professors, fishing tackle manufacturers and retailers, fishing tournament sponsors, professional fishing guides and others who hold a stake in the future of Florida's freshwater fisheries.



Participants began by identifying the key government players that are involved in ensuring safe and sustainable freshwater fisheries for Florida. They identified the Florida Fish and Wildlife

Conservation Commission (FWC), Department of Environmental Protection, Water Management Districts, U. S. Corps of Engineers and municipal governments as being key players.

Those selections seem very appropriate, since in the next phase they identified aquatic plant management as the most important issue, followed by water quality (pollution issues, both point and non-point), then water quantity concerns (minimum flows in rivers, high/low water schedules and timings in lakes), and education and outreach. Outreach is generally described as efforts to recruit/retain anglers and inform them of their crucial role in protecting our resources. Further down the list were issues of regulation management, fish stocking and more traditional conservation agency responsibilities.

The roundtable participants indicated that access issues were the key deterrents to recreational fishing participation. Similarly, knowledge about how and where to go fishing needs to be better dispersed. The cost of fishing tackle and licenses were viewed as a very minor impediment to participants.

The roundtable results were very similar to recent survey results conducted by both agency staff and objective third-party researchers, and also confirmed the issues identified in a series of local zone summits that the Division held last year for anglers and citizens. Based on these background issues the “knights” of our roundtable agreed to serve by continuing to provide input to the FWC and to maintain an open dialogue about issues and their solutions. They considered the need to organize into a proactive coalition and possibly assist with developing a new written vision and facilitating plans to ensure that Florida remains the “Fishing Capital of the World.”

Stay tuned for what happens next in our quest as the Division continues to work with stakeholders to create a shining Camelot in the future for Florida’s fish and anglers.

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