

Florida Fish Busters

May 2008

Florida's Freshwater Fisheries Vision

By Bob Wattendorf, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, with special thanks to Darrell Scovell and Dennis Renfro

The future looks bright for freshwater fisheries in Florida, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Darrell Scovell, director of FWC's Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management, presented an optimistic vision for Florida's freshwater fisheries to Commissioners at the FWC's April 2008 meeting.



“This report is the result of an ongoing effort to reach out to Florida's citizenry to obtain their input on problems and solutions and to give them a voice in managing their fishery resources,” Scovell said.

The effort began with an online survey completed in March 2005 to which 1,500 people, mostly anglers, responded. It was followed up with a series of six zone summits scattered around the state where fisheries biologists spoke directly with concerned residents about local and statewide issues. The effort then culminated in a roundtable meeting with proactive individuals representing various groups, such as 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.

Scovell pointed out the remarkable consistency between the biologists' findings, the surveys, zone summits and roundtable group on the major problems confronting freshwater fisheries.

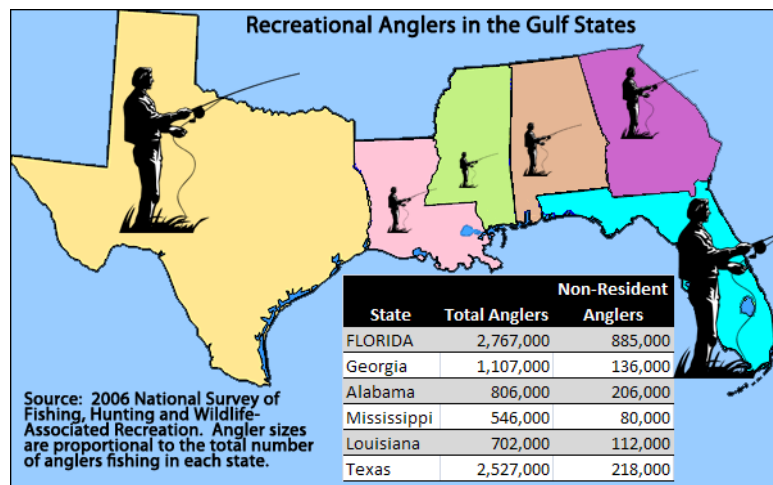
Five top issues emerged, which resulted in develop strategies to address those issues.

1. Habitat issues -- aquatic plants, water quality and water quantity.
 - Enhance interagency coordination, especially with the Department of Environmental Protection (the lead agency on most of these issues) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
 - Mobilize local stakeholders and anglers to identify issues and participate in proactive activities.
 - Continue to work with FWC's Aquatic Resource Enhancement Section.
2. Human dimensions -- conservation stewardship, education, outreach, recruit/retain anglers and volunteers.
 - Educate youth and adults using best management practices to emphasize their stewardship role.
 - Reach out to the public with e-mails, popular articles and at major events.
 - Seek grants and partner opportunities and engage the roundtable group in these efforts.
 - Proactively seek and coordinate volunteers.

3. Fishing access -- developing ramps and shoreline access for powerboats, paddlers, waders, and shore or pier fishing.
 - Identify priority areas.
 - Coordinate with FWC's Law Enforcement Boating Access Section.
 - Develop and implement a long-term maintenance plan.
4. Regulation management -- developing scientifically-supported regulations, evaluating them, enforcing them and ensuring appropriate penalties.
 - Work through the public input process.
 - Community focus with up-to-date data.
5. Nonnative species -- fish, aquatic plants and wildlife introduced from other parts of the world that represent biological pollutants.
 - Assist the Aquatic Species Coordination group with screening for nonnative fishes found in the wild or used for aquaculture or sportfishing.
 - Participate in research and management discussions to focus prevention and control efforts via risk analyses.
 - Assist with rapid response to new discoveries.
 - Increase public awareness.

Florida remains the "Fishing Capital of the World." The FWC's vision is to keep it that way by steadily working with its constituents and other management agencies to ensure quality, safe and sustainable fishing opportunities. Florida's recreational fisheries provided more days of fishing enjoyment in 2006 than any other state in the country (46.3 million versus No. 2 Texas with 41.1 million days).

Florida’s freshwater fisheries provided 24.5 million days and 23.1 million days were enjoyed angling in salt water. This is largely because the 1.4 million freshwater anglers averaged fishing 17 days each during



2006, whereas the 2 million saltwater anglers averaged 12 days of fishing that year. To maintain or enhance those opportunities, collaborative efforts correcting the problems identified above, while using the best possible research and practical, effective and cost-efficient conservation strategies, will need to be implemented and continually refined.

“The FWC,” Scovell said, “is prepared to meet those challenges.”

So if you are ready to contribute, feel free to contact the FWC and give some input. One way is to complete a survey (see MyFWC.com/Fishing and scroll down in the right column to “Take the Survey”). Another way to help conservation efforts and save you money is to purchase a five-year freshwater fishing license. There is a special offer going on right now where you get free stuff in the mail when you buy one (see MyFWC.com/Fishing/5yr-2008.html).

Additional information can be found at MyFWC.com/Fishing/Roundtable. Instant licenses are available at MyFWC.com/License or by calling 1-888-FISH-FLORIDA (347-4356).

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