



Kids are the “reel” winners

Thousands of families already know how rewarding Florida’s saltwater Kids’ Fishing Clinics are. Now, the American Fisheries Society (AFS) has formally recognized this popular educational project. AFS awarded its 2005 Sport Fish Restoration Outstanding Project Award for Aquatic Education to the FWC’s Kids’ Fishing Clinics.

Since 1996, these free clinics have introduced new anglers and non-anglers to recreational fishing. More than 36,500 children, 22,000 parents and 6,500 volunteers have participated in nearly 120 clinics statewide.

The clinics demonstrate to children the importance of protecting marine habitat and following fishing regulations to preserve marine fish abundance. These principles are taught using five separate education stations that participants must complete before they can fish, including good-angler resource conservation, touch tank (where fish live), fishing tackle, knot-tying and casting stations.

The young anglers are then given a rod and reel and allowed to fish from a pier or other appropriate site. Volunteers take pictures of participants with their fish for keepsakes, and all fish are released to help demonstrate proper catch-and-release techniques. Safety messages are also promoted throughout the events.

A schedule of classes is available online at MyFWC.com/marine/fishingclinics.

Biologists need help collecting tarpon genetic information

Biologists at the FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) need help from the public in collecting genetic information from tarpon.

Scientists have asked anglers statewide to clip a half-inch piece of tissue from a tarpon fin from anywhere in Florida. FWRI is offering tarpon anglers a free fin clip kit if they’ll just:

- E-mail researchers at tarpongenetics@MyFWC.com
- Call 1-800-367-4461
- Visit research.MyFWC.com

These samples enable experts to identify and catalog each animal and determine whether the fish was caught and released previously. Scientists use this information to determine survival, health, migration and movement of tarpon through state waters.

The fin clip kit makes it easy for anglers to help collect DNA – genetic fingerprints, unique to each individual – without harm to the tarpon.

FWRI researchers have used the fin clip survey technique successfully for catch-and-release redfish anglers in Biscayne Bay and throughout the Tampa Bay area. FWRI partner Mote Marine Laboratory also is assisting in the tarpon genetic recapture study.

Humpback whale freed from life-threatening entanglement

Researchers rescued a juvenile humpback whale, entangled in rope off the east coast of Florida, saving its life. Biologists from the FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) carried out the rescue with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR). The Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies provided guidance for the operation in waters off Ponce Inlet.



FWRI/NOAA/GDNR

Members of the large-whale disentangling team responded with an aerial observation crew and a disentangling vessel. From the vessel, biologists from FWRI, NOAA and GDNR carefully cut away the line embedded in the whale’s tail. Meanwhile, the U.S. Coast Guard provided a vessel and crew for safety backup.

Researchers believed buoys and rope embedded in the humpback’s tail were life-threatening.

After five hours work, biologists freed the 25- to 28-foot whale, and it swam away safely. Scientists took tissue samples during the operation to gather genetic information and details about the whale’s general health.

The large-whale disentangling network comprises a partnership of state, federal and non-governmental agencies along the East Coast. Members have extensive field experience and equipment to report, monitor and document entangled whales and assist in their rescue.



News & Notes

Up your odds with special-opportunity hunts

If you haven't been seeing the quantity or quality of game you'd like, you may want to consider applying for a special-opportunity hunt.

For the past nine years, the FWC has offered these unique fall-season hunts for deer, wild hog and released quail on the state's best public hunting lands. These extraordinary hunts offer large tracts of land with an abundance of game and low hunting pressure.

Deer and hog hunts take place on Fort Drum (Indian River County), Lake Panasoffkee (Sumter County), Triple N Ranch (Osceola County) and Green Swamp West Unit (Pasco County) wildlife management areas (WMAs). Released-quail hunts take place on Blackwater WMA - Carr Unit in Santa Rosa County.

Obtain a 2006-2007 Special-Opportunity Fall Hunt Worksheet at FWC offices or at MyFWC.com/hunting. Once completed, you can submit it at MyFWC.com/license or at any county tax collector's office or license agent through midnight June 14.

These coveted permits are awarded by random drawing, but you may apply for as many hunts and dates as you like in order to increase your chances of being selected.

If you're looking for the hunt of a lifetime, the FWC's special-opportunity fall hunts may be just what the doctor ordered.

Angler catches near-record striper

A Tallahassee angler flirted with setting a new state record for striped bass, but in the end, came up a bit short.

Travis Sanford fished from the Jim Woodruff Dam at Chattahoochee

and landed a 42-pound striped bass from the Apalachicola River. His fish, however, was 1/4-pound shy of the existing record. The record is a 42.25-pounder, caught by Alphonso Barnes in December 1993 in the same section of the Apalachicola.

Sanford's fish measured 39-7/8 inches in length and 29-5/8 inches in girth. He made his catch using a rod and reel and Crocodile spoon.

Eric Long, an FWC fisheries biologist met Sanford and weighed his fish on certified scales. Sanford had initially weighed his fish on an uncertified platform scale and believed it weighed 44 pounds.

"He really got close, but sooner or later the striper record will be broken," Long said.

Approximately 10 years ago, Long said, they captured a 48-pound female striped bass and took her to the FWC's Blackwater Fisheries Research and Development Center facility to use

in artificially spawning stripers for stocking. At roughly the same time, he said, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service captured two huge 70-pound stripers just above the dam in the Flint River.



Rick Long

Airboat education campaign ongoing

Florida airboat owners have a few more weeks to ensure their craft has an automotive-style muffler installed on the boats' engine exhaust.

An education campaign for airboat owners will continue through June 30. After that date, FWC officers have the option to issue written warnings or citations for failure to use the appropriate muffling devices.

Registered airboat owners in Florida should have received a letter and brochure explaining the law enforcement protocol - airboats must have automotive-style mufflers or a muffling system designed and installed to abate exhaust sounds and gases emitted from an internal combustion engine. Anyone who has yet to receive a letter and brochure, or who needs additional copies, should call Brian Rehwinkel at (850) 488-5600 or e-mail him at brian.rehwinkel@MyFWC.com.

State law requires vessels' engine exhausts to be muffled effectively in a reasonable manner. Individual counties may enact additional ordinances to restrict vessel sound to 90 decibels at 50 feet.

"Your Guide to Safe and Courteous Airboat Operation," a brochure included with the letter, discusses additional methods to further reduce sound levels and includes the Airboater Code of Ethics and tips on courtesy and proper outdoor stewardship.

For more information about airboat muffling requirements, go to MyFWC.com/Boating/AirboatMufflingRequirements.htm.



News & Notes

Teenager takes second-best buck off public land

While hunting with his father, 17-year-old Casey Phillips, of Bay Lake, harvested the second-highest-scoring deer ever taken from Florida's nearly 6 million acres of public hunting lands.

Phillips took the 16-point, non-typical buck Nov. 21 on Richloam Wildlife Management Area (WMA) during the general gun season. Tim Farley, a senior wildlife technician for the FWC, took the official measurements and gave the deer's antlers a gross Boone and Crockett score of 163 6/8 and a net score of 156 5/8.

James Stovall currently holds the top spot for his monster 25-point buck taken on nearby Green Swamp West WMA in 1999, which scored a whopping 206.

Casey was prodded by his father, Brian Phillips, to go hunting on Richloam WMA that afternoon, and they set up in two different ladder stands along a stretch of a hardwood hammock.

The trophy buck came into Casey's view around 5:15 p.m. Casey took his time to line up a shot and downed the 195-pounder with his 7mm ultra magnum rifle.

"I heard the shot and knew it was Casey, so I climbed down from my stand and started making my way toward him," Brian said. "As I was walking, I actually jumped a 172-pound six-point and took him with one shot. I thought I'd done real good until I saw what my son had."

Richloam is 58,146 acres of palmetto and pine flatwoods and is popular with dog hunters. After the first nine days of general gun season, all sportsmen need to hunt deer and hogs on Richloam is a hunting license and WMA permit.

"I'm real excited," Casey said. "I've taken a buck almost every year out of Richloam since I was 8 - but nothing like this one. I never put one in the registry before, and now I find out I've got the second-best buck taken off public land."

The minimum antler score needed to qualify for Florida's Buck Registry is 100 Boone and Crockett points for typical antlers and 125 for non-typical. Typical antlers have points growing off the top side of the main beam only. Non-typical antlers are rarer and have points either growing off the underside of the main beam or branching off other points.

If you think you may have harvested such a deer, get it registered by contacting your regional FWC office or visiting MyFWC.com/hunting.



17-year-old Casey Phillips is all smiles after taking this 195-pound, 16-point non-typical buck off Richloam WMA in November.

Redfish still need care

The FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute recently completed a stock assessment for redfish (also called red drum, channel bass and red bass). Currently, redfish stocks in Florida are healthy, but increased fishing pressure could put a damper on continued abundance of this important sport fish species.

Redfish stocks were overfished and in danger of collapse in 1986. This resulted in a ban on redfish sales, a three-month closure to all redfish harvest, and strict bag and size limits. As redfish stocks improved, a year-round sport season reopened in 1996, but the prohibition of sale and the one-redfish daily bag limit and 18- to 27-inch slot limit remain in place today.

The fishery has made significant progress and is considered to be a management success, so much so that some anglers have called for more-liberal redfish regulations, including an increase in the daily bag limit.

However, even though localized large schools of redfish do occur, the number of juveniles escaping to the offshore spawning stock is decreasing, which is critical for the long-term health and abundance of the species. Increasing the bag limit would most likely increase the number of redfish harvested, putting the stock well below the management goal, according to FWC biologists.

The FWC recently convened a stakeholder workgroup meeting to gather input on the future of the redfish fishery. After reviewing the latest scientific data, group members suggested a cautionary, proactive management approach to ensure continued success for the redfish fishery, including possibly adjusting the slot limit or closing harvest during certain periods of the year.

More information about the redfish stock assessment is available at MyFWC.com/commission/2006/April/index.html.

Cedar Key still “Clamalot”

After weathering two of the worst hurricane seasons on record, Cedar Key is still one of the nation’s top clam producers. Starting from ground zero in 1993, the small village on Florida’s gulf coast – also known as “Clamalot” for its ideal growing conditions – rapidly became the No. 1 producer of cultured hard clams in the nation.

According to the first-ever aquaculture census conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1998, Florida produces more hard clams by volume than any other state. About 80 percent of that production comes from Florida’s west coast, with Cedar Key producing 70 percent of the total.

Leslie Sturmer, a University of Florida aquaculture extension agent, said development of the farm-raised hard clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) industry in the rural coastal area started with several job retraining programs that have helped hundreds of displaced workers in the commercial fishing industry. Since 1991, more than 200 oyster harvesters and former net-fishermen in Cedar Key have been trained and moved into small-scale business enterprises, building a new aquaculture industry in one of the state’s oldest ports.

According to Chuck Adams, Florida Sea Grant marine economics specialist and professor in UF’s Department of Food and Resources Economics, the total economic impact of Florida’s clam industry, which is the largest marine aquaculture industry in the state, exceeded \$34 million in 1999.

Because clam farming requires good water quality that’s free from bacterial and industrial contamination, Sturmer has helped Cedar Key (population: 1,000) officials adopt responsible coastal development practices for shellfish-harvesting waters.

Adams said a typical two-acre facility for growing cultured hard clams can earn approximately \$35,000 per year. Higher stocking densities and careful business planning can generate even more income.

Jumping fish injures boat passenger

A Saturday outing on the Suwannee River took an unexpected turn when a large fish jumped into a boat, striking the passenger in the face.

Dawn E. Poirer, of Kenneth City, and Johnston R. Staples III, of St. Pete Beach, were traveling south on the Suwannee River near Bell, in Gilchrist County, when the 3-foot fish jumped into the boat, striking Poirer. Staples wasn’t injured.

The fish was possibly a sturgeon, according to FWC investigators.

Staples took Poirer to a nearby residence, and the homeowner called 911. Poirer was transported by helicopter to Shands Hospital in Gainesville.

The 1996 19-foot Summerford vessel sustained approximately \$1,000 in damages to the rear seat and motor cowling.

Celebrate National Trails Day on June 3



All across the country, people are getting ready to celebrate the great outdoors at this year’s National Trails Day® – America’s largest annual single-day trails and outdoor celebration. Organized by American Hiking Society, the 14th annual National Trails Day is set for kickoff on Saturday, June 3. Hundreds of thousands of trail enthusiasts are expected to participate in a wide variety of activities on public trails at more than 1,000 nationally sanctioned events across the land.

“Our nation’s trails offer Americans from all walks of life boundless opportunities to enjoy nature, renew themselves, and establish a lifetime of fitness,” said Gregory Miller, president of American Hiking Society. “From city dwellers and suburban families to rural and country residents, children to senior citizens, recent immigrants to people with deep roots here, trails offer every American a healthy, enjoyable way to spend time outside.”

Interested in attending a local event? Visit American Hiking’s National Trails Day Web site, www.NationalTrailsDay.org. The site allows users to search for registered events in their local communities and across the country.