

Amos Morris

volunteers 27 years to the Wildlife Alert Reward Association

By Henry Cabbage



STAN KIRKLAND

Amos Morris was born about the same time Florida started getting serious about fish and wildlife conservation. He's been a major player in that cause during the past half a century.

He lives near Cottdale on 120 acres, homesteaded by his grandfather, Gabe Morris, in the late 1800s. Morris and his wife, Aline, live in a house a half-mile from the spot where he was born and raised with a brother and two sisters.

Behind his hazel eyes is a lifetime of watching Florida struggle to hang on to its natural wealth while its human population rose from 1.5 million to more than 17 million.

Morris volunteered 27 years service to the Wildlife Alert Reward Association – which

offers cash rewards to callers who report conservation law violations. He was chairman 22 of those years and never missed a single meeting.

"I like to hunt and fish," he said. "If you don't take care of (natural resources), you won't have any."

His other contributions to fish and wildlife conservation include three years as chairman of Jackson County's chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and 30 years with Ducks Unlimited. In 1989, the Florida Wildlife Federation recognized Morris as its "Sportsman of the Year."

Over the years since he finished high school in 1949, he made a living as a truck driver and in the pulpwood business

before he served two years as a heavy equipment operator and demolition expert in the U.S. Army. He served in Italy.

After that, he returned to his rural Jackson County home where he farmed peanuts, cotton, corn and livestock.

He met Aline and married her in 1957.

A few years later, his friend, Gene Thorpe, invited Morris to go sucker fishing. That experience opened a whole new window for the man who already was an avid hunter and fisherman.

In those days, the annual season for sucker fishermen lasted only a few days. Morris was so hooked on sucker fishing after that first time, he spoke with a friend, the late Tom Garrison, in the then-Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission's (GFC's) Panama City Office about the possibility of expanding the season. Morris followed up on Garrison's suggestion he invite the GFC's executive director and some other dignitaries to his place for a sucker fry.

"They loved them," Morris said. "The season is nine months long now, and suckers still are an under-used resource."

Every winter for the past 32 years, Morris has hosted a sucker fry for his friends and employees of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Morris takes great pride in his service on the Wildlife Alert Reward Association. In 1979, Morris and 12 other volunteers met in Ocala to write the bylaws



TIM DONOVAN

Amos Morris was recognized for his 27 years of outstanding volunteer service to the Wildlife Alert Reward Program at the February FWC Commission meeting. **From left to right:** Commissioner Richard Corbett; Commissioner Sandra Kaupe; Commissioner Kathy Barco; Aline Morris; Amos Morris; Chairman Rodney Barreto; Vice Chairman David Meehan; Commissioner "Herky" Huffman; Commissioner Brian Yablonski.



Above: Aline and Amos Morris clean a sucker catch. **Below:** Amos holds a lake chubsucker (locally known as a pond sucker.) They are bottom-feeding omnivores, eating aquatic insects, fish eggs, crustaceans, algae and other plants.

and set the program's course. The program, since then, has resulted in more than 3,000 arrests and paid out more than \$300,000 in rewards for information about conservation law violations.

"Wildlife Alert is unique in that it gets its funding from donations and by court-ordered restitution paid by law violators," Morris said. "The legislature appropriated money to get it started, but we never spent it. It was too cumbersome."

Morris and others visited judges and asked them to order defendants pay into the reward fund, and they agreed to it.

He has the knack – or maybe, it's just the drive – to make things happen, especially when it's for a cause he believes in. When one of his favorite causes needs to raise money, Morris voluntarily buys and cooks up to

100 steaks at a time for fund-raisers who have sold tickets to one of Morris's cookouts.

In one case, Morris sent 30 tickets each to prominent politicians to buy or sell them.

All of them did except one. The result – they raised enough money to send the Cottdale High School Band to play at an event in Mexico.

"We even raised enough to give each of the kids \$40 spending money," he said.

Morris, who was the only remaining charter member still on the Wildlife Alert Reward Association, decided it was time to step down last September. The association and the FWC wish him the best as he takes on a more-leisurely retirement lifestyle. And especially, we thank him for his lifetime of stewardship for the natural resources that enrich our lives every day. **FW**



Wildlife Alert Reward Program

If you suspect a wildlife law violation, report it to the FWC Wildlife Alert Reward Program.

1-888-404-FWCC (3922)

for violations that are in progress or need immediate attention

Report wildlife violations online at

MyFWC.com/law/alert

To report a nuisance alligator, call

1-866-FWC-GATOR

(1-866-392-4286)

To be eligible for a reward:

You must obtain a confidential code number to be eligible for a reward. When reporting violations online, a code number will be sent to the e-mail address you provide. If you do not wish to provide an e-mail address, please call 1-888-404-FWCC to obtain a code number. Telephones are answered 24-hours a day, seven days a week. If your information results in an arrest, you may be eligible for a reward of up to \$1,000 (depending on the severity of the case).

You may remain anonymous. You will not be required to testify in court. You may or may not be contacted for additional information depending on your preference. It is important to report violations as soon as possible and provide as much detail as you can about the physical descriptions of violators, vehicles, license tag numbers, etc.

Examples of violations include:

- Illegal hunting, killing or capturing of protected species
- Fishing by illegal methods
- Boating under the influence.

You may also call the nearest regional office on local numbers (during business hours). Cellular phone customers throughout most of the state can make a free call by dialing *FWC or #FWC depending on their service carriers.