



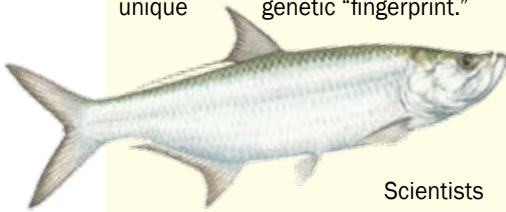
FWC Update

Biologists need help from public collecting tarpon genetic information

Biologists at the FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) and Mote Marine Laboratory need help from Florida anglers in collecting genetic information from tarpon.

The tarpon genetic recapture study gives anglers the opportunity to make a direct impact on state-of-the-art research. Anglers statewide can collect a DNA sample by removing a few skin cells from the outside of a tarpon's jaw using an abrasive pad provided in a free sampling kit. The tarpon can be any size.

Researchers catalog the DNA samples that identify each tarpon's unique genetic "fingerprint."



Scientists compare new tarpon DNA samples with cataloged samples to determine if anyone previously caught and sampled the fish. Scientists also use this information to determine survival, health, migration and movement of tarpon in state waters.

The new tarpon DNA sampling kits are easy to use, especially because the fish can remain in the water while the angler collects the sample. Participants can obtain a free tarpon DNA sampling kit provided by FWRI through one of the following options.

- E-mail tarpongenetics@MyFWC.com
- Call toll-free 1-800-367-4461
- Visit research.MyFWC.com and search for "tarpon"

FWRI and Mote researchers have used similar DNA identification methods successfully for studies of redfish with help from anglers in Biscayne Bay and Tampa Bay.

DIANE ROWE PEEBLES

FWC STAFF

FWC officer named Florida's top cop



The Florida State Law Enforcement Chiefs Association recently recognized FWC Law Enforcement Officer Rick Francis as its

2006 Officer of the Year.

The Florida State Law Enforcement Chiefs Association comprises law enforcement administrators from agencies throughout the state.

"Officer Francis is the kind of officer every law enforcement agency would like to have," Col. Julie Jones, FWC's director of the Division of Law Enforcement said. "He takes great pride in serving others, and has a selfless devotion to duty. The FWC and the state of Florida are fortunate to have him on board, and I am proud he has chosen to be part of the FWC family."

Francis received numerous recognitions based on a year in which he wrote 241 citations and 1,151 warnings. His cases include freshwater and saltwater fisheries violations, illegal alligator hunting, driving under the influence, boating accidents, sex crimes and suicide.

Jones said the ratio of citations to warnings clearly shows Francis puts a high priority on educating the public on the laws, rules and regulations that the FWC upholds, as well as proper use of officer discretion, a critical part of law enforcement.

Officer Rick Francis inspects a catch during the lobster mini season at Ponce Inlet in Volusia County.



Like all law enforcement officers, even when off-duty, Francis is on the alert for lawbreakers. In April 2005, while visiting a fellow FWC officer in the upper Keys, he was instrumental in recovering a stolen \$2.5 million Hatteras yacht and the arrests of two subjects who had false paperwork for the vessel - within hours of it being reported stolen.

In January 2005, Francis was one of the first law enforcement officers to respond to the scene of a domestic disturbance call only to find one Lake County deputy dead and two others shot. He, along with a Florida Department of Law Enforcement agent, was able to clear the house, secure the victims and perimeter, and assist in locating and apprehending the suspect.

Francis received a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Columbia University and is working on his master's degree. In the past year, he has completed radar school, line supervision, field training officer, fish identification, Intoxillizer 8000 and BUI inspector courses.

He and his wife of seven years, Stephanie, have two young children.

In his short career with the FWC, Francis has earned recognition as a leader with a positive attitude.

JOY HILL



FWC sharpening captive wildlife regulations

FWC Commissioners approved new rules concerning reptiles and other captive wildlife during their Feb. 7-8 meeting.

Meanwhile, FWC staff is working with stakeholders and others to stem the invasion of nonnative species that displace or prey on Florida's native species in the wild.

FWC officials plan to work with the agency's Captive Wildlife Technical Advisory Group during the next year to address unresolved issues such as classification of wildlife, regulation of crossbred animals, public contact with wildlife, wildlife sanctuaries and wildlife rehabilitators.

New rules address appropriate locations for housing certain wildlife and the possession and housing of certain reptiles. When they take effect, new rules will require persons who keep wildlife in captivity to have critical incident/disaster plans describing what they will do in the event of a hurricane, flood or fire to prevent animals from escaping into the wild.

They will prohibit providing false information to qualify for permits where documented experience is required. The rules define "reptiles of concern" and establish requirements for possession. Also, they require having a bite-response plan and cage card identification system for facilities with venomous reptiles.

Escapes of reptiles of concern or nonnative species of venomous reptiles must be reported immediately upon discovery to FWC's Division of Law Enforcement.

These rules create the list of reptiles of concern – the Indian or Burmese python, reticulated python, African rock python, amethystine or scrub python, green anaconda and the Nile monitor lizard.

Beginning Jan. 1, a permit will be required to possess these reptiles of concern. People who possess these reptiles as pets must be at least 18 years old and complete an application and questionnaire for the free permit.

The applicant must demonstrate knowledge of the reptile of concern by answering questions about the species, dietary needs, basic husbandry and caging and safe housing requirements. People who possess reptiles of concern will have to ensure their pets are permanently identified by implanting a microchip once the reptile reaches 2 inches in diameter. They also must meet specific record-keeping, reporting, safe housing and minimum cage requirements.

"FWC supports responsible pet ownership. We encourage people wanting to own captive wildlife to learn about the animal, its needs and behaviors before getting the animal," said FWC Capt. Linda Harrison. "Owners also should be aware that Florida laws prohibit the release of nonnative animals."

For more information, visit MyFWC.com and follow the "Wildlife" link to "Nonnatives."

FWC adopts new rules and regulations

FWC Commissioners agreed to an array of changes to wildlife management area rules during their Feb. 7-8 meeting at Sandestin. New rules allow for emergency closures – needed to cope with natural disasters, negotiating contracts to provide additional services to the public on lands managed by the FWC, regulating vehicle use, setting harvest regulations and other matters.

In other business, Commissioners approved regulations for the new Largo Central Park Nature Preserve Fish Management Area.



Snook are able to tolerate wholly fresh or salt water.

Commissioners took action on several marine fisheries issues, beginning with a final public hearing on a proposed rule to require persons recovering monofilament netting in Florida waters to notify FWC law enforcement prior to recovering the netting and to have an FWC officer present to supervise recovery and disposal of the material.

Commissioners also directed staff to continue to develop management options for red drum (redfish) to achieve a 40-percent escapement goal for spawning fish. Possible management options include changing the slot limit, implementing a closed season, managing by regions and establishing a trophy tag. The FWC will consider a draft rule for red drum at its June meeting in Melbourne, and new regulations probably won't take effect until 2008.

In other marine fisheries action, the Commission directed staff to continue to gather public input on ways to reduce the harvest of snook to sustain and improve the fishery. The FWC also heard a report on the FWC saltwater fish hatchery, considered various federal marine fisheries management issues and heard a report on the future of saltwater fishing in Florida.

The next FWC meeting is set for June 13-14 in Melbourne.