



FWC Update

FWC postpones vote on manatee management plan and reclassification

The FWC postponed a decision Sept. 12 to adopt a new management plan and two rules to reclassify manatees from endangered to threatened.

Commissioners had planned to take final action on the proposals during their Sept. 12 session, but Gov. Charlie Crist, in a Sept. 10 letter to FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto, asked for the postponement. Crist expressed concern that three FWC commissioners have just begun their terms and may need more time to evaluate manatee issues.

"We'll get with the governor and address his concerns," Barreto said.

New commissioners Dwight Stephenson, Ron Bergeron and Kenneth Wright said they will make every effort to be prepared to vote on the issue by the FWC's December meeting in Key Largo.



Two new Commissioners assume FWC posts

Two new Commissioners assumed their posts on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) on Sept. 12.

During the first day of the FWC's three-day meeting at St. Petersburg, new Commissioners Ron Bergeron of Ft. Lauderdale and Kenneth Wright of Winter Park began their five-year terms on the seven-member commission. They replace former Vice Chairman David K. Meehan and former Commissioner H.A. "Herky" Huffman.

Bergeron, an engineering contractor, is president and owner of Bergeron Family of Companies, based in Ft. Lauderdale. He was born on a family vacation in New Orleans Sept. 15, 1943. Even so, he notes with pride that he is a fourth-generation Floridian.



Commissioner Bergeron

Saving the Everglades and protecting wildlife have been Bergeron's lifelong passions. He has met with public officials

regularly to help steer priorities for Everglades projects to stop irreversible damage to the great wetland. For the past 10 years, Bergeron has worked with the Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District with value engineering, analyzing costs versus benefits of restoration projects.

"I am sincerely honored to have this opportunity to serve as a Commissioner and have such an important role in protecting the resources that have been such a big part of my life," Bergeron said. "My grandfather was a game warden in Florida, and that opened a wealth of life experiences and the background that drives me to protect our natural resources for future generations."

Bergeron is a member of the Broward County Airboat Association and the Everglades Coordinating Council. In addition, Bergeron is active in the Boys and Girls Club of Broward County, Broward Partnership for the Homeless and Children's Harbor.

He has six children.

Wright is a partner in the Orlando law firm Shutts & Bowen, where he has worked since 1989. He holds a juris doctorate from Cumberland School of Law, a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of South Florida and an associate degree from Orlando Junior College.



Commissioner Wright

He was born July 29, 1948 in Charlotte, N.C., but he has lived in Florida since 1962.

Wright is an avid outdoorsman with experience in all types of hunting and fishing in Florida.

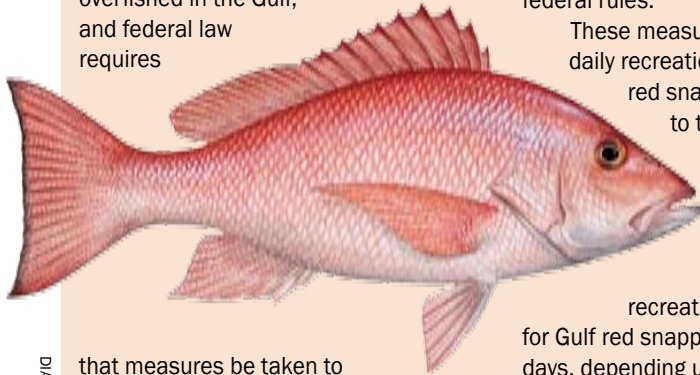
"Having lived almost my entire life in Florida, hunting and fishing," Wright said, "I look forward to working hard to ensure that opportunity is available to the next generation of Floridians."

Wright served eight years as chairman of the Environmental Regulation Commission. He said that background, coupled with his sincere motivation to be of service to the FWC, will enable him to bring a new perspective to the agency. Wright also served as chairman of the Sanford Aviation Authority and was a member of the Seminole County Port Authority. Other service includes past president of the Leukemia Society and current board membership in the Winter Park Chamber.

FWC proposes changes to Gulf red snapper regulations

The FWC has proposed changes to management rules for red snapper harvested in the Gulf of Mexico state waters. These proposed rules would be consistent with pending red snapper regulations in Gulf federal waters.

Red snapper is considered to be overfished in the Gulf, and federal law requires



DIANE ROME PEBBLES

that measures be taken to end overfishing and rebuild red snapper stocks. Florida waters extend nine nautical miles offshore in the Gulf, and federal waters extend beyond state waters.

Earlier this year, the National Marine Fisheries Service implemented a temporary action to reduce the harvest of Gulf red snapper in federal waters while a permanent plan to manage overfished stocks was finalized. This interim action for Gulf federal waters reduced the daily recreational bag limit from four fish to two fish per person, prohibited the captain and crew of for-hire vessels from retaining the recreational bag limit, and lowered the commercial minimum size limit from 15 to 13 inches total length.

However, the FWC made no changes to red snapper regulations in Gulf state waters, and Florida's daily recreational and commercial bag limit for red snapper is still four fish per person, the captain and crew of for-hire vessels can still keep the recreational bag limit, and the commercial minimum size limit remains unchanged at 15 inches total length.

New permanent federal Gulf red snapper regulations that will replace the interim rules are expected to be finalized by late 2007 and be implemented for the 2008 fishing season. The FWC has proposed rules for Gulf state waters that are consistent with the pending federal rules.

These measures would reduce the daily recreational bag limit of Gulf red snapper from four fish to two fish per person, establish a zero daily bag limit for captains and crew of Gulf for-hire vessels, and shorten the recreational fishing season for Gulf red snapper to 107, 122 or 154 days, depending upon the outcome of the pending federal rules.

In addition, these proposed rules would reduce the minimum size of commercially harvested red snapper in the Gulf and the minimum size of imported red snapper from 15 to 13 inches total length, and reduce the daily commercial bag and trip limit of Gulf red snapper from four fish to two fish per day.

The proposed rules would also allow only non-stainless steel circle hooks to be used to harvest any reef fish when natural baits are used and require a venting tool and a de-hooking device to be present onboard vessels harvesting any reef fish.

"Florida plays an important role in the success of the federal Gulf red snapper rebuilding plan because Florida's recreational fishery accounts for a large proportion of the recreational red snapper catch," said FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto. "Taking these proposed actions will likely prevent further restrictions on red snapper harvest in Gulf federal waters, which is where Florida anglers catch most of the fish."

A final public hearing on these rule proposals will take place during the FWC's February meeting in Panama City.

Far-reaching gopher tortoise management plan approved

FWC Commissioners approved a unique, far-reaching plan during their September meeting to protect and preserve gopher tortoises and their habitats.

"This is a historic step forward in the state's approach to habitat and wildlife management," FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto said.

The plan, available at MyFWC.com/imperiledspecies, is the result of thousands of hours of work by FWC staff, scientists, stakeholders, interest groups and members of the public, Barreto said.

Final approval by the Commission places gopher tortoises in the "threatened" category and outlines broad goals and very specific steps for protection of the species and its habitats, said FWC Executive Director Ken Haddad.

New requirements call for relocating gopher tortoises away from construction areas into public and private habitat where the species can thrive, Barreto said.

"We want to make certain the gopher tortoise has the protections it needs, and we want to make Florida the national leader in adopting policies to protect and preserve native wildlife and habitats," Barreto said.



WILLIAM J. WEBER



FWC Update

Yablonski new Commission Vice Chairman

One of the first items on the FWC's Sept. 12 agenda was election of a new Vice Chairman to replace David K.



Meehan of St. Petersburg, whose term expired in August.

Brian Yablonski of Tallahassee got the nod from fellow commissioners to succeed Meehan as Vice Chairman. Yablonski is an attorney and has served on the FWC since January 2004.

FWC Commissioners are appointed by the governor to five-year terms and make decisions that guide conservation of Florida's fish and wildlife resources.

New rules aid trap recovery and ease restrictions on recreational fold-up traps

The FWC approved rules on Sept. 13 to make it easier to recover or remove lobster and crab traps from state waters under certain conditions. The FWC also passed a rule to allow recreational fishers to use fold-up traps of any shape to harvest blue crabs.

The new rules will help spiny lobster, stone crab and blue crab fishers recover their traps following major storms by letting licensed trap fishers designate people to recover and possess their traps when the governor and FWC declare an emergency.

The rules also exempt local, state or federal officials from having to get FWC approval before removing traps and trap debris from areas where trapping is prohibited and modify the current definition of a derelict trap to account for a requirement that blue crab traps must now be marked with FWC trap tags.

In addition, the Commission approved rules to allow recreational

fishers to use fold-up blue crab traps up to one cubic foot in volume that are not necessarily pyramid-shaped and delete a current provision limiting the base panel of fold-up traps to one square foot.

"These rules will help commercial fishers work together to recover traps after major storms, make it easier for officials to remove illegal traps and debris from places where they aren't allowed, and let recreational fishers use more than one kind of fold-up trap to catch blue crabs," said FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto.



CHARLES R. CRAWFORD

Revised bald eagle draft management plan approved

The FWC approved the bald eagle revised draft management plan Sept. 12, giving staff the go-ahead to begin work on a final draft.

The second comment period on the plan ended on Sept. 14, and FWC staff will revise the plan to reflect comments received and will bring the plan up for its final hearing and approval at a future meeting.

Policy changes outlined in the draft management plan include regulation of a buffer zone around nests and requirements for permitting activities that violate guidelines described in the permitting framework of the draft plan.

The plan proposes adoption of a new rule to protect bald eagles and incorporates U.S. Fish and Wildlife



WILLIAM J. WEBER

Service bald eagle guidelines.

The FWC is moving to delist the species because of the increased number of bald eagles in Florida over the past few decades. The goal of the management plan is to maintain a stable or increasing bald eagle population throughout Florida.

The bald eagle still is classified as threatened by the FWC and will not be delisted until the management plan, developed with public input, is approved by FWC Commissioners. The draft management plan will ensure the bald eagle continues to be protected and thrive in Florida. The bald eagle also will remain protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.