



FWC Update

Developers must move tortoises



ROBERT J. LAFOLETTE

FWC commissioners have approved a policy that puts an end to gopher tortoise entombment and requires developers to relocate them.

Entombment occurs when construction activity fills in or covers a gopher tortoise burrow, preventing escape of tortoises and other animals that may be inside. FWC staff developed the new policy with the help of stakeholders and the public.

“We’ve listened to our stakeholders on this issue and have developed a policy we believe meets the needs of both Floridians and wildlife,” said Greg Holder, leader of FWC’s gopher tortoise management plan team.

The interim policy will affect developers who apply for incidental take permits after July 30. The policy also will apply to anyone who has an incomplete incidental take permit application before that date.

The policy is an interim measure that will remain in effect until the FWC can begin a new permitting process detailed in the gopher tortoise management plan. The plan protects individual gopher tortoises by requiring developers to relocate them in a way that ensures their long-term survival. The plan protects gopher tortoise habitat through conservation easements, and proposes habitat management to make the number of tortoises that can live and reproduce in relocated areas as high as possible.

FWC changes snook rules

The FWC approved changes to snook bag and size limits and harvest seasons during its June meeting in Melbourne.

New rules reduce the snook daily recreational bag limit from two fish per person to one on Florida’s Atlantic Coast, which means a one-fish daily limit on snook will apply statewide.

Rules also change the 27-34 inches total length snook slot limit to 28-32 inches in Atlantic waters and 28-33 inches in Florida’s Gulf, Everglades National Park and Monroe County waters.

In addition, the rules add the first half of December and the month of February to the Dec. 15–Jan. 31 and May–August closed harvest seasons for snook in the Gulf, Everglades and Monroe County. However, the Dec. 15–Jan. 31 and June–August closed harvest seasons in Atlantic waters remain unchanged.

The rules also allow anglers to carry more than one cast net aboard a vessel while fishing for snook.

“These rule changes are intended to provide additional protection for Florida’s valuable snook populations, which are considered to be fairly healthy on the state’s Atlantic and Gulf coasts,” said FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto. “However, the FWC believes a reduction in harvest is necessary to help achieve the Commission’s management goal for snook and sustain and improve the fishery for the future.”

The latest FWC snook stock assessment concluded the management goal of a 40-percent spawning potential ratio for this fishery is not being met, and increasing fishing effort and habitat loss are contributing to the decline. Spawning potential ratio is the ratio of the egg production of mature fish in a fished population to the egg production that would exist if the population were not fished.

The new snook rules took effect in July and will be implemented when the snook harvest season reopens on Sept. 1.

FWC moving ahead with species reclassifications

The FWC voted June 13 to move ahead with reclassification of four imperiled species.

Concerning the peregrine falcon, Commissioners agreed to a staff proposal to assemble a biological review panel to evaluate whether the bird warrants reclassification from its endangered species status. The review is the first phase in the reclassification process. The scientists who will conduct the review include James A. Rodgers of the FWC, Brian A. Millsap of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ken Meyer of Avian Research and Conservation Institute in Gainesville.

Commissioners also voted to proceed with the final phase of the process to reclassify manatees from endangered to threatened, gopher tortoises from species of special concern

to threatened, and Panama City crayfish from species of special concern to threatened. The final action will be adoption of a management plan for each species, and that will take place at a future FWC meeting, possibly in September except for the crayfish, which may happen early next year.



MALCOLM SCHUYL / ALAMY

Trappers to continue removing nuisance alligators

The FWC has decided not to open the door to allowing homeowners to dispose of small nuisance alligators on their own. Rather, they decided to continue the requirement that people contact the FWC, and the agency will dispatch nuisance alligator trappers to remove the reptiles.

FWC Commissioners, meeting in a two-day session in June in Melbourne, also turned thumbs down to a proposal to issue statewide permits to recreational alligator hunters and agreed to continue issuing countywide permits.

They also decided not to allow daytime recreational alligator hunting or the use of small-caliber handguns to dispatch alligators.

On the other hand, Commissioners did approve, in concept, an array of new alligator management provisions, including use of artificial lures to reel in alligators during

statewide harvests and provisions to streamline requirements of the Private Lands Alligator Management Program.

For instance, Commissioners approved removing the 6- to 9-foot closed slot limit on alligators taken in the FWC's Private Lands Alligator Management Program and to pursue broader public awareness regarding living peacefully with alligators.

Based on the Commissioners' guidance, FWC staff will prepare appropriate rule proposals for consideration in future Commission meetings.



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Florida leads nation in boating fatalities

Florida's boating accident rate (671) for 2006 was second only to California's 757. Florida led the nation with 69 fatalities, compared to 47 for Texas and 44 for California.

According to the FWC, the high numbers reflect the reality that Floridians own more than 1 million registered recreational vessels, and they use them throughout the year.

All but eight of the fatalities were the result of drowning, and none of the drowning victims were wearing life jackets.

The most likely county for boaters to be in an accident was Monroe, followed in order by Palm Beach, Miami-Dade, Pinellas, Lee, Broward, Collier, Brevard, Escambia and Duval.

The most likely month for the accident to happen was July. The most likely time of day to be in an accident was 4-6 p.m., and the most common

type of accident was a collision with another vessel or a fixed object.

Accidents occur most frequently on rivers or creeks, but the number of accidents on the ocean or gulf or in a bay or sound are almost as high. Nearly 600 of the state's accidents occurred while the vessel was cruising, and more than 400 of them occurred when the operator was not trying to change direction while cruising. Small vessels, especially those less than 18 feet long, were the most likely to be involved in accidents.

A typical accident involved a privately owned vessel, operated carelessly or without a lookout, with the operator being a male at least 22 years old – most likely 36-50 years old.

The 85-page report on 2006 boating accidents in Florida is available online at MyFWC.com/law/boating.

FWC concludes Melbourne meeting

The FWC wrapped up its June 13-14 meeting at Melbourne after addressing a broad range of issues.

Commissioners approved a draft rule outlining bonding requirements for exhibiting potentially dangerous animals and venomous reptiles, a requirement passed by the Legislature during the 2007 session. Subject to the governor's approval, final public hearings for the draft rule will be at the September Commission meeting.

In addition, Commissioners approved land-acquisition proposals including the Nature Conservancy's Davidson Ranch parcel as a mitigation park, the Nature Conservancy's donation of the Janet Butterfield Brooks Preserve as a mitigation park and two donated Nature Conservancy parcels as additions to Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area.

Commissioners also discussed proposed new rules that would allow licensed trap fishers to designate people to recover and possess their traps when the governor and FWC declare an emergency. The proposed rules also would exempt local, state and federal officials from having to get FWC approval before removing traps, derelict traps and trap debris from areas where trapping is prohibited.

In addition, the Commission proposed a rule amendment that would allow recreational fishers to use fold-up blue crab traps with square sides. A final public hearing on all of these proposed rules will be scheduled for the September Commission meeting.

The FWC also heard an update on issues and proposed rules for spiny lobster and discussed federal fisheries management issues.

The next FWC meeting is set for Sept. 12-14 in St. Petersburg.



FWC Update

Ryan Butler is FWC's prosecutor of the year

The FWC honored Assistant State Attorney Ryan Butler of Vero Beach as its prosecutor of the year during its June meeting, lauding Butler for his 12 years of diligence and commitment in prosecuting FWC cases.

Col. Julie Jones, FWC's director of law enforcement, said "He works with the FWC officers on these cases from start to finish. This includes going on details with the officers on both land and on sea, going out to crime scenes and taking calls from officers in the middle of the night. One of these details included swimming after a defendant who was illegally spearing lobster. He is an inspiration to FWC's officers and a fundamental partner for FWC."

FWC wins national awards

Two *Florida Wildlife Magazine* contributors won national Association for Conservation Information (ACI) awards. "If we build it... a seabird success story" written by FWC public information coordinator Dani Moschella won third place in the Magazine Article, Wildlife category. A helicopter/law enforcement vessel photograph by FWC information specialist Tim Donovan illustrating the "High-tech training on the high sea" article won the third place Photography award. Both the article and photograph were published in the November/December 2006 issue of *Florida Wildlife*.

Two other FWC entries won awards. The "Safe Harbor" project won second place in the Big Ideas, Small Budget category and "Florida's Native Snakes" produced by Kelly Broderick won second place in the Color Publications category.

ACI is a non-profit association of information and education professionals representing state and federal agencies and private conservation organizations.

Seventh-graders create educational alligator coloring booklet

The Sanibel School Seventh-Grade Community Problem Solving Team (CmPS) developed an alligator coloring booklet titled "All About Alligators" to educate children on how to be safe around this powerful reptile. The FWC funded the second printing of the booklet.

Dr. Trish Herman of Barry University, the CmPS team coach, said the coloring book was developed as a result of fatalities caused by alligators. The goal is to teach elementary school-aged children how to be safe and coexist with alligators.

Community problem solving teams identify issues facing their communities and then work on

developing solutions. In 2005, the Sanibel team chose to focus on living safely with alligators. The team consisted of seventh-graders Kaitlyn

Herman, Maura Dowling, Shawn McCarney, Elle Farrell, Jimmy Shannon and Laura Turner.

The FWC applauds the efforts of these motivated and concerned students. The original booklet was created and printed in 2005 with funding and distribu-

tion assistance of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. It is being distributed by the FWC and J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge at various outreach events and is available at MyFWC.com/gators/kids_only/AAA_booklet.pdf.



Floridian wins international Winchester Hunter Education Instructor of the Year

Dave Klein of Bradenton is the 2007 Winchester Hunter Education Volunteer Instructor of the Year. The honor recognizes an instructor who significantly advances the cause of safe hunting through extraordinary service in training or education.



This is the second time in the past three years a Florida instructor has won this award from the world-famous gun and ammunition manufacturer. Terry and Norma Neenan of Bell also were the first husband and wife team to win the award in 2005.

Klein also was recognized in 2006 for his commitment to teaching hunter safety by winning the FWC

"Hunter Safety - 2005 Instructor of the Year."

"There's nothing more gratifying than watching a youngster fire a shotgun or head into the field for the first time," Klein said. "I do this because I value the shooting sports and hunting - and, this is my way of being able to give back to the community."

"Volunteer hunter education instructors like Dave Klein not only promote the hunting and shooting sports, but they serve as leaders in our industry," president of Winchester Ammunition Dick Hammett said. "Winchester is very proud of Mr. Klein along with the other finalists for this award."

For more information on how to become a volunteer hunter safety instructor, call (850) 413-0085 or visit MyFWC.com/huntersafety.