Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Living on the Edge: CWCI Newsletter - Fall 2017

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Welcome to the fall 2017 edition of Living on the Edge, the newsletter of the Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative! This is a quarterly newsletter to update Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff, partners and members of the public about Florida's coastal issues, including current projects and other points of interest. Regular highlights will include featured projects related to coastal wildlife, interviews with our staff or partners, special seasonal considerations, news and events, volunteer opportunities and current funding opportunities. If you are interested in spreading the word about your project or someone doing a fantastic job in coastal conservation, please contact CWCI Coordinator Fara Ilami at fara.ilami@myfwc.com.

The Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative is an FWC-led multi-agency strategy to address threats to coastal wildlife and habitats, while also considering human interests and uses of Florida's coastal areas. The goal is a statewide cooperative process to protect coastal wildlife populations, conserve and manage coastal ecosystems, and achieve balance between conservation and opportunities for recreation, commercial activities and responsible development.

Calendar: Upcoming Meetings, Webinars, and Events

OneNOAA Science Seminars, various dates and locations

ASBPA National Coastal Conference, October 24-27, 2017, Fort Lauderdale, FL

Southeastern Environmental Conference, October 30 – November 1, 2017, Orange Beach, AL

International Conference on Renewable Energy and Environment, November 1-3, 2017, Toronto, Canada

Coastal and Estuarine Research

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Hot Topic: Florida Beaches Habitat Conservation Plan

The Florida Beaches Habitat Conservation Plan (FBHCP) is making great strides to reduce negative impacts to Florida's listed coastal species. In its 10th year of development, the FBHCP is in the final phase before being submitted for review and approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The FWC has partnered with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to develop the FBHCP, which is the first of its kind and covers 825 miles of sandy beaches in Florida.

The FBHCP will bring the State of Florida into full compliance with the Endangered Species Act by ensuring that impacts to listed species resulting from authorized legal activities are minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent practicable. This is necessary because the FDEP's Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) Program issues permits for activities that have the potential to incidentally impact (or "take") federally protected species and the coastal habitats upon which they depend. Therefore, the FDEP is applying to the USFWS for an Incidental Take Permit (ITP), which requires a habitat conservation plan that outlines how to minimize and mitigate the impacts from these permitted activities.

Some benefits of the Florida Beaches Habitat Conservation Plan:

- Promotes and improves healthy beaches for wildlife
- Ensures compliance with the Endangered Species Act
- Minimizes risk from potential third-party lawsuits
- Reduces risk of unauthorized take
- Addresses impacts comprehensively, rather than parcel by parcel
- Develops standard environmental protection measures
- Streamlines the permitting process and limits the need for individual ITPs
- Provides a clear/concise roadmap for conducting CCCL activities

The planning process was formally initiated in 2007 and is projected to be completed by late 2018. Its development is being funded by Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grants, with over $8 million received from the USFWS. Stakeholder involvement and broad support for the plan is not only desirable, but essential to the overall success of the FBHCP and the long-term viability of some of Florida's coastal natural resources. Stakeholders are encouraged to call in or attend the quarterly Steering Committee meetings. The next meeting

Federation 24th Biennial Conference, November 5-9, 2017, Providence, RI

Ocean Sciences Meeting, February 11-16, 2018, Portland, OR

American Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting, February 15-19, 2018, Austin, TX

Coastal News Snippets

Is the coast clear? Not in many beachfront areas, July 24, 2017

UF scientists discover cause of Atlantic coastline's sea level rise hot spots, Aug 9, 2017

NOAA Backs Marine Debris Removal/Research, Sept 5, 2017

All the ways hurricanes can harm—and help—the ecosystems they hit, Sept 18, 2017

Beach erosion is a problem in St. Johns County, but are seawalls the right fix? Sept 24, 2017

is planned for **November 14-15**. For more information on the FBHCP, visit http://www.flbeacheshcp.com/.

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Featured Project: In-water posting of new Critical Wildlife Areas

The featured project for this edition is the in-water posting of the FWC's new Critical Wildlife Areas. CWAs are discrete areas that are posted as closed to public access in order to protect concentrations of vulnerable wildlife from human disturbance. Closure periods and buffer distances are designed to provide wildlife at each location with the space needed to successfully roost, feed, nest, and rear young. CWAs are established by the FWC, with landowner concurrence, under Florida Administrative Code. After the FWC's ambitious effort in 2016 to establish new CWAs, there are now 32 CWAs throughout Florida.

Currently, FWC staff are completing the permitting and contracting phase of this project to install in-water signs at 14 of the new CWAs. These "closed to public access" markers are enforceable by the FWC and local law enforcement, and they will buffer wildlife from human-related disturbances. Buffers at CWAs typically range from 50 – 300 feet from the shoreline.

Some sites are closed to public access year-round, while others are closed seasonally. Popular activities like wildlife viewing, photography and fishing will continue to be enjoyed, but at a distance that will allow wildlife to rest, forage and nest productively.

Fifteen of the new or re-established CWAs are sandbars or spoil islands that support large concentrations of breeding and roosting wading birds and shorebirds. For example, Flag Island CWA in Franklin County supports an estimated 450 breeding pairs of birds representing nine different species, including state-listed black skimmers, least terns, and American oystercatchers.

Critical Wildlife Areas are not only for birds. Among the newly established sites is Withlacoochee Caves CWA, which includes 6 caves in the Withlacoochee State Forest. This site provides breeding and wintering habitat for bats such as the tricolored bat and southeastern myotis. In Broward County, Deerfield Island Park CWA hosts one of the last populations of gopher tortoises within the county.

Posting CWA buffers is coordinated by FWC staff with the assistance of key partners. The FWC and partners also monitor sites and conduct habitat management activities, such as removal of exotic plants and predator control. Protection efforts are coordinated with the landowner, FWC law enforcement officers, local governments and other agencies and organizations, as appropriate.

For additional information or questions about CWAs, contact the CWA coordinator at CWAComments@MyFWC.com. To learn more about Florida's CWAs, please visit www.MyFWC.com/CWA.

Fall Wildlife Tips: Be Aware of Horseshoe Crab Mating

The American horseshoe crab is a common sight on Florida's beaches, especially during the spring and fall. Horseshoe crabs are known for their large nesting aggregations, or groups, on beaches all along the east coast of the United States. In Florida, horseshoe crabs can nest year-round, with peak spawning occurring in the spring and fall. When mating, the smaller male crab attaches himself to the top of the larger female's shell by using his specialized front claws, and together they crawl to the beach. The attached pair bury themselves in the sand and the male fertilizes the eggs as the female lays them in the nest. Some males (called satellite males) do not attach to females but still have success in fertilizing the female's eggs as they crowd around the attached pair. Most of this nesting activity takes place during high tides around the time of a new or full moon.

What you can do:

- If you observe horseshoe crabs spawning in Florida (two or more connected together), please report this information to the FWC by filling out the online survey where you can input the information directly, email horseshoe@MyFWC.com, or call 866-252-9326. These observations will help biologists gain a better understanding of where and when horseshoe crabs are spawning in Florida.
- Consider joining the Florida Horseshoe Crab Watch citizen science program, in which trained volunteers assist biologists in surveying, tagging and resighting Florida's nesting horseshoe crab populations utilizing a standardized scientific protocol.
- If you see a horseshoe crab upside-down, you can help it out by picking it up by both sides of its shell, turning it over and releasing it in the water. Usually they can turn themselves over with their telson (tail), but sometimes they get overturned by high wave action during spawning and may not be able to right themselves, which can lead to death. Never pick up a horseshoe crab by its tail, as it can harm the animal.
- If you observe inappropriate harvest of horseshoe crabs (use of gear other than by hand or gig or harvest of more than 100 horseshoe crabs in one day), report it to the FWC's Wildlife Alert line at 888-404-FWCC (3922) or text Tip@MyFWC.com.
- When considering options for shoreline stabilization for your property, avoid seawalls and other types of development that can disrupt the horseshoe crab's reproductive activities.

Staff/Partner Spotlight: Jeff Beal

1. **What is your title?** Biological Scientist IV (technically) but I often tell non-agency folks that I'm the Marine/Estuarine Habitat Coordinator for the Indian River Lagoon as it's more descriptive.
2. **What organization do you work for?** FWC, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration Section, Marine/Estuarine Subsection (MESS!)
3. **What type of work do you do?** I focus on the conservation and restoration of aquatic habitats including saltmarshes, mangroves, seagrasses, tidal riverine wetlands, oysters and coral reefs. This involves partnering with numerous entities, representing the agency on regional matters affecting species and habitats, and often securing grant funds and managing contracts to complete projects to improve or create habitats.
4. **What project(s) have you recently been working on?** As a result of a long partnership with numerous agencies and other entities including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association's Coastal Habitat grant program, we recently restored 5 acres of saltmarsh on FWC property in New Smyrna Beach. The site is high profile and attracts numerous visitors, especially to the non-profit partner (Marine Discovery Center) conducting various programs on the site. As part of the project, we created a shoreline stabilization demonstration area for waterfront landowners to learn about alternatives for securing erosion, including the use of Living Shorelines concepts. Plants grown in the marsh are used for regional restoration projects. Working in south Florida, our agency is strategically focused on the Everglades. One aspect of this large-scale restoration is developing performance measures and monitoring key features which define success. Through a partnership with Florida Atlantic University, we are monitoring the effects of Everglades restoration on coral stress, as it relates to freshwater releases through St. Lucie Inlet. This project has become increasingly important because of a recent coral disease outbreak along the Florida Reef Tract.
5. **How does your work relate to the CWCI?** The work accomplished by MESS relates strongly to the CWCI mission. Both programs focus on coastal species and habitats. We partner to conserve them as much as possible, often acting as subject matter experts to inform coastal issues and projects. The MESS program also works especially to improve the habitats, through restoration or enhancement, which benefits the species.
6. **How long have you been working in the coastal environment, and what are some lessons you have learned?** I've worked in coastal east-central Florida for more than 25 years, including graduate school at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. I've learned that there are many things we know about the coastal zone (as proved by my office bursting with reports) but have enjoyed discovering new things that make me wonder how much we truly understand about these dynamic systems. They are surprisingly resilient in some ways and surprisingly vulnerable in others. I've also embraced the need to continually update my personal knowledge of species and habitats, often learning from the experiences of colleagues. Frankly, most of what I know was forced learning on the job. School prepared me with a foundation for constant learning and application. The job can get frustrating at times, but something

will grab my attention that I've never learned before and I'm transported back to wonderland.

7. **What do you think is the greatest threat to coastal ecosystems, and what action(s) should be undertaken to address it?** Over-development is the greatest threat to our coasts. The passage of major storms is a poignant reminder that these habitats are dynamic, wild and fragile and that we cannot truly control or tame them. We must be realistic about our ability to maintain infrastructure while also being cognizant of the many great benefits provided by green space and natural areas in the coastal zone. Conservation and restoration of coastal habitats not only makes sense for the species we hope to protect, they make sense on myriad levels including economically.
8. **What is your favorite coastal animal, and why?** I'm a fish guy by trade and experience. I've always been fascinated by them, and east-central Florida is a fish lovers paradise with nearly 800 species to study. One fish in particular caught my attention while working my first job in the field: the orange spotted goby (Nes longus). Each one lives commensally in a burrow maintained by a snapping shrimp. The fish perches in front of the burrow and warns the shrimp of danger using fin movements … guard duty in exchange for free housing … inter-phyla cohabitation. My mentor and I discovered the first recorded specimen in Indian River Lagoon years ago and I still recall vividly the fascinating moment it happened. This story reminds me that partnering done right leads to mutual benefit.
9. **Do you have a message you would like to share with readers of this newsletter?** Coastal areas provide numerous benefits to us, some of which are behind the scenes that we might take for granted. They filter water to our aquifers, provide habitat for recreationally and commercially important species, house rare and imperiled species, cycle nutrients to improve our water quality, produce oxygen for us to breathe, and take the brunt of storms while protecting private property. There's one additional benefit that I hope we won't forget: they provide peace and solace and an opportunity for reflection, recharge, and awe … if we'll carve out time to allow them to inspire us. I've rarely been moved to peace, tranquility, and contentment by the manmade, but perhaps that's just me.

NOTE: Jeff just received the prestigious 2017 Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award from the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership for working tirelessly on estuarine habitat restoration and conservation for the FWC for over a decade and finding innovative ways to initiate fish habitat projects.

Critter of the Quarter: Florida Manatee

This fall's Critter of the Quarter is the Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*), which begins migrating in November to warm water areas that are necessary to survive the colder weather of the winter. In warmer months some Florida manatees may travel outside of peninsular Florida, however Florida is the northern end of its winter range. A system of warm-water refuges, including natural springs, power-plant outflows, and passive thermal basins provide shelter in cold weather.

Adults are typically 9-10 feet long and weigh around 1,100 pounds. They have two flippers that they use to help steer themselves through the water and a paddle-shaped tail that they use to propel themselves forward. They are mammals, so they have fine hairs all over their body and breathe air. They are in the family Sirenian, which includes other species of manatees, the dugong and the extinct Stellar's sea cow. Their closest relatives on land are the elephant and the hyrax. Manatees are herbivores and eat over 60 species of freshwater and marine vegetation, although seagrass is a dietary staple. They reach sexual maturity at 3 to 7 years, and their gestation is approximately 13 months. A calf may stay with its mother for up to two years or more.

Threats to manatees include watercraft-related mortality and injuries, entanglement, and long-term loss of warm-water habitats. Human-related mortality and rescues underscore the conservation reliance of the species—meaning that threats cannot be eliminated, but only managed. Sound conservation practices and strong public stewardship are needed to sustain the species and reduce human-related threats. Your actions matter! When on the water, looking out for manatees, complying with posted speed zones, and properly disposing of fishing line and other waste are important ways to make a difference and could even save a life.

Volunteer Opportunities

Audubon Christmas Bird Count – Sign up in November to help with a bird count that runs December 14 through January 5. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation action.

Florida Horseshoe Crab Watch citizen science program – Assist biologists in surveying, tagging and resighting Florida's nesting horseshoe crab populations utilizing a standardized scientific protocol. For more information, contact tiffany.black@myfwc.com.

Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program – Volunteer to empty a monofilament recycling bin at regular intervals at a location near you, or help keep fishing line and marine debris out of the environment in other ways. For more information, contact Marine@myfwc.com.

Red Tide Offshore Monitoring Program – A volunteer program to assist the researchers who study Karenia brevis, the organism that causes Florida red tide. Citizen volunteers expand the spatial coverage of FWRI's monitoring program by collecting water samples from routine collection points and sites reported for suspected harmful algal blooms (HABs). For more information, contact RTOMP_coordinator@MyFWC.com.

Tampa Bay Watch Restoration – A variety of hands-on habitat restoration projects such as oyster dome construction, oyster shell bar installation, salt marsh plantings and coastal cleanups to help the bay recover from its devastating environmental problems. For more information, contact rarndt@tampabaywatch.org.

Funding Opportunities

Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund — Grants of up to $25,000 will be awarded in support of plant, animal, and fungi species conservation efforts for endangered species, without discrimination on the basis of region or selected species. The deadline is **October 31, 2017**.

NOAA Marine Debris Program Marine Debris Removal grant — Provides funding to support projects that will create long-term, quantifiable ecological habitat improvements for NOAA trust resources through on-the-ground marine debris removal activities, with priority for those targeting derelict fishing gear and other medium- and large-scale debris. The deadline is **November 1, 2017.**

The Conservation Alliance Grants — Program seeks to protect threatened wild places throughout North America for their habitat and recreational values. Grant requests of up to $50,000 are accepted from registered 501(c)(3) organizations. The deadline for nomination is **November 1, 2017.**

The Lawrence Foundation Grants — Foundation makes grants to US-based qualified charitable organizations for projects that support environmental, education, human services and other causes. The proposal deadline is **November 1, 2017.**

The Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation Grants — Grants are considered for non-profit organizations located within the United States for programs and projects including environmental and wildlife protection activities up to $20,000. The deadline is **November 10, 2017.**

Captain Planet Foundation -- Educators, both K-12 classroom and informal, who are interested in receiving support for students to design and implement hands-on environmental solutions are eligible for project funding. Deadline is **January 15, 2017.**

Alcoa Foundation Grant Program — Sustainability is a major focus promoting 1) the prevention of and resilience to climate change and 2) the restoration and preservation of biodiversity. Grants are awarded on a rolling basis.

BoatUS Foundation Grassroots Grants Program – Povides grants up to $10,000 to nonprofit organizations, boating clubs and student groups for projects that promote safe and/or clean boating. Applications are accepted year round.

David & Lucile Packard Foundation — Grants are made for charitable, educational, or scientific purposes, primarily from tax-exempt charitable organizations. Grants fall under several categories including climate, ocean, land, science, and conservation.

George & Miriam Martin Foundation Grants — The focus of the foundation is river and watershed conservation. Grants range from $1,000 - $200,000. There are no deadlines.

Rockefeller Family Fund — Grant making currently has an environment program focus on the challenges of climate change with an emphasis on public education. Letters of inquiry may be submitted at any time.

Surdna Foundation Grantmaking — Grant making to nonprofit organizations in the priority areas of Sustainable Environments, Strong Local Economies and Thriving Cultures. Letters of inquiry may be submitted at any time.

Waitt Foundation Rapid Ocean Conservation (ROC) Grants — This opportunity provides small grants with a quick turnaround time for solutions to emerging conservation issues. The

funding cycle is open to new applications. Proposals are reviewed monthly on a rolling basis, although some applications take additional time to evaluate.

Wells Fargo Environmental Grant Program — Environmental grant program focuses on addressing local environmental priorities in communities and providing support that fosters innovation to help accelerate a “green” economy. One letter of inquiry per year per organization is accepted.

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