Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Living on the Edge: CWCI Newsletter - Winter 2017

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Welcome to the Winter 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 interested in Florida's coastal issues about 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, and current funding opportunities. If you are interested in spreading the word about your project or someone who is doing a fantastic job in coastal conservation, please contact the 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 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

World Aquaculture Society Meeting, February 19-22, 2017, San Antonio, TX

World Ocean Summit, February 22-24, 2017, Bali, Indonesia

Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography Meeting, February 26 – March 3, 2017, Honolulu, HI

- Calendar: Upcoming Meetings, Webinars, and Events
- Coastal News Snippets

Hot Topic: Imperiled Species Management Plan

The Imperiled Species Management Plan rule changes are now in effect, including changes in listing status for many species. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved the groundbreaking plan in an effort to achieve conservation success with dozens of imperiled species throughout the state. The plan outlines the steps to conserve 57 species along with the broader vision of restoring habitats essential to the long-term survival of multiple fish and wildlife species. Read more…

Featured Project: Artificial Reef Deployment

Climate Tools Decision Support Tree Webinar, March 2, 2017

Climate Tools Decision Support Tree Workshop, March 7, 2017, Pensacola, FL

Living Shorelines Workshop, March 7, 2017, Biloxi, MS

Living Shorelines Workshop, March 14, 2017, Eastpoint, FL

League of Environmental Educators in Florida LEEF Annual Conference, March 18, 2017, Hillsborough, FL

State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit, March 26-28, 2017, Houston, TX

Gulf of Mexico Alliance 2017 All Hands Meeting, March 29-31, Houston, TX

Gulf of Mexico Workshop on International Research, March 29-30, Houston, TX

Association of Southeastern Biologists,

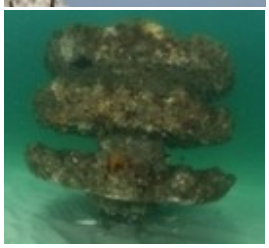
In April 2011, one year after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, BP agreed to provide up to $1 billion toward early restoration projects in the Gulf of Mexico. Since then, the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) Trustees have approved five early restoration plans, encompassing 65 projects at an estimated cost of $866 million. One of these projects, Florida Artificial Reef Creation and Restoration conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), was selected in 2014 as a Phase III early restoration project. It includes offshore marine artificial reef construction in five northwest Florida counties, Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton and Bay, and the City of Mexico Beach.

The goal of this project is to replace lost recreational opportunities caused by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Due to the months-long spill, large areas of the Gulf of Mexico were closed to fishing, and extensive damage to marine and wildlife habitats and fishing and tourism industries were reported. The addition of new artificial reefs off the Gulf coast of northwest Florida will provide new locations for anglers and divers to visit and offset some of the negative fishing and tourism impacts caused by the spill.

An anticipated 3,000 prefabricated artificial reefs will be deployed within 48 permitted areas located in state waters (within 9 nautical miles from shore). The $11,463,587 project is one of the largest artificial reef construction projects in the history of Florida's artificial reef program (annual funding rarely exceeds $700,000).

The reefs to be deployed consist of a combination of the following five designs:

Small Tetrahedron Reef: 6-8 ft. tall, 10-ton hollow concrete walled structure with three or more sides. This structure is the most common artificial reef structure in the region.



Concrete Disk Reef: 8 ft. tall, three or more rock or shell embedded concrete layers mounted on a piling. These particular reefs will be deployed within 500 ft. from shore making them easily accessible. An underwater camera was recently installed at a similar site offshore of Navarre Beach.

Photo credit: Carol Cox

Large Tetrahedron Reef: 18 ft. tall, 18-ton larger version of the original small tetrahedron described above. These reefs are especially attractive to pelagic species of fish such as amberjack.

March 29 – April 1, 2017, Montgomery, AL

Climate and Resilience Community of Practice Meeting, May 16-18, Covington, LA

Citizen Science Association Conference, May 17-20, 2017, Twin Cities, MN

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Coastal News Snippets

Living Shorelines Withstand Matthew's Force, Dec. 8, 2016

Congress includes help for Everglades, beaches in major water bill, Dec, 10, 2016

Sea turtle nesting key to beach project monitoring, Dec. 11, 2016

Everglades' water at risk from sea-level rise, scientists say, Dec. 15, 2016

Coastal Federation offers new resource for

Ledge and Disk Reef: 6-8 ft. tall, 4-ton concrete structure with a vertical disk reef and at least one side almost entirely open. This structure is especially attractive to different species of grouper.

Large Dome Reef: 6-8 ft. tall, 7-ton concrete dome shaped structures with multiple small holes throughout the structure.

Photo credit: Carol Cox

The City of Mexico Beach deployed the first 301 artificial reef modules as part of this project last year and will deploy an additional 200 modules through spring of 2017. These modules are deployed by a marine contractor using a large barge and crane. The crane carefully lowers each module to the bottom of the ocean floor to avoid breakage and ensure precise placement in a specific orientation around existing structures.

Following the successful deployment of all the artificial reef modules, extensive monitoring will be conducted to track the people using these reefs, the condition of the reefs and the species inhabiting the structures. It is expected that in a short amount of time they will be covered with encrusting invertebrates and teeming with a number of different reef fish species including red snapper, amberjack and grouper. These additional reef locations will provide generations of anglers and divers with increased fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities off the coast of northwest Florida.

Photo credit: Carol Cox

For more information about the FWC's artificial reef program and the NRDA project, visit MyFWC.com/Conservation and click on "Saltwater" and "Artificial Reefs." For more information about the Gulf Spill Restoration program across the northern Gulf of Mexico, visit gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov.

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Winter Wildlife Tips: Watching for Right Whale Migration

It's that time of year when a trip to the beaches along Florida's east coast may result in a mom and calf North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) sighting. From November 15 to April 15, pregnant females migrate southward along the

information on living shorelines, Dec. 19, 2016

Reinforce and Build: the vicious cycle driving development on Florida's most fragile beaches, Dec. 20, 2016

Corps Eases Living Shoreline Permit Process, Jan. 12, 2017

Sea level rise symposium provides insight to island residents, Jan. 25, 2017

Fishing line and tackle disposal – It's about more than just monofilament, Feb. 6, 2017

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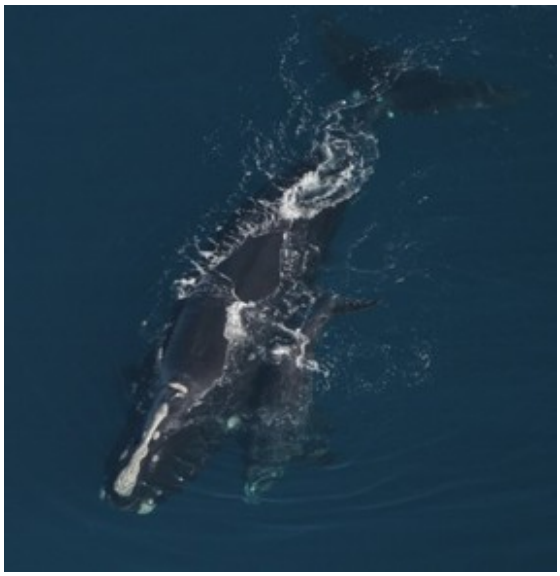

coast from their feeding grounds in the northeast U.S to the calm, warm waters off the Georgia and Florida coasts to give birth. These calving grounds for the North Atlantic right whale were designated as right whale critical habitat in 1994 by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Protecting whales at this critical life stage is paramount, especially as mothers and calves travel together. The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most endangered large whales in the world, with about 500 individuals remaining today.

North Atlantic right whale migration routes hug the coast, putting them in close contact with various human activities. They regularly traverse shipping lanes and populated areas with heavy vessel traffic, and unfortunately right whales are difficult to spot while boating. Their lack of a dorsal fin, combined with their dark coloring, slow moving nature and time spent near or at the surface, puts them at a great risk of vessel strikes. Several measures are in place to alert and educate large ships about key right whale habitats, including recommended shipping lanes and areas to be avoided, Seasonal Management Areas (SMA) and a Mandatory Ship Reporting (MSR) system. Boaters can look for education signs at boat ramps and marinas and learn how to recognize and report right whale sightings .

Right whales' habitat also overlaps with commercial fisheries areas, thereby increasing whales' chances of entanglement. Rope and netting from fishing gear can cause injuries, infection, starvation and death. Resting right whales are generally unaware of the dangers around them. Over 80 percent of the whale population exhibits scars from previous entanglements, and these fisheries interactions can have long term impacts on the health and calving rates of the whales. As members of the Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Network, biologists in Florida and Georgia have received specialized training on how to respond to entangled whales. If an entangled or dead animal is sighted, immediately notify the U.S. Coast Guard on VHF CH. 16.

FWC researchers conduct aerial and vessel surveys off the east coast of Florida and Georgia during calving season in collaboration with NOAA Fisheries, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Sea to Shore Alliance. Photographs from these surveys are used to identify individual right whales, monitor calving, habitat use and trends in health and scarring, and to develop and evaluate recovery strategies. Some interesting life history facts that have been observed in the surveys: females do not eat during calving season and therefore need to conserve energy; healthy right whales produce one offspring every 3 to 5 years; and these whales are capable of living more than 100 years. A sighting network using volunteers is also in place along Florida's east coast. It

utilizes right whale reports by citizens and relays time-sensitive information to biologists in the area.

When a right whale is sighted, it is important to report the information as quickly as possible to 1-877-WHALE HELP (a NOAA sighting hotline). Be prepared to provide the time and location of your sighting as well as a description of the animal. Florida's waters are home to several species of large whales, so species identification is key. Below are identifying characteristics for North Atlantic right whales:

- Callosities (large, white bumps)
- V-shaped blow
- Deeply notched tail with smooth trailing edge
- Broad, flat back with no dorsal fin
- Paddle-shaped flippers
- Up to 55 ft. long, up to 70 tons
- Black coloration

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Staff Spotlight: Carol Rizkalla

Carol is a former team member of the CWCI but has recently moved to a different position within the FWC. Her hard work on Critical Wildlife Areas is greatly appreciated.

1. **What is your title?** Currently Conservation Biologist. Formerly Critical Wildlife Area Coordinator and Assistant Regional Biologist.
2. **What organization do you work for?** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
3. **What type of work do you do?** I am currently responsible for implementing conservation plans for focal species on the agency's Wildlife Management Areas in the South Region. Focal species include listed species, indicator species, keystone species or species that are otherwise locally important in the area. As the Assistant Regional Biologist, I performed similar tasks but on unmanaged lands. I also helped monitor and manage Critical Wildlife Areas in the region. As Critical Wildlife Area Coordinator, I worked with partners and stakeholders to establish new CWAs, ensured consistency in

monitoring and management across the state and acquired funding to improve the program.

4. **What project(s) have you recently been working on?** Much of the past year, I worked on an unprecedented Critical Wildlife Area initiative. In November 2016, the Commission designated 13 new CWAs and modified 5 existing CWAs. After hearing an update about Bird Island CWA in April 2016, the chairman asked staff to find other areas across the state that needed protection from disturbance. Given other job duties, the process to establish a CWA typically takes about a year – from developing a proposal, summarizing data on wildlife use and disturbance, weighing alternatives, gathering public input, acquiring landowner concurrence to bringing the final proposal for approval. In this case, we were working on 19 proposals in about half the time. In the end, we were unable to get landowner concurrence for one site, but it was incredibly gratifying that all other staff proposals were approved.
5. **How does your work relate to the CWCI?** CWAs are a priority issue for CWCI since the majority of CWAs are coastal, protecting beach-nesting birds and wading birds from disturbance. Many of CWCI's other priorities also overlap, such as vegetation management, dogs on beaches, and posting in navigable waterways. All of these issues are important components in the conservation of coastal wildlife. The only difference is that an area that has been designated a CWA has a legally enforceable boundary.
6. **How long have you been working in the coastal environment, and what are some lessons you have learned?** My work along the coast began 10 years ago doing sea turtle nest surveys. I then took a job that moved me to the center of the state, along the Lake Wales Ridge, before joining FWC in 2012. My work along the coast has been mostly bird-focused, but I've also been able to do surveys for beach mice, diamondback terrapins, and several species unique to the Keys. I have learned that coastal environments are far from static, and this makes them incredibly resilient. If given the opportunity to recover, they will.
7. **What do you think is the greatest threat to coastal ecosystems, and what action(s) should be undertaken to address it?** I think coastal development is the greatest threat. New development results in habitat loss. As sea levels rise, coastal armoring will likely increase to protect the infrastructure. Beaches and their associated wildlife will not be able to retreat naturally. Unfortunately, I'm afraid the future will be decided by the economics of building beaches and seawalls, rather than maintaining functioning ecosystems.
8. **What is your favorite coastal animal, and why?** I never had a favorite animal, coastal or otherwise. I find them all fascinating. I just can't stand roaches, and the ocean may be the only place I'm safe from them.
9. **Do you have a message you would like to share with readers of this newsletter?** Sometimes I feel like humans have already done so much damage to this planet, and the prevailing paradigm won't change, so what's the point? But I wouldn't have wanted a career in conservation if there wasn't a sliver of hope that we can make a difference. Aldo Leopold, considered the father of conservation in this country, once wrote, "That the situation is hopeless should not prevent us from doing our best."

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Critter of the Quarter: Snowy Plover

This winter's Critter of the Quarter is the snowy plover (*Charadrius nivosus*), a small, quiet and charming shorebird that resides and nests on beaches, barrier and spoil islands, shorelines, sand bars and flats, and alkaline flats and lakes throughout the Gulf Coast, parts of the Pacific Coast and western US interior, throughout the Caribbean, and throughout portions of Central and South America. In Florida, the snowy plover is a year-round resident (unlike Florida's other "snow birds"), with some populations migrating from breeding grounds in the panhandle to the southwestern coast during the fall and winter months. The snowy plover can reach a length of 6.7 inches, with a wingspan of up to 13.4 inches, and weigh up to 2 ounces. The snowy plover has a short, thin black bill and grey legs. The upper body varies in color from greyish to light-brown with a white belly, dark patches on sides of neck and behind the eyes, and a distinctive black band across the forehead. In females and nonbreeding juveniles, the characteristic black markings are browner in color.

In Florida, snowy plovers nest primarily on open sandy beaches along the Gulf Coast between February and August. Nesting has not been documented on the Atlantic Coast, but several nests have been found on inland mining operations. During courtship, the males will make several practice scrapes. The female will choose one of these in which to lay her eggs. Sometimes the nest scrapes are lined with bits of shell, pebbles or other beach debris and are well camouflaged to avoid detection by predators and people. On average, each clutch consists of three buff-colored eggs, lightly to moderately covered with dark, small spots. The eggs are incubated and protected by both parents for 28-35 days. Snowy plover chicks are precocial, which means within hours of hatching, the chicks are able to leave the nest and feed on their own. However, both parents continue to protect the chicks until they fledge approximately 30 days later. Snowy plovers will commonly have 2-3 clutches per season, particularly if the first nest fails.

The snowy plover is state-designated as Threatened in Florida and is federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is also included in Florida's Imperiled Species Management Plan. Snowy plover populations in Florida are declining rapidly, mostly due to habitat loss from coastal development, human-related disturbance, predation, washover from storms, and sea level rise. In order to protect current populations and habitat and help increase nesting success and chick survival, nesting areas throughout the Gulf Coast of Florida

are delineated with symbolic fencing and signage to make beachgoers aware of the birds, nests and chicks. Nests and chicks are difficult to see, as they blend in with the beach environment. Adult birds that are flushed off the nest will call out and feign injury through a broken-wing display. If this is observed, stop in place and walk slowly away, keeping eyes on the ground for any nests or chicks which may freeze in place in an attempt to hide.

For more information on the snowy plover and other beach-nesting shorebirds and seabirds, and to discover volunteer opportunities to help protect these important birds, please visit the Florida Shorebird Alliance.

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Funding Opportunities

NOAA Gulf of Mexico Coast Conservation Corps Funding Program — NOAA is seeking applications from non-federal partners that will recruit, train, and employ workers to work on habitat restoration projects and develop skills in support of long-term Gulf coast restoration. The goal of the program is to provide labor support to projects listed on the RESTORE Act Funded Priorities Lists, projects funded through Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlements, and other funded federal or state projects. The deadline is **March 2, 2017**.

NOAA FY 2017 Coastal Resilience Grants Program — Proposed projects should build resilience in U.S. coastal communities, economies, and ecosystems. The program intends to reduce risk from extreme weather events and climate-related hazards. The deadline is **March 15, 2017**.

NFWF/Wells Fargo Resilient Communities Program — The program will help communities prepare for future impacts associated with sea level rise, water quantity and quality and forest conservation. Special consideration is given to projects that help bridge rural and urban community resilience needs with focus on the interconnectedness of natural systems and community well-being. Pre-proposals are due **March 30, 2017**.

NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program — RCPP will make awards to locally driven, public-private partnerships that improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability. The deadline is **April 21, 2017**.

Conservation Alliance — Seeks to protect threatened wild places throughout North America for their habitat and recreational values. Accepts grant applications from non-profit organizations with a focus on protection of a specific wild land or waterway, engaging grassroots citizen action in support of the conservation effort, and demonstrating a clear recreational benefit. Organizations must be nominated before applying for grant requests. Nominations are due by **May 1, 2017** and proposals are due **June 1, 2017**.

Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants — Awards are to protect, restore and enhance coastal wetland ecosystems and associated uplands. The grants are funded through the Sport Fish Restoration

and Boating Trust Fund, which is supported by excise taxes on fishing equipment and motorboat fuel. Search grants.gov for F17AS00108. The deadline is **June 30, 2017**.

Northrup Grumman — Supports communities, projects and organizations, particularly where its employees live and work, with financial, in-kind and volunteer resources. Grants are awarded to accredited schools and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations for projects focused on education and the environment, among others. Requests for funding will be accepted beginning February 1, 2017 through **June 30, 2017**.

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 (LOI) 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 (LOI) 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 application 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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