

BDA
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

MEMORANDUM

TO: Clients and Stakeholders

FROM: Dr. W. Michael Dennis
Mr. W. Jeffrey Pardue, CEP, M.S., M.B.A.

DATE: June 17, 2015

SUBJECT: **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Wildlife Updates and Stakeholder Meetings**

The purpose of this memorandum is to discuss new wildlife information and news releases from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as it pertains to stakeholders and to summarize the highlights and agendas of the most recent FWC Commission meetings.

FWC Wildlife Updates

The FWC published a *Draft Position Statement* to support consideration and adoption of policy guidance by the Commission as part of the upcoming June 2015 meeting discussion item: "Florida Panthers: Research, Management, and Recovery Update and Policy Direction for Program Strategic Priorities." The position statement includes policy guidance and strategic priorities for redefining and refocusing FWC's role in panther conservation. FWC acknowledges that the panther population in south Florida is nearing its carrying capacity and has resulted in substantial increases in panther-human interactions. FWC states that this situation will continue to demand focused management attention within the current core population in south Florida and, in turn, will contain FWC's ability to focus on other agency priorities. The position statement includes that reclaiming, restoring, and managing quality habitat and prey base for panthers on public conservation lands should be high priorities for state and federal agencies when developing future management and operational plans. FWC states that the current population recovery criteria are not helpful in guiding management and research planning in the near term and this situation places Florida in the untenable position of managing a growing panther population under the rigid provisions of the Endangered Species Act without sufficient tools or flexibility to address management challenges which may result in erosion of public support for panther conservation. FWC concluded that it is imperative for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to fully recognize the success of panther recovery efforts in south Florida and take leadership responsibility for implementing new and innovative management measures.

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FWC News Releases of Interest:

FWC: Wednesday, April 15, 2015

At its April 15 meeting in Tallahassee, FWC Commissioners approved several proposed bear-related rules that will be presented for final action in June. The draft rules address a wide variety of tools to manage bear populations and help reduce human-bear conflicts.

Staff was directed to refine changes to the feeding rule by making a new sub-section specifically for bear feeding and adding coyotes to Rule 68A-4.001(3). In responding to feeding violations, staff will focus on written warnings as a key component.

Commissioners also approved draft language to the bear conservation rule which includes the depredation permit that can be used in appropriate situations. Depredation permits would authorize a landowner to remove bears if they are causing property damage, if protective measures like electric fencing have failed or are not feasible, and if FWC staff has been unable to trap the bear within four nights.

As directed by Commissioners in February, staff is also in the process of drafting a policy paper on the need for comprehensive waste management to reduce human-bear conflicts. The report and an accompanying resolution should be ready for Commission review at its June 2015 meeting.

Finally, the commission also approved proposed rules which, if passed at the next commission meeting in June, would allow limited hunting of black bears in four of the state's seven bear management units. The four proposed units contain the state's largest bear populations, which include all three national forests and the southern-most portion of Florida. The proposal includes a seven-day season in late October on private and public lands.

For the presentation outlining these amendments, go to "<http://myfwc.com/media/3013519/11B-Revisions-Bear-Rules.pdf>." Before the final discussion during the June Commission meeting, people can provide comments regarding these and other bear-related topics at MyFWC.com/Bear.

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Recent FWC Commission Meeting:

April 14-16, 2015

Highlights of Meeting include:

- Strategic Discussion Follow-up: Economic Development – Mr. Jesse Panuccio, Executive Director of the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) discussed partnership opportunities between FWC and DEO by including fish and wildlife resources and opportunities for fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, and boating in employer recruiting outreach efforts.
- Innovations in Private Land Management – FWC staff provided an update on current initiatives to develop and implement innovative strategies designed to promote public-private conservation partnerships as well as seek direction and thoughts from the Commission on this topic.
- Items Requiring Action – Draft Rules
 - New Rules for Limited Bear Hunting Season – Staff presented a suite of proposed rules and lead a discussion with Mr. David Chanda, Director of New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, regarding his agency’s experience with comprehensive bear management. The proposed rules would establish a limited hunting season for black bears on public and private lands. Rules would include requirements related to permits, season, methods of take, bag limits, check stations, harvest quotas, and other changes. The proposed rules would also revise specific area regulations on Commission managed hunting areas.
 - Revisions to Bear Related Rules – Staff will seek approval to advertise revisions to Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) Rule 68A-4.001 — General Prohibitions relating to intentional feeding of bear, fox, and raccoon. Revisions to F.A.C. Rule 68A-4.009 — Florida Black Bear Conservation addressing protection of the black bear and issuance of depredation permits will also be presented. Staff will update the Commission on creation of a position statement on comprehensive waste management practices.
 - Quail Enhancement Areas (QEA) Hunting Rule Change – Staff will present draft rules modifying the process for establishing QEA quail hunting seasons and request approval to advertise.

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Upcoming FWC Commission Meeting:

June 23-25, 2015, Sarasota

Meeting Agenda:

Strategic Discussion Follow-up:

- A. Florida Panthers: Research, Management, and Recovery Update and Policy Direction for Program Strategic Priorities – FWC staff will provide information on the Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team and updates on current panther research and management activities.
- B. Imperiled Species Management Plan (ISMP) – FWC staff will present to the Commission a summary of changes made in the draft ISMP based on new scientific information and stakeholder input, request Commissioner concurrence with proposed changes to the species list, and highlight potential regulatory aspects of the ISMP.

Items Requiring Action – Final Rules

- A. Rules for Limited Bear Hunting Season – Staff will present a suite of proposed final rules to establish a limited hunting season for black bears on public and private lands. Rules would include requirements related to permits, season, methods of take, bag limits, check stations, harvest quotas, and other changes. The proposed rules would also revise specific area regulations on Commission managed hunting areas.
- B. Revisions to Bear Related Rules and Policies – Staff will seek approval of final revisions to rules prohibiting intentional feeding of bear, fox, coyote, and raccoon (68A-4.001) and rules addressing protection of the black bear and issuance of depredation permits (68A-4.009). An agency policy paper on proposed comprehensive waste management practices and an accompanying resolution will also be presented.
- C. Pinellas County Manatee Protection Rule – Staff will seek final approval for rule amendments that establish new state manatee protection zones in portions of western Pinellas County.

DCR/WMD/WJP