



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Public Relations and Outreach Activities Similar to Other Agencies; Options Presented for Restructuring or Downsizing

at a glance

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission primarily conducts public relations and outreach activities through two units within the Office of the Executive Director. The commission's staffing level for these activities is close to the median of other state agencies and water management districts while its budget is below the median. Fish and wildlife agencies in other states conduct public relations and outreach activities similar to the commission, but some use a different organizational structure to perform them.

The commission and the Legislature may wish to consider three options for restructuring or downsizing the commission's public relations and outreach activities. These options include centralizing the activities, reducing the number of staff conducting the activities, and reducing funding for the activities.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, this report examines the public relations and outreach activities performed by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff in the Office of the Executive Director.¹ The report addresses four questions:

- What public relations and outreach activities are conducted by Office of the Executive Director staff?
- How do the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's budget and staffing levels for public relations and outreach activities compare to other state agencies and districts that conduct similar activities?
- How do the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's public relations and outreach activities compare to those conducted by other states' fish and wildlife agencies?
- What options could the commission and the Legislature consider for modifying how the commission conducts its public relations and outreach activities?

¹ Chapter [2008-106](#), Section 6, *Laws of Florida*.

Background

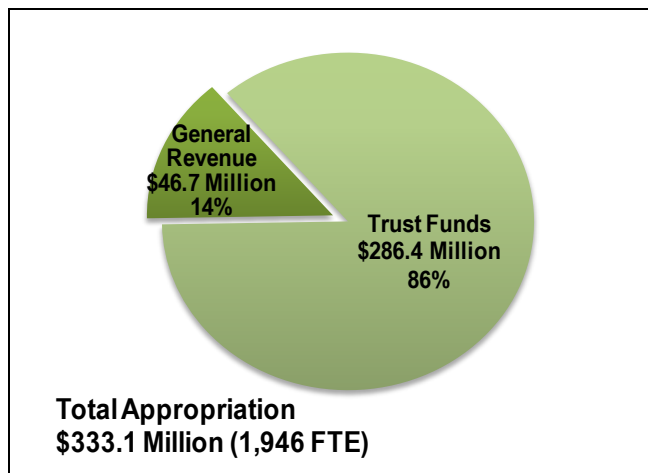
The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission manages and protects fish and wildlife resources and their habitat by:

- acquiring and managing public trust land for outdoor recreation;
- surveying, monitoring, researching, and managing the harvest of fish and wildlife species;
- enforcing compliance with fishing and hunting regulations and boating safety laws;
- maintaining and enhancing fish and wildlife species in depleted habitats; and
- producing and stocking selected freshwater and saltwater species of fish.

The commission conducts these activities through six divisions: the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, Freshwater Fisheries Management, Habitat and Species Conservation, Hunting and Game Management, Law Enforcement, and Marine Fisheries Management. The commission is divided into five administrative regions, each staffed with representatives of the divisions and headed by a regional director.

As shown in Exhibit 1, the Legislature appropriated \$333.1 million and 1,946 full-time positions to the Commission for Fiscal Year 2008-09.

Exhibit 1 The Legislature Appropriated \$333.1 Million to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for Fiscal Year 2008-09



Source: Legislative Appropriations System/Planning and Budgeting Subsystem (LAS/PBS).

Questions and Answers

Question 1: What public relations and outreach activities are conducted by Office of the Executive Director staff?

The commission’s public relations and outreach activities are designed to help recruit and retain outdoor recreation participants as well as promote stewardship and conservation of Florida’s fishery and wildlife resources.

Two units within the Office of the Executive Director are primarily responsible for conducting the commission’s public relations and outreach activities: the Office of Community Relations and the Office of Recreation Services.² In Fiscal Year 2008-09, the commission allocated \$1.87 million and 15.8 full-time equivalent positions for public relations and outreach activities conducted by these two offices. The majority of these funds and staff were allocated to the Office of Community Relations (see Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2 The Office of the Executive Director Allocated Over \$1.8 Million for Public Relations and Outreach Activities in Fiscal Year 2008-09¹

Office of	Number of Staff Performing Public Relations and Outreach Activities (Full-Time Equivalent)	Amount Allocated for Public Relations and Outreach Activities
Community Relations	14.5	\$1,515,865
Recreation Services	1.3 ²	362,137
Total	15.8	\$1,878,002

¹ This total does not include salaries and benefits for division media coordinators (\$415,583) and five regional public information coordinators (\$286,415) because these staff are not administratively located within the Office of the Executive Director.

² These staff do not include nine OPS positions that spend some portion of their time on public relations and outreach activities.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of information provided by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

² One full-time staff person in the Office of Policy and Stakeholder Coordination, another unit of the Office of the Executive Director, spends a small amount of time (5%) on public relations and outreach activities.

The Office of Community Relations is responsible for coordinating media relations activities for the commission. Office staff conduct various public relations and outreach activities such as

- issuing news releases,
- communicating with mainstream and outdoor media,
- publishing the *Florida Wildlife Magazine*,
- writing articles on fish and wildlife resources for the media,
- updating the commission's website, and
- coordinating with staff in other commission units that also conduct public relations and outreach activities. These staff include division media coordinators who serve as media contacts for their respective divisions and five regional public information coordinators who serve as spokespersons and media liaisons in the commission's regions.^{3,4}

The Office of Recreation Services provides services to meet the demand for nature-based recreation, including enhancing the public's access to the commission's fish and wildlife management areas. Office staff plans, designs, monitors, and maintains kiosks, signs, and wildlife

³ The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute has five staff to perform outreach and media relations activities (two full-time employees and three OPS staff). One of these staff functions as the division's media coordinator.

⁴ The division media coordinators promote the mission of their divisions through press releases, promotional literature, and events. For example, the media coordinator for the Division of Hunting and Game Management publicizes special opportunity hunts. The regional public information coordinators prepare and distribute materials such as news releases, fact sheets, and press kits.

viewing structures, and develops recreational guides, maps, and interpretive materials. The office also manages the Chinsegut Nature Center in Hernando County, which hosts educational programs, tours, and festivals throughout the year.

Question 2: How do the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's budget and staffing levels for public relations and outreach activities compare to other state agencies and districts that conduct similar activities?

To assess the commission's public relations and outreach activities, we compared the resources allocated to these functions by the commission to those allocated by the Department of Environmental Protection, the Public Service Commission and the five regional water management districts that manage natural resources or have a similar organizational structure as the commission. See Exhibit 3 for a description of these entities' public relations and outreach activities.

We concluded that the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's

- budget for outreach and public relations activities in Fiscal Year 2008-09 (as a percentage of its total budget) was close to the median for the entities reviewed (see Exhibit 4), and
- full-time equivalent staffing levels for public relations and outreach activities (as a percentage of total staffing) was below the median for the entities reviewed (see Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 3

Other State and Regional Entities Conduct Public Relations and Outreach Activities Similar to the Commission

Agency	Public Relations and Outreach Information															
Department of Environmental Protection	<p>Jurisdiction. Florida’s principal environmental and natural resources agency. It is divided into three primary areas: Regulatory Programs, Land and Recreation, and Planning and Management.</p> <p>Outreach and Public Relations Activities. The department conducts public relations and outreach activities primarily through a centralized Office of External Affairs and Communications under the Office of the Secretary.¹ This office conducts several activities, including those described below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Media relations and outreach staff function as the department’s primary contact for the news media regarding programs and events and monitors media outlets for developing trends, opinions, and environmental media coverage. Office staff also write and disseminate agency news releases. In addition, there are outreach coordinators in each of the department’s six district offices. These staff handle media relations, citizen services, and public events. ▪ Agency materials production staff write and create designs for print and electronic materials. Products include newsletters, invitations, brochures, displays, flyers and other marketing materials created for all department programs. Office staff also write speeches for the department secretary and deputy secretary. ▪ Environmental education staff administer the LIFE Program (Learning in Florida’s Environment), which focuses on middle school students. Staff also provides support to other department educational initiatives and serve as a liaison between teachers, community organizations, and other department staff. <p>Fiscal Year 2008-09 Budget and Staffing - \$1,491,805 and 20 FTE</p>															
Public Service Commission	<p>Jurisdiction. The commission is responsible for regulating the rates, service, and safety of utilities under its jurisdiction.</p> <p>Outreach and Public Relations Activities. The commission conducts public relations and outreach activities through a centralized Office of Public Information reporting to the Office of the Executive Director. The office’s activities include those described below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Media relations staff act as the commission’s liaison with the media and monitor media outlets to ensure that information regarding the commission is accurate. Specific activities include writing and disseminating news releases. ▪ Public outreach staff implement various outreach events, such as National Consumer Protection Week, throughout the state to help inform consumers about utilities. ▪ Agency materials production staff create and edit some agency products, such as reports and the commission website, and designs artwork and layout for bulletins, brochures, and reports. <p>Fiscal Year 2008-09 Budget and Staffing - \$1,036,735 and 15 FTE</p>															
Water Management Districts	<p>Jurisdiction. The state’s five water management districts are responsible for water supply, water quality, flood protection/floodplain management, and natural systems protection.</p> <p>Outreach and Public Relations Activities. As part of their responsibilities, the districts engage in outreach activities, although they vary in how they conduct these activities.² For example, some districts have a centralized office with staff that conducts outreach and other related activities, while one district allocates its staff to both a centralized office and regional offices. Outreach activities vary across water management districts, but typically include those described below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Media relations - serving as a contact for the media by performing interviews, providing information and special feature articles on topics such as restoration activities, issuing press releases, and giving tours of district projects. ▪ Community and public awareness - conducting educational campaigns, including developing written materials, displays, and public service announcements on topics such as water conservation, and participates in community events. ▪ Educational activities - developing and implementing water resource education programs for school age children, providing educational materials, including curriculum to teachers, and providing teacher training. ▪ District materials production - creating informational materials such as posters, educational kiosks, and booths for events, publishing newsletters, brochures, fact sheets, and district reports, and creating and managing district website content. <p>Fiscal Year 2008-09 Budget and Staffing. In Fiscal Year 2008-09, the water management districts’ budgets for outreach activities ranged from a low of \$117,100 in Suwannee River Water Management District to a high of \$6,506,939 in the Southwest Florida Water Management District.</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">▪ Northwest Florida Water Management District</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 20px;">\$243,063</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2 FTE</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">▪ St. Johns River Water Management District</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 20px;">\$5,132,893</td> <td style="text-align: right;">27 FTE</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">▪ South Florida Water Management District</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 20px;">\$5,532,744</td> <td style="text-align: right;">36 FTE</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">▪ Southwest Florida Water Management District</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 20px;">\$6,506,939</td> <td style="text-align: right;">19.74 FTE</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">▪ Suwannee River Water Management District</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 20px;">\$117,100</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 FTE</td> </tr> </table>	▪ Northwest Florida Water Management District	\$243,063	2 FTE	▪ St. Johns River Water Management District	\$5,132,893	27 FTE	▪ South Florida Water Management District	\$5,532,744	36 FTE	▪ Southwest Florida Water Management District	\$6,506,939	19.74 FTE	▪ Suwannee River Water Management District	\$117,100	1 FTE
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¹ Other Department of Environmental Protection program staff that are not housed in the Office of External Affairs and Communication also conduct public relations and outreach activities.

² Other activities include district management and administration, acquisition, restoration, and public works, regulation, operation and maintenance of land and works, and water resource planning and monitoring

Source: Department of Environmental Protection, Public Service Commission, and the five water management districts.

Exhibit 4
The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Budget for Public Relations and Outreach Activities for Fiscal Year 2008-09 Is Close to the Median of Similar Entities

Agency	Amount Budgeted for Public Relations and Outreach Activities	Total Agency Budget	Percentage of Total Funds Budgeted for Public Relations and Outreach Activities
Department of Environmental Protection	\$1,491,805	\$1,944,280,963	0.08%
Suwannee River Water Management District	117,100	69,786,244	0.17%
South Florida Water Management District ¹	5,532,744	2,974,417,619	0.19%
Northwest Florida Water Management District	243,063	120,508,346	0.20%
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	1,878,002	333,063,246	0.56%
St. Johns River Water Management District	5,132,893	375,688,413	1.37%
Southwest Florida Water Management District	6,506,939	376,489,390	1.73%
Public Service Commission	1,036,735	27,984,878	3.70%
Median			0.38%

¹ The South Florida Water Management District's total budget of \$2.9 billion includes \$1.75 billion in certificates of participation funding for the proposed acquisition of assets from the U.S. Sugar Corporation for the purpose of Everglades restoration.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of information provided by the Department of Environmental Protection, Public Service Commission, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the five water management districts and analysis of Legislative Appropriations System/Planning and Budgeting Subsystem (LAS/PBS) data.

Exhibit 5
The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Staffing Levels for Public Relations and Outreach Activities for Fiscal Year 2008-09 Are Below the Median of Similar Entities

Agency	Number of Full-Time Equivalent Staff Conducting Public Relations and Outreach Activities in Selected Offices ¹	Total Agency Full-Time Equivalent Employees	Percentage of Total Staff in Public Relations and Outreach Offices
Department of Environmental Protection	20.00	3,594	0.56%
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	15.80	1,946	0.81%
Suwannee River Water Management District	1.00	68	1.47%
South Florida Water Management District	36.00	1,828	1.97%
Southwest Florida Water Management District	19.74	736	2.68%
Northwest Florida Water Management District	2.00	59	3.39%
St. Johns River Water Management District	27.00	717	3.77%
Public Service Commission	15.00	331	4.53%
Median			2.33%

¹ The number of staff presented in the exhibit does not include OPS positions.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of information provided by the Department of Environmental Protection, Public Service Commission, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the five water management districts and analysis of Legislative Appropriations System/Planning and Budgeting Subsystem (LAS/PBS) data.

Question 3: How do the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s public relations and outreach activities compare to those conducted by other states’ fish and wildlife agencies?

To determine how other states’ fish and wildlife agencies conduct public relations and outreach activities, we contacted agencies in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, New York, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington, and reviewed agency documents. We concluded that other states conduct public relations and outreach activities similar to the commission. However, some states used a different organizational structure than the commission to conduct these functions.

Other state fish and wildlife agencies conduct public relations and outreach activities similar to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

For example, the states also handle media relations through press releases and responding to inquiries, provide information through printed and electronic media, publish magazines, and conduct outreach events.

Other states differ in how they organizationally structure public relations and outreach activities.

Some other states, such as Arizona and Kentucky, conduct public relations and outreach activities through a centralized office. For example, Arizona’s Department of Game and Fish has a chief of public relations that coordinates all public relations and outreach functions for the agency and has 25 public information staff. Further, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources’ Division of Information and Education had a Fiscal Year 2008-09 budget of \$6.5 million and a staff of 68 to conduct public relations, outreach, and education activities for the entire agency.⁵

However, other states assign public relations and outreach activities to both central office and staff in division or program offices. For example, Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources has communication and education staff in each of the department’s six divisions, and one person in the

department’s central office who serves as a communications director and handles media relations and legislative affairs.

Question 4: What options could the commission and Legislature consider for modifying how the commission conducts its public relations and outreach activities?

The commission and the Legislature may wish to consider three options for restructuring or downsizing the public relations and outreach activities of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

- **Option 1.** Centralize the commission’s public relations and outreach activities.
- **Option 2.** Reduce the number of staff conducting public relations and outreach activities.
- **Option 3.** Reduce funding for public relations and outreach activities.

Option 1. Centralize the commission’s public relations and outreach activities. Under this option, the commission would consolidate the public relations and outreach activities performed by the Office of Community Relations, the Office of Recreation Services, and the Office of Policy and Stakeholder Coordination. This option could improve efficiency and could produce cost savings by eliminating some administrative positions. In addition, it could help improve coordination of the activities. However, consolidating these functions could result in a lower priority being given to some activities.

The commission could also consider moving its division media coordinators to the Office of Community Relations or a consolidated central office. This would help facilitate coordination of the commission’s public relations and outreach activities. However, it could result in public relations and outreach activities being performed by central office staff who may not have detailed knowledge of the divisions’ issues and activities.

Option 2. Reduce the number of staff conducting public relations and outreach activities. Under this option, the commission would eliminate the division media coordinator positions and require the Office of Community Relations and the divisions to conduct their responsibilities with

⁵ Kentucky’s Division of Information and Education’s \$6.5 million budget represented over 13% of the total agency budget of \$48.9 million.

existing staff. This would result in a cost savings of \$415,583 annually.

The primary advantages of this option are that it would reduce the commission's costs and centralize public relations and outreach activities within the commission. However, a disadvantage of this option would be that Office of Community Relations staff may not have specific knowledge and expertise regarding the divisions' programs. In addition, this option would increase Office of Community Relations staff workload.

Option 3. Reduce funding for public relations and outreach activities. Under this option, the Legislature would reduce the funding appropriated for the commission's public relations and outreach activities. The commission is proposing a \$441,549 reduction in funding for public relations, outreach, and education activities in its legislative budget request for Fiscal Year 2009-10. These reductions included eliminating a contract for marine education, reducing funding for alligator marketing and education activities, reducing hunting informational materials, reducing brochure printing for wildlife management areas, and reducing publication of saltwater fishing regulations.

The Legislature could also consider eliminating funding for the commission's *Florida Wildlife Magazine*. The magazine is currently produced six times per year at a cost of \$390,000 by 1.5 FTE and 2 OPS staff. In Fiscal Year 2007-08, the magazine had a circulation of approximately 30,000 with 3,000 paid subscribers (10%). These subscriptions resulted in \$45,000 in revenue. However, for the last two fiscal years the magazine has not received any revenue from advertising. Eliminating the magazine would reduce costs, but could reduce the commission's ability to reach stakeholders and convey information about fish and wildlife resources.

Agency Response

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(5), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the executive director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to review and respond. The executive director's written response is reprinted herein in Appendix A.

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Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D., OPPAGA Director

Appendix A



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Commissioners

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December 30, 2008

Dr. Gary VanLandingham, Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability
The Florida Legislature
111 West Madison Street, Room 312
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475

Dear Dr. VanLandingham:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the report entitled, "Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Public Relations and Outreach Activities Similar to Other Agencies; Options Presented for Restructuring or Downsizing".

Your staff has done a good job in reviewing our programs. I was pleased that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) public relations and outreach resources fall in the middle or below when compared to other agencies. As the agency responsible for the conservation of Florida's fish and wildlife resources, we recognize the high level of public interest in fish and wildlife management issues in our state, particularly the economic benefits derived from recreational and commercial activities that depend on abundant fish and wildlife resources. For this reason, it is imperative to keep the public informed about fish and wildlife issues, current and changing regulations, how to live in harmony with wildlife, and how to fish, hunt, or view wildlife safely in this ever-growing state. It is also imperative that these efforts are done in an efficient and cost-effective manner and we are always striving to improve.

There is always debate about whether to centralize operations or decentralize them. When FWC restructured in 2004, it was determined, after two years of planning and discussion both internally and with our stakeholders, that parts of our outreach efforts should be decentralized. Placing outreach staff in the divisions and regions has greatly enhanced our ability to provide high quality and accurate information about fish and wildlife issues to the public in a timely and efficient manner.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to submit comments, and we appreciate the thoroughness and professionalism of your staff.

Sincerely,

Kenneth D. Haddad
Executive Director

kdh/jlf