



# Options Exist for Restructuring the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fisheries Outreach and Education Programs

## *at a glance*

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management conduct a variety of outreach and education activities including fishing clinics and workshops. These activities are similar to those conducted by other states and do not duplicate the efforts of other state agencies. However, the Legislature may wish to consider two options to improve coordination and reduce program costs: merging education staff of the commission's two fisheries management divisions into a centralized office and reducing funding for outreach and education activities.

## Scope

As directed by the Legislature, we reviewed the outreach and education activities of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management. Our review assessed whether these activities duplicated those of other state agencies and if restructuring the activities would produce efficiencies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2008-106, Sec. 7, *Laws of Florida*.

This report addresses four questions.

- What outreach and education activities are conducted by the Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management?
- How do the divisions' outreach and education activities compare to those conducted by other states?
- Do the divisions' outreach and education activities duplicate those of other state agencies?
- Would restructuring or combining the commission's outreach and education activities produce efficiencies?

## Background

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for managing and protecting fish and wildlife resources and their habitat. The commission seeks to meet its responsibility by acquiring and managing public trust land for outdoor recreation; surveying, monitoring, researching, and managing the harvest of fish and wildlife species; and enforcing compliance with fishing and hunting regulations and boating safety laws. The commission also maintains and enhances wildlife species in depleted habitats, and manages hatcheries that

produce and stock selected freshwater and saltwater fish species.

Two of the commission’s divisions, the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management and the Division of Marine Fisheries Management, are responsible for managing freshwater and marine aquatic life.

**The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management** facilitates the responsible and sustainable use of Florida’s freshwater aquatic resources. The division’s activities include maintaining fish management areas and operating two freshwater hatcheries that produce fish to stock lakes and rivers.<sup>2</sup> The division also provides technical expertise about fisheries management issues and conducts aquatic education programs. The Legislature appropriated \$7 million and 69.5 full-time staff to the division in Fiscal Year 2008-09.

**The Division of Marine Fisheries Management** facilitates responsible and sustainable use of Florida’s marine life resources. The division’s activities include developing recommendations for managing and enhancing commercial and recreational saltwater fisheries resources, developing fisheries management plans to provide for sustainable marine fisheries, and managing grants to construct and monitor artificial reefs. The division also provides educational services and outreach to recreational anglers and serves as a liaison to federal agencies and fishery management councils on marine issues. The Legislature appropriated \$6.2 million and 30 full-time staff to the division in Fiscal Year 2008-09.

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<sup>2</sup> A fish management area is a pond, lake, or other body of water established for the management of freshwater fish.

## Questions and Answers —

### *Question 1: What outreach and education activities are conducted by the Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management?*

The two divisions conduct similar outreach and education activities to promote the conservation of fisheries resources and recreational angling opportunities in Florida. These activities include conducting fishing clinics and camps, making presentations, and producing educational materials. The divisions spent \$1.3 million and allocated 11.5 full-time staff for these activities in Fiscal Year 2007-08. Over half (55%) of these expenditures were from federal sources.

The divisions coordinate attendance and distribute each other’s materials at some events such as boat shows. However, they generally conduct separate outreach and education activities.

**The Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management’s programs seek to educate anglers, students and the general public about aquatic ecology, fisheries, and resource stewardship.** The division has three full-time staff, two of whom are located at the Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center in Gadsden County and the third of whom is located in West Palm Beach, that conduct aquatic education activities. Other division staff assist in these activities by conducting fishing derbies, fishing clinics, and other events on a part-time basis.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the division’s aquatic education activities are conducted at the Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center. The center was created in 1995 to provide an opportunity for students to gain an understanding of freshwater aquatic ecosystems, fisheries science, and freshwater angling skills.

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<sup>3</sup> In Fiscal Year 2007-08, these staff conducted 38 fishing derbies and 6 fishing clinics and participated in 59 other events such as outdoor expos.

Students participating in the center's day program learn about identifying wetland and aquatic plants, pond life, and fish; managing fish resources; and fishing techniques. The students also have an opportunity to fish in the Joe Budd Pond. The center also offers week-long fishing camps that teach students spin casting, outboard and trolling motor use, and compass and Global Positioning System navigation techniques.<sup>4</sup> In Fiscal Year 2007-08, the center staff conducted 135 student events that served 4,820 children. In addition, the staff conducted five fishing camps that served 156 campers.

The division staff also conducts occasional workshops to train educators and volunteers to teach sportfishing and aquatic education. For example, the division conducts a workshop that enables participants to become a certified Hooked on Fishing - Not on Drugs Program instructor.<sup>5</sup> In Fiscal Year 2007-08, the division conducted 11 workshops including five fishing clinic workshops, one summer camp staff workshop, and five Hooked on Fishing - Not on Drugs workshops.

The division also has one full-time position located in Tallahassee that conducts other outreach activities, such as managing promotional campaigns to increase fishing license sales. For example, the division conducted a promotional campaign to increase the sale of five-year freshwater fishing licenses in Fiscal Year 2007-08. The division also conducted a direct mailing campaign to recruit anglers whose fishing licenses had expired.

**The Division of Marine Fisheries Management's outreach and education activities are intended to increase public support and participation in the management and conservation of the state's marine fisheries.** These activities also provide an opportunity for division staff to inform the public about new regulations. The division allocates 7.5 full-time staff to organize and supervise outreach events and educational field experiences throughout the state. These activities include those described below.

- **Kids' Fishing Clinics.** These clinics serve to recruit anglers and promote fisheries conservation. The clinics are held at locations where children can participate in different stations that teach basic angling techniques, such as the principles of ethical angling, knot tying, casting and reeling. After completing the stations, the children are provided with a rod and reel and can fish with live bait. These clinics are organized by division staff and depend on local sponsors and volunteers. In Fiscal Year 2007-08, the division held 15 clinics in coastal cities throughout the state. The commission reports that 922 volunteers staffed and 3,380 children participated in these clinics.
- **Ladies, Let's Go Fishing.** This program consists of a two-day, hands-on fishing clinic designed to introduce women to the basics of saltwater fishing and promote fisheries conservation. The participants learn fishing skills such as casting, knot tying, and boat maneuvering. Participants also have the opportunity to apply the skills taught on a scheduled fishing trip. The clinics are co-sponsored by the commission, but are organized by non-governmental entities. In Fiscal Year 2007-08, the commission co-sponsored five of these clinics in coastal communities and served 240 participants.
- **Field Experiences.** This program conducts activities designed to educate teachers and students. For example, division staff teaches students about data collection methods used by commission fisheries biologists in managing saltwater fish populations, such as using a

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<sup>4</sup> The commission reports that an October 2007 evaluation of the fishing camp program found that the program was meeting its objectives in enhancing long-term participation in fishing, improving fishing skills, and increasing awareness of the importance of protecting aquatic resources.

<sup>5</sup> The Hooked on Fishing - Not on Drugs Program is a nationwide angling education program for youth. It teaches angling skills, aquatic ecology, and conservation stewardship. The program emphasizes positive life skills and choosing to remain drug-free.

seine net and counting fish.<sup>6</sup> The division also displays a marine habitat trailer at major events, such as the state fair, to explain the importance of marine habitats. In addition, it conducts workshops that teach educators how to collect aquatic species for educational purposes.<sup>7</sup>

- **Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program.** This program, which is a partnership between multiple organizations including the commission, is designed to heighten awareness of the impacts that fishing line debris has on human welfare, marine life, and water quality. The program’s goal program is to decrease the amount of fishing line entering and remaining in the natural environment by increasing the amount of fishing line being recycled. To accomplish this goal, the division provides bins for monofilament recycling at boat ramps and promotes their use on the commission’s website. There are monofilament recycling bins in 46 of Florida’s 67 counties, and the commission has distributed over 300 bins to locations throughout the state.
- **Angler Events and Communications.** This is the division’s primary outreach effort and includes a variety of activities and projects through which division staff provide information to anglers. These activities include manning educational displays at the Florida Sportsman Fishing Shows, fishing seminars, fishing club meetings, boat shows, and fishing tournaments. They also include communicating with the public through letters, telephone calls, television and radio interviews, electronic mail, and the commission’s website regarding marine fishing in Florida. Other outreach and education activities conducted by the division include producing publications such as recreational saltwater fishing

regulations and the Fishing Lines Anglers Guide, which identifies marine fish species commonly caught by anglers in Florida.

**In Fiscal Year 2007-08, the Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management expended a combined total of \$1.3 million on outreach and education activities.** The Division of Marine Fisheries Management spent a higher percentage of its funds on outreach and education than the Division of Freshwater Fisheries (20.9% versus 6.3%) due to differences in staffing levels (see Exhibit 1).

**Exhibit 1  
Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management Expended \$1.3 Million for Fisheries’ Outreach and Education Activities in Fiscal Year 2007-08**

Division	Total Expenditures	Outreach and Education Expenditures	Expenditures on Outreach and Education as a Percentage of Total Expenditures
Freshwater Fisheries Management	\$6,386,644	\$402,880	6.3%
Marine Fisheries Management	4,407,629	921,183	20.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$10,794,273</b>	<b>\$1,324,063</b>	<b>12.3%</b>

Source: LAS/PBS System and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Of the \$1.3 million expended by both divisions in Fiscal Year 2007-08, over half (\$729,857, or 55%) was from the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program, with \$263,149 in matching state funds.<sup>8</sup> The remaining funds (\$331,057) were from various state and other grant funds.

<sup>6</sup> These activities are held at three locations: the commission’s Cedar Key marine laboratory, the Crystal River Marine Science Station (operated by Citrus County), and Pigeon Key.

<sup>7</sup> In Fiscal Year 2007-08, 30 field experience workshops were conducted for 407 Florida teachers. The workshops are conducted at locations throughout the state by commission-trained facilitators.

<sup>8</sup> The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program funds aquatic education activities through excise taxes on sport fishing equipment, import duties on pleasure boats and yachts, and tax revenue from motorboat fuel sales.

***Question 2: How do the divisions' outreach and education activities compare to those conducted by other states?***

We contacted fish and wildlife agencies in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, New York, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington to identify their outreach and education activities and organizational structures. We concluded that most of these states conduct similar activities as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, although some states used a different organizational structure to perform these services.

**Other states' fish and wildlife agencies conduct similar outreach and education activities.** The agencies, like the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, typically conduct outdoor fishing events where staff teaches fishing skills including identifying fish habitats, tying knots and casting, and boat safety. The other states also generally offer classes, workshops, and presentations on aquatic resources in classrooms or educational centers. Fish and wildlife agencies in the other states also produce educational materials such as activity guides, coloring books, and posters for teachers and students. Finally, staff in the other states typically attend boat shows, fairs, and festivals to distribute educational materials.

**Some states structure outreach and education activities differently than Florida.** Like Florida, some states, including Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington, conduct separate outreach and education activities for their freshwater and marine fisheries programs. State program managers cited various reasons for conducting separate activities, such as differences in locations for outdoor fishing events (freshwater vs. saltwater), fishing gear, and program funding sources.

However, South Carolina and Texas use a different organizational structure than Florida to perform outreach and education activities. These states have staff in a central office outside of the fisheries management programs that perform these activities. For example, the South Carolina

Department of Natural Resources' Division of Outreach and Support Services perform aquatic education activities for freshwater fisheries while the Division of Marine Resources conducts outreach and education activities for marine fisheries. None of the states with both marine and freshwater fisheries programs have combined their outreach and education activities.

***Question 3: Do the divisions' outreach and education activities duplicate those of other state agencies?***

One state agency—the Department of Environmental Protection—performs education and outreach activities that have goals similar to the commission. The department is responsible for managing state-owned submerged lands which include marine habitat, and it conducts outreach and education activities to inform the public about marine resource conservation issues and recreational opportunities. However, these activities have a different focus and do not directly duplicate the commission's efforts.

The department's Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas oversees the management of the state's 41 aquatic preserves, three National Estuarine Research Reserves, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and the Coast Reef Conservation Program. The office provides planning, research, management, and assessment of the aquatic areas, and its staff also performs a variety of outreach and education activities, including conducting field trips, classes, and workshops. Most of these activities are performed by staff located at the three national estuarine research reserves. The office's budget for outreach and education for Fiscal Year 2008-09 is \$1.4 million with 16 full-time staff.

While the department's outreach and education activities have marine resource conservation goals similar to those of the commission, the activities have a different focus. The commission concentrates its outreach and education programs on angler stewardship and conservation as a means of managing fisheries resources. In contrast, the department's outreach and education efforts are directed towards informing the public about managing the entire coastal marine ecosystem

rather than just fisheries. Overall, the department's and the commission's outreach and education activities are complementary rather than duplicative of each other.

In addition, the commission and the department have taken steps to coordinate their marine resource conservation-related activities. For example, they established the Marine Resource Conservation Partnership in 2007 to design and implement coordinated saltwater outreach and education activities.

***Question 4: Would restructuring or combining the commission's outreach and education activities produce efficiencies?***

While there is limited overlap between the outreach and education activities of the commission's two divisions, the commission and the Legislature may wish to consider two options to improve coordination and reduce costs.

- **Option 1.** Merge the Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management outreach and education staff to a single office.
- **Option 2.** Reduce the divisions' outreach and education costs.

**Option 1. Merge the Divisions of Freshwater Fisheries Management and Marine Fisheries Management outreach and education staff to a single office.** Under this option, the commission would consolidate the divisions' education staff into a single unit, such as the Office of Community Relations. This office conducts public relations and outreach activities for other commission divisions. Its services include issuing news releases, communicating with mainstream and outdoor media, publishing the *Florida Wildlife Magazine*, and writing articles on fish and wildlife resources.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A separate OPPAGA review of the public relations and outreach activities conducted by staff in two units within the Executive Director's Office proposed the option of combining or consolidating the activities in a central office. See *Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Public Relations and Outreach Activities Similar to Other Agencies; Options Presented for Restructuring or Downsizing*, OPPAGA Report No. 08-73, December 2008.

In this option, outreach and education staff currently working outside of the commission's central office, such as those assigned to the Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center, would remain at their location, but would report to the office's director.

This option could help improve coordination between all of the commission's education and outreach activities. In addition, this option may produce cost savings of \$21,000 by eliminating outreach and education-related work from the duties of a full-time Division of Marine Fisheries employee. Currently, this employee works half time on ensuring that the division's outreach and education activities are conducted and tracked in compliance with federal grant requirements. This employee's work would need to be assumed by other agency staff in the consolidated unit.

The option could have the disadvantage of separating the staff responsible for outreach and education from other division staff that has direct knowledge of current fisheries management issues and practices.

**Option 2. Reduce fisheries outreach and education costs.** Under this option, the Legislature would reduce the funding appropriated for the divisions' fisheries outreach and education activities. It should be noted that the commission is proposing a \$199,064 reduction in funding for marine fisheries outreach and education activities in its legislative budget request for Fiscal Year 2009-10. This proposal would reduce or eliminate education programs for K-12 schools in the Fort Pierce area (a savings of \$80,000) and reduce the publication of recreational saltwater fishing regulations (a savings of \$119,064).

The Legislature could also consider further funding reductions for outreach and education activities in the Division of Marine Fisheries Management by eliminating an outreach and education position in Cedar Key that serves a limited geographic area (a savings of \$44,060). In comparison, the division's other outreach and education staff conduct activities throughout the state. Since this position is funded by federal grants, the commission could shift these funds to

other activities such as marine fisheries management or research.

In addition, the Legislature may consider directing the commission to charge or increase user fees for its aquatic education events. The commission does not currently charge participants for aquatic education events, such as workshops and kids fishing clinics. In some cases, other organizations that help sponsor events charge fees to cover some costs. For example, the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Inc., charges a fee that it uses to purchase boats and motors, fishing rods, and tackle boxes for the week-long fishing camps at the Joe Budd Aquatic Education Center. However, this fee is not shared with the division to cover its staffing and indirect costs. Other states, such as Washington, charge participants a fee for participating in fishing clinics.

This option would increase revenue to the commission and make the educational events more financially self-supporting. However, it could have the disadvantage of reducing participation in these events. Another disadvantage is that any income generated from fees may reduce funds the commission receives from the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program unless the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services gave prior approval to the commission's use of such income.

## 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, "Options exist for Restructuring the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fisheries Outreach and Education Programs".

Your staff has done a good job in reviewing our programs. We cannot over emphasize that over half of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) fisheries outreach and education activities are paid for from the federal Sport Fish Restoration program, which is funded from excise taxes paid by sportsmen when purchasing fishing gear. As the agency responsible for protecting Florida's marine and freshwater fish resources, we recognize the high level of public interest in fishery issues in our state, particularly the economic benefits derived from activities that depend on abundant fish resources. It is critically important that the public is informed on fishery issues, how best to conserve these important resources, current regulations, and when those regulations may change.

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 our marine and freshwater fishery management divisions has greatly enhanced our ability to provide high quality and accurate information about fishery 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