Special STAR 2017 Update

Longliners Seek Permit for Conservation Area

Oyster Bay Project Brings Out Volunteers
Last of the Wild Places

My eyes has always been drawn to the empty places on maps. There is something uniquely mysterious and varied about the water of the coastal Everglades. It is a shadowy mixture of salt and fresh, of mud and oyster shell. It is the physical convergence of two great ecological forces, the Everglades and the Gulf of Mexico.

It is also the last truly wild place in South Florida. All else in the region has felt the heavy hand of man for many decades. Even the interior Everglades is not as it once was, cut off from its headwaters and doomed to a perpetual thirst for fresh water. Despite armies of engineers, environmentalists, and hydrologists, despite expenditures counted in billions, most feel that it will never again be as it once was.

But in the coastal Everglades you can still catch glimpses of a wild and unforgiving place. You can stare at the ragged shoreline of an unnamed island 20 miles south of the last sign of civilization. You can see how centuries of wind, tide, and storms have been to work on it. Ancient piles of oyster shells, their occupants consumed ages ago, litter the countless beaches and bars. Gently curving beaches, ever yielding to the force of sea and tide, forever being shaped by the conditions around them.

It is a lonely place, the silence broken only by the cries of a heron or the low muttering of feeding ibis. It is a place of secret bays and creeks, its winding river systems so bent and tangled that even the most seasoned navigator must always be on guard. It is a place where you can quietly watch a heavy snook patrol the powdery blue green water of an outside point. You watch the confident power in the casual swish of her tail, the turn into a lonely cove, the sudden coil and explosion on a panicked mullet. All of these sights are the same as they were thousands of years ago. It is the last untouched corner of the third most populous state in the Union.

Indian River Lagoon, Florida Bay, the Caloosahatchee River, and the greater Charlotte Harbor estuary are all also dependent on the health of the Everglades. They each have their own wild corners. All of these Everglades dependent estuaries are unquestionably under attack. For the past 100 years politicians, farmers, engineers, and land developers have spent billions of dollars and man hours attempting to untangle the natural system in order to feign control over the gentle, southerly fresh-water flow of the Everglades.

Anglers are outraged at the disregard for our estuaries and coastlines. The public in general is outraged at our chronic coastal water quality issues. CCA Florida remains committed to common sense, achievable solutions to treat the continued plight of the Everglades and its dependent estuaries. This is a long term commitment to solving what is the most complex ecological problem in our state’s history. These issues are not going to go away overnight. But with anglers leading the charge, we have a chance now to turn the tide. CCA Florida is committed to fighting to the end. We have to honor and defend the last of our wild places.
The Finances of Water Quality

Governor Rick Scott recently released his proposed 2017-2018 Budget. His outline sets aside $3.9 billion to protect agricultural and natural resources. The proposed priorities include:

- An additional $77 million for hurricane damage to Florida’s beaches
- $22 million to start a new Wastewater Treatment Facility Storm Preparedness grant program
- $60 million to clean the Indian River Lagoon and Caloosahatchee
- A recommended $225 million towards Everglades restoration
- $65 million towards restoring Florida springs
- $100 million towards a sustainable water supply
- $50 million towards Florida’s Parks
- $178 million towards land acquisition and management, including $30.2 million toward lands for Everglades restoration projects
- $1.7 billion for agriculture

This proposed budget must be approved and appropriated by the Florida Legislature, but there is some good news. The Governor’s budget outlines several key Everglades restoration projects including funding for the C-43 and C-44 reservoirs, which are designed to hold billions of gallons of water along the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers, respectively. The C-51 reservoir, in Palm Beach County, and the C-23/C-24 projects, in St. Lucie County, also get specific mention. For at least the last 16 years, Florida has been working in conjunction with the Federal Government towards Everglades restoration. Known as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), years have been spent planning, permitting and partially funding these projects. CCA Florida wants to see the projects to completion.

The budget could also foreshadow a fight over funding for storage south of Lake Okeechobee. Noticeably absent from the Governor’s budget is funding for Senate Bill 10 which calls for the purchase of up to 60,000 acres from willing buyers in the Everglades Agricultural Area. The Bill proposes a $1.2 billion bond effort to be matched by $1.2 billion from the Federal Government. The proposal is bold and controversial, and CCA believes that it has certain merits. Governor Scott was quoted as saying that he looks forward to working with Senator Negron, a champion of the bill to buy land south of the Lake. Cooperation on this bond proposal may make or break this important legislation.

CCA Florida encourages the purchase of appropriate land from willing sellers. This land purchase should be in addition to optimal use of land we Floridians already own, and must not cannibalize funds from other restoration projects. CCA is committed to Everglades restoration, and for the right amount of clean water to flow east, west and south of Lake O. For the last year, water quality issues have been at the forefront of CCA Florida’s focus. And no water quality issue has generated as much thought and attention as storage south of the Lake. There is strong support across the state to save the Everglades, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee, and those goals shared among conservation and advocacy groups must be achieved.

But one thing is clear. We don’t have the money to do it all right now. While spending billions on Everglades restoration, we must remember to stem red tide blooms around Destin, help the struggling Apalachicola, address issues with the St. Johns River, stop pollution of the Kissimmee watershed, and end the horrible problems in the upper Indian River Lagoon. CCA Florida has been and will continue to be a champion of water quality for all Floridians, throughout the state.
It’s time for parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and even our educators to start thinking about what the kids in their lives will be doing this summer. Let’s plan to unplug them from their video games, televisions and electronic diversions. Organized sports has been one way to unplug, it does teach competition and provides some semblance of physical exercise but sports can preclude some youngsters as they may not have the athletic ability to participate plus it really does not provide an opportunity for quality family time.

Let Coastal Conservation Association offer you a great way to unplug today’s youth that is fun, inexpensive, provides quality family time, instills a competitive spirit, allows participation by kids of most ages and all skill levels and educates them on the need to practice conservation of our marine resources, enter them in STAR by making them a New Tide Member of CCA. Membership is only $10.00. This membership provides youth ages 6 thru 17 a FREE registration in the family friendly fishing competition, STAR. Featured in the competition is the Youth Scholarship Division presented by Academy Sports + Outdoors which offers 12 education scholarships (two $25,000 and ten $5,000 scholarships) valued at $100,000.00. To compete in this division a youth angler only needs to catch a legal eligible species of trout, snook, sheepshead, non-tagged redfish, cobia, kingfish, dolphin, ladyfish or Jack Crevalle, take a photo of the fish on the 2017 Official measuring device and upload it via the STAR app or the website. Youth participants may fish with family, friends or solo from the shore, a dock, pier, sea wall or boat. They may submit only one entry each day they fish during the 101 days of competition and winners are determined by a random drawing of all eligible entries submitted. This provides every youth who submits an entry the opportunity to win, eliminating any youngsters from being excluded. Another way for Youth anglers to win some super prizes is in the signature division of STAR, the tagged redfish division. The first two youth anglers who are properly registered for STAR and catch a STAR tagged redfish will win a new Carolina Skiff 16 JVX CC powered by Yamaha and sitting on a Road King trailer. What kid would not want to win a new boat?

Wanting to win a new boat in STAR isn’t just for the kids. There are over $500,000 in prizes and 14 divisions with the first 8 tagged redfish eligible for a prize of a new GMC Truck or boat, motor and trailer package. And to make STAR even more exciting, six adult winners in the tagged redfish division get to choose what prize they win from the list of prizes available at the time of their win. Pretty exciting, the first tagged redfish winner can choose from the GMC Sierra Pickup or one of these Yamaha powered boat packages; Contender 22 Sport, Pathfinder 2200TRS, Maverick HPX-S, Sea Hunt 225 Ultra or the Carolina Skiff 21 Fish & Ski. Which prize would you choose?
The competition also features an Open, Ladies, Fly, Kayak and Professional Guides division. Eligible species are Spotted Seatrout, Snook, Sheepshead, Non-tagged redfish, Cobia, Dolphin (Mahi Mahi) & Kingfish. STAR also sports three divisions unique to Florida, the Conservation, Lionfish and Trash Division. The Conservation Division is designed to reward anglers that provide the most catch data on all fish caught and released while fishing the tournament, no matter what species or size. The Lionfish Division hopes to help make a dent in the removal of this invasive species by rewarding the top three participants who harvest the most Lionfish during STAR. The newest addition to Florida STAR is the Trash Division. Participants who gather trash while on the water and submit a photo entry of at least a 5 gallon bucket full of trash with the 2017 official measuring device in their entry will be eligible for a random drawing at the end of the 101 days of STAR for 1st thru 3rd place.

As a Catch & Photo competition STAR is designed to educate the general public about the importance of conservation of Florida’s marine resources. STAR’s state-of-the-art smart phone app eliminates the need for anglers to bring their entry to a weigh-in. To enter a catch, anglers submit a photo of their fish on the official measuring device via the app right from the boat, dock, or boat ramp. All STAR entries provide a significant amount of catch data information that can be used by the conservation community to make science based decisions on habitat management, stock assessment and other relevant issues. It is not the biggest fish that wins as most division winners are determined by a random drawing. This format encourages youth and adults of all ages to practice catch & release when possible. The kickoff for STAR is Saturday, May 27th, Memorial Day weekend, and ends Labor Day, Monday, September 4th at 5pm.

Make your child or one you know a CCA New Tide member and plan to take your family fishing this summer. It will be more fun if everyone is registering for STAR and has joined Coastal Conservation Association. Just imagine, someone may win a new truck, boat, motor and trailer package, a valuable scholarship or one of the many other great prizes. For more information visit www.ccaflstar.com.
Visit Space Coast
They Have Extra STAR Power!

CCA Florida STAR presented by Yamaha is even bigger and better in 2017. The competition is offering over $500,000 in prizes and scholarships with an additional tagged redfish prize making the first eight tagged redfish eligible for a new GMC Truck or boat, motor and trailer package. And to make it even more exciting, adult winners in the tagged redfish division get to choose what they win from the list of prizes available at the time of their win. Yes, the first tagged redfish winner can choose from the GMC Sierra Pickup or one of these Yamaha powered boat packages: Contender 22 Sport, Pathfinder 2200TRS, Maverick HPX-S, Sea Hunt 225 Ultra or the Carolina Skiff 21 Fish & Ski. Youth anglers again will be eligible to participate in the tagged redfish division with the first two winners taking home a Carolina Skiff 16 JVX CC powered by a 40hp Yamaha sitting on a Road King trailer.

Where can you have the best opportunity to catch one of these prize winning fish? Florida’s Space Coast is the East Coast Destination Partner for CCA Florida’s 2017 STAR Tournament! As the home to the largest percentage of the Indian River Lagoon, the Space Coast offers more opportunities than most other coastal counties to land that winning tagged Redfish!

The IRL is made up of three bodies of water: Mosquito Lagoon, Banana River and the Indian River. The entire IRL runs 156 miles from New Smyrna Beach to Stuart, through five counties. Brevard County (the Space Coast) encompasses 72 miles of the IRL: the southern portion of Mosquito, the northern portion of the Indian and all of the Banana. With 29 sets of public boat ramps (nearly all are Free!) lining all three bodies of water, anglers have many choices on where to put in. The No-Motor-Zone of the Banana River can only be fished from kayaks, canoes or boats without a propeller. Mosquito Lagoon has two “pole and troll zones” where internal combustion engines must be off and boats drafting more than 12 inches at rest may not enter; electric trolling motors are allowed. You have to put in a little work paddling or poling to reach them, so there is less pressure on the fish in those areas.

In addition to catching a tagged STAR Redfish, anglers here can also catch Reds with multiple spots. We all know Redfish have at least one dark spot near their tails, but on the Space Coast, fish may have several spots. The reason is, in other areas the fish move offshore to spawn. In the IRL system, there are no easy outlets for them to reach the ocean, so they spend their entire lives within the Lagoon. They school up, interbreed and produce offspring with multiple spots. Even if you don’t land one with a tag, you can still get some great photos of impressive catches here!

Since there are no natural ocean inlets, there is very little tidal influence on these waters. The water moves when the wind blows, so keeping an eye on the weather is paramount to finding the fish. The only real exception to this is the area adjacent to Sebastian Inlet in southern Brevard. Waters close to the inlet do rise and fall with the tide but the influence of it dissipates the farther north or south of the inlet you fish. Most of the IRL averages about three feet in depth, with many skinny water flats interspersed throughout. The Intra-coastal Waterway Channel does divide the Indian River with depths of 8 to 10 feet. Spoil islands also present some underwater structure for fish to forage, so be sure to check those out.

Anglers have their choice of equipment to target fish here. Fly fishers can normally find calm conditions to sightfish Reds and other species. Shorelines, points and the spoil islands offer protection from the wind. Throwing artificial lures with Spin outfits is very popular and soaking live or dead baits produces nice catches as well.

Watch for details from the Space Coast regarding special hotel room rates for STAR Tournament anglers. Visit Space Coast will have a special code and website for you to find your accommodations. Spend a few days and fish some different areas. Plan multiple trips to give you more opportunities to catch that winning fish! Contact the Space Coast Office of Tourism to request your boat ramp map and vacation planner at www.VisitSpaceCoast.com, call (877) 572-3224 or send an email to info@visitpacecoast.com. For more information or to register for STAR visit www.ccaflstar.com.
Discover Crystal River ... They Have More Tagged Fish

Discover Crystal River is sponsoring the 2017 Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) and Statewide Tournament Anglers Rodeo (STAR) fishing competition which kicks-off Saturday, May 27, (Memorial Day weekend) and ends Labor Day, Monday September 4 at 5 PM. “We are excited to be a part of this event to help support coastal resources. It goes hand in hand with our efforts to support manatee conservation; it’s just the perfect fit,” states Adam Thomas, Director of Citrus County Visitors and Convention Bureau. “The competition showcases the variety of fishing opportunities in Citrus County. In 2016 Crystal River ranked fourth in the state for the number of registered STAR anglers. That just proves how much this area is a hot spot for fishing,” adds Thomas.

The summer-long STAR competition presented by Yamaha is a family-friendly event and a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors by fishing some of the world’s most pristine gulf waters, rivers and beachfronts. STAR and CCA also instill conservation efforts which are unique to Florida as the competition is designed to reward anglers that provide the most data on fish caught, regardless of size or species. Anglers and junior anglers must register for the event. Registering properly allows every registered participant to win exciting prizes and becomes stewards of Florida’s coastal community since all STAR entries furnish catch data that can be used by the conservation community to make science based decisions on habitat management, stock assessment and other relevant issues.

As the west coast destination sponsor, Discover Crystal River will have more tagged redfish released in their waters than any other western county. Compared this to the four tagged fish released in the other coastal counties and it only makes sense to fish Citrus county this summer: Having more tagged fish and the ability to land all the inshore and offshore species in the Open Divisions presents anglers with a greater opportunity to win their share of over $500,000 in prizes and scholarships. This summer the first eight anglers that catch a STAR tagged redfish are eligible for a prize of a new GMC truck or a boat, motor and trailer package. The STAR Youth Scholarship Division presented by Academy Sports + Outdoors offers New Tide member’s free entry into STAR and the opportunity to win one of twelve scholarships totaling $100,000.

You can also forget bringing an entry to weigh-in as STAR’s state-of-the-art smart phone app eliminates this step. To enter a catch, anglers submit a photo of their fish on the STAR measuring device via the STAR app right from the boat, dock, or boat ramp. It is not the biggest fish that wins as most division winners are determined by a random drawing. This format encourages sportsmen and sportswomen of all ages to protect and conserve Florida’s fishery for future generations.

New this year to Florida STAR is the Trash Division. Participants who gather trash while on the water and submit a photo entry of at least a 5-gallon bucket full of trash with the 2017 official measuring device via STAR’s smart phone app will be eligible for a random drawing at the end of the 101 days of STAR for 1st thru 3rd place.

Improve Florida’s coastal waterways, win exciting prizes and enjoy a summer vacation on Florida’s most pristine lakes, rivers and coastal areas with friends and family this summer. It’s easy to register for STAR and to join the Coastal Conservation Association, and who knows you may take home a new truck, boat, motor and trailer package, a scholarship or one of the many other great prizes. Visit DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com to request a vacation planner or review our online fishing guide or call 800.587.6667 for additional details. Stay tuned as the County will be posting information on STAR room night specials. For more information visit www.ccaflstar.com

**About Discover Crystal River**

Discover Crystal River, is the only place in the United States where travelers can legally swim with manatees. With more manatees than anywhere else in Florida, it’s The Manatee Capital of the World. There are numerous choices for kayaking, paddle-boarding and canoeing and fishing as seven rivers, a chain of lakes, islands, marshlands and mangroves create the ideal environment for a day on the water. It is a wonderful choice for those who relish fresh-caught seafood. Summer is scallop season, fall is blue crab season and spring and fall usher in seasonal fishing seasons. The area is becoming known as a top choice for eco-travelers as pristine swimable springs, endless bicycling, walking, birding and hiking trails abound. Visit online or call 800.587.6667. Like us on Facebook, post a photo to our Instagram page or Tweet us!
Third Time’s a Charm!

Renowned fishing authority and Captain, Tommy Thompson told me I should sign up for STAR. Now, what Tommy tells you, you need to do, be sure you do it. The first year of STAR, I witnessed Ken Knopf in action entering a CCA eligible Cobia and Snook, and, later learned he won a nice prize in the 2015 CCA Florida STAR Cobia Division. What the heck – I’m already a member of CCA. So for a modest entry fee of $35 and $15 for my wife, I signed up this past Spring. I thought we’d help CCA, have some fun, and, who knows…..we may get fortunate and win something.

In early May I downloaded the STAR Tournament app and went by Gary’s Tackle Box to pick up my 2016 official measuring device (both free). I read the rules about the various divisions, especially, the tagged Redfish division. The competition started the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend and ended Labor Day, Monday, September 5th. On opening day Marcia and I headed to Cedar Key with our Jon boat to catch one of those tagged Redfish. We figured with four tagged Redfish released per coastal county, opening day was our most probable day of catching a winner.

Now if you catch a tagged Redfish you need to know the rules!

I would be taking lots of pictures of tagged red on the official measuring device to upload in the STAR app, clipping the tag, calling the toll free number on the tag within two hours of catch and loading up for the day to head to nearest distribution location (Sea Hag) for verification of tag immediately. Why? Someone else may have caught a tagged fish before me – the race may be on, and I want to be within reporting time deadlines! A polygraph examination and interview would follow for the Redfish division, as serious prizes (new GMC Sierra Pickup, Contender 22’ Sport, Pathfinder 2200 TRS, Hells Bay Waterman, Sea Hunt 235 Contender 22’ Sport, Pathfinder 2200 Sport, Yamaha and trailer at the Awards Banquet in Haines City mid-October). Marcia and I have enjoyed several successful trips aboard our new STAR boat. I am so happy I listened to my Friend Captain Tommy and registered for STAR. For More information or to register visit www.ccaflstar.com.

Escape boats all powered by Yamaha) can tempt folks to stray from the truth. The CCA STAR crew wants to be sure the contest is fair for all.

Catch a fish in the additional divisions day – we knew it would not last with 100 days left in the competition– in the Top Ten for the State of Florida, not bad!

We got in a couple more trips. Our best trip was nine Redfish, only one was legal, and, none were tagged. It was exciting to hook up, each time thinking “this may be the one”.

July 4th weekend, my cousin and his family visited from Washington, DC. Seeking to give them a unique Florida experience I invited them fishing. We took my 23’ Mako to Cedar Key/Sea Horse Reef for some action and to catch enough fish for dinner. Our visitors took sea sickness medicine (you know what I am about to report). All was going well, weather and fish had cooperated, plenty of action, they were enjoying the experience! At 11am, sea sickness hit and the world changed - it was time to go home.

On the way in I explained what a Cobia was in hopes the crew was fine with a final stop at Marker 1, they were and wanted a chance to see one. My first drift cast with a jig triggered a missed strike. I had saved some pigfish from earlier in the live well. I rigged a lively bait and cast near the marker, immediately I got hit. With too swift a hook set… I was left with just a glimpse of a legal Cobia. I opted for one more drift. I cast a lethargic Pig Fish. The third time was the charm!! Strike, wait before setting the hook, and the fight was on! The fish was legal (35” to fork). I had a STAR Cobia entry.

Back to my story

Marcia and I departed from Cedar Key opening day of STAR. I planned to visit several spots where I had luck in the past, long story short, “nada” on Redfish. Marcia hooked one nice fish, it cut off when crossing an oyster bar – given it got away and we never saw it, we’re sure it was a tagged Redfish??!! We did however catch my first ever boat limit of Tripletail, and, Marcia caught her first Tripletail – the disappointment of not catching tagged Redfish on opening day was somewhat mitigated. We entered Tripletail, Pigfish, Crevalle, and Sand Trout in the Conservation Division. At the end of the day the scoreboard on the STAR website www.ccaflstar.com had us in the Conservation Division top ten. Bragging privilege for a

My cousin and his family with winning Cobia. Had I known the fish would be the CCA Florida STAR Cobia Division winner, I definitely would have gotten in the picture.
Every year, my family and I look forward to the summer long fishing experience that STAR puts on! First we are a competitive family, second we love to fish and most importantly we like spending time together. Prior to the STAR activities we schedule time to go out and scout the areas where the fish are biting, track the weather patterns, get familiar with the tides, and the moon cycles. Any excuse to spend time together is a great excuse. However, when the starting bell rings, our competitive nature kicks in. We are certainly a little more motivated to have a line in the water at all times. Since we are all registered individually, the competition is fierce but a lot of fun.

Fishing has been part of my life from a young age. I love launching the boat and making the run out to our first spot of the day. My brother navigates the boat around oyster beds, my mom and dad are rigging up the rods, and I ready the trolling motor. Casting out to the perfect location and walking the lure in (without getting hung up) puts a smile on my face every time. Then when that line starts singing and the rod bends over, the excitement continues to build and its game on!

It would be easy to say that a fish at the end of the line is the best thing about fishing, but what I enjoy the most are the people I am with. My dad and brother have been my mentors from the beginning and I learn something new every time I am on the boat with them. Our family has a very busy lifestyle, but we make the time to fish together. Friends that ask to join us are always welcome, but first must register for STAR! We don’t want to take any chances. You could call it an obsession but with so many prize packages, who wouldn’t be excited about every cast?

Our time on the water is full of laughter and stories. We talk about the amazing prizes and which ones we would choose if we had the chance. But regardless of what happens memories are being made. We always have the friendly competition of declaring who catches the most fish and we always ponder why an ordinary sandwich taste extraordinary on the boat.

Some people see the STAR summer long experience as 100 days of prizes. I see it as year round family adventures. We haven’t won a division yet, which makes the anticipation for this year even greater. So keep an eye out for a family fishing hard, enjoying themselves, and grateful for the time together. That will be us! However, if you see this same family jumping up and down and giving high fives, something more extraordinary than a great sandwich has happened!
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As the days get longer and temperatures begin to rise, excitement builds the closer to Memorial Day weekend we get, not because this annual holiday signals the unofficial start of summer, rather this highly anticipated weekend kicks off CCA Florida’s STAR, a fishing event like no other that lasts until Labor Day weekend. This State-wide Tournament Anglers Rodeo program awards $500,000 in prizes for an activity that many arguably claim runs through their veins…..FISHING.

With dreams and visions of landing one of the first eight tagged redfish properly registered anglers of all ages and skill levels will set out early, stay out late, invest in the best gear on the market, and some will even consult their spiritual advisors for guidance on how to develop the best fishing strategy for catching one of these golden beauties rewarding them with the Catch of a Lifetime and earning one of the top most sought after awards of the entire program; a brand new truck or boat, motor & trailer package. Tagged red fish are not the only catch that garners valuable prizes. Qualified entries in the trout, snook, cobia, kingfish, dolphin (mahi mahi), sheepshead, ladyfish or jack crevalle, lionfish, open, conservation, ladies, kayak, guides, and youth divisions can land awesome rewards as well.

Trash fishing is about to take on a whole new meaning during this year’s STAR with the addition of the TRASH division, this is not a category to catch “trash fish” rather a class created from the need to clean and protect our precious water resources. For every 5 gallons of trash collected, removed, and documented; participants will earn one entry into this division for the chance of winning an awesome prize. Winners in this category won’t be the only ones profiting from great rewards, the environmental and conservation benefits from this new category will help preserve our valuable ecosystems for the next generation of STAR anglers.

What a sensational event! Volunteers collected over 1,800 pounds of trash from the Steinhatchee River on Saturday, and then we had a party! Massive thanks goes out to Sea Hag Marina, Swamp Head Brewery, Costa Sunglasses, Hydro Flask and Hitchcock’s Markets for making this first year event so special.

By Janis Royce
LIFE MEMBER PROMOTION

Move up to CCA Life Membership and receive a CCA Life Member shirt from AFTCO, a custom cooler from Engel Coolers and a gift card good for any pair of Costa sunglasses on their website!

Limited time offer so go to www.ccaflorida.org/store to register today!
Louisiana representative takes on corrupt federal fisheries privatization program

Already well-known for his leadership on legislation to move management of the troubled Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery to the states, Louisiana Congressman Garret Graves is now playing a leading role in an unflinching critique of the federal government’s efforts to privatize Gulf fisheries for a select few commercial harvesters in a five-part investigative series by Fox8/New Orleans.

“If you watch this series you know that the forces trying to take over public marine resources like red snapper for their own are not afraid to target and take down any politician who opposes them,” said Bill Bird, chairman of Coastal Conservation Association’s National Government Relations Committee. “That makes what Rep. Graves is doing by standing up to this corrupt system even more admirable. Recreational anglers and the public at large owe him their utmost support as he leads this charge.”

In his investigative report, “Hooked Up,” Fox8’s Lee Zurick digs into the immense transfer of public wealth to private hands for free that is occurring in the nation’s federal fisheries over the objections of the angling public and even the Gulf states. The Sea Lords, as the commercial shareholders have come to be known, are earning millions of dollars on gifted red snapper. Many of them do not even fish anymore, but are leasing their fish to others to catch for them. As the investigation reveals, many of the Sea Lords take the considerable spoils from this scheme and plow them back into campaign contributions to Members of Congress to protect their scheme.

“It takes courage to shine a spotlight on this flawed system as Congressman Graves is doing,” said Bird. “This is a high-stakes political battle with a very well-funded and entrenched foe that will stop at nothing to keep what they have been gifted. We encourage Congress to follow Graves’ lead and make every effort to eliminate this flawed program in the Gulf.”
Anglers Call on Trump to Deliver

The recreational fishing industry hopes for sea change from new administration

By Jeff Angers

Center for Sportfishing Policy

After years of being ignored in Washington, saltwater recreational anglers are hoping for a breath of fresh air with the Trump Administration. It’s not hard to imagine that President Trump would be a friend to our community. After all, he has made clear that he values spending time with his family and has an obvious interest in a strong national economy fueled by Americans. His sons, Eric and Donald Jr., are both avid anglers and hunters.

That’s good news for sport fishermen and their families who take part in one of America’s oldest and most beloved pastimes – and spend a lot of money doing it! Sadly, though, there is a long-standing history between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries and recreational fishermen that leaves anglers wanting – needing – more. More access. More acknowledgement. More input.

The economic impact of America’s 11 million saltwater recreational anglers should make any president proud. Recreational anglers make a combined economic contribution of $70 billion annually and support more than 450,000 American jobs. Why would an agency within the U.S. Department of Commerce – focused on jobs and growth – not pay more attention to the recreational fishing sector which creates the most jobs with the lightest footprint?

To NOAA Fisheries in the Obama Administration, saltwater recreational fishing largely remained an afterthought to the commercial fishing sector. And although the agency has announced the creation of recreational fisheries policies in recent years, the rubber has yet to meet the road. Joe Sportfisherman at the docks has not seen positive results. Fundamental change is needed. The Trump Administration has a major role to play in the future of recreational fishing, and it starts with agency leadership.

President Trump has an opportunity for a course correction with his pick for NOAA’s Assistant Administrator for Fisheries. The recreational fishing community hopes to see leaders who understand that the commercial and recreational fishing industries are fundamentally different and should be managed differently. We need change, and that change comes by bringing someone in with an outside perspective.

The folks who understand recreational fishing the most are state fisheries managers from the areas of the country with significant recreational and commercial components, such as the Southeast. In those areas, the state agencies have found a way to balance the interests of both sectors. They strive to manage for a high level of access for the public and for the health of the natural resources they steward. And they do that job extraordinarily well. Those coastal states have a strong familiarity with the federal fisheries management system and can bring proven ideas from their states to solve federal problems. The knowledge they would bring to Washington is backed by the deep respect of anglers from coast to coast.

Recreational anglers should stay tuned to see if President Trump turns federal fisheries management back over to the people.

Looking For A Guide?

Log on to ccaflorida.org and choose from our regionalized directory of Fla. guides who support CCA’s conservation initiatives.
February 3, 2017

Margo Schulze-Haugen
Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1)
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Schulze-Haugen,

More than two decades ago swordfish in the Western Atlantic were in serious trouble. The average landed weight had dropped to approximately 60 pounds, swordfish were overfished and overfishing was occurring. Conservation efforts to recover the species were diverse and widely supported at the grassroots level, including a drive to inform local chefs of the problem and placards displayed in restaurants that did not serve swordfish. The public responded forcefully to the plight of swordfish and today anglers point to the recovery with pride as a significant conservation victory.

The initial problem with the fishery was that too many juvenile swordfish were dying due to longlining off the coast of Florida and the Charleston Hump. As a result, those nursery areas were identified and closed to the United States pelagic longline (PLL) fleet in 2001. These domestic measures proved to be successful, and it did not take many years before the scientific wing of International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) declared the Western Atlantic swordfish to be recovered.

Unfortunately, ever since the fishery was deemed recovered, there have been ill-conceived attempts to reopen the closed areas to commercial harvest and expose it to the types of intense commercial fishing pressure that drove into an overfished condition in the first place. Under the guise of research, an exempted fishing permit (EFP) is currently being considered by the National Marine Fisheries Service that seeks to allow six PLL vessels into the northern portion of the East Florida Coast PLL Closed Area, with an additional seven “backup” vessels standing by to participate. The EFP would allow the six vessels to make up to 1,080 longline sets per year, with each set consisting of up to 750 hooks. The EFP would authorize the PLL vessels to fish in the East Florida Coast Closed Area for up to three years.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on this EFP and convey to you that our organizations question the necessity of the proposal and have a great deal of concern on the potential impacts of the proposed research. According to the Draft Environmental Assessment issued by NMFS, if the EFP is approved and research is conducted for the three years requested, an additional 5,499 undersized swordfish, 759 billfish and 6,135 sharks that are prohibited from retention will be killed over and above what would take place in the PLL fishery if the EFP was not issued. These estimates are a grim reminder of the threat that efficient, indiscriminate longlines pose to conservation gains not just in the East Florida Coast PLL Closed Area, but in all of the world’s oceans. It is difficult to reconcile those projections with the overall stated purpose of the EFP “to evaluate the effectiveness of existing area closures at meeting conservation and management goals under current conditions using standardized PLL gear on a specified number of commercial vessels.”
Additional, it appears that all of the longline vessels participating in the EFP are owned by a single company and are docked in nearby Fort Pierce, Florida. The federal EFP process is rife with examples of abuse and attempts to circumvent established management processes. We question whether this proposal is truly about science or merely being used as a tool of convenience for a single longline operator to gain access to nearby pristine fishing grounds.

Finally, reference is made again in this EFP to protecting America’s swordfish quota at ICCAT, a clear implication that if America does not catch and kill every swordfish allotted to it then this international management body will reassign that quota to other nations. This line of argument has been used repeatedly over the years as justification to open up conservation areas closed to longline gear. We do not believe that this is reason to retreat from the conservation gains that have resulted from the East Florida Coast PLL Closed Area. Furthermore, ICCAT itself touts the swordfish recovery as one of its greatest conservation achievements; it is difficult to believe that ICCAT would punish the United States for having achieved that victory. Although this argument has been around for years, the United States has not lost a single pound of swordfish quota.

The reasons cited in this EFP application are insufficient to jeopardize the conservation gains that have been made for swordfish and we urge you to reject it. It was not many years ago that a similar attempt to use the EFP process as a thinly veiled excuse to re-introduce industrial harvest into conservation areas was made and rejected after a resounding tide of opposition from the public. We encourage you to again protect this unique and cherished conservation victory.

Sincerely,
Mike Nussman, President
American Sportfishing Association
Jeff Angers, President
Center for Sportfishing Policy
Patrick Murray, President
Coastal Conservation Association

Jeff Crane, President
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Guy Harvey, Chairman
Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation
Thom Dammrich, President
National Marine Manufacturers Association

Big Bend (Tallahassee) Banquet
Thursday, May 18th
The Big Bend Banquet presented by Merrill Lynch is taking it to the University Center Club this year! Save $100 on tables of 10 if you buy before March 17th. Mark your calendars and join us for this annually epic affair! For additional information please contact Caitlin Mitchell at (407) 401-7677.

Homestead Banquet
Thursday, May 18th
Join us in celebrating the Homestead Chapter’s 2nd Annual Banquet and Auction at a new and exciting venue. We are happy to announce that we will be moving to Schnebly Redland’s Winery & Brewery! Don’t miss this year’s featured artist, Eric Estrada. As well as the amazing raffles, silent auction, and live auction items you would typically find at a CCA Banquet. For additional information please contact Adam Miller at (407) 401-7674.

STAR Tournament begins
Saturday, May 27th
Join in a summer filled with fishing and fun! Tournament entry is just $35 for current CCA members for 101 days of fishing. Inshore and offshore divisions with nearly $500,000 in prizes and college scholarships up for grabs! For additional information please contact Leiza Fitzgerald (844) 387-7827.

Inter Chapter Challenge (ICC)
Friday & Saturday, June 24th & 25th
The 14th Annual CCA Florida Inter Chapter Challenge (ICC) is scheduled for June 23rd and 24th, 2017 at River Palm Cottages and Fish Camp in Jensen Beach. The ICC was started in 2004 to bring members together from all over the state to share ideas, talk about their individual chapters and have a great day on the water. This is a great event for the entire family! The 2017 tournament will again feature an inshore and offshore division as well as a youth, fly and ladies division. Please visit www.ccaflorida.org to download the complete rules and entry list. For additional information please contact Brian Gorski at (407) 401-7670.
CCA Florida teamed up with the University of Central Florida (UCF), the Florida National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the Marine Discovery Center, the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program, and individual volunteers to help stabilize severely eroded shoreline in Mosquito Lagoon. The shoreline stabilization will now protect a prehistoric Indian shell midden of unique importance, both culturally and historically. It is also the location of a 16th century shipwreck of French explorers. This science-based stabilization is essential to improving water quality and protecting the lagoon into the future.

With over 60 volunteers and 8 boats, a new record was set for this project with 200 meters of shoreline stabilized in only 4 hours! Volunteers shuttled out and deployed hundreds of oyster shell bags and planted smooth cordgrass and buttonwoods utilizing a proven method of shoreline stabilization by UCF. After 4 hours of hard but rewarding labor, the volunteers gathered back at UCF’s Feller’s House for some lunch, socialization and reflection on what had just been accomplished. This ongoing shoreline stabilization work and oyster restoration that UCF has been conducting for the better part of 10 years is worthy of world-wide attention due to its effectiveness and the incredible amount of volunteers over the years. UCF, along with over 44,000 volunteers and counting, have restored 75 reefs covering over 2.2 acres and approximately 10.2 million oysters! CCA is proud to be a part of this restoration work and will continue to participate into the future.

This project was funded in part from donations made by CCA members and through our fundraising events. UCF has ongoing Oyster Bay stabilization work days planned for March 25th and April 22nd. Please contact Frank Gidus (fgidus@ccaflorida.org) for more information.
Thank you to all the incredible volunteers who participated in the Oyster Bay shoreline stabilization day on January 21st at Canaveral National Seashore!
In line with CCA’s objective to conserve, promote and enhance the present and future availability of those coastal resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the general public, habitat restoration has increasingly become a major focus around the state. Over the last several years, hundreds of CCA members have volunteered countless hours on habitat restoration projects and on helping acquire the funding for those projects. Without these ongoing and increasingly important restoration efforts, both our habitat and our fisheries would suffer greatly. Based on this, CCA has begun recognizing in SeaWatch some of the people that have gone above and beyond to help protect and restore our fragile coastal resources. With this in mind, the clear choice for the latest habitat hero is Randy Carroll from Longwood, Florida.

Randy grew up in Houston Texas and received an undergraduate degree in building construction and a master’s degree in finance from Texas A&M University. He retired from H. J. High Construction Company in Orlando in the spring of 2014. Around the time Randy retired he found himself becoming an avid inshore fisherman and he wanted to find an organization of like-minded enthusiasts to learn more about fishing and possibly get involved in some way with the governing/rulemaking entities of the Indian River Lagoon. Thankfully Randy joined CCA in 2008. Shortly thereafter, he met Greg Harrison (Orlando CCA habitat volunteer extraordinaire) who was trying to promote the efforts of Dr. Linda Walters (UCF Biology Professor) and her work in the rebuilding of oyster reefs in the Mosquito Lagoon. Randy volunteered for a few of the deployments that first year and was impressed with the dedication and intenseness that Dr. Walters, her husband Paul and even their son Josh showed toward the oyster reef renovation project. Even though he knew little about oyster restoration, Randy was hooked and decided that he wanted to help these folks in their endeavour. That was 9 years ago and according to Dr. Walter, Randy has been steadfast in his volunteering efforts ever since and never misses an event!

When asked what obstacles he commonly faces in restoration work, Randy quickly said, “heat and high water. Also, seemingly non-responsive permitting authorities - the mat deployment season is relatively short from late spring thru mid-summer. When the permitting authorities fail to review and issue approvals in a timely manner, we lose that time. Importantly, we lose volunteer time that was available in the summer thereby hindering the whole program effort.”

When not volunteering, Randy enjoys fishing, woodworking, pistol and rifle target shooting, metal-working, artwork (primarily acrylics), canvas and upholstery work, and seamster of various bags, purses, and backpacks. Finally, when asked what his favorite saltwater species to fish for was, Randy replied, “I am a redfish-fisherman. I am not a trophy fisherman per se. I’m not looking for the 50” redfish to catch and release. I would prefer to catch one within the 18”-27” slot and keep the fish for eating.” With all the hard work Randy has selflessly dedicated over the last 9 or so years to habitat restoration, we are certain there will be more redfish for Randy, and for us, to catch!

www.rhodanmarine.com
Are you tired of seeing our waterways used as a dumping ground? Are you ready to get your hands dirty and your feet wet? Are you ready to have fun while you’re at it? Then you are in luck! CCA Florida, Swamp Head Brewery, and Hell’s Bay Boatworks have teamed up to bring you the Florida Trash Tour!

These trash cleanup events will help clean up our coastal waterways and give you a chance to make an immediate positive impact on our cherished marine resources. Each Trash Tour stop will be run as a tournament-style trash round up with a ton of prizes. We will be traveling through our sunny state, visiting our favorite fishing spots, cleaning up Florida’s waterways and we want you to join us. And yes, it’s a clean-up, but of course we will be bringing some rods just in case! So come out for a beer, some food, free goodies, a great day on the water and a competitive display of coastal conservation.

The 2017 Trash Tour dates and locations include:

- Cedar Key: Saturday, March 25, 6am to 3pm
- Titusville: Saturday, April 22, 6am to 3pm
- Jacksonville: Saturday, June 10, 6am to 3pm
- Steinhatchee: Saturday, August 26, 6am to 3pm
- St. Augustine: Saturday, November 4, 6am to 3pm

REGISTRATION: Pre registering is encouraged. We want to be sure to have enough food, brews and prizes for you. Please contact Caitlin Mitchell at cmitchell@ccaflorida.org to pre-register. You can also register the day of the tournament starting at 6:00am.

ENTRY FEE: Free. There is no cost associated with registering for the Trash Tour and volunteers can gather trash on foot or by boat. Your donation of time and effort to clean up Florida’s waterways is plenty for us and all of our amazing sponsors.

PRIZES: Each participant in the Trash Tour will walk away with some goodies plus there will be raffle drawings and other prizes from our sponsors. Many thanks to Swamp Head Brewery, Hell’s Bay Boatworks, Costa Sunglasses, Academy Sports & Outdoors, and Drummond Community Bank for sponsoring the Trash Tour.

What the day will look like:

- 6:00-8:00am – Registration
- 7:30am – 1:00pm – Trash Collection
- 1:00pm – Lunch and Beer
- 1:30pm – Trash Tour Awards Ceremony

If you love Florida’s waterways, Swamp Head beer, a day on the water, and spending time with good people, then gettin’ trashy at our Trash Tour is your new weekend getaway. Email us at cmitchell@ccaflorida.org with any questions about the event, or to get involved as a sponsor. Let’s make our waterways sparkle!

THANKS TO OUR WASTE DISPOSAL PARTNER:
Following a stormy 2016 wet season, CCA Florida recently spent 2 days on the water with Tim Osborn, the NOAA Navigation Manager for the Central Gulf Region, Office of Coast Survey. Together they surveyed for derelict and abandoned vessels along a portion of the Indian River in Brevard County and in upper reaches of Tampa Bay. The end of the 2016 Hurricane Season was a reminder of the power of water and storms to the coast and bays of Florida. “When you look back over the years, Florida has not really been impacted by a severe hurricane since the 2004 Season,” Frank Gidus of CCA Florida recounted. “This year saw three storm events, all of them inflicting various degrees of damage to our coastal communities and habitats and all of them within just a few months of time.”

Being on the water across Florida is to be part of some of the nation’s most beautiful aquatic environments. However, with the passing hurricane season, and for so many years, the sight of derelict and abandoned vessels through the coastal bays and inlets is common - and growing.

“When you fish and spend time with your family and friends all across the Indian River area and even down to the Keys, you see dozens of vessels abandoned or sunken through some of the most beautiful fishing areas and water imaginable,” says Rob Beckner, CCA Florida Space Coast Chapter President. “Each time I am on the water, I see even more derelict boats out here, especially with the passage of Hurricane Matthew.”

From the deck of Rob’s 19 foot flats skiff, a trip along the Indian River was illuminating in the number of vessels that were found in just a few miles along the lagoon. “To see over a dozen sailboats, power yachts, and other boats, in just a four or five mile stretch of the river around Sebastian Inlet, shows you the problems we are living with in this area,” says Rob. “And, it’s not just boats - we have a lot of old and abandoned docks and pilings here in the Indian River Lagoon that are not lighted and are huge dangers to boating and fishing, especially in the early mornings or evenings or with stormy weather when you can’t see these hazards very easily.”

From one side of lagoon to the other, Rob brought his boat alongside several abandoned vessels that were all just one storm (and high water event) away from floating back into the water and becoming a danger to passing boats and fishermen. (continued on page 33)
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EPA Calls For More Ethanol in Fuel ... What You Need to Know

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently called for increasing the amount of ethanol in fuel, paving the way for E15, fuel that contains 15% ethanol and 85% gasoline, to be sold nationwide in 2016. Ethanol produces less energy than gasoline; as a result, ethanol-blended fuels deliver decreased engine performance, reduced maximum power and lower fuel efficiency compared to engines fueled by 100% gasoline. These factors and more make it even more critical that consumers use Star Tron Enzyme Fuel Treatment.

Star Tron’s proprietary enzyme formula combats many of the issues associated with ethanol-blended fuel, including decreased power, gum formation and decreased fuel stability. Formulated to work in all engines and all fuel, Star Tron helps improve fuel combustibility to ensure maximum burn of the fuel charge which results in maximum power, performance and fuel economy in all engines. A more complete burn of the fuel charge also greatly reduces harmful emissions as well as a reduction of carbon and other engine deposits.

Every new vehicle and most built since 2001 can safely burn E10 - gasoline with up to 10 percent ethanol. Flex-Fuel vehicles are designed to safely use E85, 85% ethanol fuel. However, many vehicles made before 2001 can’t use more than 10% ethanol fuel without risking damage such as weakened rubber fuel lines. While the EPA has said vehicles made after 2001 should be OK, most automakers disagree, warning that fuel containing more than 10% ethanol could harm the vehicle and possibly void warranties. Small engines for outdoor power equipment are especially affected by the proposal to increase ethanol levels. The EPA has acknowledged comments and testimony opposing the proposed increases.

Star brite is a leading manufacturer of fuel treatments, including Star Tron Enzyme Fuel Treatment. The Company, headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, owns and operates a 300,000 sq. ft. manufacturing and distribution facility located in Montgomery, Alabama. The firm distributes Star brite-branded products worldwide and also provides private label products to a wide variety of firms. The firm is traded on the NASDAQ exchange under the OBCI symbol.

For more information on Star brite products, visit the websites at www.starbrite.com, www.odorstar.com and www.startron.com or call (800) 327-8583.

From our friends at Star brite
WATER (chemical formula: \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \)) is a transparent fluid which forms the world's streams, lakes, oceans and rain, and is the major constituent of the fluids of organisms.

A FACT is something that has really occurred or is actually the case.

Florida’s coastal estuaries are impacted in varying degrees from human population growth and coastal development impacts which compromise estuarine water quality and fisheries sustainability. In Florida’s Panhandle, Apalachicola Bay has been threatened by man’s decades-long alterations of water flows in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin, which is a massive 21,000 square mile area found in three states, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. The region has also suffered from inadequate local municipal storm water drainage systems.

At over 100 miles long, the Apalachicola River is Florida’s largest river in flow magnitude and originates at the Florida-Georgia state line near the town of Chattahoochee, Florida. It is approximately at this point where the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers merge to form the Apalachicola. In flow volume, it is the fifth largest river feeding the Gulf of Mexico, and the 21st largest in the country. The river gets its name from Native American peoples who lived along its banks up until the middle part of the 19th Century. The river basin in Florida is a story in contrasts and bio-diversity, and includes various flat wood and pine forests as well as swampy wetlands. Elevations throughout the entire ACF watershed in the three states vary from sea level to almost 4,500 feet in northeast Georgia in the southern Appalachian Mountains. Water flows throughout the basin have been altered dramatically by dams, flood control structures, and hydroelectric facilities over the past century. Apalachicola Bay, East Bay, St. George Sound, and St. Vincent Sound are all part of the estuary basin of the Apalachicola River. Other tributaries to the basin include the Chipola River, the New River, and the Carrabelle River.

According to studies prepared by the Florida Storm Water Association, US Environmental Protection Agency, Florida State University, the American Society of Civil Engineers and others, the state of Florida is faced with approximately $50 billion in water resource management needs by 2035. Water resource discussions cannot take place without understanding statewide demand for funding, and Florida’s legislature must continue to make water resources its highest priority. There is a preponderance of evidence Florida needs to take necessary actions to secure the entire state’s future water supplies, not only for human needs and consumption, but also for a complex set of environmental demands.

A great example of this dynamic is the extensive resources necessary to secure adequate water supplies to protect our coastal fisheries in Apalachicola Bay. Complicating any possible solutions is a multi-decade lawsuit among Florida, Georgia, and Alabama over water consumption and water rights throughout the ACF system. At the center of the water wars among the three states is the United States Army Corps of Engineers, which is responsible for managing the water in the ACF system. Another critical element at play is the Endangered Species Act (ESA), providing additional challenges to water managers’ mission in their oversight of an already complex system. The Corps has established operational guidelines and rules which govern water releases, timing, and quantities from various federal dams throughout the watershed and, in doing so, according to Florida’s legal argument, has put Apalachicola Bay at risk.

As is true throughout other watersheds and estuary systems, the water management in the ACF basin is incredibly complex. In the case of the ACF, the Corps operates several action zones in its attempts to manage water demands in the three states. Just some of the challenges facing the Corps include droughts, seasonal rainfall and variables, modified hydroelectric schedules, navigation, flood control, and, of course, human water supply needs by millions of inhabitants. In the case of the latter, Lake Lanier in Georgia provides the lion’s share of water demands of the greater Atlanta metropolitan area, which alone are over 375 million gallons per day (Georgia’s water demands are expected to double over the next 25 years). In reality, the lake is a 60 square mile reservoir which was created in the 1950’s when the Chattahoochee River was dammed for downstream flood control.
control and for water supply
demands of the greater Atlanta
area, which is downstream from
the lake. The re-design of the
system and its current manage-
ment have had profound effects
on fish and wildlife.

At the terminal point of this
complex over-engineered system
is Apalachicola Bay. The Bay sup-
ports one of Florida’s largest oys-
ter fisheries as well as over 130
fresh and saltwater fish species. The area typi-
cally provides approximately 90% of Florida’s
commercial oyster harvest, as well as an abun-
dance of blue crabs and shrimp. According to a
recent study by Georgia Tech, the Apalachicola
River normally provides up to 90% of the fresh
water the system requires. Data suggests oys-
ter health is directly related to appropriate sa-
linity levels in the Bay. Further, oyster health is
proven to provide a natural filtration system
as well as vital fish and shellfish habitat. The
ACF system has been studied extensively and
most conclusions support increased fresh wa-
ter flows to Apalachicola Bay. Despite several
protective state designations, Apalachicola Bay
is still at risk of collapse.

Like some other water
issues, the problems of the
Apalachicola River will be
resolved in the courts, and
its outcome is still uncertain.
The long standing “Water
Wars” being waged by Flor-
da, Georgia, and Alabama
are primarily over who owns
and controls the water in
the basin. The court case is
focusing on a severe drought
in 2011 - 2012, during which time Georgia
held back water in the ACF system for its
use, and at the expense of Florida’s oyster
industry. It is anticipated - and strongly pre-
ferred - the Supreme Court will come up
with some type of equitable apportionment
of water use throughout the system.

CCA Florida’s legal team has reviewed
certain aspects of the current case (there
were previously other legal actions pur-
sued), which was filed in the U.S. Supreme
Court, and not through the normal appeals
process. This is primarily because it involves
three different states, although Alabama has
largely sided with Florida in the case. The
trial involves a Special Master of the court
(a federal judge appointed by the court to
hear the case), which ended just recently on
December 1, 2016, and was based in Port-
land, Maine in an effort to avoid conflicts of
interest and to keep the case from being en-
snarled in a media circus. The Special Mas-
ter’s report is due in the immediate future,
and his recommendation will go to the U.S.
Supreme Court for the final ruling. Judge Ralph Lancaster, the Court’s Special Master,
continues to urge the states to settle the
case through mediation, and has given them
until January 24 to come to terms. Florida’s
Department of Environmental Protection
(DEP) and other advocacy groups have filed
amicus briefs in the case.

Priorities for the Apalachicola
River and for Apalachicola Bay:
• Considering the legal complexities of the
current case before the U.S. Supreme
Court, CCA Florida believes it is vital to
establish an improved operational manual
to address all of the system needs, and in doing
so equitably allocate water for each of the
three states and all of their multiple con-
stituencies, now and into the future. This

(continued on page 28)
operational manual should be designed to insure a vibrant natural system throughout the ACF riverine watershed to the extent possible, provide for flood protection, residential and commercial water needs, and recreation. The balance needed will, no doubt, be imperfect, but there has to be a better managed balance of the resource for all concerned.

• Local communities closest to Apalachicola Bay, such as Carrabelle, the City of Apalachicola, Eastpointe, and other municipalities throughout the Panhandle, need to continue to do their part and improve their storm water run-off systems, and proactively eradicate septic systems in favor of more environmentally-friendly sewer systems.

• All Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) plans should be accelerated and funded by the Northwest Florida Water Management District and the State of Florida immediately.

• The Army Corps of Engineers should restore normal flows and manage seasonal fluctuations to the greatest extent possible.

• All interested parties, user groups, and concerned citizens would encourage cooperation among Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as residents and business interests.

• All agricultural interests and all land owners in the ACF watershed should be encouraged to use Best Management Practices, specifically using buffer zones, minimal fertilizer use, seasonal fertilizer cessation, limited herbicide distribution, and more efficient irrigation systems.

• Florida leaders need to increasingly recognize that water is the state’s most precious resource. CCA strongly advocates for increased funding for strategic water resource needs.

As we consider issues of water management throughout Florida, whether they be in the Panhandle, South Florida, or Northeast Florida, it is important for CCA members to be aware parallel dynamics and challenges exist throughout the state. All of Florida’s riverine and estuary systems are incredibly complex, and each of them face similar high demands from a growing number of residents and businesses, all of whom must be cognizant of the delicate balance necessary for a healthy environment for fish and wildlife. In just about every case, the natural system has been dramatically altered by man over decades, so returning them back to their original state is virtually impossible. CCA members should pay particular attention to the dynamics and complications created by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) which effects how the Army Corps of Engineers and state water managers oversee every system. Another reality is the fact that any particular area will receive, on average over time, the same amounts of historic rainfall that feed the system. At the same time, demands on water from rainfall have risen dramatically with growing populations, whether they be in greater Atlanta in the ACF system, for example, in the I-4 Corridor in Central Florida, or in South Florida, and it is rare to find a naturally flowing system.

ACA system map courtesy of the Apalachicola Riverkeeper
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WWW.STARTRON.COM
Top left to right: Palm Beach County - Pine Glades Natural Area; Atlantic Ocean Sunrise. Bottom: Atlantic Ocean Sunrise- Jensen Beach

Photos courtesy of Martin County member, Paul Strauss

Please send your photos to: Dan Askin, P.O. Box 568886, Orlando, Florida, 32856-8886  (407) 854-7002  daskin@ccaflorida.org

Surf Fishing in Stuart
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“When you see a boat of this size disappear from this location with a passing storm, you all of a sudden start wondering where it went to and what kind of new danger is poses to us and our families, said Rob.”

The following day, CCA Florida and NOAA joined Captain Mike Anderson (http://reelanimalsfishingteam.com) and Don Roberts (CCA Tampa Chapter) in the upper reaches of northeast Tampa Bay and the need for locating and reporting abandoned vessels was again highlighted. Several vessels were observed abandoned with their identifying numbers removed and left at the mercy of the environment. Most of the vessels were left anchored in bays and marina’s where one storm could easily break them free and cause severe damage to people and property. At least one abandoned vessel was observed in every bay and marina visited that day, and often there were several. Expand this out to the entire Tampa Bay area, and then to the entire Florida Gulf and Atlantic coastlines and all the connecting water bodies and the issue becomes clear that the state is facing a problem that is not going away anytime soon.

However, there is something you can do to help when you see an abandoned or derelict vessel while on the water. “CCA members help in taking just a little time with each trip out on the water to locate and report and take a photo of a wrecked or abandoned vessel can support it being removed hopefully in the future,” said Don Roberts, a lifetime CCA Florida member. When you come across such a vessel, you can either report it directly to your local law enforcement or to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 888-404-FWCC (888-404-3922). The case will be assigned to an officer who will investigate it.
The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for many things in order to achieve their stated mission: “Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.”

Law enforcement is a primary focus in that mission. We all understand that without strong enforcement, the rules and regulations we work so hard to pass do nothing. CCA Florida is proud to continue our regular feature in Sea Watch; The FWC Law Enforcement Update.

Please remember you can do your part by reporting all fish and wildlife violations to the FWC at 888-404-FWCC (3922). Cellular phone users, call *FWC or #FWC.

FWC Law Enforcement Update

FWC names Jason Hutchinson 2017 Officer of the Year

He’s rescued a first-time hunter lost at night in the treacherous Escambia River swamp, caught people illegally night hunting and trespassing, discovered a hidden alligator snapping turtle and even apprehended one of his area’s most wanted methamphetamine distributors. He’s also developed an officer mentoring program and performed countless outreach hours to area youth and civic organizations. And all of that was just in 2016.

For his exceptional performance, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has named Officer Jason Hutchinson its 2017 Officer of the Year. Throughout 2017, Hutchinson will represent the FWC at various events.

“I’m truly humbled by this honor. It’s a real blessing to be able to do what I love with the FWC and my fellow officers,” said Hutchinson. “Officer Hutchinson’s dedication to resource issues and public safety make him an ideal FWC officer,” said Col. Curtis Brown, the FWC’s Division of Law Enforcement director. “He has made a difference in his patrol area and we’re proud to have him representing the FWC.”

Originally from Santa Rosa County, where he now patrols, Hutchinson uses his local knowledge to protect the resources and people in his community. He makes a positive impact both on- and off-duty, and his actions set an example that reaches statewide.

Hutchinson began his career at the Florida Department of Corrections with the ultimate goal of eventually becoming a sworn officer for the FWC, which he achieved in 2012. Hutchinson’s varied work experience provides him with a wide-ranging experience set to draw from, and affords him the unique ability to identify with a number of officers from other agencies with different backgrounds. He has used that ability to the benefit of Floridians multiple times, including when he was instrumental in the apprehension of one of Santa Rosa County’s most notorious methamphetamine cooks. While working a night-hunting detail, he apprehended a subject in the Blackwater Wildlife Management Area who resisted arrest. Experience and instinct led him to contact the Santa Rosa County Narcotics Unit, which obtained a warrant and found seven active meth labs, meth and other paraphernalia in the suspect’s vehicle. Trafficking and manufacturing charges took the subject off the streets and placed him in prison.

Public outreach is another category in which Officer Hutchinson excels. During the past year, he has taught hunter education classes, conducted outreach events at schools and festivals, and has participated in the Blackwater Family Hunt and the Hutton Unit Mobility-impaired Hunts. During these events, Hutchinson has been an integral part of the effort to provide participants with the assistance and support they need to ensure a memorable experience in the outdoors.

Hutchinson created a program in conjunction with the local courts in which juvenile violators speak to their peers during hunter education classes. This counts toward their community service hours, has an impact on youth and keeps the focus of their community service on resource conservation.

“We’re fortunate to have Officer Hutchinson on our team,” Brown said. “The whole state of Florida is fortunate to have him. He not only provides exceptional service on a daily basis, but he sets an example for others as well.”

Hutchinson and his wife Heather, along with their son Jake and daughter Haylee, live in northern Santa Rosa County. Community members know that if they call his phone number with information or a violation to report, they have the ear of a dedicated, hardworking and engaged FWC officer who cares about them and their community.

To learn more about becoming an FWC officer, visit JoinFWC.com.
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