



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Annual Report for Youth Hunting and Fishing Programs FY 2022-23

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FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.

Executive Summary

Section 379.352(13) of the Florida Statutes (F.S.), authorizes the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (Commission), tax collectors, and subagents to request and collect donations when selling recreational fishing and hunting licenses or permits under section 379.354, F.S. The law specifies that all such donations shall be deposited into the State Game Trust Fund to be used solely for enhancing youth hunting and youth freshwater and saltwater fishing programs. The law further requires the Commission to provide an annual report on the status of these programs by January 1st of each year to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Beginning July 1, 2007, the Commission implemented a process to request and collect donations for youth hunting and fishing programs in conjunction with license and permit sales. Hunting and fishing licenses and permits are sold through the Commission's licensing system, GoOutdoorsFlorida. This system facilitates the sale of recreational licenses and permits across multiple platforms including online, the Fish|Hunt FL mobile application, telephone sales including interactive voice response (IVR), and in person at more than 700 agent and tax collector locations.

Before completing the purchase of a recreational license or permit, customers are prompted to add an optional donation to their transaction. In the case of internet sales, a customer will see this request before completing their purchase:

"Please make a donation for youth programs, because the future of fishing and hunting depends on our youth."

Customers may then opt to add a donation to their purchase or select "Not At This Time". Donations can be added in the amounts of \$2, \$5, \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100 or at any variable amount of the customer's choosing.

During FY 2022-23, donations totaling \$380,259 were collected and deposited in the State Game Trust Fund, with the largest amount of funds coming from the variable category. Given the consistent public support via donations, the Commission anticipates donations will increase as marketing efforts gain momentum and the public sees the direct benefits with youth from these donations. The Commission has specific recurring spending authority for a portion of these funds to support and expand youth conservation programs focused on getting kids outdoors and "creating the next generation that cares."

Section 379.354(8), F.S., is the authority that further ensures the cultural heritage of



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hunting and sport fishing will be passed on to future generations by designating that up to 10% of fees received from specified fishing, hunting, and recreational activity permits shall be used to promote hunting and sport fishing, with an emphasis on youth participation. This funding further enhances the Commission's dedicated efforts toward youth programs.

National and international studies recognize that engagement in active, hands-on, nature-based recreation leads to happier, healthier, and smarter lifestyles. This may be even further critical with current trends in mental health, specifically in youthful populations. Increased participation further leads to greater resource stewardship and economic benefits, including job creation. Recreational hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing is big business in Florida, generating nearly 200,000 jobs and over \$16 billion in economic contribution to Florida each year.

During FY 2022-23, the Commission continued multiple efforts to enhance youth fishing and hunting programs. These include coordinating efforts with other government, non-government, university, private, and commercial groups who have similar interests in achieving public benefits by providing youth with opportunities to learn safe and sustainable ways to enjoy lifetime outdoor recreational traditions. Using this partnership approach, donation funding provides valuable leverage for seeking matching funds to increase support for youth programs. Moreover, the Commission uses volunteers to increase the number and impact of youth programs beyond what can be accomplished with existing staff. Volunteering, mentoring, year-round programs and opportunities all work together for youth to experience the fun and challenge of nature-based, recreational activities such as hunting and fishing. This is creating the next generation that cares; to reinforce their learning and encourage stewardship and conservation of natural resources as a lifelong pursuit. This is the primary motivation behind the Commission's commitment to youth conservation education throughout the agency and through initiatives such as the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network.

The following list provides an overview of all current FWC youth conservation education programs:

Combination Fish-and-Wildlife Recreation Programs

To the degree that these combination programs specifically support youth hunting and fishing activities, they are considered for funding by donations gathered under s. 379.352(13), F.S. These initiatives maximize the Commission's ability to reach youth throughout the state and to garner matching funds from partners.

Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network (FYCCN) - (www.fyccn.org): The



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Commission has worked with the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Inc., to establish regional youth conservation centers throughout the state. Modeled after the Joe Budd Youth Conservation Center (located near Tallahassee), centers are now in place on the Suncoast (Apollo Beach), in Ocala, and in the Everglades (West Palm Beach), with additional expansion of services planned for the Tenoroc Youth Conservation Center and the Chinsegut Conservation Center. These centers provide youth and their families opportunities to participate in outdoor activities and share experiences that strengthen connections with and support for fish and wildlife conservation.

Youth conservation centers provide the facilities and settings for young people and families to: develop skills for hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing (youth hunts, fishing ponds, wildlife viewing trails, etc.); experience shooting sports (archery, rifle, and shotgun ranges); provide boating instruction and opportunities (kayak, canoe, jon boats, sailboats, etc.); and learn about fish and wildlife management and conservation (hands-on field programs).

Youth conservation centers offer year-round outdoor educational opportunities for families, school field trips, and for people with disabilities. During the summer, the centers offer seven to eight, one-week-long immersive camp sessions, full of activities to develop outdoor skills, including hunting and fishing, for youth ages 9 to 14. An experienced camp staff team with knowledgeable Commission employees and volunteers provide educational, fun-filled learning experiences in areas such as fishing, boating, archery, kayaking, awareness of firearm safety, and wildlife stewardship. Many youth take their first hunter safety lesson, catch their first fish, and comprehend their role as stewards for the first time, at these centers and have the opportunity to interact with Commission law enforcement personnel.

In a further effort to reach families, Hunting & Game Management (HGM) along with FYCCN began the Outdoor Weekend Learning Seminars (O.W.L.S.) in 2022. This replaced the Becoming an Outdoor Woman program with more of a focus on women, youth and families by giving them hands-on opportunities over a weekend to learn how to safely and responsibly enjoy fishing, paddling, camping, shooting sports, and other outdoor activities. These seminars are for people who want to learn new outdoor skills or build on their existing ones. They are a great opportunity for families to use the conservation centers, meet partners, and connect with others who enjoy the outdoors.

In addition to the use of these regional youth conservation centers, FYCCN developed a model to partner with various groups throughout the state, such as city parks, state parks, local groups, and nonprofit entities, that provide outdoor activities to youth and their families. FYCCN provides equipment, training, and support, while the partner sites agree to provide data on the number of youth served. During FY 2009-10, the first call for



partnerships resulted in more than 50 private and public entities becoming a part of FYCCN. As of June 2022, the network has grown to nearly 360 partner sites supported across Florida, close enough to population centers to be convenient for families, while at the same time providing accessibility to families from smaller towns and rural areas. Regional FYCCN staff log tens of thousands of hours annually to support these partners in their conservation education efforts under the four pillars of shooting sports, boating, fishing, and wildlife exploration. Between the conservation centers, partners, educators, volunteers, and coordinators, over 2,000,000 youth have had experiences via the various FYCCN efforts. With support from partners and the Commission, FYCCN has added in-school programs, more capacity for hands-on experiences, a program focused on conservation careers, and bilingual conservation education initiatives to further reach a diversity of youth.

Youth Programs Associated with Fishing

Partner Administered Freshwater Fish Camp Programs, Statewide: The Commission began expanding the Freshwater Fish Camp summer program in FY 2009-10 and continued expansion through FY 2019-20. One new location for fish camps was established this fiscal year at Twin Lakes Park, Sarasota (Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources) with a sportfishing education program workshop conducted to train staff for this facility. Equipment, such as 12-foot jon boats, electric trolling motors, boating safety equipment, rods and reels, and fishing tackle, was purchased to start fish camps at this location. In total, cooperators administered and conducted 36 Fish Camp programs at a total of 16 locations around the state, providing 645 youth with week-long fishing education camps during FY 2019-20. While the number of locations offering this program increased, the number of camps and participants decreased from 2018-19 by roughly 20% due to the cancellation of three and a half months of programming because of the pandemic and public health considerations.

Kids' Fishing Clinics: The Kids' Fishing Clinic program began in 1996. The program targets children ages 5 to 15 and is designed to promote responsible marine resource stewardship. This goal is accomplished by teaching youth the vulnerability of Florida's fragile marine ecosystems and fisheries resources. Kids are also taught fundamental saltwater fishing skills and are provided with a positive fishing experience. Kids' Fishing Clinics are conducted in coastal cities statewide with sponsorship from local governments, businesses, and civic organizations, which also provide the necessary volunteer effort needed to organize and conduct the events.

For FY 2021-22, staff initially planned to evolve the Kids' Fishing Clinics into a "train the trainer" format by creating digital resources to reach more of Florida's youth. These resources would include a clinic guide focusing on SFR and SFR programs in Florida with five educational stations (knot tying, ethical angler, fishing tackle, marine habitats, and casting) and a shore-based fishing experience). However, due to staffing changes and challenges associated with the pandemic, trainings of local partners did not occur, and the



clinic guide was not finalized. Staff were still able to provide event support to 10 Kids' Fishing Clinics for 1,038 youth. For FY 2022-23, the clinic guide was reviewed and updated, and will be finalized in FY 2023-2024. The guide will then be posted on MyFWC.com. Since staff in the Division of Marine Fisheries Management are typically unable to attend clinics in person, only the number of events supported were tracked. Staff supported 20 community fishing events, which included 15 Kids' Fishing Clinics.

School Fishing Clubs: The School Fishing Club program began in 2016 with the goal to help schools around the State of Florida start and continue their high school fishing clubs. The program began by providing funding for up to 30 schools each year to support their club. In addition to the \$500 grant, the Commission provides the clubs with educational material to help teach their students about ethical angling and aquatic conservation. During the school year of FY 2021-22, 36 schools participated in the program, with over 903 students involved. Throughout the school year students also conducted 47 conservation projects, focusing on reducing single use plastics and cleaning Florida's aquatic habitats. Most recently, there has been a high demand for this program and a surge of interest with over 60 applications from middle and high school clubs. In a joint effort across divisions to meet the demand, at least 50 high school fishing clubs of both middle and high school ages will receive grants and support in 2022-23.

Expansion of Saltwater Youth Fishing Programs: To facilitate the expansion of saltwater fishing programs, fishing rods and reels, line, hooks, weights, cast nets, casting plugs, fisheries conservation tools (dehooking tools, slings, rubber mesh landing nets), fish identification books, Fishing Florida books (kids fishing activity books), safety equipment, and a variety of aquatic education equipment (seine nets, dip nets, magnifiers, plankton nets, water chemistry test kits, etc.) were provided to partners. Staff equipped one new partner and provided re-training resources to past partners to do weeklong, 40-hour fishing camps. These five-day camps cover the benefits of the Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program, fisheries conservation practices, basic fishing skills, sport fish habitats, marine ecosystems and the participants' role in fisheries conservation; Commission staff will develop the program curriculum, protocols, for these events; Commission staff will provide resources and web-based training to educational staff at partner locations to utilize the fishing curriculum at future events and camps.

For FY 2021-2022, due to the continued COVID-19 pandemic and limitations caused by staff shortages, a total of 60 youth participated in 3 of FWC's Suncoast Youth Conservation Center (SYCC) Saltwater Fishing Camps, 74 youth participated in 4 SYCC Summer Camps with a saltwater fishing component, and 338 youth participated in 6 partner-run Saltwater Fishing Camps that were supported by FWC (for a total of 472 youth reached). The camps were held at various facilities across Florida and used a curriculum provided by FWC staff. Due to the continued pandemic constraints related to travel and in-person interactions, detailed training videos to aid in training new and



current camp partners were provided to camps that contacted FWC for support.

Angling continues to be a high priority for the agency as a way to create resilient youth and the next generation that cares for the outdoors. Programs are being assessed for a more hybrid style of education and training delivery. Detailed training videos are being developed to aid in training both new and current fishing partners and increase angling program efficiency and reach.

Conclusion

The Commission, through its programs and partners, is committed to providing opportunities to engage Florida's youth, including under-represented populations, in the traditional heritage of recreational fishing and hunting. Actively creating the next generation of anglers, hunters, and resource stewards is essential to the future of safe and sustainable use of our fish and wildlife. By doing so, a happier, healthier, and smarter group of youth will carry on the American traditions of fishing, hunting, and stewardship of nature.

