



# Ringer News

United Waterfowlers – FL, Inc.  
 The **Voice** of Florida Waterfowlers  
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## 2010 UW-F WINTER BOARD MEETING & HUNT

The UW-F Board of Directors joined a large crowd of Members, families and guests at the KOA Campground in Clewiston on Saturday January 16 for the annual UW-F Winter Hunt and Board Meeting.

Many of those attending had come to Clewiston the night before and hunted in the nearby marshes, Lake Okeechobee or STA 3/4 that morning. The Board Meeting is arranged at 12 Noon so that those intending to hunt in the afternoon can also attend. A lunch was served during the meeting. Board Members attending included David Lithgow, Joe Richter, John Hitchcock, Jorge Gutierrez, Jr., Dennis Dutcher, Stephen Williamson.

President David Lithgow called the meeting to order and a moment of silence was taken in honor of all our men and women serving in the armed forces.

Joe Richter, Vice President Treasurer, gave the UW-F financial report. He reported slightly lower income during this recession year, but also, slightly

lower expenditures, resulting in an increase balance to be carried forward into 2010. The major expense continues to be the RINGER NEWS, which is understandable as the number of copies printed grows as UW-F grows in membership. The "travel and entertainment" item in the budget grew as the number of conferences and meetings attended by UW-F representatives across Florida increased. A copy of the 2009 expenditures and the proposed 2010 budget was distributed to the audience for review during the presentation. A formal vote to accept the UW-F 2010 Budget proposal was passed without dissent.

John Hitchcock, Vice President Secretary, followed with a report on the various projects UW-F is conducting with other Florida groups, including the legislation to remove Phosphorous from Urban Turf Fertilizer. He also outlined the plans for UW-F to participate in the USFWS Atlantic Flyway meeting. John recognized Milan Balkanski for assuming the RINGER NEWS production duties and setting up the

*See Page 7*



**PARTNER**



*THIS YEAR'S  
 YOUTH HUNTS  
 WERE HUGE  
 SUCCESS-  
 SEE PAGE 4*

## From the Presidents' Blind

First I must say it has been an honor being involved in the leadership team of United Waterfowlers – Florida. We have so many volunteers who freely give up their personal time to work to make duck hunting better for ALL of Florida's waterfowlers. These folks could be fishing, they could be spending time with their families, or they could be working at a job that actually pays the bills. Instead, time after time, meeting after meeting, workday after workday, youth event after youth event, a core group of dedicated waterfowlers



show up and contribute their energy to a cause bigger than themselves.

All waterfowlers and indeed all hunters and outdoor recreational interests in Florida owe you all a great debt of gratitude. THANK YOU!!!

As I take a step back from day to day involvement with the internal workings of UW-F I do so with complete confidence that the team we have in place will continue making ducking hunting better for Florida Waterfowlers.

*David Lithgow*

***JOB WELL DONE DAVID AND WISHING YOU ALL THE BEST JOHN***

First of all, I would like to thank David Lithgow for his dedication for the past 2 years as our UW-F President. It's a tough job. I personally thank David, and will continue to seek his and Newton's advice. I am proud to have been chosen and will do my very best to represent the Sportsman/Waterfowlers of Florida.

As we move into our 2<sup>nd</sup> decade, we will inevitably have growing pains. But it's important to always remain focused on the basic principles of our founding. We will always be a partner with the various government bodies who manage and set policy affecting waterfowl hunters. This formula has been

our greatest tool. That said, with knowledge and common sense as our guide, we will leverage existing state rules and law, and continue to fight for 24-7 access to public boat ramps,



wise use on existing venues, and expanded access on other public land and water for all waterfowlers.

And with habitat restoration and conservation in Florida being among our most widely held concerns, we will apply those principles which have served our success; we will always be Florida's friend and partner for projects reflecting practical, active, and adaptive management of wetlands.

And, of course, we will always do our best to introduce new folks, especially Florida's youth, to Waterfowling, Sportsmanship, and Conservation.

*John Hitchcock*

## ATLANTIC FLYWAY COUNCIL MEETING

The Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section held the annual meeting February 21-26 in St. Petersburg, Florida. The Technical Section meets in advance of the full Council meeting to lay the groundwork for the agenda and subsequent rulings on regulations for the forthcoming year. There are Game Bird and Non Game Bird sections.

UW-F maintained a hospitality suite throughout the session and hosted a social event for all attendees on Wednesday evening at the Rotunda at the University of South Florida campus.

UW-F's Chairman of the Board of Directors, David Lithgow, addressed the Council on the opening morning. The presentation included a power point selection of slides outlining the various Florida habitats important to migratory birds. Specific areas included the Kissimmee River restoration and the Storm Water Treatment Areas. Lithgow continued by describing the UW-F volunteer conservation work at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Youth Programs, including Youth Camps and Youth Hunts supported by UW-F were shown. The UW-F efforts to open public land for waterfowling and to conserve and restore marshes for public use were highlighted along with the political advocacy work to remove phosphorous from Urban Turf Fertilizer and to use Adaptive Management Principals for Aquatic Plant Management and other processes affecting the habitat.

The official agenda on the first morning featured Dana Varner, graduate student at Auburn University, who gave a report on Mottled Duck telemetry.

Dana worked in cooperation with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologists to capture ducks in Urban and Rural areas in South Florida. Radio transmitters were installed and data gathered on movement



patterns. Rural ducks were found to have a broad range that took them from as far south as US.41 to as far north as the Kissimmee valley. Urban ducks stayed very close to the capture point. This is interesting data as the mottled duck cross breeding with tame mallards occurs mostly in urban areas and the pattern may help maintain a pure strain of Mottle duck in the future.

Subsequent days included various committee meetings on specific species, both game and non-game. Detailed objectives and programs for waterfowl management were discussed, including

harvest levels for the game species. One specific species, Pintails, may see a new harvest protocol recommended to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service by the Council. The models presented would indicate a two bird limit 58% of the time, a one bird limit 26% of the time and a closed season 16% of the time. There would be no "part" seasons using this methodology.

The UW-F entertainment Wednesday evening was hosted by Membership Chairman Steve Simpson with Tim Harris manning the grills. A large variety of duck bites and other game was served along with fish from the nearby gulf. The event was attended by a number of UW-F Members, local Ducks Unlimited (DU) Members and guests as well as the Flyway Council attendees. The standing ovation given UW-F at the Council Meeting on Thursday morning attests to the success of the event.

UW-F President, John Hitchcock, maintained a hospitality suite at the hotel featuring a large collection of decoys and a library of waterfowl and waterfowl hunting books. Hitchcock's two dogs, Rex and Shah added to the atmosphere and the suite was a central location for many of the biologists from the Canadian Provinces and the Eastern States participating in the Council meetings.

The Council's formal dinner on Thursday evening included a raf-

# YOUTH HUNTS 2010

## JACK BYLSMA III UW-F YOUTH HUNT

STA 1 W was the venue for the 2010 JACK BYLSMA III UW-F YOUTH HUNT CELEBRATION. A record number of youngsters with their parents or mentors were treated to good hunting, good food and at least one "prize" for all. The ducks cooperated as STA 1 W has held large numbers of blue-winged teal and blackbellies all season and they were still in abundance for the Youth Hunt. At least a dozen UW-F First Duck Pins were mailed to participants.

The festivities started at 11 AM as the morning hunt participants left the marsh and the afternoon participants arrived. Some hunters came from the STA 3/4 morning hunt as well. Craig Kriminger and Ron Smith had the grill and fryer loaded with a variety of food for all. George Kriminger, Ryan Loutan and Milan Balkanski directed the activities and the free raffle.



In addition to making "killer" decoys, Ron Smith can cook some "killer" burgers.

Some very nice raffle prizes were distributed. Sets of teal decoys, bags, completed duck mounts, a free duck mount for one of the young hunters, a guided hog hunt, and a ROBO Decoy made for some exciting draws and happy winners. Everyone left with at least one prize, including duck calls and hats. These events depend on generous Sponsors. UW-F thanks everyone who donated prizes, funding, food, supplies and helped in anyway to put smiles on the youngsters faces. Special thanks to the following for their priceless contribution: BASS PRO SHOPS (DANIA), DUCKS UNLIMITED (BRETT BAINTE), JACK BYLSMA II, JAMIE GAMIO-TEA, GIANNI BERTUZZELLI, EARY WARREN, TOM DEVLIN, IRV KARLHOFER, JAMES WEBSTER, CHUCK ECHENIQUE, and all the fine folks who contributed for renting the grill. You guys are the best!

## CAMP BLACKBELLY YOUTH HUNT

DUCKS UNLIMITED Brevard Chapter sponsors the BLACK-



Andrew is a lucky winner of a set of decoys.

BELLY event each year. The 2010 Youth Hunt had all the trappings that make it so popular. The overnight camp with campfire and story telling, as well as important safety and hunting tips from FWC officers and the FWC crew that does such a good job managing Goodwin/Boardmoor "for the ducks" adds to the hunting experience. Most of the volunteers are UW-F Members as well and UW-F supports the event.

Good food, including the favorite food for most youngsters, pizza, and plenty of volunteer help to be sure every youngster gets into the marsh for a quality hunting experience are the hallmarks of the



GOODWIN/BROADMOORE rocked

## YOUTH HUNTS 2010

BLACKBELLY event. You can count on Tony Rushing, Jeff Kraynik, Darryl Jacobs, Lenny Schwenneker, Joe Richter, John Hitchcock all of DU and UW-F, and Walt Lorraine of the Brevard County Airboat Association and many other volunteers to be there each year donating goods and their time working to make the event a success.



Darryl and his son Edward

The "Thank you" from the youngsters and their parents are what makes the event worthwhile. Many young people are introduced to duck hunting at these

hunts and become our new neighbors in the marshes. Starting with a first class education and the example of the mentors means better neighbors for us all.

### BEAU TURNER CENTER YOUTH HUNT

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) conducted youth hunts at the BEAU TURNER YOUTH CONSERVATION CENTER near Tal-



lahassee during the February 6/7 weekend. UW-F Members assisted with the program and a Member supplied items for a free raffle.

UW-F Board Member Stephen Williamson, Member Jeremy Smith and other volunteers led the young hunters out for ducks each morning then followed up with a combo of quail hunting, fishing or trap afterwards. Duck hunting was in flooded cornfields. The facilities at

BEAU TURNER are first class and the youngsters all received the very best in mentoring and training. Property Manager Kenny Barker was a good host for the event.

Mike Murphy, Kids Hooked on the Outdoors TV, taped the event and recorded the fun.

Beau Turner, the son of Ted Turner, is dedicated to expanding the participation of young people in outdoor recreation, especially fishing and hunting. He has been instrumental in developing a model with his Conservation Center that is being expanded across Florida as part of a new FWC program.

Two hunters earned their UW-F First Duck Pins during the weekend. Hunter Bull was the lucky winner of the Rossi Combo .410/22.

Thanks to all the contributors and volunteers. Sponsors included:

STEPHEN WILLIAMSON (MAJOR RAFFLE PRIZES), BEAU TURNER, REBEL YELP CALLS, RIG'EM RIGHT, FINAL APPROACH.



John Hitchcock's books and decoys on display at the hospitality suite

#### *From Page 3*

file where UW-F's David Lithgow donated a Florida Highwayman's wildlife print, John Hitchcock donated a hand carved decoy and UW-F Member and DU Marsh Chairman, Capt. Jeff Kraynak, donated a guided hunt.

There are many UW-F Members to thank for all the work and effort that made UW-F a very positive memory for all those attending the Atlantic Flyway Council Meeting. Comments were made by the representatives of several states how they wished they had an organization like UW-F in their state.

## EDUCATIONAL CORNER

### ***THE AMERICAN SPORTSMEN AND CONSERVATION— Part 2***

As the 1800s were winding down, industry was well oiled, and expansion was well under way. Many in America were benefiting from the emerging power and wealth of our free economy. More folks had more free time for leisure activities and more wealth from the fruits of their labor. Hunting and fishing, more and more, were becoming sporting activities that families and friends enjoyed during their leisure time, rather than simply to put food on the table.

Expansion westward was at a full pace. Railroads were being built, lacing the corners of the west to the east. The railroad industry included logging operations to provide the railroad with lumber. Businesses and towns sprung up quickly along the railways. The railroads employed professional hunters whose job was to provide meat for the worker's plate. Market hunters and trappers followed the expansion and provided food and furs for the settlers. These hunters and trappers also sold and bartered their goods to traders who would ship the pelts and other animal products back east on the railroads.

The expansion was spreading south into Florida as well. Tracks were being laid south toward Miami by Flagler and to Tampa by Henry Plant. Market hunters and pot hunters were feeding the expansion here in Florida too, and plume hunters were killing non-game birds for their plumage, and shipping the skins to the northeast and to Europe, supplying the millinery industry. Well-to-do women had no idea of the devastation of wild birds occurring for the plume feathers that adorned their hats.

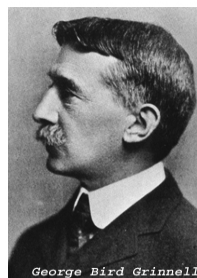
In the late 1800s; there was virtually no discussion among the general public regarding exhausting the seemingly endless supply of natural resources. And railroads, market hunters and traders, and loggers were virtually un-checked by any regulation or law. Books on hunting

and fishing adventures, and story books and guide books had been around for a long time. What became prevalent in the 1870s were the hunting and sportsmen clubs formed to discuss conservation issues, game laws, and fish culture. The sporting newspapers and journals were founded during the same period and provided a voice for these sportsmen, who were by this time well aware of the over-hunting and over-fishing.



Among the new sporting news journals was Forest and Stream. Founded by Charles Hallock in 1873, Forest and Stream became popular very quickly among sportsmen. Hallock brought many game issues before his readers. He promoted the concept of the sporting ethic and fostered responsible use of land and conservation of game.

But it was George Bird Grinnell, who bought Forest and Stream from Charles Hallock in 1880, that championed the causes of conservation, articulated the issues and ideas in a way easy to understand, and inculcated the leaders



*George Bird Grinnell*

of the time regarding the conservation issues at hand.

Grinnell championed such concepts as "conservative forestry", ending spring shooting of waterfowl, and damage to fisheries by pulp mill dumping in lakes and

Grinnell was ruthless, never backing down.

In 1885, one of Theodore Roosevelt's first books came out - "*Hunting trips of a Ranchman*". A review of the book by Grinnell in Forest and Stream led to the two men meeting for the first time at the Forest and Stream offices.



*Theodore Roosevelt*

Many lengthy conversations between Grinnell and Roosevelt followed their first meeting and led to their forming the Boone and Crocket Club. Theodore Roosevelt became the club's first President. Most think

today of the Boone and Crocket Club as a big game hunter's organization that keeps records of big game kills with the rifle. But it was intended to be much more than that. Grinnell and Roosevelt championed conservation of habitat and of the big game animals using the Boone and Crocket Club's prominent members, their political connections, and their money. The Boone and Crocket club was the first true conservation organization in America with a national scope, preceding even the Sierra Club with its efforts to preserve Yellowstone.

Part III – We'll pick up with the Boone and Crocket Club's story and its efforts to preserve Yellowstone Park from the skin hunters and poachers and their efforts to save the American Bison from extinction.

**JOHN HITCHCOCK**

## 2010 WINTER BOARD MEETING —cont.

new RINGER EMAIL.

Newton Cook's Executive Director's Report described the work with other associations, including the Arthur Marshall Foundation, Allied Sportsman's Association of Florida, Everglades Coordinating Council and the Future of Hunting in Florida to expand UW-F's influence in the environmental and legislative areas. Also, a brief analysis was given of the many meetings UW-F representatives attend and speak at, Water Management Districts, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and governmental. Membership Chairman, Stephen Simpson, reported increasing UW-F membership, but also the need for a better retention rate. We now have several hundred members who have become "lost" over the years and a plan needs to be developed to reconnect them with UW-F. The number of Sponsor renewals fell during this year of a slow economy, but several new Sponsors have joined as well.

### DAVID LITHGOW TURNS GAVEL OVER TO JOHN HITCHCOCK

The meeting continued with the announcement that David Lithgow had chosen to end his term as President. John Hitchcock was nominated to be the new President, effective immediately. The Board of Directors voted in the affirmative without dissent. John assumed the duties of President of UW-F.

The first motion made by the new president was to nominate David Lithgow as Chairman of the Board. The Board of Directors voted in the affirmative without dissent.

The Board voted "aye" to continue our contributions and support of the following: **Allied Sportsmans Association of Florida, Everglades Coordinating Council, Arthur Marshall Foundation, Future of Hunting in Florida, Ducks Unlimited.**

The Board voted "aye" to accept the proposed 2010 UW-F PROJECTS LIST. The Board voted "aye" to a "hunting" shotgun for the UW-F Spring Raffle. The Board voted "aye" to participate in the Federal Flyway Council. The Board voted "aye" to support the UW-F Winter Hunt and Board Meeting in north Florida, the UW-F Mudfest and Family Picnic and Regional events.

The featured speaker was introduced, Joe Benedict,



FWC State Waterfowl Manager. Joe gave a good rendition of the status of waterfowl habitat and future prospects for duck hunting in Florida. He then moved to a controversial subject, the permitting process for the STAs. The failures of the TLS system used to do the permitting using a First Come, First Served method have resulted in the need to go to a "mail in" random draw procedure. There are pros and cons to this change and UW-F Members are about 75% against the change, but a substantial minority supported the draw process. Joe made himself available for long discussions on the subject after the formal part of the meeting. Jorge Gutierrez, Board Member and Vice President Legislative Affairs, was a leader in the review of this subject.

President Hitchcock concluded the Formal Board meeting and opened the Member Discussion Meeting to all in the audience. The first portion of this session were Regional Director reports. Several Regional Directors gave reports and answered questions. Other than the TLS situation, the other major discussion was the lack of waterfowl on the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge this season and what UW-F could do to help. Patrick Stone led this discussion.

The food was good, the discussions interesting and those who stayed for the night enjoyed the fellowship well into the evening around grills smoking with duck bites. Early alarms sent many out into the predawn darkness to STA 5 and Lake Okeechobee for a day of waterfowling in South Florida. Another UW-F Winter Hunt and Board Meeting came to an end with a lot of happy folks traveling to homes across Florida.

# UW-F NEWS & EVENTS

## MINWR HAS NEW MANAGER

Ms. Layne Hamilton has been appointed the new manager of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR). Ms. Hamilton has over 23 years of refuge management experience. She has worked on refuges in Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi. Ms. Hamilton is currently the manager of Florida Panther Refuge. The work there included complex fire operations, invasive plant control and endangered species issues.

## UW-F WINTER RAFFLE WINNER

Congratulations to UW-F Member Jim Reynolds who won the BROWNING SILVER HUNTER O/U SHOTGUN featured in the UW-F WINTER RAFFLE. Jim's name was pulled at the UW-F WINTER HUNT AND BOARD MEETING in Clewiston on January 16. Thanks to all who donated to the WINTER RAFFLE. The funds help finance this Newsletter and the UW-F web site.

UW-F only has two fund raising events each year, a SPRING RAFFLE and a WINTER RAFFLE featuring attractive shotguns and sometimes, in addition, a guided hunt or duck mounting. Support for this limited number of events is very important. Please watch the UW-F Forums and the next edition of RINGER NEWS for the details for the SPRING RAFFLE.

## UW-F FIRST DUCK PINS AWARDED

The end of season Youth Hunts always bring a number of requests for UW-F FIRST DUCK PINS and this season was no different. Most duck hunters can remember in great detail the events surrounding their first duck

put in the bag. UW-F sends a memento of the day upon request. Waterfowling is a sport that demands discipline, good stewardship of wetlands and good manners in the field. The rewards are many beautiful sunrises with flights of all varieties of birds, including a few that are our quarry.

Please send your UW-F FIRST DUCK PIN requests to:

[newtoncook@bellsouth.net](mailto:newtoncook@bellsouth.net)

The latest group to become addicted for life to our sport includes:

- |                  |                    |                |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| ALBERT HENANDEZ  | DYLAN O'BRIEN      | JOSH CRUMBO    |
| ALEX ORDET       | EDWARD JACOBS      | KRISTIN KILLEY |
| ANDREW ALEXANDER | ETHAN FOGT         | L. RUBINOV     |
| AUBREY DUNCAN    | HARRY CHODOROW     | LUKE TANNER    |
| BRADY RHODES     | HUNTER CRUMBO      | MICHAEL HENSCH |
| CARLY GRIFFITH   | HUNTER PIRIE       | MIKE MONTERO   |
| CLAYTON REASOR   | J. P. GUTIERREZ    | MIKE RIGSBY    |
| CODY BALLARD     | JACOB MILLER       | RONNIE EDGEMAN |
| DANIEL THIGPEN   | JACOB TANNER       | TOMMY LINN     |
| DAVID HARDY      | JASON TANDLICH     | TYLER FOGT     |
| DAVID MARTIN     | JESSICA LEE REASOR | ZANDER STEWART |
| DONNA WILSON     | JORGE L. DIAZ      |                |



KRISTIN IS PROUD OF HER FIRST DUCK

### *From Page 14*

conservationists.

Conversely, we all see too many of the "outlaws" in our marshes. How we address that problem is important. UW-F Members are known for our ethics and our care to be "legal". We must do everything we can to educate our fellow hunters to do the same. If they choose to break the rules, we need to report them and have them removed from our ranks. Everyone in the marsh needs to understand the importance of the heritage we represent and the way we are viewed by others.....the image. Otherwise, a meeting with all of us sitting on very hard pews may find us on the wrong side of a vote.



## UW-F REGIONAL REPORTS

### NORTHWEST REGION

We had an odd year in north Florida, which seems to be the case for the rest of the state as well. September was cool and brought the promise of an early Fall, but November turned very warm. The first push of birds seemed to bypass their traditional haunts and continue south. Rain was the almost daily routine and the small swamps and ponds were all full, spreading the ducks out. The wood ducks we count on as a staple were scattered, although plentiful.

During the season the flights came through, concentrating on some lakes, leaving others empty of birds. Lake Seminole did seem to have a fair number of ducks all season. High water and lack of hydrilla, or having the hydrilla covered by the high water, prevented the ducks from holding well.

The coastal areas held a good variety of ducks, but they came in waves and left as fast as they appeared from any one location.

The weather did cooperate with several good cold fronts and we ended the season with more birds. However, habitat that would hold the birds longer appears to be an ongoing problem for the Northwest. I encourage all Members to contact their Regional Director to review the issue of habitat. Local information is important for us to pass along to the agencies responsible for the specific area's environment and habitat. UW-F has a seat at the table and confers with FWC and Water Management Districts.

**Larry Helms**

### NORTH EAST REGION

Few ducks and few duck hunters in East Marsh, Ansin or Garcia. Stick Marsh is not even a venue to scout. The locals found a few ducks on a few days in their "honey holes" but not a lot to report. T. M. Goodwin/Broadmoor was better than last season and many good hunts were recorded. TMG has easy access, even walk in for some spots, but scouting is the key to success. The FWC staff does a great job conducting the hunting and the Youth Hunt is always a highlight of each season.

Mary A and Sartori had some ducks, but lots of vegetation making access, even for airboats, a challenge. Construction closures are always in the area. Moccasin Island, with the levee gone and access even harder to obtain in the "filled" canal, was only a shadow of recent seasons. However, there were some good days and fun hunts to be had.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) simply disappointed everyone. Despite a lot of work and attention to habitat all year, the ducks simply did not come. Hard to believe the area once held hundreds of thousands of ducks....and now hunters are often skunked. UW-F is dedicated to working with the MINWR staff to find out what needs to be done and what can be done to help with the situation. MINWR was established to protect waterfowl and now the number of waterfowl visiting each winter is dropping. It is easy to note the divers are being harassed by the many boats in the river, but that cannot explain the low numbers of puddle ducks in the marshes.

Guana WMA is always a challenge. Few hunters do well despite the good habitat. However, several good hunts were reported during the season. The Canada goose season is relatively new to northeast Florida and the few flocks seem to have already learned to avoid the hunters. However, a few geese were taken by those who scouted them and obtained permission to hunt where they were going each day.

Overall, the Northeast had fair hunting...some surprisingly good small "hidden away" spots paid dividends for most of the season, but it was difficult to find ducks regularly in the normal haunts.

### NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Regarding Ocklawaha Prairie, I contacted R. H. Davis of the SJRWMD and he stated a burn was planned for the entire impoundment this winter/spring if conditions allow. Apparently the growth has been knocked down by the cold and is now dense enough for a successful burn. Burns in the past have had mixed results, but a good one should improve the habitat and open up the marsh for better access.

The west boat ramp improvements have survived the season. It was used a lot as the floating tussocks blocked the east ramp most of the time.

I will be speaking with Joe Benedict, FWC Waterfowl Manager, and the SJRWMD staff regarding a walk-in system to replace permit "no shows" next season. The record shows a 17% usage of available permits this past season. Probably due to very few ducks in the marsh, but there needs to be a way for hunters to use the per-



## UW-F REGIONAL REPORTS

mits on a daily basis. The “random draw” system to be in place next year will probably increase the “no show” numbers and it is critical the issue be addressed.

### **Steve Pasteur**

On the bright side of things, the SJRWMD was gracious enough to take UW-F Members on a tour of the Lake Apopka marshes to discuss future hunting opportunities. SJRWMD staff also met with a group of hunters at Emerald Marsh to hear concerns about lack of management, especially of the cattail monoculture, on the marsh. Some progress was made with the issues, but hunting on the Apopka marshes faces several hurdles and the SJRWMD continues to give habitat a secondary status versus “water management” when planning for Emerald and other marshes.

Often, we go out to our favorite marsh or wetland and do not find the ducks in the numbers of past seasons. A lot has been said about the many places the ducks now have to go where hunting is either not allowed or highly restricted....Lake Apopka marshes, Viera Wetlands, and all the EEL....plus the STAs in south Florida. This issue is why it is so important that UW-F Members attend the public meetings at the Water Management Districts and speak, or represent by their presence, our support of public access to public land.

### **Hunter Thompson**

#### **CENTRAL REGION**

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Interagency Meeting to discuss float-

ing plant and hydrilla management programs on Lake Toho will be on March 23. Dr. Mike Netherland will be reporting on the UF/FWC herbicide monitoring projects. Another topic will be focused on snail kite nesting and the need to modify the snail kite protection guidelines. The USFWS and FWC are considering adopting specific language that would establish a 500 foot boundary around known snail kite nests. The nesting season usually is after duck hunting season, but can back up into the latter part of January. Our concern is with the time of “pairing” which begins in December and, if this is in the “protection” period, could present a problem for hunting access.

### **Newton Jones**

#### **KISSIMMEE RIVER C-38 WATERWAY OPENED TILL MAY**

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has announced the completion of the latest phase of the Kissimmee River restoration and the temporary opening of the C-38 waterway to navigation. Waters are open from structures S-65A through S-65C. The waterway will be open until May, 2010.

Outdoor enthusiasts can now enjoy several miles of newly restored river. Workers backfilled four miles of the C-38 channel, reconnected historic oxbows and re-carved sections of the river. The section of work is located south of the Avon Park Bombing Range Boat Ramp and connects with a previously backfilled segment of the canal. To date, the USACE has restored 13 miles of the C-38 lower basin.

This section will be closed again in May to allow the South Florida

Water Management District (SFWMD) to refurbish navigation locks on the Kissimmee River and locks between the Chain of Lakes. SFWMD estimates the renovation will be completed by November 2010.

Overall, the Kissimmee Restoration Project is intended to restore over 40 square miles of river and floodplain ecosystem including 43 miles of meandering river channel and 27,000 acres of wetlands.

Ducks in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (KCOL) were spotty due to lower lake levels and less marsh areas and the excessive spraying of Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV). Lake Toho held more ducks than usual as the SAV spraying was distorted by the presence of the endangered Snail Kite. The FWC and USFWS staffs at the Interagency Meetings attended by UW-F Members, especially Newton Jones, did listen to our requests and seem to have made a few adjustments. Lake Kissimmee was almost void of SAV and held few ducks as usual.

Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge had only a sprinkling of ducks. The staff and UW-F Members have met and discussed the problem. A similar situation exists on the west coast at Lake Rousseau. The lake is the confluence of the Withlacoochee River and the Gulf. Rousseau once had large flights of bluebills and redheads coming in from the Gulf. A “drip flow” herbicide in the river has eliminated a lot of the SAV the ducks need to survive.

A trip to Rousseau resulted in the observation of very few mottle ducks and a few wood ducks. The ringers and pintails of past



## UW-F REGIONAL REPORTS

days are no more. I found other disgruntled hunters at the ramp and introduced them to UW-F. Together we can work to “make duck hunting in Florida better for Florida’s duck hunters.”

***Dennis Dutcher***

### **SOUTHWEST REGION**

Once again our local lakes and river were slow although the habitat looked good. Why the birds were scarce is a mystery. After several too dry years, the water was back in the rivers and marshes. The lack of birds caused most of the hunters to travel east to central and south Florida. As usual, the saltwater denizens found mixed pickings in the estuaries, bays and open waters.

The ringnecks did not show in any appreciable numbers. There were more teal than usual and the local mottle ducks and tree ducks made up a lot of slack and helped the bag.

What counts, of course, is the time we spend together with friends and family in the duck blind. The beautiful sunrises and the wildlife we see every day are special to our sport of waterfowl-ing.

I was able to attend the Atlantic Flyway Council meeting and enjoyed meeting all the UW-F group and many biologists from all the eastern states and Canada at the UW-F hospitality suite. Hitch’s decoy and book collection was impressive. Plus, his dogs, Shah and Rex, stole the show.

***Mike Kuhn***

### **LAKE PANASOFFKEE**

Lake Panasoffkee is a significant

sport fishery resource with a national reputation for the red ear fishery. As an important contributor to both the local and regional economies the influx of sediments in past decades was addressed with a dredging project completed in 2008. The project removed 8.3 million cubic yards of sediment and more than 900 acres of tussocks. The open water area was increased by 37 % to 3,313 acres. Hard bottom was restored to 174 acres. The cost of the project was \$28.2 million.

Lake Panasoffkee typically has an abundant coverage (70% or more) of SAV (eelgrass, naiad, pondweed and coontail). Hydrilla has been present on the lake for decades. However, unlike most Florida lakes, it has never dominated the SAV community or required large scale treatment. For example, a total of 30 acres of hydrilla was treated during 2007, none in 2008, and 120 acres in 2009.

The importance of maintaining the healthy and historic SAV community on Lake Panasoffkee to maintain water quality and habitat is well understood. The maintenance of at least 60% SAV coverage during the dredging project was a requirement of the Environmental Resource Permit issued by the state. An annual SAV survey showed coverage varies between 76.0% and 65.8 % normally. The survey confirmed the importance of the lake being allowed to fluctuate to reach lower water levels on a regular frequency to ensure a healthy SAV community. Since the summer of 2009 SAV levels have declined due to reduced water clarity an

the SWFWMD is reducing water levels to try to reverse this trend.

Dennis Dutcher and Chuck Echenique will be sitting on the Southwest Florida Water Management District’s (SWFWMD) Stakeholders Workgroup which aims to combine various user groups and SWFWMD staff in discussions on methods to improve public access to District lands. UW-F will be joined by the Florida Field Trial Association (FFTA) and The Future of Hunting in Florida (FHF) organizations. They will work to bring more unrestricted access for hunting. Dennis, Paul Daniel, the FFTA president and I plan on presenting a list of District lands that can support additional hunting activity. We urge all Members to visit the SWFWMD website ([www.watermatters.org](http://www.watermatters.org)) where all District public land is listed and provide us your knowledge of the District lands. Meetings are open to the public and will have a Public Comment period.

This year marked an increase in membership from the Southwest Region and a broadening of influence in the area. Southwest UW-F Members played a key role in the successful Atlantic Flyway Council hospitality event. Stephen Simpson, Mike Hart and Mike Kuhn all contributed to the cooking and catering to our guests needs.

***Chuck Echenique***

### **SOUTH REGION**

Lake Okeechobee had vegetation and food for the ducks and a water level that allowed easier access to the best hunting places for the first time in several years. Good vegetation even existed on the eastern shore and some



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flocks of ducks used the area most days. Areas cleared in the northern marshes to remove muck during the low water period gave new opportunities to those without airboats to access good habitat. Hunting was good throughout the season with a wide variety of ducks on hand, including blackbellies in the shallower areas.

What was noted, however, was the lower number of ringneck ducks in the marshes. There were some rafts of divers occasionally, even in the southeast corner of the lake, but not in the large sizes of past years.

Lake Okeechobee is back! The fishing is getting better and next season's duck hunting should be even better if the water is not roiled by a large storm.

### **Capt. Chris Chessley**

Reporting on the South Region is not complete without comments on the STAs.

STA 1 W seemed to hold the most ducks, but STA 5 had excellent hunting and STA 3/4 had places where ducks were plentiful. The wide variety of ducks wintering on the STAs is one reason they are so attractive to hunters. Bluewing teal dominated the scene as ringnecks were often lower in numbers than usual. There were spots on the STAs where a limit of widgeon was possible. Other spots would allow a hunter to bag a limit of six with five species. Once again, the blackbellies were numerous adding excellent table fare to many a bag. The Glades were short of ducks again, but there were plenty to be found with a lot of

scouting. The ducks seemed to be more south and west again this year. The Arthur Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge had a second poor year....the ducks are probably on nearby STA 1 W.

### **Lake Okeechobee**

The SFWMD WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee met in Clewiston February 24. Newton Cook, Executive Director, represents UW-F on the Committee.

Lake Okeechobee is in a very healthy state compared to recent history. The lake has refilled after the drought in a manner that allowed growth of aquatic plants and the clearing of the water. Fish and wildlife are flourishing. Phosphorous (P) contamination is between 80 ppb and 150 ppb, within the range expected considering the level of contamination coming into the lake from the north. Following the storms the P was at 400 ppb. Total suspended particles today are about 40 mg/l versus 180 mg/l after the storms. The 13.4 ft. level of the lake is on schedule for this time of the year. Hunting reports for the past season were excellent. A wide variety of ducks were broadly distributed across the marshes feeding on the proficient vegetation.

A presentation was made by the SFWMD and USACE managers for aquatic plant control. Don Fox, FWC Lake Okeechobee Biologist, described the spray programs and used "before and after" photos to explain how the bulrush will recover within two months following being "bleached" by over-

ics be sprayed as early after they appear as possible to keep the level of chemical use low and to not wait until a massive area has been infected. John Morton, USACE, invited stakeholders to attend the planning meetings held regularly to set targets and dates for spraying.

The recent news article regarding the Lake Okeechobee Habitat Alliance (LOHA) acquisition of a lease from Glades County in cooperation with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and SFWMD to improve the habitat and establish a public recreational area, including hunting, on Curry Island was read. The five-year lease is contingent on an approved management plan being written and submitted by the LOHA organization.

The health of Lake Okeechobee is directly linked to the Kissimmee basin to the north as much of the contamination comes from that watershed. Pinar Balci, SFWMD, gave a presentation on the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Plan. The Kissimmee River restoration project is included in work above the lake to improve the water quality. UW-F continually lobbies for a minimum of 30% Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) in this system and was able to make the point again at this meeting. SAV feeds on the nutrients, including P, reducing the levels in the lake and ultimately reducing the P going into the very expensive STA system to be cleansed.

All in all, a very positive meeting with good news for Lake Okeechobee hunters. Barring a large storm event the lake should be in good shape for next season.

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# Sunset

## HUNTING'S FATE? by Newton Cook—Executive Director/Editor

Sitting in the hard pew like seats of the Apalachicola Court House I keep squirming, hoping to find a non-existent soft spot. I wish I had a concession for ticket sales to today's FWC Commission meeting. High theater and entertaining passion. Dog hunters versus the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and other anti-hunting organizations. The room is packed. The issue is "pen" hunting or the chasing of foxes and coyotes in pens for dog training and "sport". "Pens" is really a misnomer, they are actually large fenced rural areas of two hundred acres up to over a thousand. The prey are captured foxes and coyotes who are chased and usually recaptured, rarely killed, as they are valuable. The layout must have escape havens to "save" the animal before the dogs catch it.

The controversy....three-fourths of

the pen operators have been charged with serious violations, including importing animals and running without proper escape havens resulting in alleged brutal deaths of the prey. The hue and cry is to "shut them down". The HSUS and their "750,000 Florida members" speak of terror and blood and death. Tears in their eyes, ladies (and the occasional fellow) plead for the tortured foxes and coyotes. The exception becomes the rule.....The legitimate operators do value their prey animals as they do their dogs. However, the "outlaws" have ruined the image. The dog hunters valiantly try to defend the indefensible with words like "sport", "fair chase" and "tradition". The Commission votes to end all "pen" dog chases.

Fox hunting with hounds is centuries old. A high society sport full of tradition and love of the horses,

hounds and the elusive fox. The equipment needed is polished and oiled, boots and special clothing mark the identity of the sport. The tales of past hunts fill a heritage for generations. Today, even this fine sport for fine people is under siege. Chases on a lower scale, such as those enclosed to prevent dogs and prey from running over private property and creating multiple problems, are now banned in Florida.

How does this relate to our sport, waterfowling?

Waterfowling is a "fine" sport with all the trappings of the chase. Special clothing, equipment we care for, even dogs for the retrieve. We have traditions that go back for generations and we all have hunts that define our love of the marshes in ways only a duck hunter can fathom. We have the image of

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