



Ringer News

United Waterfowlers – FL, Inc.
The **Voice** of Florida Waterfowlers
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2011 WINTER HUNT & BOARD MEETING



The 2011 UW-F WINTER HUNT AND BOARD MEETING was held in Fellsmere at the MARSH LANDING RESTURANT Saturday, January 15. The meeting room was full to capacity with UW-F Members, family, friends and guests from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Lunch was served during the meeting. UW-F Directors attending were: David Lithgow, John Hitchcock, Joe Richter, Stephen Williamson, Kevin Hall, and Dennis Dutcher.

The meeting was called to order by UW-F Chairman of the Board, David Lithgow, and a moment of silence recognizing the service of our brave

troops in harms way was first on the agenda. John Hitchcock, UW-F President, welcomed all those in attendance and gave the President's Report.

John reported UW-F had completed a very successful year with several major events, including helping the

FWC host the ATLANTIC FLYWAY COUNCIL TECHINCAL MEETING in St. Petersburg in February 2010. UW-F maintained a hospitality suite throughout the session and hosted a social event one evening at the Rotunda of the University of South Florida campus. UW-F's David Lithgow addressed the Council on the opening morning. The next major event was the UW-F/FWC WATER-FOWL SUMMIT held in Ocala in August. The SUMMIT brought a wide array of Water Management District, State, County, Federal and university experts in land management, especially wetland management, into one location for two days of presentations and social events to create an

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From the President's Blind

UW-F is on the move. We've covered a lot of ground over the last year for an all volunteer organization. We are the undisputed leaders in Florida when it comes to access for waterfowlers, and those of you that read our E-news, you know that we have been talking a lot about habitat and clean water these days.

If you are a Ducks Unlimited member, then you know that habitat and clean water are DU's top priorities as well. We have always worked to grow our relationship with DU. Most recently we became a Ducks Unlimited Life Sponsor Organization. We've also arranged with DU state volunteers and staff to schedule the 2011 UW-F Waterfowl Summit and the Ducks Unlimited Florida State Convention as back to back events at the Ocala Hilton, August 26-28.

UW-F is incorporated as a c (4), so we can actively lobby state and local issues. We actively work access and habitat issues at the state and local level.

Public land access and protection of native Florida habitat are our major priorities. The two subjects go hand in hand. Loss of healthy wetland habitat on public lands affects all of us. That is why we team with DU, and why we put so much time and effort into our legislative lobbying, and why



we put so much capital into the Waterfowl Summit.

On access, we have a list of areas opened to Waterfowl hunting most recently, with many efforts still in the works:

- UW-F RDs have been meeting with the SWFWMD management to add substantial new hunting opportunities in SW Florida. The anti-hunting culture is deeply embedded in this region, but our dedicated volunteers are not giving up and this work will soon pay off.
- About 2000 acres were added to the Kissimmee Public Use Area between US 98 and the river.
- The Hungryland WMA also was expanded by several thousand acres.
- Frog Pond Dove Field was opened and the Rocky Glades SGHA moved to a

new location. More work is ongoing to improve these opportunities further.

- STA opportunities increased for the 2010/11 season from about 7000 individual hunt opportunities per year to well over 10,000.
- Fellsmere SGA1 opened 4000 additional acres to offer superb duck hunting.

We're actively engaged to open waterfowl hunting opportunities on the Apopka wetlands. Hopefully these efforts will pay off in the next few years and add at least another 4000 acres of prime waterfowl hunting.

We also added a new youth hunt this year at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge that was a success in many respects. I have no doubt it was the result of close work among several of our RDs and refuge staff that helped to spawn this wonderful event.

UW-F at work...Every UW-F member has plenty to be proud of.

John Hitchcock, UWF President





WINTER MEETING—con't

From p. 1 atmosphere of cooperation, coordination and learning.

John announced the next WATERFOWL SUMMIT will be conducted this coming August at the same location and will add DUCKS UNLIMITED as a partner with the FWC. The format will have the SUMMIT occurring on Thursday and Friday and the DUCKS UNLIMITED STATE CONVENTION to follow on Saturday and Sunday.

John presented the WOOD DUCK BOX WITH HEN that will be awarded to the UW-F CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR this spring.

Joe Richter, UW-F Vice President Treasurer, reported another year of growth in both income and expenses with expenditures slightly above income due to the cost of the ATLANTIC FLYWAY and SUMMIT events. The RINGER NEWS costs remained about the same as previous years despite an increase in copies mailed due to some savings on the costs of supplies. The 2011 budget proposal included continued support for our allies, FUTURE OF HUNTING IN FLORIDA, ALLIED SPORTSMANS ASSOCIATION, EVERGLADES COORDINATING COUNCIL, DUCKS UNLIMITED and the ARTHUR MARSHALL FOUNDATION. Basic budgets for the Youth Hunts supported by UW-F including the JACK BYLSMA III STA, MERRITT ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (MINWR), BEAU TURNER YOUTH CONSERVATION CENTER and the T. M. GOODWIN YOUTH HUNT were listed.

The Board of Directors voted to accept the 2011 Budget as proposed. Milan Balkanski, UW-F Secretary, described the improvements in the publication of RINGER NEWS and the addition of several E-MAIL NEWS formats that address various interest groups as well as UW-F Members. The outreach for UW-F's message has been dramatically improved with these e-mail lists.

Stephen Simpson, UW-F Membership Chairman, reported a stable membership with some loss of renewals reflecting the economic conditions. Renewals shifted at least a month later than usual during this year and accounts for some of the deficit. New mem-

bers added are about the same as previous years. What is gratifying is the increasing number of SPONSOR MEMBERS. Steve announced he will be stepping down from the position after a number of years of service, and that George Kriminger is ready to assume all responsibilities and has been a CO-CHAIRMAN for two years.

Newton Cook, UW-F Executive Director, outlined the "way forward" based on the foundations laid by those who began UW-F just nine years ago. He noted the first WINTER BOARD MEETING was held around a small grill cooking duck bites at the KOA campground on Rt. 46 seven years ago. The less than a dozen in attendance that evening and the large crowd at the 2011 function is an indication of how UW-F has grown into the most influential group lobbying for hunting rights and access in Florida as a partner to the various Water Management Districts, FWC, USFWS, USACE and other agencies.

Next on the Agenda were reports from the UW-F Regional Directors. Those in attendance included Stephen Williamson, Northwest, Dennis Dutcher, Central, Jeremy Smith, Northeast, Newton Jones, Central, Patrick Stone, East Central, Dan Daniels, East Central, Chuck Echenique, Southwest and Milan Balkanski, South.

Steve Williamson and Jeremy Smith spoke to the hard work being done at the BEAU TURNER YOUTH CONSERVATION CENTER by our volunteers. Dennis Dutcher and Chuck Echenique related the progress made with the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) as UW-F lobbies for more hunting access on the public lands the District controls. The new SWFWMD Recreation Meetings have opened the door to more exposure of the hunting opportunities. Milan Balkanski reported on the great duck hunting this year on the STAs, but with problems of crowding due to the lack of enough parking spots. Lake Okeechobee is a bit low, but the hunting has been good as the marsh conditions are excellent in most areas. Patrick Stone and Dan Daniels outlined the forthcoming first Youth Hunt at MINWR and their needs for items to be distributed to the young hunters. UW-F volunteers do a lot of work



WINTER MEETING—con't

on the Refuge, especially “clean ups” and maintaining the valves at the culverts in the impoundments. Newton Jones related the problems and opportunities in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (KCOL), especially the aquatic plant control spraying. Some significant progress has been made with the agencies to consider the needs of the migrating waterfowl in the spray schedules.

The Regional Directors revealed the many facets of UW-F activities to “make duck hunting in Florida better for Florida’s duck hunters” across the state.

The BUSINESS portion of the Board Meeting consisted of Board votes to approve the initial UW-F 2011 PROJECT LIST with final approval deferred to the new 2011 Board, approve the 2011 MUDFEST AND FAMILY PICNIC event, Spring Raffle, the south location for the 2012 WINTER HUNT AND BOARD MEETING and voted to defer the appointment of 2011 UW-F Officers and Regional Directors to the first meeting of the new 2011 UW-F Board in February.

The last item on the Board of Di-

rectors meeting agenda was the election of UW-F Board Members for three-year terms beginning in 2011. Five of the current Board Members completed their terms in 2010. Those with expiring terms were: David Lithgow, Joe Richter, Sr., John Hitchcock, Jorge Gutierrez, and Kevin Hall. George Gutierrez had indicated that he would not be available for a second term.

The Board nominated and approved the following Board of Directors Members with terms beginning in 2011: David Lithgow, Joe Richter, Jr., John Hitchcock, Kevin Hall and Milan Balkanski. The other two Board Members are: Dennis Dutcher and Steve Williamson with terms running until September 2012.

David Lithgow adjourned the 2011 UW-F BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING. He introduced Newton Cook and John Hitchcock to conduct the MEMBERSHIP OPEN MEETING.

The guest speaker, Joe Benedict, FWC Waterfowl Manager, gave a brief description of the FWC positions on waterfowl management in

Florida and introduced Erin Rainey, FWC Permits and Licensing, to answer any questions regarding the changes in the quota hunt programs. Joe also gave some information on the progress being made at the Apopka marshes with hopes of opening the area to duck hunting in the future. Members had many questions and comments and the discussions carried over pass the close of the meeting.

The UW-F WINTER HUNT AND BOARD MEETING brings together a cross section of Members from across Florida with issues and ideas that benefit all duck hunters. The meeting in 2012 will be in South Florida, usually at the KOA Campground in Clewiston.

Both locations allow Members to schedule hunts in areas they normally will not visit with locals and the socializing at the motels and campgrounds are an important element of the events. Every year the attendance grows and the presentations, most importantly those of the Regional Directors, reveal the dedication of many UW-F Members to improved waterfowling in Florida.

From p. 12 ducks numbered in thousands as well, especially at STA1 W. The UW-F Jack Bylsma III Celebration Youth Hunt at STA1W was a success. A report on the event can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

The new “split” area at STA 1W was very popular. However, the “B portion” of STA 3/4 was not as successful as vegetation filled a lot

of formerly open areas. That reduction in hunting area plus the shortage of parking spots in general on STA 3/4 caused some crowding complaints. Issues on the STAs will be discussed at a forthcoming STA recap meeting with the FWC and SFWMD staffs. The Arthur Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge was in good shape. Water was a little lower than normal and that at-

tracted a number of teal. Like the WCAs, LOX is a very large marsh and the ducks move quickly from day to day. There are a few spots that hold a good population of mottle ducks and one or two with wood ducks, but the ringers and teal dominate the bags. Taken together, all the duck hunting venues in south Florida had excellent results for this season.

Waterfowl Books

By John Hitchcock, UW- F President

To celebrate UW-F's recent Ducks Unlimited Life Sponsorship, I thought we would give you a look at a wonderful little book and a few snippets of history that surround the era that the book was published in. The book predates Ducks Unlimited, but it's an integral part of the genesis of Ducks Unlimited.

Formed in 1930, More Game Birds in America was a Foundation created by several businessmen to propagate game birds, mostly ducks using various methods that they would research and test.

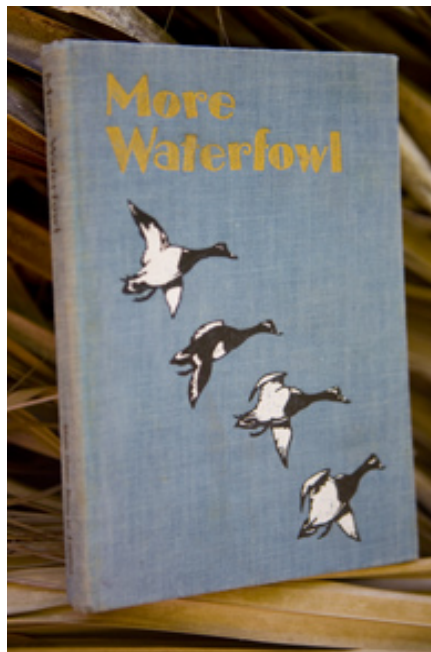
In the end, or more rightly, in the beginning, More Game Birds in America became Ducks Unlimited.

Among the founders of More Game Birds in America Foundation were Joseph P. Knapp of Crowell Publishing Co. and Publisher Thomas H. Beck of Collier's Weekly.

Knapp, often called "Uncle Joe" or "The Old Man" around the publishing shop was also considered to be the warmest-hearted of tycoons. His slogan was "Ducks Unlimited". Later that slogan would become the new name for More Game birds in America in 1937.

Thomas Beck would serve as chairman of the "Beck Com-

mittee", also referred to as the "Duck Committee" along with Aldo Leopold and Ding Darling in 1934. The report that President Roosevelt (FDR) apparently never read was heralded by others and set off a chain of events termed the "New Deal for Ducks" that would eventually end with the creation of the Federal Duck Stamp, an outcome that has been a watershed for conservation in America to this day, paid for throughout its history by duck hunters.



The Foundation published several small books and sold them for the cost of printing to market their ideas regarding issues with game bird populations and how to increase populations using various methods and pro-

grams. They were among the first organizations to call for a tax on ammunition to pay for some of these programs. About a dozen titles were published, among them was a small book titled "*More Waterfowl by Assisting Nature*" published first in August, 1931. It sold for 35 cents a copy or 3 copies for one dollar. Many of the concepts and philosophies that Ducks Unlimited still holds today are explained along with science of the time. The goal was to outline a program, including methods to fund it. The book is written very much like a business plan. This was done on purpose to gain support and funding for the conservation programs. It's a wonderful historical look into the thinking of our founders of conservation among those so dedicated to the ducks. "More Waterfowl", and "Enough Ducks to fill the Skies"...still the same mission 80 years later.

You can still find original copies of this book on line. I have 2 copies, and I don't think I paid more than \$10 for either of them. I also have several other original books published by More Game birds in America, some still relatively easy to find.

UW-F NEWS & EVENTS

UW-F HONORED TO BE INVITED AS A PART OF THE CLEAN WATER SUMMIT

UW-F was invited to attend the Clean Water Summit in Memphis February 15. We took a board vote and I attended the meeting for UW-F.

The Clean Water Summit was organized by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Ducks Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation, Izaak Walton League, and Trout unlimited. Much of the conference was funded by a grant from the Turner Foundation.



The primary goal of the conference is to team the sportsmen's message related to clean water issues and send a strong message to congress and the EPA regarding protection of the so called "Isolated Wetlands". Protection of Isolated wetlands was "muddied" by several Supreme Court rulings. The goal is to get the EPA to re-structure rules on these isolated wetlands now that it's clear that an act of Congress is not in the cards.

Dr. Scott Yaich of DU started the morning off and gave the main presentation on the Clean Water Act, history of the Act, the Supreme Court rulings that have pretty much removed the Act's protection of isolated wetlands found very commonly in the Prairie Pothole region, but also are very common in Florida and many other states.

We broke up into workgroups after lunch to discuss messaging the clean water issue, how to localize the message, prioritize and simplify the message to build support and develop leaders who will attend various meetings and meet with state and local leaders.

The various orgs invited to the meeting (including UW-F) were given opportunities to comment and

make suggestions, primarily regarding how the coalition of organizations will proceed, what the message will be to the EPA rulemaking committee, and mostly regarding how to get the message out to sportsmen and sportswomen so that congress and the EPA will hear our message. There will be more on this in the coming months when the comment period begins.

This was a learning experience for everyone at the meeting. Some came with very good ideas, many coming from their personal experiences. You may have already noticed some of this in our e-blasts to sportsmen regarding related issues important to all of us in Florida.

The meeting was closed with a talk from Dale Hall; CEO of DU. Dale was the director of the USFWS during the Bush administration before becoming the CEO of DU, so he is a Washington insider. It's clear he is a devoted waterfowler and it's also clear that continued protection of our isolated wetlands is his top priority.

One of the themes that he repeated was the message regarding the Sportsman's contribution to the economy. It's important that we make sure our legislators know how important sporting tourism is to the economy. This also has been reflected in our E-blast messaging.

Another theme repeated in his remarks, was that "Culture drives everything we do", and that if you violate the cultural rules, you'll get no-where. I think this is a lesson we all need to think about. Basically what Dale meant was that if you don't respect the established "culture" when dealing with government, in this case the Federal Government but I think it applies universally; your message will largely be ignored. And this can mean anything from not hearing from the Sportsmen and Sportswomen to the way a message is delivered, and even the timing.

Attending this meeting puts us on the map with other national organizations and many state organizations that were also in attendance. We received complete email lists and those emails are now in our database. Most importantly UW-F is now recognized as a significant force in Florida by these other groups. I see it as part of my job to make sure everyone knows what we do in Florida for waterfowl and conservation. I delivered that message loud and clear to the entire

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group when it came my time to speak. Be sure that attending this conference, just like each of the other meetings and events our volunteers attend, are well worth the time and money. UW-F is effectively making friends all over the eastern US.

John Hitchcock

BEAU TURNER ANNUAL YOUTH OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE



On March 5th 2011 the Beau Turner Youth conservation center held its Annual "Youth Outdoor Experience". It was estimated that nearly 3000 youth and their families were in attendance for this event. The entire 900 acre property was staffed with FWC employees as well as volunteers. What a great way for the children to get a taste of the great outdoors! Activities included fishing and casting competitions, Olympic-style archery, muzzleloader, shotgun and rifle shooting, and K-9 demonstrations. A FWC law enforcement helicopter as well as live turkeys and alligators were on display so that the kids could get a closer look at them. There were Antique decoys, shotgun and bow manufacturers, a "swamp buggy", hay rides, bounce houses, and more candy and goodies than most could imagine. Shooting demonstrations were given by Mossberg shooting pro Patrick Flanigan, "Badlands Bill" Oglesby from the history channel, and Florida's own Browning shooting expert, 13 year old Zac Cooper. Mr. Beau Turner saw to it that every child that came to the center could find

something to his or her liking to participate in. UW-F President John Hitchcock was on hand with information about UW-F as well as part of his collection of fine decoys. Also on hand to run the shotgun range and teach children proper shotgun safety were UW-F members Mike McKenzie (SuspectXX), Nick Schaaaf (Ichabod97), Stephen Williamson (swilli1054), and Jeremy Smith (Hunt-chessies). Over all it was a great experience and a wonderful turnout. Through this event; Mr. Turner gives the sportsmen of Florida the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with the future sportsmen and sportswomen of Florida and as always United Waterfowlers - Florida was a major part of making this event the huge success it was.

JACK BYLSMA III CELEBRATION STA YOUTH HUNT

STA 1 W was the site for the UW-F JACK BYLSMA III CELEBRATION on Saturday February 5. The event was timed to allow both morning and afternoon hunt participants to enjoy a cook out lunch and a prize drawing including guided hunts, carved decoys, waterfowling gear, and the top prize - a MOSSBERG youth shotgun. Approximately one hundred young hunters, mentors and family members were served.

The STAs require paddling and wading as no motors are allowed and the morning hunt was especially exciting as the red eyes of the very numerous and very large sized gator population glowing in the predawn darkness gave every youngster something to recall to his or her friends at school. Then the large flights of teal and ringers start up with the sunrise and there is all the adrenalin that brings "duck fever".

The hunting was very good and a number of the youngsters checked in their first duck and each will receive a UNITED WATERFOWLERS-FL FIRST DUCK PIN as a memento of the day.

Chuck Echenique, UW-F Regional Director, and his daughters were accompanied by a television film crew doing a program on game calls. Chuck is the owner of REBEL YELP GAME CALLS. The crew in-

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interviewed a number of the young hunters and we supplied them with plenty of footage for the show.

These events depend on a long list of volunteers and donors to be successful. The UW-F leaders were Milan Balkanski, George Kriminger and Ryan Loutan. Gianni Bertuzzelli supplied ice and drinks. Prizes ranged from hats from DUCKS UNLIMITED to the MOSSBERG shotgun. Every participant received at least one prize.

CAMP BACKBELLY YOUTH HUNT

The South Brevard Chapter of DUCKS UNLIMITED conducted the BACKBELLY YOUTH HUNT at T. M. Goodwin/Broadmoor the weekend of February 5th. The outing included camping at the Observation Tower, a dinner sponsored by the Brevard County Airboat Association, campfire and hunter meeting with safety and



procedure instructions. Breakfast before the hunt was sponsored by Curt McKinney Construction and Darryl Jacobs, Esq. supplied a pizza lunch for all.

Many of the host of volunteers that do the hard work to make this



event a success are UW-F Members. Captain Jeff Kraynik, Tony Rushing and all others who help each year have made the BLACKBELLY YOUTH HUNT one of the top youth hunting venues in Florida.

MERRITT ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FIRST YOUTH HUNT

UW-F sponsored the first youth hunt ever at the MERRITT ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (MINWR) on February 5th. Pat Stone and Dan Daniels, UW-F Regional Directors, arranged for lunch and prizes for the young hunters. A pre-hunt meeting was conducted at the Visitor Center on the evening before the hunt to familiarize the mentors and hunters with the special regulations at the Refuge. Thanks to Lieutenant Franklin from the FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

COMMISSION (FWC) for his participation.

MINWR had been short of ducks during the regular season but an influx of new ducks just before the Youth Hunt made for much better shooting. Several youngsters bagged their first ducks.

Lunch was served at the Sandlers Pavillion and prizes distributed to all participants. The inaugural hunt was deemed a success by all.

Thanks to all who volunteered and donated the prizes for the youngsters. A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE MINWR STAFF WHO SUPPORTED THE YOUTH HUNT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.....AND MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF WATERFOWLERS TO ENJOY THE BEAUTIFUL REFUGE.



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NORTHWEST REGION

Cold.....that is the broad report. Record cold spells arrived one after the other all season. Good part, it brought ducks early and often; bad part, dealing with ice! and the rapid departure on the new ducks to warmer climes. However, overall a fairly good season in the freshwater areas and a normal one in the estuaries and diver haunts. There was no impact on the salt water venues from the BP oil spill. Plenty of water in the small marshes that are such good wood duck habitat made for some good hunts, especially with the current three bird limit.

Lake Seminole had some very good days but the lack of SAV, especially hydrilla, remains a detriment to long term stays by waterfowl looking for food. Corn ponds often serve as the smorgasbord for northwest Florida puddlers. Ringers were about in reasonable numbers and most puddle ducks, especially mallards, a bit higher than normal as the cold moved them down from the ice and snow that stretched into the mid southern states. The other larger lakes: Jackson, Carr, Miccosukee and Iamonia all had similar reports. The northwest will never be a duck mecca but can hold a good number of ducks for the persistent hunter to pursue. The Canada geese were to be found in the normal spots, but, as usual are very difficult to pattern for any consistent success.

The highlight of the season for UW-F is the Youth Hunt at Beau Turner Youth Conservation Center. Steve Williamson and Jeremy

Smith participate and represent UW-F. A more detailed article can be found elsewhere in this edition.

STEPHEN WILLIAMSON/JEREMY SMITH

NORTH EAST REGION

A good number of ducks were available the early part of the season due to the early cold fronts. The numbers declined rapidly with pressure and scouting became paramount. As normal, the ducks became very wary of boat blinds and hunters needed to find natural vegetation. Layout boats also were better at fooling the ducks as the season progressed.

Guana WMA was definitely hit or miss throughout the year. Despite reasonably good habitat the ducks seem not to "hold" well on the marsh. Old hands will scratch out a duck or two on a regular basis but consistent success is hard to come by. Most hunters in the area travel to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge but, as reported elsewhere, the ducks did not show there either.

Canada geese were abundant in northeast Florida. They are "residents" and establish patterns that can be worked to a hunter's success the first few days of season. However, the geese quickly change their routines as soon as the shooting begins and become almost impossible to predict.

ZACK RAULIE

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

The North Central region experienced a serious lack of water during the recent hunting season due to an extended drought last fall and early winter. With the low wa-

ter levels it seemed that ducks were concentrated in some areas and virtually nonexistent in others. If you did your homework by way of putting lots of miles on your truck and boat scouting and were able to get on the "X" you were rewarded with good hunting. However, a lot of hunters expressed their overall dissatisfaction with the season due to low numbers of birds in traditional areas and higher concentrations of hunters on the areas that were holding water and/or birds. While some folks proclaimed this to be one of the best seasons they've experienced in a long time, others were on the opposite end of the spectrum bemoaning this as one of the worst ever.

We're now at the start of the annual maintenance/treatment period for many of the water bodies in this area and things have been happening. On the good news front, the SJRWMD initiated controlled burns on Emeralda Marsh and Ocklawaha Prairie during February. In Emeralda Marsh, they were able to burn approximately 1,000 acres in Area 3 with mixed results. The cattail monoculture that has covered the majority of the hunting area the last few years seems to be little affected by the burn. It appears that more aggressive treatment will be necessary to remove or get rid of that and open it back up to hunting, but I don't know if that's in the plans for this year. However, if we get good rains this summer and water levels come up a couple of feet, there should be more open areas to hunt this fall.

On Ocklawaha Prairie, they started the controlled burn on the



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north end, but due to high winds they had to cut it short and only got a portion burned of what they wanted. The extreme north end as well as the northeast quadrant got a good burn that should open up some areas up there for hunters. A lot of the "upland" areas on the east and northeast side will benefit significantly from the burn and the snipe hunting next season should be improved. Like with Emerald Marsh, if we get some tropical weather this summer (rains but not winds) and get it back to normal pool level (maybe another 18-24 inches of water), it should create more opportunities on the north end for duck hunters.

There has been no significant action taken on Orange Creek as of yet. This area continues to suffer from a severe lack of water and is overrun by cattails. Water levels in here are directly related to levels in Orange Lake, so until the lake comes up the OC basin will continue to remain low with poor hunting opportunities.

The treatment plans for Orange Lake, Lake Lochloosa, and Newnan's Lake call for minimal hydrilla treatment at this time. The extreme cold weather combined with the ducks and coots devouring the hydrilla have done a good job knocking that stuff back with the result being that it will require less chemical treatment early on to keep it in check. However, if the water levels remain low throughout the spring, as is expected, it will allow for better growing conditions for the hydrilla and it will come back with a vengeance. As with all these area waterways, it will be an ongoing thing monitoring and react-

ing to the changes as they occur throughout the summer. In their ongoing battle with keeping hydrilla in check, the SJRWMD will be testing and using some new chemicals this summer developed by the University of Florida. The hope is that this will lead to less chemical being used less often which is good for everything. There will certainly be spot treatments on an as needed basis to keep some areas open for anglers as well as treatments of the boat channels whenever necessary to keep those open as well. And as always, there will be on and off spraying of the water lettuce and hyacinths over the course of the hot months. However, at this time there are no plans for any large scale chemical treatments on any of the area waterways.

UW-F urges its members to attend any of the SJRWMD meetings open to the public whenever possible in an effort to stay informed on local events and provide input to them on matters that concern waterfowlers. A listing of their meetings can be found on their web site at www.sjrwmd.com under News, meetings, and notices. Get out of the house this spring and summer whenever possible and enjoy the many recreational opportunities we have available to us in this state. Take care.

STEVE PASTEUR (ESTEBAN)

EAST CENTRAL REGION

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (IMINWR) was simply too dry when the vegetation needed to grow in the impoundments. Despite reasonable water levels in places and all the hard work the UW-F volunteers did during the

summer at the culverts, the ducks simply did not show up. There was some early success and a pick up at the end of regular season. Lots of shovelers and fair flights of teal, wigeon and pintails. There is a lot of concern regarding the long term viability of the Refuge as a major resting place for wintering waterfowl. The decline in numbers continues. The same can be said for the divers in the adjacent river. However, there may be a discernable reason for the diver loss....the many flats boats harassing them all winter. Unexpectedly, a fair number of ducks showed just in time for the first UW-F MINWR Youth Hunt and made for a fun hunt and day for the young hunters. See the article describing the MINWR Youth Hunt elsewhere in this edition.

T.M. Goodwin/Broadmoor reports were very good for the most part. However, being early in the drawing is essential to getting a good spot in the marsh. A lot of the property is difficult to hunt and without good scouting information finding a "hole" can be a problem. The FWC staff does a very good job with these permitted hunts.

The new Fellsmere Marsh was a hot spot for those hunters willing to do the work it took to get out into the prime areas. Walking, dragging and paddling small craft are required. Plenty of ducks were available all season. Nearby Mary A and Sartori marshes, airboat country, also had some very good spots and



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plenty of "large ducks" as well as the normal teal and ringers. Moccasin Island was a shadow of the past glory days. Unfortunately, the Stick Marsh has deteriorated to the point it is usually not worth scouting (or fishing for that matter). East Marsh and Ansin/Garcia always have a few ducks and can sometimes be a surprise. A small contingent of regulars seem to enjoy the lack of competition and spend some days hunting the areas. A new area was added to East Marsh this year but low water was a problem.

The low water situation kept the ducks in the marshes, not out on private fields and pastures, and made for steady hunting throughout the season.

DAN DANIELS

SOUTHWEST REGION

As many of you know, Dennis Dutcher and I have been working on our proposal to SWFWMD to open nearly 169,000 acres of District lands to hunting. While we're not expecting to gain access to all of the land, we are hoping to gain some access (at least in part) on all 35 of the tracts identified. Recently, a stakeholder meeting was held on November 18, 2010, where we were once again under attack by the anti-hunting factions. I'm proud to report that the same cast of characters who defeated us at Circle B Bar are now scratching their heads in amazement that we've not lost the fight to them already.

We squared off with the likes of Audubon, Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, The Plant Society and other groups who attempted to discredit hunting and hunters by painting us in a bad light with false information. We had answers and logical retorts to every false accusation they threw our way. In the end, we not only swayed some of the undecided folks our way, but we convinced SWFWMD to meet with just the hunters to advance our proposal.

On January 28, 2011, Dennis, myself, Paul Daniel (field trial hunters), and Jack Phathean (fox hunters) subsequently met with Will Miller - Land Use & Protection Manager for SWFWMD, and identified the first seven tracts which we will attempt to qualify for inclusion of hunting. They are (in no particular order) Cypress Creek (7,446 acres), Lower Hillsborough (16,000 acres), Green Swamp Hampton Tract and East & West non-WMA tracts (16,150 acres), Weekiwachee Preserve (9,000 acres), Chazhowitska River & Coastal Swamps (5,637 acres), Halpata Tastanaki, (7401 acres), & Lake Panasofkee (3,041 acres). This totals approximately 64,675 acres of possible new hunting lands. This represents almost 40% of the lands we're asking to open in the very first round of negotiations.

At this time, FWC will study the identified parcels and make recommendations to SWFWMD as to the types of hunting and the frameworks for hunting that they

believe are sustainable. Once FWC has given its recommendations, the areas will be publically vetted in a series of open meetings. Once we have the dates and locations of those meetings, we will be calling on every available member to speak in support of proposed hunting on these lands. Butts in the seats will be key to making the District Board understand there is serious public support for hunting these areas. Once the public meetings are over with, District staff will then send their recommendations to the District Board for approval.

It's going to be a long and involved process, but we hope to have the first properties opened by as soon as the 2012-2013 hunting season. We're going to need all UW-F members and any hunting friends you may have to show up en masse to the public meetings and the District Board meeting when the time comes. Stay tuned... it's fixing to get heated up real soon. The next scheduled meeting is March 15 at the Circle B Bar and hunting will once again be on the agenda. We'll keep you posted on what transpires.

CHUCK ECHENIQUE

This season the southwest part of Florida could have been considered a duck hunters wasteland. Only those with access to a private mecca, a secret honey hole or have learned the ins and outs of the salt water estuaries found any number of ducks all season. The continuing drought did not



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help and the ducks seem to gravitate east to the lakes and marshes that stretch so invitingly from Kissimmee to Florida Bay. Thus, the not uncommon treks to the east for most southwest Florida duck hunters.

The rare exceptions are always those devoted to hunting the divers in the bays and estuaries. These hardy souls do well, sometimes because of simple dedication to the "salt water" venues. However, the Ten Thousand Island National Wildlife Refuge continues to disappoint as few ducks seem to visit there any longer.

The closest duck territories for many are the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. Hunting there was good from time to time, especially before the aquatic plant spraying begins. Water was low, perhaps reducing the populations of birds, but putting those on hand in easier to reach marshes and open water. The key to good waterfowling on all the Chain is the amount of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in the lake or marsh. There is a constant pulling and pushing of various stakeholders and agencies as they seek to control the SAV for one constituency or another. UW-F representatives attend the KCOL aquatic plant control planning meetings and have an influence to some degree. However, the anglers, USFWS, USACE and the local governments all have their own issues. The presence of the endangered Snail Kite adds a new dimension to the planning

and access elements.

The UW-F goals are to have a program designed to keep a minimum of 30% of the water body with a healthy crop of SAV and to have spraying occur after duck seasons.

CHUCK ECHENIQUE/DENNIS DUTCHER

SOUTH REGION

LAKE OKEECHOBEE

Lake Okeechobee is in excellent shape for both hunting and fishing. The water is clean, the submerged aquatic vegetation is plentiful and there is enough water for access to the marsh areas and not so much water that would spread the ducks over a vast area.

These conditions made for an outstanding duck season. In the beginning a tremendous number of teal were on the lake, numbering in the tens of thousands. The unusual freezes early in the season moved a lot of them out, but a large number of ducks came in from the north, including pintails, gadwalls, redheads and even canvasbacks. A fair number of divers, including ringneck ducks and bluebills were on the open water areas. The cold weather also brought an unusual number of geese to Lake Okeechobee. Large numbers of blackbelly whistling ducks could be found in the northwest corner of the lake as usual.

The Lake Okeechobee Habitat Alliance is in the process of establishing a stakeholder group for the

initial Management Advisory Group meeting. All stakeholder comments and views will be welcome by the group.

CAPT. CHRIS CHESLEY

WCA'S/STAs/LOXAHATCHEE NWR

As is usual the large expanse of the WCA's made scouting mandatory to "stay on the ducks". Plenty of ringneck ducks were in the area, large flocks early in the season, but they moved quickly once any hunting pressure occurred. For once, water levels were stable and both deep enough for regular motors and shallow enough to attract the ringers. Mottle ducks were not as numerous as in the past and the large flocks of teal found in other areas of south Florida were rare in the WCA's. Some years the WCAs have too much water, especially if there has been a large storm. This is caused by the USACE and SFWMD not being allowed to move water south under the Tamiami Trail due to restrictions protecting the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow. There is a review in process that hopefully will give the Corps and SFWMD more leeway to let water out of the WCA's when it is doing damage to the ecology in the WCAs. UW-F is lobbying for allowing that flexibility.

The STAs had another banner year. Well over 10,000 hunting opportunities with a very high rate of hunter satisfaction. Literally thousands of teal were on the marshes from the first day of the season until the last. Unusually large numbers of gadwalls, redheads and pintails could be found in various cells in the system. Blackbelly whistling

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Sunset

Winter Hunt

Cold.....bitter cold. The waters of the Little Miami River ran in dark rivulets between sheets of ice from bank to snow covered bank. The ice chimed in the pools and tinkled in the short rapids as the current ebbed and flowed....a frigid musical backdrop to the ancient sycamores and oaks along the shore. A fog, more ice crystals than vapor, wafted among the grey trunks and limbs. Charlie and I were simply struck with a bad case of cabin fever from almost two weeks of arctic weather in Ohio. We were determine to go duck hunting despite the only open water left was the fast flowing river. The lakes had turned into ice fishing venues and our blind at Lake St. Mary's was frozen in over a foot of ice....."hard water" the ice fishermen would say.

We had the small john boat used to fish the river in warmer times. We had white sheets to cover us and the boat. We dropped one truck at the take out point several miles downstream from where we launched....not knowing for sure if there was an open way from one to the other through the ice strewn

river. We knew where the pools were that might hold a few brave mallards that had not migrated south despite the freeze....and we hoped a flight of canada geese might fly up the river's path as they moved from one snow covered corn field to another. We had six mallard decoys in case we decided to take a break from paddling and set up at a pool. And we were dressed as warmly as possible....but the cold seeped into your body none the less and gloves became stiff with ice at any contact with the water. Paddling was not without discomfort.

We began with me paddling and Charlie prone at the front of the boat, gun ready, as we drifted along. The best chance for a shot is when you turn a bend just before a pool. If you are quiet enough any ducks in the pool will not flush until the shooter is in range.

.....
Duck hunters are a different breed. We relish the extremes of weather and are particularly happy to go out into a new winter's front blasting from the north. I have three "bad discs" in my lower back today from wading and pushing a boat full of

decoys up a frozen creek for almost a half mile, breaking ice all the way. Paid a dear price for that little episode of middle aged arrogance! But, like all addicted waterfowlers that is "just a story to tell" as part of the lexicon of the sport.

Another season has ended. We all have more tales of the invariable hits and misses over the decoys and the mishaps that come with exposing yourself to nature's elements. The unusually cold winter for Florida brought the unheard of reports of "We had to break ice" from hunters more inclined to need mosquito spray. We all look with longing to next September when we can start duck hunting again.

.....
The two mallards did not even flush until Charlie raised the gun....a pair. Charlie picked the greenhead with bright orange legs that only come with winter's cold. We both shouted with satisfaction that our frozen journey had been rewarded. That was the only shot of the day, but it was all we needed to break the mid-winter doldrums. Only a duck hunter would understand.....

Newton Cook-Executive Director/Editor

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