

FWC looks toward Florida's future



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As Florida's human population and associated environmental stresses increase, the need for information about natural resources is urgent. Florida must make forward-looking management decisions to protect critical resources and balance competing demands for limited resources. Sound scientific information must drive decisions. Planning and conducting research to provide this information is the core of the FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's (FWRI's) mission.

FWRI is the FWC's scientific research arm.

Our research programs are statewide and focus on the wide-ranging information needed by resource managers. Through effective research and technical knowledge, we provide timely information and guidance to manage Florida's fish and wildlife.

FWRI is organized into five broad, interrelated science sections: Marine Fisheries Research, Freshwater Fisheries Research, Ecosystem Assessment and Restoration, Wildlife Research and Information Science and Management. The principal liaison between the institute and the public is the FWRI Outreach Coordination Office. Nearly 600 staff members – approximately half of them working at the downtown St. Petersburg headquarters and half operating from more than 20 field laboratories at key inland and coastal locations – make up our research arm.

While FWRI came into being on July 1, 2004, the groups that form the institute have been generating quality science in support of resource management for more than 50 years. Marine research components date back to 1955, while the freshwater fisheries and wildlife research-oriented programs date to the 1940s.

Our research programs are funded from user fees, grants, state general revenue and specialty license plates. User

fees include hunting and fishing licenses. FWC's \$42 million annual research budget supports 300 research projects.

FWC's research projects investigate well-known species found in Florida, including manatees, black bears, panthers, sea turtles and alligators. In addition, researchers explore a variety of issues, ranging from endangered beach mice to tropical coral reefs. Researchers collect and analyze data on Florida's many recreationally and commercially important fisheries, such as largemouth bass, snook and spiny lobsters.

FWC researchers gather data to help guide responsible management decisions, and work collaboratively with many partners to enhance our capabilities. Scientific data from FWC serves natural resource managers both within and outside the agency. Research results are also distributed to stakeholders and the public. Additional details are available on our Web site, research.MyFWC.com.

Each year, the institute hosts MarineQuest, a free open-house for the public to go behind the scenes at our headquarters in St. Petersburg and get up close with marine life, peer through microscopes and learn from some of Florida's top scientists. Vibrant exhibits with hands-on displays and activities draw visitors into the world of marine science and the fascinating things FWC scientists discover. We hope you will join us for the next MarineQuest on Saturday, April 21.

As we look to Florida's future, FWC will continue to focus on the most pressing needs relative to our resources. FWRI's role within FWC is vital as sound scientific information is essential to the management process. We encourage you to become an active participant with us in the wise management of our fish and wildlife and their habitats. Visit our Web site to learn more about our programs and provide us with issues, concerns and comments about our programs and our mission.