



WILDERNESS PROTECTION · WILDLIFE PRESERVATION · FISHING AND HUNTING CONSERVATION

BFA JANUARY 2016 NEWSLETTER

Happy New Year Everyone!

Please mark your calendar for the next General Membership Meeting

Wed, 3 February

This will be an Eating Meeting with a Guest Speaker! Doors open at 5:30 PM. Dinner will be served at 6:00 PM. Dinner will consist of a fish fry, baked beans, coleslaw and hushpuppies. Vegan options for our vegan friends will also be available.

Cost \$8.00/person

1615 East LaRua Street, Pensacola

PRESENTATION - " Blackwater River State Forest: a gem in Northwest Florida"

Please join us in welcoming Peggy Baker, who has been on the Francis M. Weston Audubon Society (FMWAS) Board of Directors for the past nineteen years. She has served in many capacities. As a retired elementary teacher, the job of Education Chairman has been her main focus but now she serves as Outreach Chair. She has been on the Hyatt Center Committee since its inception. She has also served as President and on the President's Council for several years. As director of the Blackwater River State Forest Bird Survey, she has spent many days counting the birds in the forest. Her interest in birds has taken her to Costa Rica, the Yucatan, Australia and throughout the United States.

A Message from the President...

Citizen Scientists have always played an important role to various agencies; Sea Turtle monitoring along the 1,200 mile Florida Coastline could not be accomplished without the dedication of trained volunteers; Many a Black Skimmers and Snowy Plovers fledged in 2015 thanks to a handful of dedicated Audubon Volunteers, who policed known nesting areas (morning, noon and night) and educated the public during Spring Break, the 4th of July, and the Blue Angels Weekend as to our little feathered friends needs for quiet and privacy; and the BFA Water Quality Monitoring Team Volunteers who have taken the Pledge of Allegiance to sample the 1st Sunday of the month to collect important water quality chemistry and samples.

Data collected by Citizen Scientists at the grass roots level, once verified by Quality Assurance/Quality Control protocols are used by agencies to make decisions at the 25,000 and 50,000 foot level. This information is key and vital to understanding the different regions, and for agencies to make informed decisions. Without the extensive data base for the NW FL regional rivers, streams, creeks of nutrient loads and water chemistry supplied by the BFA over the past 50 years, the USEPA & FL DEP may not have had the robust data set needed to create the Numeric Nutrient Criteria that now govern our discharge effluent in surface waters within the region.

While Environmental Agencies and programs are experiencing funding cuts across the board, many decisions being made about land management, certain areas, and presence/absence of flora and fauna are being decided by the data collected by Citizen Scientists.

Having just attended the 4 plus hour Escambia County Board of Commissioners & the Escambia County Restore Advisory Committee Meeting, which is in the act of reviewing the methods to decide which Restore Proposals will provide the most Bang-for-the-Buck; it is clear that no matter how much money is available, it will never be enough to address all the environmental needs identified by our community. Ironically, the projects that bubbled up to the top during the first sweep of the project evaluations were all water quality and environmental in nature. Inherently, somehow we all know that 'Restoring our Environment; Restores our Economy'. This message has been spoken - loud and clear by the FL Wildlife Federation & the National Wildlife Federation for many years!

During this New Year, the BFA, the FMWAS, and the Longleaf Chapter of the Native Plant Society are combining efforts to support and advocate for the implementation of Amendment 1 funds and the sound management of public conservation lands, defending them from incompatible use proposals ranging from oil and gas exploration to recreational over- development. In addition, all three organizations will support meaningful Gulf restoration by advocating for conservation uses of RESTORE Act funds and engaging in environmental citizen science programs and stewardship.

GRASI Update:

A Record of Decision (ROD) based on comments received in 2015 on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) from the public over the use of the Air Force on the Blackwater River State Forest & Tate's Hell State Forest has been modified...in our favor!!

The Gulf Regional Air Space Initiative (GRASI) - Audubon Florida, the Francis M Weston Audubon Chapter, and countless other outdoor citizens and recreational groups engaged their time, energy and collaborated in sending a strong message to the military and the state that conservation lands purchased with the intent to restore habitat and greenways were not compatible with on-the-ground military training. Military connections and roots run deep in NW Florida; hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, paddling, bird watching, horseback riding, mountain biking and just listening to the wind rustle through the trees and observing nature also have strong purpose for the citizens and communities embedded within the landscape. Some activities are not intended for multiple users. Training is a must, but may not be compatible on conservation lands where some delicate species are just now making a comeback.

This 'David and Goliath' scenario has played out over the past 2.5 years, but actually began in 2008/9 when the military realized that closing many bases and transferring those activities to Eglin AFB would begin to delay training programs and impact military scheduling for new recruits. Eglin's Landscape is roughly 450,000 acres and spans several counties. The Blackwater River State Forest in Santa Rosa & Okaloosa Counties and Tate's Hell State Forest in Franklin & Gulf Counties combined equal ~440,000 acres.

Originally begun as the Gulf Regional Air Space Initiative (GRASI), the program was focused on using existing forest fire towers to set up emitters which aircraft could triangulate with. Suddenly, in 2010/11 the focus shifted to include 'on the ground' activities, including driving Hummers through wetlands, dropping troops via aircraft at one location, allowing bivouacking and living off the land while said troops made their way to an aircraft pick-up station. There were examples of pyrotechnics and other explosive activities to be used upwards of 232 days/year on each forest.

Eglin's Landscape is largely off limits to the public as they conduct many active training missions with live ammunition. Eglin also uses large swaths of air space over the Gulf of Mexico for training purposes. The military is an important component in our area and rightfully needs space to train; that said we are at an interesting crossroads in NW FL with land, conservation issues, and encroachment due to growth of the area.

Both the Blackwater River State Forest and Tate's Hell State Forest are Managed Ecosystems which have had incredible positive responses to fire management regimes. Keep in mind, our forests are fire dependent and have evolved with fire which often begins with lightning strikes. This concept was not fully realized and understood until the late 20th Century.

Smokey Bear became the iconic symbol of the adage 'Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires'. This fear of fire manifested through roughly three generations. Today we understand that fire plays an important role in removing deadwood fuel and invasive species which coincidentally really enjoy our climate and soil conditions.

The introduction of fire back onto this fire starved landscape has resulted in a plethora of native flora and fauna returning to these otherwise barren regions. Native pitcher plants and hundreds of forbs, grasses, lily's and orchids, to name a few, have returned from forgotten seed banks that have lain dormant until conditions became optimum. Once these plants returned, so did the insects, which attracted the birds and the other inhabitants that call a thriving forest home. The Red Cockaded Woodpecker and the Gopher Tortoise are two keystone species that have returned, indicating the environment is becoming healthier and through careful management are rebounding, as are the many species dependent on their presence.

The Gopher Tortoise creates a deep burrow with many cavities at different subterranean depths that have been found to house over 300 different species of insects, reptiles, and mammals. Gopher Tortoise were collected and eaten by many through the mid twentieth century; By the 1980s and 90s they almost disappeared due to lack of habitat (interrupted by lack of fire management and increased development); in 2007 they were eventually listed on the states' Threatened & Endangered Species List. Today, the Gopher Tortoise is making a comeback in the managed forest. In areas where natural lands are being converted to development, many tortoises and their burrow-mates are buried by heavy equipment unintentionally.

Fire Management is vital to the health of our forests; Fire Management is also expensive since wild land firefighters must be trained through many program tiers including annual refresher courses, and the process itself has a high risk component. Fire Fighters, both the men and women who participate in this activity are an amazing bunch which is often undervalued in their role in protecting the environment. Funding for fire management programs is always tight; as is the case with virtually all funding for environmental purposes. But the results can be staggering as we will hear during the Feb BFA Meeting Presentation.

The military, understandably, needs land to train new recruits. Large tracts of land are becoming harder to come by, but there were several options that were not properly vetted. Several large land owners offered to lease or sell their lands to the military for such purposes, including the St Joe Paper Company which had 440,000 acres spanning several counties for sale. These large tracts of land have not been managed with fire; in fact many were in timber plantations (Silviculture) which discourages fire because it negatively impacts the quality of the wood. These options were never openly discussed or vetted.

What many ecologists and conservationists have observed is that natural lands, when properly managed, are resilient and support a great amount of species diversity. Healthy uplands support healthy waters, which in turn support healthy communities and a healthy economy.

Both of these large forests have been well managed by the FL Forest Service and the FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on a shoestring budget. The 2014 passage of Amendment 1 was to help with continued management of these remarkable lands and the purchase of additional sensitive lands for wildlife corridors and species protection. To date, those monies have not been appropriated as intended. The state is currently being sued by two organizations over these issues and concerns.

Look to sometime in early 2016 for the FL Dept of Acquisitions and Restoration Council (ARC) to accept or reject the military's use of the forest under greatly reduced frequency, intensity, and range of most activities that would be requested by the Air Force. The FMW Audubon Society will be in attendance and speak on behalf of our forests; and as Peggy Baker says, when she introduces herself to the public, 'I speak for the birds'.

The Long Awaited BFA Water Quality Sampling Class will be Scheduled Soon...

This class will be split between classroom learning and field practice. Participation is encouraged and sampling obligations are limited to 4 times per year. Several area high schools have been active in sampling area waterbodies, as was presented at the Nov BFA Annual Fish Fry. We hope to recruit some of these fine Washington High School Marine Science Academy students to join our program this year! Our Rivers and creeks are the key to healthy bays and bayous!

Bream Fishermen Association is a 501 (C) 3 Organization chartered in 1970
Jan 2016 Newsletter – visit www.BreamFishermen.org for more articles and information

Notes from the Field & Issues we are keeping an Eye On

The old adage, 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' still holds true, especially when considering all the 'Ecosystem Services' that nature provides us when she is in her natural, healthy & resilient state!

This message was reiterated for our Water Quality Monitoring Team during the first run of the New Year on 3 Jan. The Jan/April/July/Oct Run samples the Blackwater and Yellow/Shoal Rivers and many of the smaller creeks that feed into the larger tributaries of each system. As everyone that was here during the holidays knows, the month of Dec was overcast and filled with rain. Not buckets of rain like we had in Jan 2014 or June 2012, but 1-2 inches at a time in our region. North of us (and way north of our watersheds) the region experienced heavy rains and floods, but for the most part our weather was mild and wet.

The Blackwater and Yellow/Shoal River Run allow us to compare creek responses to these weather conditions under managed conditions and developed conditions. Most of the Blackwater River and its feeder creeks and tributaries are on Blackwater River State Forest Lands – which have healthy riparian buffers and flood plains. One of the smaller creeks that feed into the river is not in managed forest land, and that was evident during our sampling trip. What is normally a small creek with 'Gin Clear' water on this morning looked like someone had poured a half glass of milk and topped it off with water. Chalky and laden with suspended sediment, this creek was swollen and carrying its sediment load to the river. Where did the suspended sediment come from? Upstream the creek has development including an active sand pit, sub divisions and a nearby air field. The riparian zone has been thinned and can no longer do its job of slowing the water as it flows through the trees and thereby allowing the sediment to drop out.

Further along on the run, we sampled several more creeks that flow into the river. These creeks were all swollen but had the advantage of jumping the creek/stream banks and flowing through the flood plains. The water in these systems was brown from the tannins yet translucent. As if someone had poured a half glass of ice tea and topped it off with water.

At the Yellow River on Hwy 90, we encountered an alarming scene. For the past year, the FDOT and their team have begun a project of replacing the bridge spans over river. To date, the northern west bound span is ~60% completed. Equipment like cranes, truck containers, temporary bridge materials, welding materials and acetylene tanks, 55 gallon drums and everything needed to build a bridge was staged in the floodplain and on this day covered in water as the Yellow River jumped its banks to the adjacent flood plain. The turbidity curtains were the equivalent of putting a Band aid on a cut femoral artery, useless.

The irony here is that the oil spill reminded us how closely our economic health as a community and region are connected to our environmental health. At a time where we are trying to revive water quality and habitat conditions to support oysters, seagrass beds and a fishery which has been in decline – these types of 'mistakes' are still occurring – everyday – in every watershed. Until the federal government, state, county, and cities all get on the same page – and get serious in protecting our habitats and environment, we will never get back what we once had!

Apropos Water Quality

The BFA has finalized the new Water Quality Sampling Standard Operating Procedures & Quality Assurance/Quality Control Manual; this manual has been blessed by FL DEP and includes growing the BFA Monitoring Program with UWF and Escambia County Student Interns. Growing this important program will provide the opportunity to teach more Citizen Scientists about stewardship of our natural resources and how to make their observations count towards the future.

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The Bream Fishermen Association is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the conservation responsibilities as well as the recreational enjoyment of fishermen, hunters, campers and related outdoorsmen.

The BFA meets four times a year for a General Membership Meeting (1st Wed in Feb, May, Aug and the 1st Sat in Nov for our annual fish fry) and generates four newsletters a year.

It is the objective of the BFA to support, develop, and implement programs that will:

- 1) Improve the quality of our environment;
- 2) Protect and maintain our present wilderness type lakes, rivers, swamps, marshes, bays, forests, and beaches in their natural undeveloped state; and
- 3) Advance the causes of plant, marine, and wildlife preservation.

Membership is open to all individuals who support these objectives. Please join the BFA by sending us your contact information (name, mailing address, phone, and email) be sure to notify us if you prefer to receive notices and announcements by mail or email, and \$10 annual dues to our mailing address: 1203 North 16th Ave, Pensacola, FL 32503

ATTENTION: BFA Members interested in participating in the Water Quality Monitoring Program are asked to sign-up. Space will be limited. Please contact me by phone or email 850.384.6696 or Barbara@PanhandleWatershed.org

Bream Fishermen Association

1203 N. 16th Ave, Pensacola, FL 32503
