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March News from Welaka National Fish Hatchery

Happy Birthday Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge

The Fish and Aquatic Conservation offices of Florida would like to wish the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge a happy birthday as they mark 114 years of conservation. Welaka National Fish Hatchery and the Peninsular Florida Fisheries Office were able to celebrate with the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge and their friends as they held their 25th Pelican Island Wildlife Festival in Sebastian, Florida on March 18.

The team at Welaka National Fish Hatchery set up a fish tank to show attendees of the festival how hatcheries are working to conserve fish and threatened and endangered mussels, like striped bass and the Suwannee moccasinshell, the same way Pelican Island NWR works to conserve and protect the historic pelican rookery, habitat for threatened and endangered species, and lagoon habitat for migratory birds. The striped bass on display, grown at the hatchery, were a big hit for folks who are familiar with the species from having spent time living and fishing along the east coast of the United States.

The Peninsular Florida Fisheries Office (FWCO) provided boys and girls hours of entertainment at the kid's casting station. John Galvez and his team of volunteers spent the day teaching kids how to cast a fishing pole and worked with them on casting a "lure" casting plug into a small bucket. When the FWCO team wasn't assisting a child or untangling lines, they were able to talk to their parents about Fish and Aquatic Conservation issues in Florida such as aquatic invasive species.

The day was made complete when President Teddy Roosevelt stopped by for some encouraging words and a few photos. We look forward to celebrating again next year.



Deputy Project Leader Tony Brady poses with President Teddy Roosevelt.

Aquarium with fish reared at Welaka NFH on display at the festival.



A family enjoys their time at the refuge.

Welaka National Fish Hatchery Provides Channel Catfish for Atlanta Urban American Outdoors Fishing Event and Military Base

Fishing is a great way to enjoy the outdoors, but when kids are used to the instant gratification and quick action of video games, if the fish aren't biting then the kids will lose interest FAST, so it helps to stack the deck in favor of the great outdoors. Stocking hungry channel catfish into a pond is a great way to ensure the fish are biting and stack that deck. The channel catfish program in federal fish hatcheries isn't the most popular of programs, but when the Regional Office calls looking for channel catfish for an urban fishing event in their back yard, a hatchery with catfish can really come in handy.

The last week of March, both Welaka and Warm Springs National Fish Hatcheries assisted in the Atlanta Urban American Outdoor Fishing Derby, by providing over 2,000 channel catfish for this event. This fishing event attracted around 100 kids and as many adults to participate in the sport of fishing. Despite flooding a few days before the event, a lot of fish were caught and even more smiles were plastered to the faces of the participants. The catfish cultured at Welaka National Fish Hatchery aren't just for kids fishing derbies. When the team at the hatchery harvested the pond for the channel catfish to go to Atlanta they harvested more than twice as many as was needed for the urban fishing event, so the majority of the remaining fish were stocked into four fishing ponds at the Avon Park Air Force Range. The families of the men and women stationed at Avon Park Air Force Range are now able to enjoy many family fun days fishing on base. Stay tuned to see where Welaka NFH stocks fish next in an effort to connect people with nature through the sport of fishing.



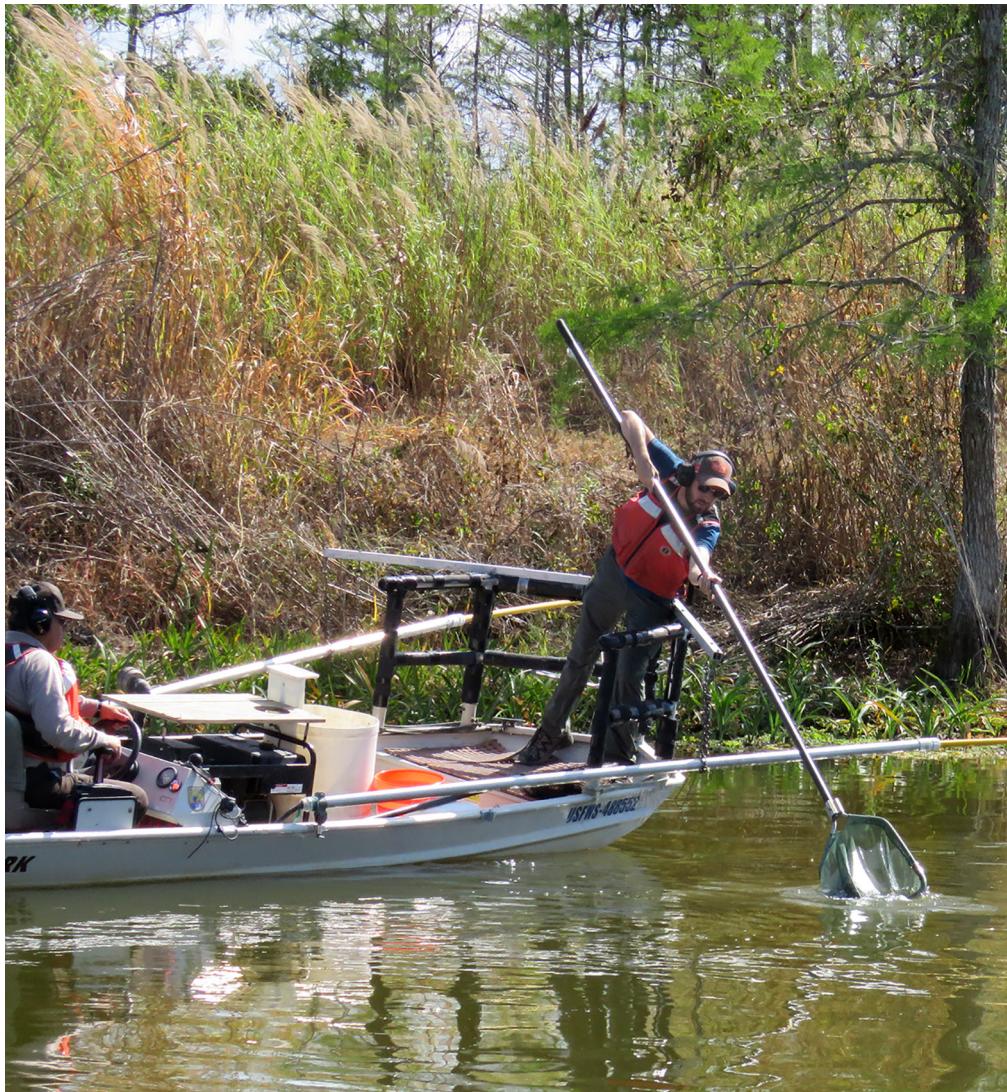
The kids and parents had a great time catching channel catfish and even managed to catch a large carp.



A fish basket loaded with channel catfish caught during the event.



About 200 folks gathered to catch fish at the Urban American Outdoors Fishing Event.



John Galvez, Project Leader of the Peninsular Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office and Miccosukee biologist, Julian Douglas, net invasive fish from the river.



John Galvez working hard netting fish.



Some of the invasive species collected: sailfin catfish, walking catfish, Mayan cichlids, and black arca.

On the Hunt for Aquatic Invasive Species in the Everglades

Florida has come to be known for the plethora of aquatic invasive species that have been released in state waters over the past decades.

Despite all the efforts to educate the public about the problems of releasing aquarium fish in local waters, new invasive species continue to appear in Florida waterways. In order to keep track of these new species as they appear, biologists from multiple federal and state agencies spend two weeks a year searching various waterways for any new invasive species that may have been recently released and established in Florida. These sampling efforts have been named Fish Slams.

In March, the latest Fish Slam took place in the Everglades around the Big Cypress National Preserve. Fish and Aquatic Conservation team (FAC team) members from Welaka National Fish Hatchery and the Peninsular Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office started Fish Slam Week off by spending a day working with the Miccosukee Tribal Nation to assist their newest biologists on understanding the problem of aquatic invasive species and how they are impacting the waters that flow through Miccosukee tribal lands. In about an hour of electrofishing time, the combined efforts of the FAC team and the Miccosukee tribal biologists were able to collect and remove 140 Mayan cichlids as well as a couple of walking catfish. For the remaining three days of sampling, the FAC team assisted a larger group of biologists sampling various locations in the Big Cypress Swamp area.

The Fish Slam sampling effort is led by the U.S. Geological Survey's Wetland and Aquatic Research Center. Fish Slam produced 13 aquatic invasive species, two species (*Nile tilapia* and *brown hoplo*), which have never been found in Big Cypress National Preserve. A detailed account of the entire Fish Slam sampling efforts can be found at the following link: <https://www.usgs.gov/news/usgs-and-partners-team-track-down-nonnative-and-invasive-fishes-south-florida>. The next Fish Slam is scheduled for this fall and the FAC team is looking forward to being a part of that sampling effort.