

*Report on the Public Opinion on Fish and Wildlife Management Issues
and the Reputation and Credibility of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in the Southeastern
United States*

Background Report – May 10, 2005

The Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) contracted with Responsive Management to conduct this survey. Most of the questions asked were common to all 16 member states. Each state also was allowed to submit two customized questions. For Florida, one question dealt with general public opinion of the success of the merger that created the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; another dealt with license exemptions.

In February 2005, surveyors completed approximately 6,500 random-digit phone call surveys with persons 18 years and older in the southeastern states. Florida's segment included 402 completed calls, which provides a 95% confidence interval within a sampling error of +/- 4.89 percentage points. In other words, 95 out of 100 times that a similar random sample was tested, the answers would be within 4.89 percent of those listed here.

In April, three FWC staff members attended a two-day workshop to discuss findings of the 16-state survey and individual state surveys. The workshop proved valuable in providing detailed insight on survey design and findings. Open discussion focused on practical uses of the findings in the survey.

- ❖ The survey revealed 87 differences in responses between Floridians and southerners as a whole. Below are the top 10 “very highly significant” differences.
 - o A shorter duration residency in Florida than in other home states.
 - o Fewer have gone hunting in Florida than in other home states in the last 5 years.
 - o More disapprove of legal hunting
 - o More disagree landowners should be allowed to develop land regardless of wildlife impacts
 - o More have been saltwater fishing in the last 12 months
 - o Disagree that efforts to conserve wildlife habitat are adequate
 - o Say development/urban sprawl is an important habitat issue
 - o More do not consider themselves to be a hunter
 - o Fewer consider legal hunting opportunities to be important
 - o More have kayaked or canoed in the last 12 months

- ❖ The following survey highlights are specific to Florida. The +/- next to some of the entries indicates the direction of the difference when compared to the southeast. For example, plus (+) means that Florida had a higher score than the SEAFWA average.
 - o 32% of Floridians could come close to naming the FWC as the state conservation agency (69% could not name the agency; +).
 - o 22% said FWC is doing better after the merger than before (only 3% said worse)
 - o Slightly less than 1 in 5 (19%; -) of the randomly contacted Floridians had contacted the FWC for information or assistance. This was most likely by phone (64%) and most often dealt with nuisance wildlife removal (20%), followed by hunting (17%, plus 5% about hunting licenses), or fishing (14% plus 7% about fishing licenses).
 - o Overall, 84% were satisfied with their contact with FWC.
 - o When surveyors asked an open-ended (top-of-mind) question pertaining to FWC funding, unspecified taxes, state taxes and federal taxes were the top three replies, totaling 48%. Surprisingly, only 12% mentioned fishing and hunting licenses, and only 1% specifically mentioned federal aid.
 - o Most felt fishing and hunting license fees are properly priced.
 - o As to supporting license exemptions: 50% support exemptions for seniors, 45% for youth exemptions and only 25% supported the shoreline exemption. Overall, 25% did NOT support ANY exemptions.
 - o Most thought user fees should be increased to cover management of fish and wildlife, especially if new opportunities were provided.
 - o Most thought user fees should be used to support fish and wildlife management.
 - o More Floridians think our water quality (46% (+)) is unhealthy, than think it is healthy (41%). Most consider water quality to be an important issue, and 26% think industrial waste is the biggest problem, followed by wastewater treatment (21%), litter (17%) and agricultural runoff (16%).
 - o Questions about land use development vs. fish and wildlife yielded 87% agreeing that land development should be restricted to protect fish and wildlife.
 - o 71% agreed that hunting and fishing are part of scientific management of wildlife populations.
 - o The Internet (34%) is the most popular source of fish, wildlife and outdoor recreational information for Floridians, followed by newspapers (16%; +) and magazines (11%).
 - o USFWS and FWC officers and biologists are perceived as more credible than university professors (+; also more thought professors were not at all credible), PETA (+), local sportsman's organizations (-) or environmental organizations (+).
 - o Approval for legal recreational fishing was 93% , for legal recreational hunting was 69% and for legal regulated trapping was 42% (-).