



**Performance Report
South Florida Ecological Volunteer
and Outreach Corps**

**Cypress Chapter of the
Izaak Walton League of America**

United States Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered
Species Conservation - Recovery Implementation



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Endangered Species Conservation - Recovery Implementation Funds are to support the recovery of listed and at-risk species in South Florida through outreach and engagement of private citizens. To meet these objectives, the Cypress Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America ("Chapter") coordinated numerous events and programs during the October 2023 - September 2024 reporting period which promoted significant public and private stakeholder engagement throughout South Florida including awareness of Florida's at-risk species and other wildlife. The Chapter is dedicated to conserving, restoring, and promoting the sustainable use and enjoyment of our natural resources, including soil, air, woods, waters, and wildlife. The Chapter's accomplishments included:

• Programs, Events, and Field Trips



25+ Events
Organized



220+ Stakeholders
Engaged



75+ Volunteers
Coordinated



950+ Volunteer Hours
Worked



~\$80,000 of
In-Kind Services
Volunteered

• Additional Stakeholder Engagement



Five U.S. Senators,
17 U.S. Representatives,
2 State Senators,
3 State Representatives



U.S. Army Corp of
Engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service, U.S.
National Park Service

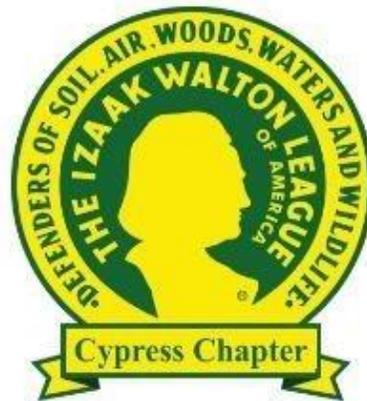


South Florida Water
Management District
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Florida Fish and Wildlife
Commission, Lake Istokpoga
Management District



Miccosukee Tribe

TABLE OF CONTENTS



EVENTS

Page 1

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

Page 4

LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Page 6

LOOKING FORWARD

Page 8

INTERVIEWS AND MEDIA

Page 9



EVENTS

Chapter activities during the October 2023 - September 2024 reporting period included youth programs, educational guided hunts, outreach events, community events, and legislative programs and field trips. Over 25 events were coordinated and organized by the Chapter during this reporting period, which included participants from the public, as well as from state and federal agencies. A summary table with events and brief participation information is provided. Key events included a youth turkey hunt, a scouting trip to the Florida Panther NWR, and numerous legislative programs. These events provided a diverse set of stakeholders with an opportunity to connect to their public land and enjoy time outdoors, increasing environmental stewardship and instilling an outdoor ethic supportive of wildlife; participation at these events is highlighted in this report.



EVENT LIST

Event	Summary of Participation
Youth Fishing Event at the Florida Panther NWR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 130 children and their parents from the local area participated in a fishing event and related activities
Scouting Trip to Florida Panther NWR Ahead of Youth Turkey Hunt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant time with the involved agencies to prepare for the Youth Fishing event
Conservation at the Capitol at Tallahassee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration with 20 Conservation Organizations
Devil's Garden Field Trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interagency event with CCIWLA Board members Jesse Lee, Panther Hound Planning, USFWS Larry Williams, David Shindle; FWC Melissa Tucker, Carol Rizkalla; NPS Tom Forsyth
Big Cypress National Preserve Outreach Field Trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various News media and journalists to discuss pythons, Wilderness designation of the Big Cypress National Preserve (WINK News, Florida Trend Magazine and others) US Army Corps of Engineers, Howell Ranch, Col. Booth, Major Bell, pat Howell, CCIWLA Board members Heather Cleckler, Diamond Bergeron Live Wildly Meredith Budd, NPS BICY Chief Ranger Josh Vann Defenders of Wildlife Elizabeth Flemming; National Geographic George McKenzie; Love The Everglades Movement Robin Haines Merril; FWC Python Contractor Anne Vega; \$1200 In Kind Contributions – 10 Volunteer Hours Lostman's Slough with NPS Josh Vann & Diamond Bergeron
Water Conservation Area 3A Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> US Congressman Jared Moskowitz, SFWMD staff, Diamond Bergeron Everglades Foundation Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership Ryan Lockwood, Ian Nakayama; NPS Kat Finnerty; FDACS – Jorge Abreu, Ellen Cruz; Fish & Wildlife Foundation Dani Richter National Geographic George McKenzie Congressman Gimenez staff, Patricia Clarke Madison Hardiman, Beatriz Vera; Betty Osceola, Diamond Bergeron Senator Marco Rubio staff
Eagle Haven Ranch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation Tour with Live Wildly Arnie Bellini, Meredith Budd; Conservation Florida Adam Bass; FCG Jim Strickland; North Florida Land Trust Alison Defoor, Ramesh Busch; Archbold Joe Guthrie Conservation Tour with SFWMD Drew Bartlett, Megan Jacoby, Ben Butler, Lori Wenkert-Lane, Jacob Landfield, Ayounga Riddick, James Blush, Jon Madden FWC Land Planning survey with Conservation Florida Chelsea Wisner, FWC Cory Snyder, Angela Romero FWC Habitat & Species Conservation FWC Melissa Tucker, Monica McKenzie, Tyler Beck, Tom Graef; ASA Gary Jennings, United Waterfowlers Andy Braddock Eagle Nest Assessment with Monica McKenzie
Green Glades West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tour with Congressman Byron Donalds, Jesse Purdon, Stephanie Neurock, Chris Ploch, Daniel First, Daniel First, Mercedes Prive Harry, Miccosukee Curtis Osceola, Heather Cleckler, Diamond Bergeron, Ron Bergeron; \$4,500 In Kind Contributions

<p>FWC/Legislative Python Hunts and Surveys</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Python surveys in Charlotte and Sarasota counties • Rep. Lauren Melo, Bergeron Everglades Foundation, SFWMD Ben Butler, SFWMD Libby Pigman, Senator Marco Rubio Staff
<p>Fisheating Creek</p>	<p>Cypress Chapter IWLA Board of Directors meeting</p>



INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

- Invasive species removal includes pythons and feral hogs. Notable pythons were 17'2", 12'1" and 10'4".
- More than 67 feral hogs were killed at Eagle Haven Ranch
 - tours and land management activities totaled over 700 hours.



The Youth Fishing Tournament, Youth Turkey Hunt, SFWMD WCA Field Trips, Legislative Python Hunts, and media field trips were made possible with significant support from volunteers and local sportsman, which further enhanced public awareness of Federal trust resources, and their habitat needs while engaging the public to promote informed conservation stewardship.

These events were supported by more than 75 individual volunteers providing over 950 total volunteer hours and ~\$80,000 of in-kind services. Equipment and supplies were also donated by volunteers.



In addition, the Board of the Cypress Chapter personally collected over 1,000 helium balloons and one NOAA weather balloon from our public lands, including over 50 balloons in a single day.



Cypress Chapter

Izaak Walton League of America

ADVOCACY

WATER

BIG CYPRESS

JOIN

The Cypress Chapter of the Izaak Walton also launched a new website www.cypressiwla.org and hired a Director of Science and Outreach.



Dr Nora Demers joined the Cypress Chapter in the Spring of 2024. She is an Associate Professor of Biology at Florida Gulf Coast University and has worked in SW Florida for over 25 years advocating for “*civic engagement for a sustainable future*”.

Her work will include scientific research, presentations and outreach events of Chapter efforts.

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The League participated in efforts to promote land conservation including:

- USFWS Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area – 4 million Acres
- SFWMD Green Heart of The Everglades – 11,387 Acres Collier County – New Public Access
- NPS/DOI Miccosukee Green Heart of the Everglades – 450,000 Acres Mineral Rights – BICY/FPNWR
- Acquisition of Big Cypress National Preserve Mineral Rights



LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT

The Chapter further met grant objectives by promoting conservation and awareness through involvement with several legislative committees and engagement in regulatory meetings, which helps increase information on species and habitats that will inform recovery plans, actions, and reviews. Advisory groups and committees with Chapter representation include:

- FWC meetings at Jensen Beach, Duck Key, Lakeland
- FWC Bear Management Technical Advisory Group
- FWC Aquatic Plant management Technical Advisory Group at Lake Bartow and Lake Kissimmee
- SFWMD Governing Board meetings
- SFWMD WRAC meetings
- SFWMD meetings Recreational Forums at Fort Myers and Palm Beach
- USFWS meetings Everglades to Gulf at Immokalee
- National Academy of Sciences CIRERP Biennial Review
- USACE Lake Okeechobee Periodic Scientists call
- USACE WERP PDT
- USACE WERP scoping at Big Cypress Headquarters
- DOI South Florida Ecosystems Restoration Task Forces in DC and Miccosukee Tribe lands
- DOI SFERTI Working Group/Science Coordination Groups meetings
- Highlands County Board of County Commission meetings Sebring
- Coastal and Heartland National Estuary Partnership SW Florida Climate Summit in Charlotte County



LEGISLATION ADVOCACY

The chapter advocated in Washington DC for legislation to protect and conserve the Big Cypress National Preserve including:

- HR 8998 – Big Cypress Wilderness Appropriations
- HR 8206 – Big Cypress No Wilderness Bill
- S 4267 – Big Cypress No Wilderness Bill
- Amendment 2 – Right to Fish & Hunt

COLLABORATIONS AND PARTICIPATION

- SFWMD/Aguculture Lake Istokpoga Nutrient Reduction Project
- NPS Volunteer Trail Patrol Program
- Audubon Eagle Watch Program Volunteer
- Guest Speaker at Kissimmee River Valley Sportsmen's Association Unity Event Lake Okeechobee with Senator Erin Grall and Representative Lauren Melo.
- Panelist at Congressman Byron Donalds Water Quality Summit at Ft. Myers
- Panelist at Miccosukee Everglades Summit @ Miccosukee Casino



LOOKING FORWARD

The Cypress Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America will continue to be involved in and have an impact on conservation efforts throughout the state of Florida by advocating for effective land and water stewardship at local, state and national government meetings.

We will continue to educate residents with presentations and field trips for the media and community groups.

The Chapter activities scheduled to occur during the next reporting period include Pistol Pond Enhancement, removal of over 10,000 pounds of discarded tires from the National Panther Refuge. We will have a booth at the Swamp Heritage Festival for the 50th Anniversary of the Big Cypress National Preserve, participate with University wildlife clubs, Wildlife monitoring program at Eagle Haven using over 25 game cameras, monitoring several eagle's nests as part of the Audubon Eagle Watch Program.

Through these actions and others, the Chapter's involvement and influence is expected to continue growing in the coming years.

SELECT INTERVIEWS, PRESENTATIONS & MEDIA



[House Presents Hurdle to Wilderness Designation at Big Cypress](#) (Coastal Breeze, Aug 8, 2024)

[New protections for Big Cypress? Miccosukee, hunters worry about being locked out](#) (Miami Herald March 21, 2024)

[AguaCulture project ‘sucking up the muck’ off the bottom of Lake Kissimmee](#) (Lake County Water Atlas June 20, 2024)

[Bucking Python takes Florida men for a wild ride](#) (Click Orlando Podcast December 8, 2024)

“Media and other outreach efforts to help educate southwest Floridians about problems and issues facing our Gulf of Mexico” (2024 Gulf of Mexico Alliance Conference Feb 19-24)