

THE PUBLICATION DEDICATED TO CONSERVING AND PROTECTING FLORIDA'S MARINE RESOURCES

SEAWATCH

WINTER 2022-23

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Vessel Speed Restrictions Will Cripple Coastal Communities, Fail to Protect Right Whales

The leading organizations representing recreational fishing and boating in the United States urged the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to pause its proposed North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule, citing numerous significant flaws with the proposal. The proposed rule would broaden the current 10-knot (11.5 mph) speed restriction to include vessels 35 feet and larger (down from 65 feet); expand the go-slow zones from discrete calving areas to essentially the whole Atlantic Coast out as far as 90 miles, and extend these zone restrictions as long as seven months a year.

As America's original conservationists, recreational anglers and boaters proactively support science-based efforts to conserve our marine ecosystems. In many cases, our industry has offered the constructive input that was ultimately used to develop management solutions that meet conservation goals and allow for the continued social and economic contributions our sector provides to the nation.

While this proposed rule has been in development for more than a year, NOAA's Office of Protected Resources did not conduct any formal engagement with stakeholders. A pause would allow time for additional analysis of significant flaws within the rule and potential new alternatives to be developed in collaboration with the recreational fishing and boating industry.

"Protecting right whales is urgent, and we are ready to do our part. NMFS' failed due diligence excluded from the conversation America's recreational anglers and boaters – the most affected stakeholders. The agency needs to get it right," said Jeff Angers, president of the Center for Sportfishing Policy. "Based on actual interactions between recreational boats and right whales, the proposed restrictions on vessels 35 - 65 feet are unjustifiable, ineffective and unnecessarily costly to America's economy."

"While we all support the intention of this rule to protect right whales, by not consulting with the recreational fishing and boating community at any point during its development, NMFS has put forward a deeply flawed rule that will have severe economic impacts and provide little benefit to right whales," said Glenn Hughes, president of the American Sportfishing Association. "The fact that the proposed rule fails to meet 6 of the 12 criteria NMFS is using to justify selecting this option is clear evidence that a pause is necessary."

"NOAA's proposed rule unfortunately underestimates the very real economic impacts on the recreational boating and fishing industry, the largest contributor to the nation's \$689 billion outdoor recreation economy. The rule will bring the vast majority of boating and fishing trips along the Atlantic Coast to a screeching halt, impacting millions of Americans who go boating each year," said Frank Hugel-meyer, president of the National Marine Manufacturers Association. "We urge the agency to pause its rule making process and engage with our industry to determine a better path forward that protects the North Atlantic right whale and the health of the recreational boating and fishing industry."

"Safeguarding our natural resources is always a priority of boaters, but it shouldn't come at the risk of human safety. We believe the current proposed rule needs to be paused and redesigned," said Chris Edmonston, president of the BoatUS Foundation. "We look forward to working with NMFS on boater education and more effective ways to avoid whale strikes because we strongly believe boats can safely operate and avoid whales."

Among the recreational fishing and boating community's many concerns with the proposed rule, most notable are:

An analysis of NMFS data found approximately 5.1 million rec-

Recreational fishing and boating community cites flaws in Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule, asks agency to hit pause, get it right

reational fishing trips were taken in this region by vessels 35 - 65 feet in length since 2008. Assuming all five right whale strikes during that time were from recreational vessels, and that all these vessels were on fishing trips, the chance of a 35 - 65 foot recreational vessel striking a right whale during an offshore fishing trip is at most 0.000098%, or less than one-in-a-million. Attempting to predict risk on a one-in-a-million chance of a vessel strike is simply not an effective management strategy and highlights the futility of expanding the Seasonal Speed Zones (SSZs) to address such a small possibility of vessel strike interactions.

NMFS is using unrepresentative whale density values in their risk modelling, thereby creating a significant bias that may overestimate risk to whales from small vessel strikes. NMFS' own technical memo states that, "the high densities predicted along the mid-Atlantic may not be realistic."

The model assumes 10-meter draft depth criteria when calculating vessel strike risk. However, recreational vessels in this size class rarely have a static draft that exceeds 2 meters. This also creates bias that may overestimate risk to whales from small vessel strikes.

NMFS underestimates the number of recreational vessels that will be impacted by the proposed rule at 9,200 vessels. However, based on 2021 vessel registration data analyzed by Southwick Associates, there were more than 63,000 registered recreational saltwater vessels measuring 35 - 65 feet in states across the proposed SSZs.

NMFS estimates the positive economic output from whale watching in the northeast at \$95.1 million. In contrast, NMFS estimates \$46.2 million in negative impacts for all vessel size classes and regions combined. It is difficult to understand how the economic benefits of whale watching operations in the northeast exceeds the proposed rule's economic harm to all recreational vessels.

Enforcement of the proposed rule using Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) would be impractical and could lead to significant human safety risk. AIS is mandatory for certain vessels over 65 feet to improve the navigational safety of the vessel and other vessels operating in the area. AIS is not required on recreational vessels 35 - 65 feet although many boat owners voluntarily carry and operate AIS for the added safety-at-sea benefits. It is a very real concern that operators of boats less than 65 feet may decide to turn off their AIS systems in fear of triggering a speed restriction enforcement action. This would have the unfortunate consequence of reducing navigational safety, boater safety and hampering efforts during search-and-rescue operations.

Vessel speed is a significant safety feature on a recreational boat. Most recreational boats lack high displacement hull design that often provides ocean-going and commercial vessel stability and the

ability to operate safely in significant sea states. The 10-knot speed limit would force recreational boaters to operate in conditions that would compromise safety of the passengers and vessel.

The organizations believe more exploration of technology that can deliver real-time monitoring of individual right whales is needed. It is feasible to gather real-time location information on a significant portion of the right whale population and disseminate information to mariners and other vessel operators, which would apply empirically-based, targeted precaution instead of excessively severe measures that do not accurately reflect actual risk nor can be adequately enforced. Developing ways to distribute this information to vessel operators will only occur through direct engagement with the industry and fishing and boating organizations.

As part of pausing this rule, the organizations are calling on NMFS to work with the recreational fishing and boating community on more scientifically justifiable management solutions that are less severe and more effective options to protect right whales. Click here for the organizations' formal comment letter.

The coalition of groups calling for NMFS to pause the Proposed North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule includes American Sportfishing Association, Boat Owners Association of the United States, Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, Center for Sportfishing Policy, Coastal Conservation Association, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, International Game Fish Association, Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, National Marine Manufacturers Association, Recreational Fishing Alliance and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.





South Atlantic Council Rejects Bottom Closures

At its most recent meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council elected to remove large-scale closures for all bottom fishing from consideration in management measures designed to reduce red snapper release mortality. The council's decision came after robust public testimony from recreational anglers and the recreational fishing and boating industry urged the Council to focus on less draconian measures to address the controversial issue of recreational discards.

"We applaud the Council being the voice of reason in this matter," said Scott Whitaker, executive director of CCA South Carolina.

Red snapper have been under an intense rebuilding plan since 2011 when the first-ever modern stock assessment

conducted on the species revealed that it was severely overfished and undergoing overfishing. Since then, red snapper seasons have been virtually non-existent, and the fishery has come roaring back. The South Atlantic Council was recently informed that the current population of red snapper is larger than perhaps at any point in its history.

"The red snapper recovery should be considered an incredible conservation success story, but it is becoming another example of the shortcomings in federal fisheries management law," said Trip Aukeman, advocacy director for CCA Florida.

In making a case for large-scale closures, NOAA Fisheries cited both a lack of older fish in the population and its own controversial data that indicates recreational anglers are releasing so

many red snapper that don't survive that it is causing overfishing of the species. It's a situation known as a 'recovery trap' which occurs when a fishery recovers faster than NOAA's models expect and federal law treats subsequent increased encounters with a healthy stock as an overfishing crisis.

"Large-scale closures should be an absolute last resort, after everything else has been tried and failed," said Ted Venker, conservation director for CCA National. "That's not the case here. There are real concerns over the accuracy of NOAA's discard mortality data. There is a unique independent stock assessment underway that may find older fish in unique areas like a similar effort did in the Gulf of Mexico recently. And beyond all of that, the Council has been working on measures to achieve additional conservation that aren't as destructive to recreational angling and the communities that depend on it."

The South Atlantic Council reaffirmed its commitment to continue working on alternatives such as depth- and distance-based management, targeted closed areas and seasons to address the issue of discard mortality at the Charleston meeting. Several Council members also called on the recreational angling community to do its part by raising awareness of the need to use descending devices and best-fishing practices to reduce release mortality.

"CCA's ReleaSense program is designed to convey the latest best-fishing practices so that anglers more effectively conserve marine resources," said Whitaker. "We are happy to partner with the Council to spread that message and we'd like the opportunity to work with the states to develop more accurate and timely recreational data. We greatly appreciate the Council's recent actions, but we will have to remain vigilant so that NOAA does not attempt to prematurely place restrictions on bottom fishing again."

Anglers turn out to urge Council to avoid devastating, unnecessary closures



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Proposed Bottom Closure Highlights Need For Regulatory Reform

Several years ago, red snapper anglers in the Gulf of Mexico were facing an almost inexplicable management dilemma. After several decades of conservation challenges and political gyrations, the red snapper fishery was finally rebounding at a rate far beyond expectations. In the space of just a few short years, red snapper became so abundant that it was difficult to catch anything else offshore.

Anglers soon found themselves in a “recovery trap,” which meant that since the fish were so easy to catch, NOAA Fisheries calculated to show that the entire recreational quota was being caught in a matter of days. The fishery was obviously booming, but the recreational season was getting shorter. Eventually it was set at a mere three days, and the wheels came off. Questions arose about every aspect of the fishery – was the recreational harvest

data accurate? How is it possible to overfish a stock that continues to grow? Should a stock be considered recovered based on a calculation or based on what is happening in the water? And where did all these fish come from??

Flash forward past an incredible amount of debate and the Gulf states eventually were given authority to manage the private recreational sector using their own data collection systems, which are universally acknowledged to be much more robust than the federal data system. Perhaps more importantly, Congress authorized \$10 million for an unprecedented, independent assessment of Gulf red snapper which eventually showed that the actual population was, conservatively, at least three times larger than previously believed. The assessment found a huge, unknown biomass of snapper on “uncharacterized bottom” – a vast



unmapped area of exposed pipelines, unknown wrecks, lost cargo containers, divots in the seafloor and countless other hidden features harboring red snapper.

The results of this first-of-its-kind assessment shook the foundations of the entire Gulf red snapper management regime.

This story is ongoing in the Gulf, but it provides a roadmap for South Atlantic anglers who find themselves in an almost identical, nonsensical recovery trap. Off the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, a booming red snapper population is threatening to close all bottom-fishing in the region for years. Red snapper are currently in a rebuilding plan that won't conclude for more than two decades, but they are already so numerous that NOAA Fisheries calculates just what anglers catch as bycatch is overfishing red snapper. At the same time, the science indicates that the red snapper population is larger than at any point in recorded history.

If possible, this situation makes even less sense than what anglers experienced in the Gulf and the questions are almost exactly the same: is the bycatch data accurate? How is it possible to overfish a growing stock that is larger than it has ever been? Should a stock be considered recovered based on a calculation or based on what is happening in the water? And where did all these fish come from??

What's driving this dilemma is a requirement that the Council end overfishing within two years of being notified of the condition. NOAA Fisheries notified the Council over a year ago that based on the last stock assessment red snapper were undergoing overfishing, so the regulatory clock is ticking – loudly. NOAA says a complete ban on directed harvest will not end the overfishing, so it believes something must be done to substantially decrease the discards (and discard mortality) to end overfishing.

The path to an ultimate solution will be difficult, but undoubtedly the South Atlantic states are going to have to take a more active role in the management of the recreational sector. NOAA Fisheries and the Magnuson-Stevens Act – the overarching law managing the nation's marine resources – were simply not designed to manage recreational fisheries, and they do it poorly. The federal recreational data system exacerbates this problem with its inability to measure offshore catch with any precision or accuracy, and its complete inability to measure catch in-season. Changing the agency and the law is necessary, but that is a massive political undertaking that will take time. In the meantime, the states can do a better job collecting data from their own angling constituencies and begin painting a more accurate picture of the fishery. As we saw in the Gulf, this is vital.

Perhaps more importantly, an independent effort to assess the South Atlantic red snapper population very similar to the one in the Gulf is underway and it could hold the key. Is there a hidden, unknown biomass of larger, older snapper fueling this amazing recovery? Many anglers believe that to be the case and, if so, closing the entire bottom of the South Atlantic would be unnecessary. Making any decision before the results of that assessment are known is wildly premature. While the assessment is already underway, it is critical that Congress and state management agencies ensure that it has all the resources necessary to produce quality results with so much at stake economically.

**Is the bycatch data accurate?
How is it possible to overfish a growing stock that is larger than it has ever been?
Should a stock be considered recovered based on a calculation or based on what is happening in the water? And where did all these fish come from?**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is set to meet Sept. 12-16 in Charleston, and Regulatory Amendment 35 – Snapper Grouper Release Mortality Reduction and Red Snapper Catch Levels – will be on the agenda. Coastal Conservation Association is urging the Council to postpone any decision on a bottom closure until the results of the independent red snapper assessment are known.

Closing the entire bottom of the South Atlantic to conserve a fishery that is larger than it has ever been makes no sense. As we saw in the Gulf, when fishery issues make no sense, it's because the information is incomplete. The Council and NOAA owe it to the angling public to gather the best information possible and wait for the results of the assessment before even considering a bottom closure.

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Tim Gysan
LOSOM Project Manager
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District
Via Email: LakeOComments@usace.army.mil

Re: LOSOM Draft EIS Comments

Dear Mr. Gysan

Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) Florida submits this letter in support of the Preferred Alternative as described in the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) and urges that the ACOE and related reviewers accept the DEIS and adopt the LOSOM Preferred Alternative.

CCA Florida is a grassroots organization with nearly 20,000 members, and since 1985 has been committed to preserving and protecting Florida's marine resources. A recent National Marine Manufacturers Association study states that recreational boating provides an economic impact to our state in excess of \$23 Billion Dollars and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) has reported that recreational angling provides an impact of over \$13 Billion Dollars. In 2021, for the first time in history, the FWCC reported the number of boats registered in Florida exceeded 1 million! Recreational fishing and boating are major economic drivers for the state, and clean water is essential to Floridians' health and our state's economic wellbeing.

The Preferred Alternative is intended to reduce Lake Okeechobee releases to the St. Lucie Estuary, enhance Everglades ecology by sending more water south with dry season focus, improve water supply and increase low and optimal flows to the Caloosahatchee River Estuary. These objectives are necessary to protect Florida's state waters. And while CCA Florida supports the Preferred Alternative and the DEIS, it has concerns regarding any Lake Okeechobee flows into the Caloosahatchee River Estuary ("CRE") through S-79 greater than are 6,500 cfs; CCA Florida asks that these flows be managed in a way that will do the least amount of damage. These extreme flows damage the CRE and impact the downstream region that includes San Carlos Bay, Estero Bay, and the Gulf of Mexico. Additionally, some of the dry season benefits to the CRE will not be realized until the C-43 Reservoir is operational. The WCP (water control plan) should consider the Lake Okeechobee as a fresh water source to supply flows to CRE.

CCA Florida has been engaged in CERP/CEPP process and, most recently, LOSOM public comment and participation since its inception, and has previously supported LOSOM Iteration CC. CCA Florida has reviewed the Preferred Alternative and supports it and the DEIS.

Very truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Kennedy".

Michael Kennedy
Chair, CCA Florida Water Resources Committee



STAR



A Constellation of

The definition of a constellation is a group of stars seen as forming a figure or design in the sky. Well, our STARS formed on the water, docks and boat ramps and became a constellation of 2022 winners in Florida's largest family-friendly fishing competition, the West Marine CCA Florida STAR competition presented by Yamaha.

The eighth annual STAR competition officially concluded Monday, September 5, and STAR staff drew and announced the more than 100 winners the following week.

Once again, CCA Florida, the state's leading organization dedicated to habitat restoration projects, water quality initia-

tives and fisheries advocacy organization, had another successful STAR competition. Since its launch in 2015, the catch-and-photo event has awarded nearly \$2 million in donated prizes, with \$800,000 of that dedicated to Youth scholarships.

"STAR continues to be an effective tool for CCA Florida and helps bring awareness to our organization by creating conservation partnerships with our sponsors and encourages anglers to implement conservation practices all while enjoying a really cool fishing competition," STAR Director Captain Leiza Fitzgerald said. "STAR keeps friends and families planning their summer

around our event and engaging in conservation which makes me so proud."

This year, STAR had nearly 7,200 registered anglers logging their 25,000 catches across 17 divisions. The signature division, the Tagged Redfish, had two winners who will take home new boat, motor and trailer packages. Jeff Moore from Punta Gorda chose the Pathfinder 2200TRS sporting a Minn Kota trolling motor, Humminbird electronics and Yamaha 150 HP. The second winner, Kenneth Dobson of Suwannee, claimed the Contender 22 Sport with 200 Yamaha motor and trailer. There were only two major prizes unclaimed in the



Michelle Frady

of Winners!

Tagged Redfish Division, the Spyder FX19 Vapor powered by Yamaha and the Super STAR Tagged redfish prize. The Tigress Outriggers & Gear Tagged Dolphin Division \$10,000 prize was also unclaimed. The Tagged Dolphin Division prize and the sale of the unclaimed boat will help to underwrite the Youth Scholarship fund.

The T-H Marine non-tagged redfish division, which was the most popular in the Bull Bay Rods Open Inshore Divisions, also had the largest number of catch entries followed by the Custom Gheenoe Spotted Trout division and the Snook division. In the

Engel Coolers Open Offshore Divisions, the danco sports Grouper had the highest participation, and the AFTCO Non-tagged Dolphin division and Cannon Kingfish division were also favored.

Despite the strict handling regulations in the Humminbird Tarpon Division presented by Deck Gear, it continued to anglers' favorite with more than 200 entries. The Native Watercraft Kayak Division experienced the greatest growth in entries for this year. Other registrant favorites were the Ladies, Youth, Lionfish, Power Pole Conservation division and the Costa Kick Plastic Trash

(continued on page 16)

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Contender
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 Beyond our Shores Foundation
 Dolphin Research Program
 Ocean Tamer Bean Bags
 Anisa Stewart Jewelry
 Luna Sea Cush it
 Knotty Tails
 Talon
 Boaters Exchange



Division, which had staggering total of more than 3,000 entries of five-gallon buckets full of trash. One of the divisions that offered the most fun was the Florida Marine Tracks Fun Fishing Photo competition, in which anglers just submitted photos of themselves having fun while fishing in STAR...oh the pictures we received!

The highlight of the competition will be awarding \$100,000 in scholarships to youth anglers who were drawn as winners in the Realtree Fishing Youth Scholarship Division. There are two \$25,000 scholarships to be awarded by Realtree Fishing and Spyder Boats & Academy Sports & Outdoors, as

well as 10 \$5,000 scholarships to be awarded by Southeast Environmental Solutions, Florida's Sports Coast, Plantation Redfish Classic, Flagler Sportfishing Club, Florida Cracker Invitational, Tailin Toad's Egg nog Open, Phillips & Jordan Construction Co., Miller's Marine, Florida Sportfishing Association, Strike Zone Melbourne, Sodium Fishing Gear, Barnes & Thornburg LLC and Coastal Conservation Association.

CCA Florida STAR is not only a fun fishing competition where any fish or bucket of trash can win an angler a prize, but it gives everyone a chance to do their part for conservation while enjoying time on the water.



Please take the time to patronize STAR's many partners and sponsors of STAR as we would not be able to offer such a wonderful event without their support.

This year's STAR Awards Ceremony and Banquet presented by Visit Space Coast was postponed as a result of Hurricane Ian. STAR plans to award nearly \$450,000 in prizes by mail, winner pick-up and at local CCA Florida events.

Mark your calendars for STAR 2023 beginning May 27. Next year's competition

promises to bring some BIG changes which will make STAR easier to register, easier to enter your catches and, most importantly, easier to WIN! STAR will provide another reason for anglers to fish and practice conservation over the summer, but you can start the winning early. Get registered today for STAR 2023, and if you recapture any past years' STAR tagged redfish, then you will win a \$1,000 gift card from Engel Coolers. Just snap a picture of the tagged redfish with the tag still in the fish, submit

the photo via STAR's Facebook page and, if you are a current member and registered for 2023 STAR, you will win.

Start planning your fishing trips now to Brevard County (www.visitspacecoast.com), Citrus County (www.discovercrystalriver.com) or Charlotte County, Englewood/ Punta Gorda (www.pureflorida.com) as they are all our destination counties and will have more tagged redfish than any other coastal county.

For more information on STAR visit our website. www.ccaflstar.com.



☆ This year, STAR had nearly 7,200 registered anglers logging their 25,000 catches across 17 divisions. ☆



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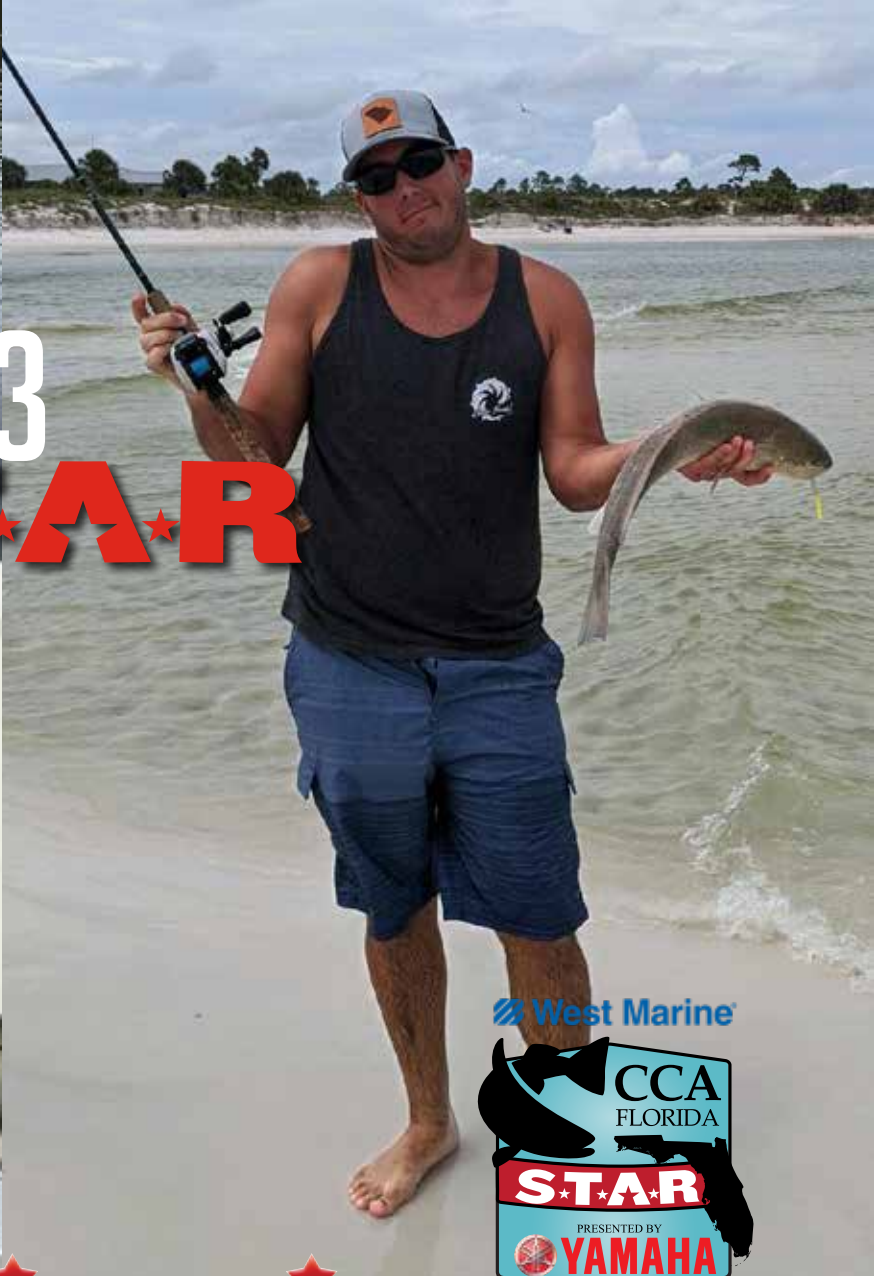
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2023 STAR



REGISTRATION FOR THE 2023 WEST MARINE CCA FLORIDA STAR COMPETITION PRESENTED BY YAMAHA IS OPEN

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FREE for current, youth CCA Florida Members | \$10 for youth, ages 6 to 17
(includes New Tide Membership)

STAR is Florida's largest family-friendly fishing competition giving anglers of all ages endless summer-long fun!

For more information on STAR, please visit www.CCAFLSTAR.com



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WORKED WITH FWC TO
ENSURE MAXIMUM
ANGLER ACCESS
FOR RED SNAPPER

PROTECTING FLORIDA'S MARINE
RESOURCES AND ANGLERS'
ACCESS FOR MORE
THAN 35 YEARS

INITIATED NET BAN
CONSTITUTIONAL
AMENDMENT

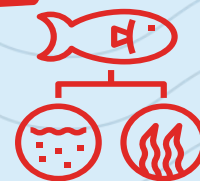
HELPED CONGRESS
INTRODUCE DESCENDING
DEVICE BILL AND FORAGE FISH
CONSERVATION ACT

HELPED BAN LONGLINES
FOR BILLFISH
AND PELAGIC SPECIES

42
ARTIFICIAL
REEFS



70
HABITAT
PROJECTS



5,000 SNOOK
RESTOCKED AND RELEASED

205,000 REDFISH
RESTOCKED AND RELEASED

40,000 SEA TROUT
RESTOCKED AND RELEASED



**\$800,000 IN CCA FLORIDA YOUTH
COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS HAVE BEEN AWARDED SINCE 2015**



\$25 FROM EACH TAG GOES
DIRECTLY TO CCA FLORIDA'S STATEWIDE
WATER QUALITY, HABITAT AND
RESTOCKING INITIATIVES

**CCA FLORIDA WORKED
WITH THE FLORIDA
LEGISLATURE TO CREATE
THE CONSERVE FLORIDA'S
FISHERIES FLORIDA
LICENSE PLATE**

**ACCOMPLISH YOUR GOALS FOR FLORIDA'S FISHERIES. CONTACT
ENDOWMENT@CCAFLORIDA.ORG TO LEARN MORE**

UPDATE ON THE APALACHICOLA BAY

*Dr. Sandra Brooke, Faculty Research,
Florida State University Coastal and Marine Lab*

Photos by Jenny Bueno, FSU



STATUS OF OYSTERS IN THE BAY

In 2013, the Apalachicola Bay wild oyster fishery was declared a Federal Fishery Disaster, which precipitated significant funding for research and restoration. Despite these efforts, monitoring data collected from historic oyster bars and several cultching (shelling) projects across the Bay show that oyster populations are still very depleted. Most of the observed oysters are small juveniles (spat), with few larger juveniles and adults, and less than 1% were market-sized. It takes time for oysters to grow, reproduce and build up sufficient substrate for new larvae to latch on to. Restoration can supply the habitat oysters need to help the reef recover faster. Some previous cultching and restoration efforts used material that quickly disintegrated, leaving little suitable habitat for newly settling oysters. More recent efforts have used limerock (calcium carbonate) which has a similar composition to oyster shell and has persisted longer. This material has been somewhat successful, but oysters have still not returned to a level that can support a fishery. All these projects used a thin layer of material, which may not be enough to restore the severely degraded reefs of Apalachicola Bay. Oyster reefs provide habitat for many other species, so the loss of functioning oyster ecosystems no doubt has impacts on the other species that utilize them, some of which are economically important.

THE APALACHICOLA BAY SYSTEM INITIATIVE

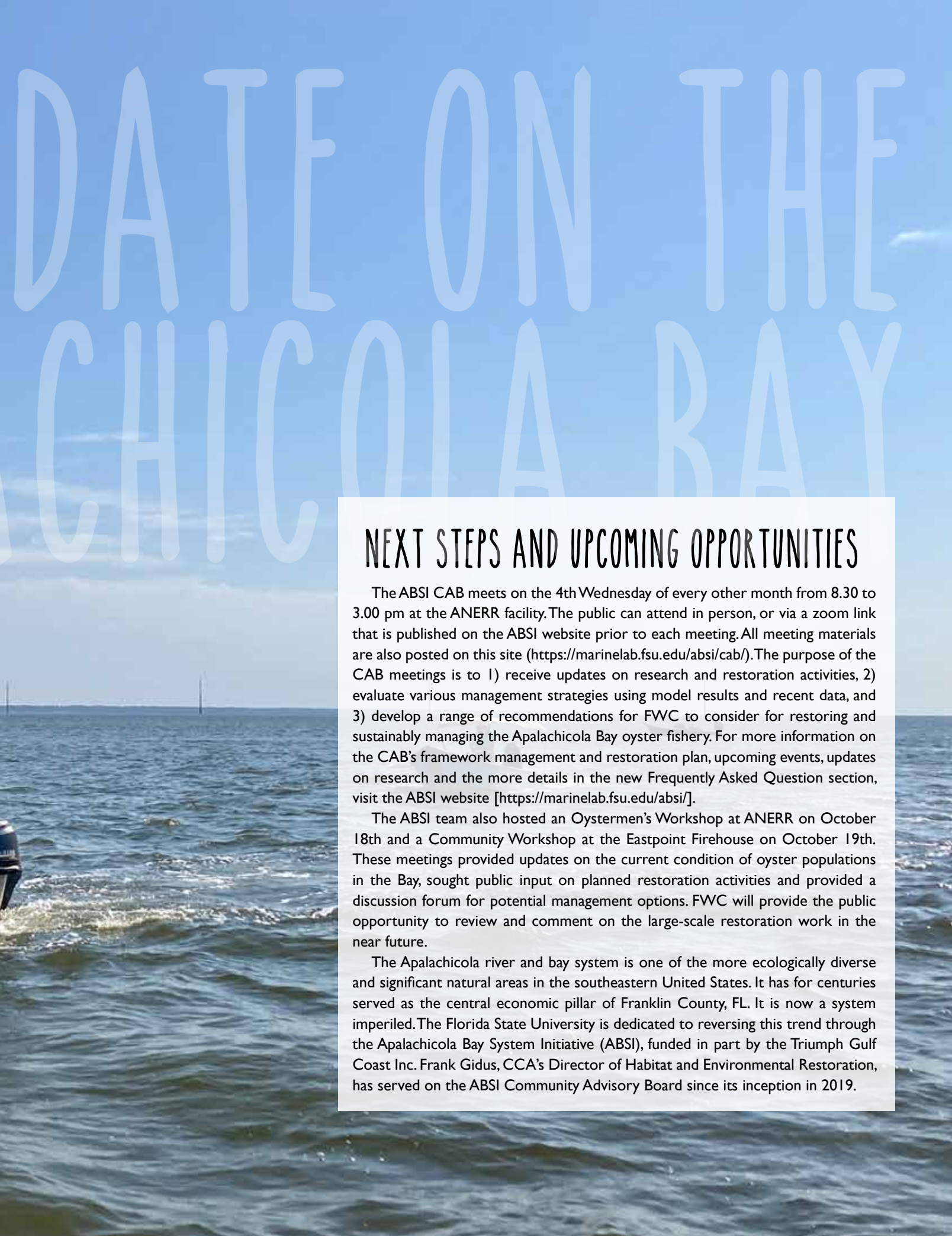
The Florida State University (FSU) Apalachicola Bay System Initiative (ABSI) was funded by Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc. to conduct research and work with the community and state agencies to try to understand why the Apalachicola Bay oyster populations collapsed and how to best restore them. At the beginning of the Initiative, a Community Advisory Board (CAB) was formed, comprised of oyster harvesters, scientists, county and city leaders, business owners, and representatives of the seafood industry, Sea Grant extension office, non-governmental organizations, and state management agencies. In late 2021, the group completed their framework for a science-based management and restoration plan that will provide information to state agencies, particularly the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), to help restore and sustainably manage oysters in the Bay. Currently, the CAB is working with researchers to evaluate potential management strategies that will allow sustainable oyster harvesting in the Bay, hopefully sooner rather than later.

CURRENT RESEARCH AND RESTORATION

Many of the restoration efforts done over the past ten years have not yet met their ecological goals of meaningful oyster population recovery and several groups are working to understand why, and how we can reverse this situation. Several entities including FWC, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the FSU ABSI are monitoring oyster populations to better understand recruitment, growth and mortality dynamics, and impacts of predators, parasites, diseases. Computer models help us understand how river flows influence environmental conditions and larval dispersal patterns and where the best oyster habitat is located. All of this information will inform future restoration efforts.

In 2021, the ABSI research team, with the help of local oystermen, deployed experimental reefs that were 1.5 ft (0.3m) tall, to see if a thicker layer of material would better support oyster recruitment and used three materials (shell, small limerock and large limerock), to see which performed better. The reefs were in two locations that have historically grown oysters. So far, the larger limerock is performing the best. An additional experiment to identify the most cost-effective reef height will be deployed later this year, using monitoring data and computer model analysis to identify the best locations. Additionally, the FWC will be conducting a pilot project in summer 2023 to test material size, and FDEP will continue to monitor their existing projects. All the available science, plus input from local stakeholders, will be combined to inform the FWC large scale restoration effort planned for 2024.





NEXT STEPS AND UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

The ABSI CAB meets on the 4th Wednesday of every other month from 8.30 to 3.00 pm at the ANERR facility. The public can attend in person, or via a zoom link that is published on the ABSI website prior to each meeting. All meeting materials are also posted on this site (<https://marinelab.fsu.edu/absi/cab/>). The purpose of the CAB meetings is to 1) receive updates on research and restoration activities, 2) evaluate various management strategies using model results and recent data, and 3) develop a range of recommendations for FWC to consider for restoring and sustainably managing the Apalachicola Bay oyster fishery. For more information on the CAB's framework management and restoration plan, upcoming events, updates on research and the more details in the new Frequently Asked Question section, visit the ABSI website [<https://marinelab.fsu.edu/absi/>].

The ABSI team also hosted an Oystermen's Workshop at ANERR on October 18th and a Community Workshop at the Eastpoint Firehouse on October 19th. These meetings provided updates on the current condition of oyster populations in the Bay, sought public input on planned restoration activities and provided a discussion forum for potential management options. FWC will provide the public opportunity to review and comment on the large-scale restoration work in the near future.

The Apalachicola river and bay system is one of the more ecologically diverse and significant natural areas in the southeastern United States. It has for centuries served as the central economic pillar of Franklin County, FL. It is now a system imperiled. The Florida State University is dedicated to reversing this trend through the Apalachicola Bay System Initiative (ABSI), funded in part by the Triumph Gulf Coast Inc. Frank Gidus, CCA's Director of Habitat and Environmental Restoration, has served on the ABSI Community Advisory Board since its inception in 2019.



Addictive Fishing/CCA FL/UF/FWC Clam Restoration Project, Multi-Day Project

2022 CCA FLORIDA HABITAT UPDATE

2022 was another busy year for CCA Florida on both coasts with six artificial reefs deployed and over 25 habitat projects completed! Since 2010, CCA Florida and Building Conservation Trust (BCT) have contributed over \$1.2 million, which has been leveraged with our partners to create over \$9 million in habitat projects in Florida.

Currently, there are eight ongoing and six future habitat projects, but below is a summary of completed habitat projects from this year:

FEBRUARY

Duke/FDEP/CCA Spartina Grass Planting Project – On February 1, volunteers from CCA Florida helped the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Central Panhandle Aquatic Preserves harvest thousands of smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) plants from the Duke Energy Mariculture Center in Crystal River. The spartina grass, donated by Duke Energy and the University of Florida/IFAS, were re-planted by CCA Florida's Frank Gidus and other volunteers at the Cat Point Living Shoreline located at the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve.

MDC/CCA Oyster Pillow Event – On February 6, volunteers from Travel Country Outfitters, Kayak Junkies and CCA Florida joined forces to make 151 oyster reef restoration bags at the Marine Discovery Center (MDC) in New Smyrna Beach. These bags (called pillows) will be used for oyster reef restoration and habitat improvement efforts in the Mosquito Lagoon and three state parks in Flagler County.

MARCH

Samsons Island Submerged Lands Restoration Project – On March 5, CCA Florida volunteers supported the City of Satellite Beach on the Samsons Island Submerged Lands Restoration Project. The city is testing new techniques with project partners by creating a habitat mosaic utilizing clams, oysters and seagrass. 30 tons of recycled oyster shells were used to create an oyster breakwater; along with 13,500 seagrass plugs and 42,000 clams. Other participants included MDC, Florida Institute of Technology, Florida Oceanographic Society, Whitney Laboratories and Satellite Beach High School.

UCF Inaugural Cement Ring Workshop – In March 2022, CCA Florida, the University of Central Florida (UCF) Environmental Professionals student club and colleagues from AECOM participated in the inaugural cement ring workshop at UCF. These concrete rings have been scientifically proven to provide excellent oyster recruitment while providing shoreline stabilization. A total of 80 cement rings were completed by the volunteers.

CCA/Southwest Florida Fishing Club Coastal Cleanup – CCA Florida and the SWFL Fishing Club partnered to complete a coastal cleanup on Saturday, March 26, at the Causeway Islands Park in Fort Myers. Over 50 participants picked up tons of trash along the beaches and even received awesome raffle prizes provided by CCA Florida.



CCA Florida/Sarasota Bay
Watch Clam Event
May 2022



Restoration in Mosquito Lagoon
June 2022



APRIL

CCA Dragon Reef Eagle Scout Sponsorship – CCA Florida sponsored Andrew Hall's "Dragon Reef" Eagle Scout project that was deployed off of Broward County on April 18. Andrew is the son of CCA Florida's contact at Contender Boats and he completed his Eagle Scout project, which involved deploying four artificial reefs that he personally constructed with his boy scout troop. The first three reefs consisted of cinderblock reefs embedded in a concrete pad and each reef weighed about 4 tons. The fourth reef consisted of a pair of stainless-steel stabilizers with steel pipes going through them, which was also embedded in a concrete pad weighing about 3 tons. The reefs were deployed in 70-feet of water off Lauderdale by the Sea in site C2 at approximately 26° 09.5150 N and 80° 04.7710 W. CCA Florida agreed to cover the \$5,500 funding Andrew needed to tow and deploy the structures.

Oyster Mats at Marine Discovery Center – On April 16, volunteers from the Lakeland Magic and CCA Florida (including two new STAR members) made oyster mats at the MDC in New Smyrna Beach. These oyster mats are a vital part of the habitat restoration work in the Mosquito Lagoon by UCF, FWC, the National Park Service, the Indian River Council and CCA Florida.

MAY

Chris Hall Eagle Scout Life Member Sponsorship – CCA Florida congratulated Chris Fox, CCA Florida's newest Life Member and the Boy Scouts newest Eagle Scout! On May 1, Frank Gidus from CCA Florida presented Chris with his Life Membership at The Angelus in Pasco County during his Eagle Scout award ceremony. Thanks to Capt. Rich Doherty for letting us know about Chris, and to Trent Doherty for helping Chris achieve this amazing accomplishment!

CCA/Duke Mexico Beach Artificial Reef – On May 2, CCA Florida joined Duke Energy and partnered with the Mexico Beach Artificial Reef Association (MBARA) to deploy four 38,000-pound and four 5,000-pound reef modules off Mexico Beach to create "The Duke Energy/CCA Florida Reef." The eight reef modules were deployed by Walter Marine at the pre-permitted Sherman Site, an area known for attracting red and gray snappers, amberjack, king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, gag grouper and cobia. These specific reef structures, ranging in height from 8 to 25 feet, provide greater habit diversity while attracting vast species of fish and appealing more to recreational anglers. The reef site is located offshore 11 miles west of Mexico Beach at 29° 55.384, -85° 40.765. Duke Energy contributed \$60,000 to this artificial reef project.

CCA Florida/UCF Oyster Patty Event – On May 2, CCA Florida volunteers and staff held an oyster reef restoration event at UCF and manufactured "patties" using burlap mixed with cement. These structures provide an excellent substrate for oyster reef restoration. This batch will soon be put to work in the Mosquito Lagoon attracting new oysters and helping seagrasses reestablish. Special thanks to Zach and Regina Thrasher for putting it together.

2022 CCA FL



CCA Florida/Sarasota Bay Watch Clam Event – On May 6, CCA Florida assisted Sarasota Bay Watch (SBW) sort, tumble, clean and deploy 105,000 clams in Sarasota Bay. CCA Florida is a proud SBW supporter and has donated \$30,000, which equates to 300,000 clams, to support its efforts. To date, SBW has deployed more 750,000 clams in Sarasota Bay in order to restore natural populations and to clean and filter the water.

Haul Out Indian River Event! – On May 7, CCA Florida joined Thrash Can and Fresh Catch Coffee to “Haul Out Indian River.” Dozens of volunteers participated and picked up tons of trash on land and water. CCA Florida also brought some raffle prizes too. Thank you to everyone who attended!

Canaveral National Seashore Living Shoreline Stabilization – On May 25-26, CCA Florida along with volunteers from MDC, IRL National Estuary Program, FWC, National Park Service, the Lakeland Magic, Florida Sea Grant and UCF, which included undergraduates in the National Science Foundation Research Experience, deployed living shoreline stabilization along 450 feet of highly eroded Native American shell middens. Volunteers planted 143 mangroves and 400 spartina (marsh grass) plugs and also deployed 150 cement/jute wave breaks plus 400 soft metal gabions (pillows) filled with recycled oyster shell wave breaks. These living shorelines provide incredible

marine habitat while protecting and preserving these archeologically significant ancient shell middens. Thank you to everyone for their time and muscle power.

CCA Turtle Bay Oyster Reef – On May 26, CCA Florida partnered with Ingman Marine, Abbott Construction, Lee Reefs, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF), Capt. Jay Withers, Placida Point LLC, Clermont Oyster Bar and Lake County Solid Waste Division to deploy another two large truck loads of oyster shells in Charlotte Harbor’s Turtle Bay in effort to boost water quality, marine fisheries and recreational angling. The oysters were hauled from CCA Florida’s Oyster Recycling Program at the Lake County Landfill in Astatula and transported to Placida. The oysters were then loaded onto a barge provided by Abbott Construction and deployed in Turtle Bay at a pre-permitted location.



JUNE

Oyster Repair in Mosquito Lagoon – On June 9, volunteers from Brambles Ltd, MDC, FWC, UCF and CCA Florida worked to repair damaged restored oyster reefs in the Mosquito Lagoon. To date, 91 oyster reefs have been restored in the Mosquito Lagoon, an indication that these efforts are producing positive results. In fact, the most Star grass (*Halophila engelmannii*) an FWC researcher has ever observed was recently spotted at a monitoring site near River Breeze Park in Oak Hill. This is an exciting development as Star grass thrives in clear water.

CCA/University of North Florida Restoration Project - CCA Florida is working with Dr. Kelly Smith, Associate Professor of the UNF Biology Department, on a joint CCA/ UNF coastal oyster restoration and marsh restoration project. The project locations are Shell Bluff in St. Johns County, and Kingsley Plantation in Duval County. CCA Florida contributed \$4,633, which included lift nets and fish monitoring supplies for this coastal wetland restoration project. In addition to the funding, CCA Florida members worked with UNF on the construction of modules for the project. The construction events (building molds for the cement) occurred in June 2022. The oyster shells will be graded and collected at GTMNERR Middle Beach. The initial ce-

ment coating and POSH construction took place at UNF on July 6 and 7. Deployment is planned in the fall of 2022, and they have a group of inner-city youth (the Green Team) who will assist in the deployment.

Duke Energy Cleanup at Fort Desoto Park – CCA Florida staff joined Duke Energy and organized a cleanup event for Duke Environmental Health and Safety employees at Fort Desoto on June 16.

Ongoing Restoration in Mosquito Lagoon - Between June 24-28, CCA Life Members Frank Gidus, Tom Emge and Greg Harrison assisted UCF, MDC, FWC, the IRL National Estuary Program and the National Park Service to restore nine oyster reefs and enhance two more by using BESE (biodegradable mesh made from potato chip waste and recycled oyster shells from local restaurants) oyster mats and cement-infused jute patties. This restoration work added 500 live oysters per square meter across 1,011 square meters (roughly .25 acres), which equates to 505,750 new oysters. If each oyster filters 25 gallons of water a day, then that means 12,643,750 gallons of additional water will be filtered each day in Mosquito Lagoon.



**R.Z. "Sandy"
Safely Reef
August 2022**

JULY

15th Annual Treasure Coast Waterway Cleanup - The CCA Treasure Coast Chapter participated in the 15th annual Treasure Coast Waterway Cleanup hosted by the Marine Industries Association of the Treasure Coast, Inc. and the Florida Inland Navigational District. From July 16 to July 24, 125 miles of waterways were cleaned up in Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River Counties. The CCA Treasure Coast Chapter participated in island cleanups in Indian River County on July 23, removing hundreds of pounds of trash and marine debris. The cleanup was followed by some free pizza courtesy of CCA Florida at the Walking Tree Brewery in Vero Beach.

Dr. Bart Carey Memorial Reef - On July 25, CCA Florida and OAR deployed 46 reef modules off the coast of Carrabelle, Florida in memory of the late Dr. Bart Carey from Tallahassee. Forty-six concrete and limestone reef modules weighing approximately 336 tons were deployed in 50 feet of water 10 miles southeast of Dog Island to create the Dr. Bart Carey Memorial Reef. The pre-fabricated reef modules consisted of five 'Super Reef' modules that are 15 feet tall, and forty-one 8-foot tall 'Florida Special' modules. They were distributed among five patch reefs in close proximity to each other with the Carey family and friends in attendance. The center point of the reef modules is N 29° 39.711', W 084° 30.000. CCA Florida was honored to play a role in creating new marine habitat for decades to come in Dr. Carey's memory, and we thank the Carey family and friends for trusting us with this task. CCA Florida teamed with the Carey family, the City of Carrabelle, and OAR and submitted a \$60,000 grant application to FWC in March 2021. In June 2021, we received news that the grant was approved, but for a total of \$138,000! The total project cost was \$165,000.



AUGUST

R.Z. “Sandy” Safely Reef – On August 23, CCA Florida in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the BCT and the Organization for Artificial Reefs (OAR) deployed 30 reef modules to create the R.Z. “Sandy” Safely Reef, a tribute to Safley’s commitment to protecting Florida’s marine habitat and the rights of recreational anglers. Six, 15-foot-tall super structures weighing 18 tons each and 24, 8-foot-tall pyramids weighing 1 ton each were deployed in 50 feet of water by Walter Marine in a pre-permitted area known for attracting grouper, snapper, amberjack, king mackerel and cobia. These specific reef structures will provide greater habit diversity while attracting vast species of fish and appealing more to recreational anglers and divers. The reef site is located offshore 15 miles south of Carrabelle at approximately 29°39.882 N. 84° 30.012 W. The super structures are embedded with Safley’s passions and interests including a golf club, aluminum redfish, aluminum tomahawk steak along with family memorabilia. The reef was funded by a \$25,000 donation from BCT, \$25,000 from CCA Florida and \$75,000 from FWC.

Starship II Reef – Following the Starship Reef that was deployed off the coast of Jacksonville in 2018, CCA Florida began working with BCT, Shell and Shell Lubricants again in 2021 on the new Starship II Reef. On August 23, nearly 400 tons of concrete and 25 tons of granite were deployed in 50 feet of water to create the Starship II Reef about 2.75 miles off the coast of Ponce Inlet, W 80° 53.316’ N 29° 07.276’. The deployment took place on Volusia County’s newly permitted Lighthouse Point Artificial Reef site. The concrete was donated by Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) and transported by them from St. Cloud to Titusville. OUC also donated the use of a temporary staging and loading site for the reef materials at their power plant on the Indian River Lagoon in Titusville. Special thanks to our partners BCT, Shell USA, OUC, Volusia County and McCulley Marine for helping make this project a reality.



SEPTEMBER

CCA Florida Supports UCF's Coastal & Estuarine Ecology Lab Educator's Workshop – On September 1, CCA Florida provided boat support, food and swag for UCF Professor's Dr. Linda Walters' 13th annual K-12 Educator's Workshop in Canaveral National Seashore. Excited teachers from area elementary schools were treated to a very special day on boats and even harvested mangrove propagules (seeds), which will be sprouted and planted by their students during the school year.

Red Mangrove Propagule Collection/Planting – On September 15, CCA Florida staff and volunteers collected almost 1,000 red mangrove propagules from the Indian River Land Trust Coastal Oaks property along the Treasure Coast. The propagules were then transported to the Duke Energy Mariculture Center in Crystal River. Special thanks to Treasure Coast volunteers Pat and Andy Steinbergs for their help on this project. The propagule collection was followed up in October by CCA Florida staff who ventured to the Mariculture Center to help plant the red mangrove propagules into pots. Once the mangroves mature, they will be used for habitat restoration projects along the southwest coast in areas negatively affected by Hurricane Ian.

OCTOBER

John Michael Baker (JMB) Memorial Reef – CCA Florida once again supported the annual deployment on the JMB Memorial Reef off Broward County with a \$6,000 donation. The remaining funds for the deployment were generated through donations and from the annual JMB fishing tournament. On October 4, the fourth deployment on the JMB Memorial Reef was successfully deployed. 17 structures weighing over 150,000 pounds were deployed in approximately 70 feet of water in memory of John Michael Baker, a CCA Florida member, avid diver and angler who passed away in a tragic boating accident in 2015. The main reef structure consisted of a 10,000-pound reef ball containing John Michael Baker's ashes and a plaque. The project is located just offshore of Fort Lauderdale between Oakland Park Blvd. and Birch State Park and was led by the family and members of the CCA Broward Chapter. Special thanks to our partners, including Guice Offshore, CCA Florida, US Concrete Products, Brownies Global Logistics, Industrial Divers, Dania Cut Superyacht Repair, Broward County and Reef Innovations for helping make this project a reality. And thank you to Captain Rick Murphy and RM Media for the awesome video footage.

STARSHIP II Reef
August 2022



HABITAT UPDATE



MULTI-DAY PROJECTS

Treasure Coast CCA Riverside Park Re-vegetation Project – CCA Florida recently joined the City of Vero Beach, the Treasure Coast CCA, and the Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County on a ditch re-vegetation project in the Indian River Lagoon (IRL). The City of Vero Beach has approximately 2,000 feet of shoreline in a drainage ditch connected to the eastern shore of the IRL on the north side of Riverside Park. The project consisted of re-grading the shoreline and re-vegetating the area with native vegetation. CCA Florida donated \$5,000 to the project and provided volunteers for the work.

Brevard County Reefs – CCA Florida has an ongoing partnership with Brevard County to support their artificial reef program. Last year, CCA donated \$3,000 to contribute toward their upcoming 2022 summer deployments. As in years past, CCA Florida also wrote a grant support letter on behalf of Brevard County for an FWC artificial reef grant in which they were awarded funding. CCA Life Member Greg Harrison has been working on the Brevard artificial reef program for many years and has observed excellent invertebrate species growth on them as well as black sea bass, juvenile red snapper, crabs and large schools of baitfish. CCA Florida, again, donated \$3,000 to their reefing program in March 2022 for the 2023 deployment, along with another grant support letter to FWC.

Sarasota Bay Watch Clam Restoration – This past summer, CCA Florida donated another \$10,000 to Sarasota Bay Watch (SBW) to sponsor the restoration of 100,000 clams back into Sarasota Bay. This is the third year that CCA Florida has contributed to this program. SBW is working to restore clams and scallops to the Bay with these important filter-feeders that play a critical role in mitigating poor water quality. They actually eat red tide and other algae, sequester carbon, filter up to 10 gallons of water per day, and provide food for other marine life. In total, each of the 300,000 clams are over 2-inches in size and according to Dr. Bruce Barber, Executive Director of the Gulf Shellfish Institute, a single 2-inch clam filters out 50,000,000 red tide organisms per day. That equates to 1 trillion organisms per day for the 300,000 clams.

Addictive Fishing/CCA FL/UF/FWC Clam Restoration Project – The IRL Clam Restoration Project began in 2017 and will continue indefinitely. On April 22, CCA Florida joined Starbrite to host its inaugural “Clean Water Collective,” a three-day event to celebrate Earth Day and promote habitat restoration in the IRL. Clean Water Collective and CCA Florida staff and volunteers also planted hundreds of mangroves, attended education workshops focused on marine conservation

Andrew Hall's “Dragon Reef”
April 2022



and participated in a coastal cleanup. The event kicked off on Earth Day at Marker 24 Marina located on the Banana River.

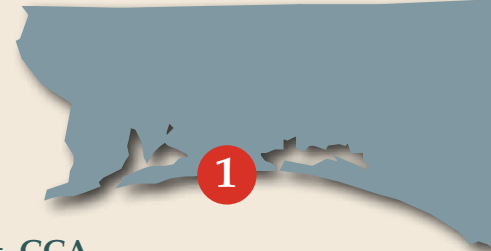
And on September 10, CCA Florida and our partners released 55,000 more clams in the IRL behind Florida Oceanographic Society (FOS) in Jensen Beach. The clams were transported in a cooling truck, increasing the possibility for early spawning. Since 2018, over **15 million clams have been deployed in the IRL** as part of this collaboration project in effort to improve water quality and habitat restoration! Special thanks to University of Florida Whitney Laboratory, Blair Wiggins Outdoors, FWC and FOS for helping make this project a reality.

The Ghost Trap Rodeo Event Series – The Ghost Trap Rodeo Event Series is a family-friendly event dedicated to improving and maintaining the health of Florida's sensitive marine environments for the longevity of our shallow water fishery. This angler-led restoration project, designed by Ocean Aid 360 and CCA Florida, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), is built on the belief that shallow water anglers know their local waters as well or better than anyone. The Ghost Trap Rodeo is an opportunity show what you know, to find and remove derelict crab traps, which catch and kill unchecked, and other forms of marine debris that negatively impact our fishery. The following Ghost Trap Rodeos were held around the state of Florida in 2021-2022:

- Apalachicola 1/9/21 (Over 4,000 pounds of marine debris and 78 derelict crab traps were removed from the water by approx. 50 volunteers).
- Homosassa 7/24/21 (Over 1,300 pounds of marine debris and 42 derelict crab traps were removed from the water by approx. 50 volunteers).
- Jacksonville 1/16/22 (1,650 pounds of marine debris and 62 derelict crab traps were removed by volunteers in just 4 hours).
- Tampa Bay 1/22/2022 (4,480 pounds of marine debris and 27 derelict crab traps were removed by more than 100 volunteers).
- Titusville 8/13/22 (6,397 pounds of marine debris and 123 derelict crab traps were removed by more than 100 volunteers, including none other than Capt. Blair Wiggins and Blair Wiggins Outdoors).

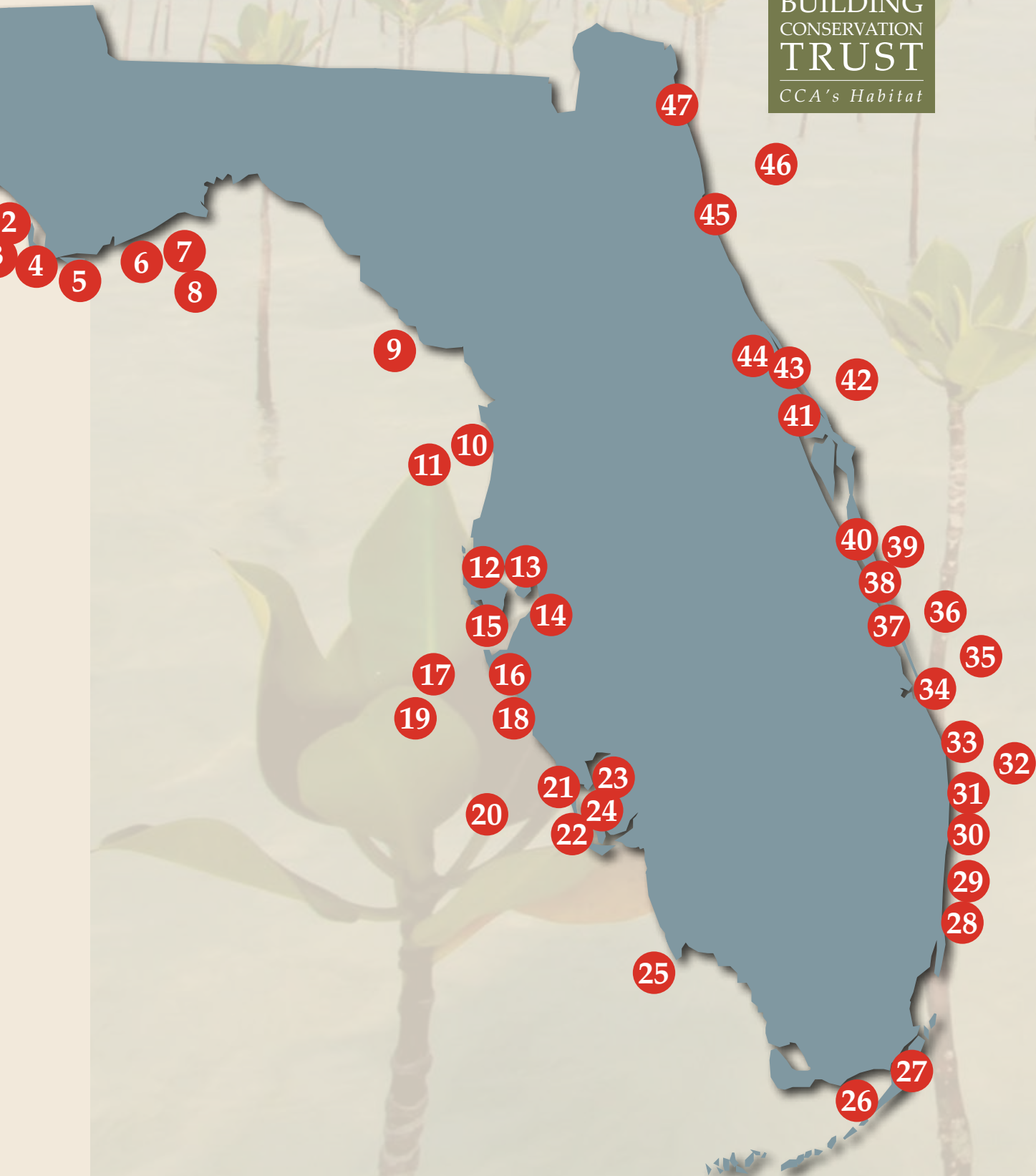
CCA Florida could not accomplish all of the habitat restoration work without our members and partners! As a grassroots organization, we rely on our members to identify habitat projects and needs in their area. Our staff is here to support our members and bring project ideas to fruition. With 1,350 miles of coastline in Florida, we need to hear from you with regard to projects or issues in your community. For more information, contact Frank Gidus at fgidus@ccaflorida.org.

COMPLETED HABITAT PROJECTS

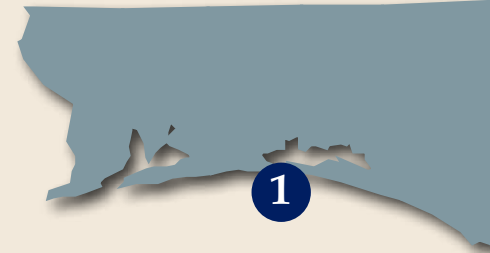


Since 2010, and in collaboration with the Building Conservation Trust, CCA has contributed over \$1.2 million, which has been leveraged with our partners, to over \$9 million in habitat projects statewide. Join us in these efforts!

1. CCA/South Walton Artificial Reef Association, Inc. Reefs
2. CCA Reef/MBARA
3. CCA Duke Energy Reef – Mexico Beach
4. CCA/Ocean Aid 360 Apalachicola Ghost Trap Rodeo
5. CCA/FDEP/Duke Spartina Grass Replanting
6. CCA/R.Z. Sandy Safley Reef
7. CCA/BCT Billy's Barge Artificial Reef
8. CCA Dr. Bart Carey Memorial Reef
9. NCBS Lone Cabbage Reef Fish Monitoring
10. CCA/UF/IFAS Centipede Bay Oyster Reef Restoration
11. CCA/Hernando Co. Ghost Ship Reef
12. CCA/BCT/Tampa Bay Watch Fantasy Island Oyster Restoration
13. CCA/BCT/Tampa Bay Watch 2D Island Oyster Restoration
14. CCA/FWC Suncoast Youth Conservation Center Saltwater Pond
15. CCA/Ocean Aid 360 Tampa Ghost Trap Rodeo
16. CCA/UCF De Soto National Memorial Living Shoreline Stabilization
17. CCA/BCT Sean Gucken Memorial Reef
18. CCA/Sarasota Bay Watch Clam Restoration
19. CCA/FWC Larry Borden Artificial Reef – Manatee County
20. CCA/Lee County USS Mohawk CGC Reef – Veterans Memorial Reef
21. CCA/BCT/Lee County Punta Rassa Oyster Restoration
22. CCA/BCT/Lee County San Carlos Bay Oyster Restoration
23. LBHS Prop Scar Restoration and Sea Grass Project
24. CCA Turtle Bay Oyster Reef Restoration
25. Naples Bay Oyster Restoration Project
26. CCA Florida Bay Seagrass Restoration
27. CCA/UNF Florida Bay Turtle Grass Research Project
28. CCA Andrew Hall Eagle Scout Reef
29. CCA Broward Chapter Pilot Oyster Project
30. CCA/No Shoes Reef 4
31. CCA/BCT Goggle Eye Reef
32. CCA/BCT Andrew "Red" Harris Foundation Reef
33. CCA/BCT Andrew "Red" Harris Foundation "No Shoes" Reef
34. CCA/Florida Oceanographic Society Seagrass and Oyster Restoration
35. CCA/MCAC Brause Girls Reef
36. CCA Curtis Bostick Reef
37. CCA/Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute Seagrass Restoration
38. CCA Indian River Lagoon RISSA Seagrass Buoys and Oyster Restoration
39. CCA Treasure Coast Revegetation Project
40. CCA Spotted Seatrout Acoustic Study
41. CCA/UCF/NPS Canaveral Nat'l Seashore Indian Midden Living Shoreline Restoration
42. CCA/BCT Lady Philomena Cargo Ship - Volusia County Reef Site No. 12
43. CCA/UCF Tomoka State Park Indian Midden Living Shoreline Restoration
44. CCA/Heineken/UCF Tomoka State Park Indian Midden Living Shoreline Restoration
45. CCA/City of Fernandina Living Shoreline Oyster Restoration
46. CCA/BCT Starship Reef
47. CCA/BCT Jacksonville River Reef



ONGOING & UPCOMING HABITAT PROJECTS



Since 2010, and in collaboration with the Building Conservation Trust, CCA has contributed over \$1.2 million, which has been leveraged with our partners, to over \$9 million in habitat projects statewide. Join us in these efforts!

1. CCA Okaloosa County Reef
2. CCA/Duke Energy/Citrus County Reef
3. CCA/Hernando County Bendickson Reef
4. CCA/Hernando County Jenkins Creek Living Shoreline
5. CCA/Duke Energy/Pasco County Reef
6. CCA/Pinellas County Reef
7. CCA Tampa Bay Reefs Project
8. CCA Phoenix Reef
9. CCA John Michael Baker Memorial Reef - Broward County
10. CCA Bob Burton Memorial Reef
11. CCA/Sandoway Marine Park Vessel Deployment
12. CCA Loxahatchee Seagrass Project
13. CCA/FWC/Wildlife Florida IRL Eelgrass Restoration
14. CCA/BTT/IRL Land Trust Tarpon/Snook Impoundment Tagging
15. CCA/Blair Wiggins Outdoors/FWC/UF Indian River Lagoon Clam Restoration
16. CCA/Brevard County Artificial Reefs
17. CCA Starship II Reef
18. CCA/UCF Mosquito Lagoon Oyster Restoration
19. CCA Oyster Shell Recycling Program
20. CCA/UNF Oyster Restoration Projects



-  Ongoing
-  Upcoming
-  Coastal Cleanups

 Redfish Stock Enhancement
Locations - Total of 200 Adults
and 78,650 Juveniles released

 Snook Stock Enhancement
Location - 5,150 Juveniles
released

 Spotted Seatrout Enhancement
Location - 20,000 Juveniles
released





**CCA FLORIDA
THE DUKE
ENERGY
MARICULTURE
CENTER
FWC**

**LAUNCH
EAST COAST
RESTOCK
EFFORT**

**IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS WITH SUPPORT FROM FWC, CCA FLORIDA
AND DUKE ENERGY HAVE RELEASED MORE THAN 150,000 REDFISH AND SPOTTED SEATR
ALONG FLORIDA'S WEST COAST TO HELP PROVIDE ABUNDANT RECREATIONAL FISHING ON**

H COAST CKING TS



OUT (4 TO 30 INCHES)
OPPORTUNITIES.

THE PARTNERS
RELEASED REDFISH
ALONG FLORIDA'S
EAST COAST,
INAUGURATING
ITS "RELEASE
THE EAST"
INITIATIVE





COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION FLORIDA (CCA FLORIDA), THE STATE'S LEADING ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO MARINE FISHERIES CONSERVATION, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY, JOINED THE DUKE ENERGY MARICULTURE CENTER AND THE FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION (FWC) TO LAUNCH ITS REDFISH RESTOCKING INITIATIVE, "RELEASE THE EAST," AND RELEASED 65,000 HATCHERY-REARED, JUVENILE REDFISH (AVERAGING 4 INCHES IN LENGTH) IN THE WATERS OF BREVARD COUNTY ON NOV. 4 IN EFFORT TO COMBAT THE DECREASING POPULATION ALONG FLORIDA'S EAST COAST.

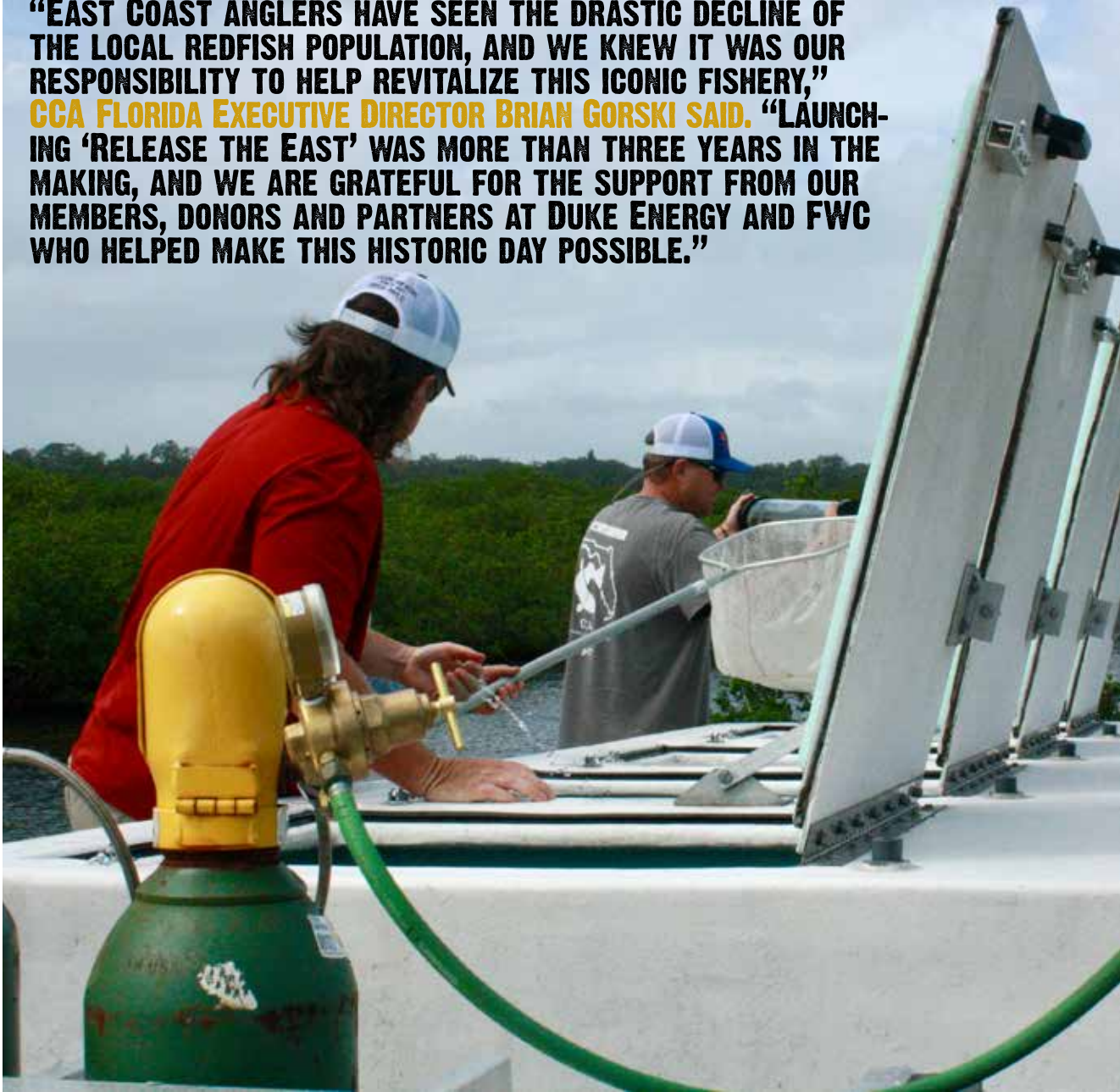
IN RECENT YEARS, THE REDFISH POPULATION HAS DRASTICALLY DECLINED AS A RESULT OF WATER QUALITY ISSUES AND LOSS OF HABITAT. TO COUNTERACT THESE EFFECTS, CCA FLORIDA AND ITS PARTNERS HAVE TAKEN A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO HABITAT RESTORATION, FOCUSING ON RESTOCKING EFFORTS FOR ONE OF FLORIDA'S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER INSHORE FISH, THE REDFISH.



EAST COAST RESTOCKING EFFORTS



"EAST COAST ANGLERS HAVE SEEN THE DRASTIC DECLINE OF THE LOCAL REDFISH POPULATION, AND WE KNEW IT WAS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP REVITALIZE THIS ICONIC FISHERY,"
CCA FLORIDA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRIAN GORSKI SAID. "LAUNCHING 'RELEASE THE EAST' WAS MORE THAN THREE YEARS IN THE MAKING, AND WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT FROM OUR MEMBERS, DONORS AND PARTNERS AT DUKE ENERGY AND FWC WHO HELPED MAKE THIS HISTORIC DAY POSSIBLE."



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THE LATEST RESTOCKING EFFORTS FOR THE NONPROFIT-CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP ARE PART OF A MULTIFUNCTIONAL AND MULTIYEAR STRATEGY TO REBUILD AND MAINTAIN GAME FISH STOCKS. THE RELEASE THE EAST INITIATIVE WILL BE AN ONGOING CAMPAIGN AS REDFISH RELEASES ARE PLANNED ALONG THE ENTIRE EAST COAST OF FLORIDA OVER THE NEXT YEAR.



EAST COAST
GAME FISH STOCK
REBUILDING EFFORTS

EAST COAST RESTOCKING EFFORTS



"WE ARE PROUD TO CONTINUE OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH CCA FLORIDA AND EXTEND OUR COMMITMENT TO HELPING PRESERVE AND PROTECT FLORIDA'S MARINE ENVIRONMENT ALONG THE EAST COAST" DUKE ENERGY MARICULTURE CENTER MANAGER ERIC LATIMER SAID. "REDFISH IS AN ESSENTIAL SPECIES TO OUR STATE AND WE MUST WORK TOGETHER TO CONSERVE THIS FISHERY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION."



Snapper Cakes With Spicy Remoulade Sauce

RECIPE & PHOTOS BY HEATHER PETEREK
JOINCCA.ORG/RECIPES

Ingredients

SPICY REMOULADE SAUCE

- ½ c mayonnaise
- ½ c sour cream
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp horseradish
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp Louisiana hot sauce
- 1 tsp Cajun seasoning
- Juice of 1 lemon

SNAPPER CAKES

- Vegetable oil for frying
- ¾ c fresh corn kernels
- ¼ c red bell pepper, finely diced
- ¼ c yellow onion, finely diced
- 1 clove fresh garlic, minced
- 2 large snapper fillets, cut into small pieces
- ½ c mayonnaise
- ¼ c green onion, thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 c panko bread crumbs

Directions

Make the remoulade sauce by whisking all ingredients thoroughly in a small bowl. Let sit in refrigerator for at least 30 minutes. The longer it sits, the better, even as long as overnight.

In a large skillet, heat 1 tablespoon oil over medium heat. Add corn, bell pepper, yellow onion and garlic; cook until all vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes. Add all the snapper pieces to the skillet and cook about 5 minutes per side or until fish is cooked through. Transfer the fish and vegetable mixture into a large bowl and let cool for 10 minutes. Add mayonnaise, green onion, mustard, salt, pepper, egg and panko bread crumbs. Gently fold it all together until well combined, taking care not to break up the fish too much. Refrigerate for 10 minutes then shape mixture into ½ cup patties.

Heat about 4 tablespoons vegetable oil in the same skillet over medium-high heat. Once oil is hot enough for frying, cook cakes in batches until golden brown, about 3 minutes per side. Let drain on paper towels or a wire rack. Repeat process until all fish cakes are browned.

To serve, place one or two snapper cakes on a plate, top with remoulade sauce and garnish with extra chopped green onion and lemon wedges. **MAKES ABOUT 8 CAKES.**

**Scan the QR code on the previous page for some helpful videos.*



Where would you like to fish today?

AT MAVERICK, WE THINK THERE ARE NO BETTER WORDS TO START A MORNING. THAT'S WHY WE'VE BEEN A PROUD SUPPORTER OF CCA FLORIDA FROM THE BEGINNING. BECAUSE WE WANT ALL FUTURE FISHING PARTNERS TO BE ABLE TO ASK EACH OTHER THIS VERY QUESTION.



Maverick

Fish the Legend.



SINCE 2019, CCA FLORIDA HAS LED EFFORTS TO SECURE THE \$100,000 NEEDED TO COVER THE EQUIPMENT, FEED AND SUPPLY COSTS FOR THE RELEASE THE EAST INITIATIVE, AND MUD HOLE CUSTOM TACKLE KICKSTARTED FUNDRAISING WITH A \$20,000 DONATION.



"WE WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE COLLABORATIVE RESTOCKING EFFORTS OF OUR VALUED PARTNERS, CCA FLORIDA AND DUKE ENERGY, AND ARE EXCITED TO BE A PART OF THE NEW 'RELEASE THE EAST' INITIATIVE," SAID FWG EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ERIC SUTTON. "ENSURING OUR REDFISH POPULATION IS SUSTAINABLE IS CRUCIAL FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THIS IMPORTANT SPECIES AND ALLOWS US TO CONTINUE TO BE ABLE TO ENJOY THE RESOURCES FLORIDA HAS TO OFFER."

QUEEN OF CONSERVATION

Receives Historic Induction in the Florida Sports Hall of Fame



An Angling Athlete Reco

For more than three decades, Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) Florida STAR Director Leiza Fitzgerald has been a leader in the fishing industry, trailblazing the sport one species at a time.

To commend her commitment to fishing, the Florida Sports Hall of Fame named Leiza a distinguished honoree in its 2022 class, the first angler to receive this distinction.

The Florida Sports Hall of Fame recognizes Florida's most iconic athletes, and this year's 12-member class is one of the most unique, representing more than six sports and adding two new sports, fishing and

Special Olympics. The class comprises the best in athletic achievement, community involvement and education efforts of their sport within the state of Florida, and includes a Super Bowl MVP, a Stanley Cup Champion, an Olympic gold-medal coach, a World Series champion, a Guinness Book World Record holder and an all-STAR angler, Leiza.

A champion for conservation, Leiza has spearheaded the CCA Florida STAR competition for eight years, a catch-photo-release event designed to educate the public on the importance of protecting Florida's marine resources. Her tireless dedication to the com-



LEIZA FITZGERALD

Recognized for the First Time

petition has helped improve marine habitat and support restocking efforts across the state.

"Leiza is forever our 'Queen of Conservation,'" CCA Florida Executive Director Brian Gorski said. "From leading the STAR competition to restocking fish and hooking grand slams in between, Leiza's love for sportfishing and Florida's fisheries is unmatched. Leiza is more deserving of this award than anyone I know, and the entire CCA Florida family could not more proud."

Leiza's passion for fishing spans beyond her profession, a self-

proclaimed "top hooker," she has fished worldwide in freshwater, saltwater, on fly, spinning rod and more. Leiza has won numerous "top 10" fishing titles at events such as the ESPN Redfish Cup and FLW Redfish Tour, as well as numerous regional and local events. Recently, she received recognition as "Top Angler for Redfish" and "Top Angler for Redfish, Snook and Sheepshead" from the International Women's Fishing Association (IWFA). Leiza's other accolades include being named one of "The Top 12 Lady Anglers in Florida" by

(continued on page 56)



Queen of Conservation

continued from page 55

Salt Strong, "Sportsman of the Year" by The Sarasota Sportsman's Association and one of "The 30 Most Influential Female Anglers in North America" by Wildlife Enthusiast magazine.

Not only is Leiza a competitor, but a creator too, helping establish the World Sailfish Championships and the World Tar-

pon Championships. She is also a steward for philanthropy, as Leiza and her friends' fishing team, "Screaming Reels and High Heels," benefits two important charities, Hooked on Hope and Children's Pediatric Cancer Foundation.

Off the water, you can often find Leiza with a bow and arrow in hand, as she hunts throughout North America. In addition, she frequently contributes to local and national

outdoor publications, radio shows and podcasts, participates in dozens of annual speaking engagements and fishes alongside many of TV's celebrity anglers.

Leiza has been instrumental in introducing women to the sport of fishing, conservation and the outdoors, and will make history as the first angler to be inducted into the 61st Florida Sports Hall of Fame on Nov. 2 at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, FL.

advocacy news

CCA Joins Lawsuit to Protect Recreational Fishery Allocations

Coastal Conservation Association has intervened in a lawsuit initiated by the commercial fishing industry that is attempting to roll back an important precedent affecting fishery allocations. Although the commercial lawsuit seeks to overturn an action reflecting better data in a single fishery – the Gulf of Mexico red grouper fishery – it threatens a precedent that will be applied to almost every fishery under federal management, with profound implications for the recreational fishing sector and the businesses that depend on it.

"If the Gulf Council's action is not defended, anglers will eventually be negatively impacted in a host of other fisheries like red snapper and amberjack that are set to undergo a similar data calibration process," said Bill Bird, chairman of CCA's National Government Relations Committee "There is so much at stake here."

The issue is technical but it revolves around the method by which NOAA's historical recreational harvest data for a species of fish has been recalculated using improved techniques.

"Functionally, nothing has changed as a result of this change to reflect better data. Managers just have a clearer picture of what is actually happening in the fishery, and the commercial sector has not been deprived of a single fish," said Bird. "However, if the commercial sector successfully argues that it should have been arbitrarily awarded an allocation increase based on changes to historical recreational data, the closures impacting red grouper this year will be much worse in the future. That is the peril of this lawsuit."



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Ingredients

Extra virgin olive oil

Salt and pepper

- 9 mini red, orange and yellow sweet peppers, seeded and sliced (3 of each color)
- 3 jalapeño, seeded and sliced
- 1 12 oz can evaporated milk
- 1 12 oz package quesadilla melting cheese
- 4 oz cream cheese
- 1 tsp Cajun seasoning
- 1 clove garlic, grated
- 1 c green onion, thinly sliced
- 12 oz fresh lump crab meat
- 2 bags thick tortilla chips
- 2 c shredded Monterey jack cheese

Garnish: lime wedges, cubed avocado, sliced green onion

Cajun Crab Nachos

RECIPE & PHOTOS BY HEATHER PETEREK JOINCCA.ORG/RECIPES

Directions

Preheat oven to 425°F.

Arrange sweet peppers and jalapeño on a large baking sheet, drizzle with the olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake for about 10 minutes to soften. Remove from oven and set aside for assembly. Leave oven on for cooking nachos.

In a medium saucepan, heat evaporated milk until hot, but not boiling. Slowly add in cheeses, Cajun seasoning and garlic, and whisk continuously until smooth. Once all ingredients are thoroughly combined, gently stir in crab and green onions. Remove from heat and set aside.

Distribute a layer of chips on a 14"x19" sheet pan, greased and lined with parchment paper. Spoon desired amount of the crab mixture over the chips then top with another layer of chips. Spoon over more of the crab mixture, then top with the shredded Monterey jack cheese. NOTE: you will have enough crab mixture to make two full 14"x19" sheet pans full of nachos.

Bake in the preheated oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until the cheese is melted.

Remove from oven and top with roasted peppers, avocados and green onion. Serve immediately with lime wedges. SERVES A CROWD.



SPRING EVENTS SAVE THE DATE

February

- 2/2 Mid Coast Banquet
- 2/16 North Brevard Banquet and Auction
- 2/23 Keys Banquet and Auction
- 2/24 Quail Creek Sporting Clays

March

- 3/2 Manatee County Banquet and Auction
- 3/9 Emerald Coast Banquet
- 3/9 Citrus County Banquet and Auction
- 3/16 Fort Myers Banquet and Auction
- 3/23 Martin County Banquet and Auction
- 3/23 Tampa Banquet and Auction
- 3/30 Charlotte County Banquet and Auction
- 3/31 Knights Banquet and Auction

April

- 4/6 Polk County Banquet and Auction
- 4/13 Lake County Banquet and Auction

4/14-4/16

Tortuga Music Festival

4/14

Ocala Banquet and Auction

4/15

Y.S.P. Grand Scholarship

4/18

ABC Tournament

4/21

Orlando BBQ

4/21

Space Coast BBQ

4/22

Mangrove Run 5k

4/27

Broward County Banquet and Auction

4/27

Hernando County Banquet and Auction

4/28

Sarasota All Release/BBQ

May

5/4

Homestead Banquet and Auction

5/11

Big Bend Banquet and Auction

5/13

Naples Banquet and Auction

5/18-5/21

Life Member Outing

5/19

Northeast BBQ

For additional information, please contact Amanda Krpan at akrpan@ccaflorida.org.

CCA FLORIDA PET CLUB

By joining the CCA Florida Pet Club*, your pet will support Florida's marine fisheries, habitat, waterways, coasts and more. Join us as we continue to work toward enhancing these resources and Florida's fishing future.

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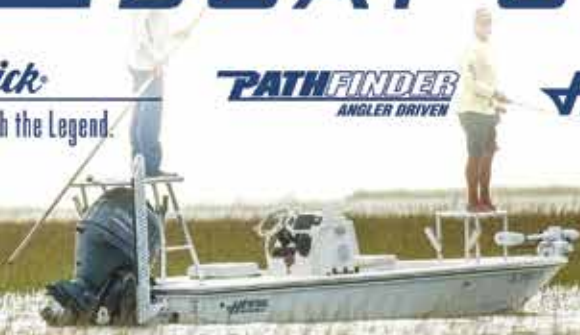
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