

# Myakka Wild and Scenic River Program 2014 Annual Report



**A. Myakka Wild and Scenic River Program Updates**

1. The Park Service proposal to transfer Myakka River Permitting to the FDEP Regulatory Office in Ft. Myers remains under consideration.

**B. Permitting Program**

1. MRP060713 originally issued August 9, 2013 to the Florida Department of Transportation for a project to add scour countermeasures to the pilings associated with the bridge over the Myakka at U.S. 41 was amended June 5, 2014.
  - Discussion began April 30, 2014 related to possible use of Senator Bob Johnson's Landing (SBJL) as staging area which were not detailed in permit application.
  - A site visit occurred on May 8, 2014 to assess potential sites that would not impact mangroves or other native vegetation protected by the river rule
  - Project was completed by September 13, 2014
2. MRP030314 was issued to Sarasota County on March 19, 2014 for the replacement of the bridge at C.R. 780 over the Myakka River. Construction may begin in the late spring 2015.
3. MR112514 was issued to Sarasota County on December 22, 2014 for several improvements at Snook Haven Park. These include:

On the Snook Haven Addition (Decker Property):

- replacing the existing boat ramp, and
- constructing a new dock (6 x 20ft).

At Snook Haven:

- removal of the existing concrete and aluminum finger piers (3) and the concrete and wooden tour boat dock,
- construction of two docks (10 x 12ft),
- one pier (5 x 20ft) ,
- one fishing pier (10 x 12ft)

Other activities include improvements to the existing canoe launch, shoreline restoration areas, and ADA access.

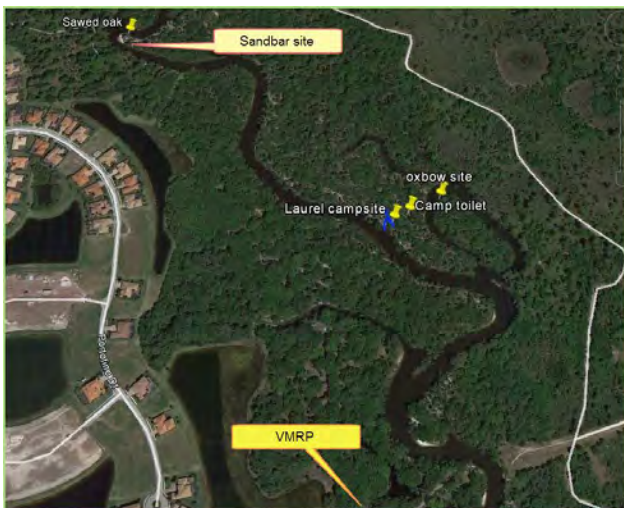
4. Discussion continues with Sarasota County staff related to the future development and potential recreation activities at SBJL near U.S. 41. No formal plans or applications have been submitted to the Florida Park Service.

**C. Natural Resources Events and Incidents**

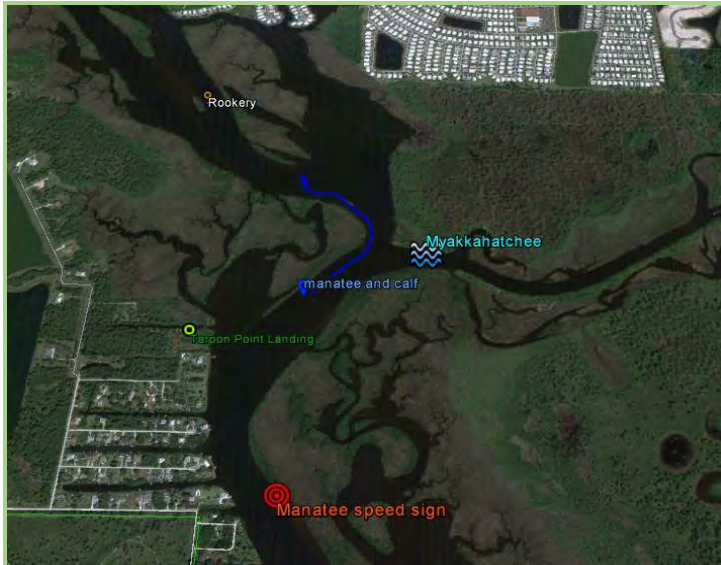
1. Evidence of the January 12, 2014 fish kill at Deep Hole was apparent with hundreds of brown hoplo (**Hoplosternum littorale**) bodies being worked over by vultures, with more than 230 black vultures at Deep Hole alone. Several smaller fish were also struggling at the water surface, exhibiting behaviors common with low dissolved Oxygen.



2. A manatee stranding event occurred January 17, 2014, just above Down's Dam. (Discussed further on page 9 of this report.)
3. Starting in late January small amounts of green algae were noticed in patches. In early February the algae increased into a large bloom that covered the surface of large areas especially south of Rocky Ford down toward Snook Haven. By the mid-February inspection the algae was barely observed. (The cause of the bloom was not determined.)
4. Blatant non-compliance with MWSR and manatee speed limits remains a serious issue with paddlers, fisherman, and concession operators reporting observations to this office and Law Enforcement (LE). These activities have an impact to the wild and scenic values in the river area and are a potential hazard other people recreating on the river.
5. Continued unpermitted camping and fires, illegal removal of vegetation continued at the sandbar across from the Venetian Conservation Easement property and other established sites above Laurel Road (which are all on Sarasota County's Carlton Reserve and within the Myakka River Protection Zone).



6. During the month of May several individuals inquired about the legality and increasing number of bush hooks on the river.
  - During the May wildlife survey 29 bush hooks were observed in the area from Laurel Road south to Border Road. The vast majority were unmaintained and non-functional with more than half not even in the water. These bush hooks were not in compliance with recreation or commercial fishing rules (68A-23, F.A.C.).
7. Sometime just before December 19, 2014, a very large "Fried Man-O-Tee" recipe sign was posted at the "slow speed/minimum wake" manatee speed signpost south of Myakkahatchee Creek. The sign was removed. (In February 2012 a similar anti-manatee sign was placed on the same post.)



#### D. Nuisance and Exotic Plants and Animals

1. Island apple snail (IAS) eggs began showing up on Upper Myakka Lake in September 2011. In August 2013 one egg mass from the invasive IAS (*Pomacea maculate*) was observed south of S.R. 72 Bridge which appears to be the first report in this section. MRSP and the MWSR program use volunteers in the spring through the early summer to locate and remove these snails. Data on locations of casings and removal is being recorded.
  - Increasing numbers of IAS casing began appearing the river section below S.R. 72 to the LML in the early spring of 2014. In this river section casings were most often on water hemp, pop ash, and para grass stalks. In the LML the first casing was observed 4/16/14 and numbers observed during the May inspection were high.
  - In addition to hours from MRSP staff and volunteers; MWSR volunteers and staff removed approximately 350 IAS egg casings in 2014 (see table 2 for summary of Apple Snail activities).



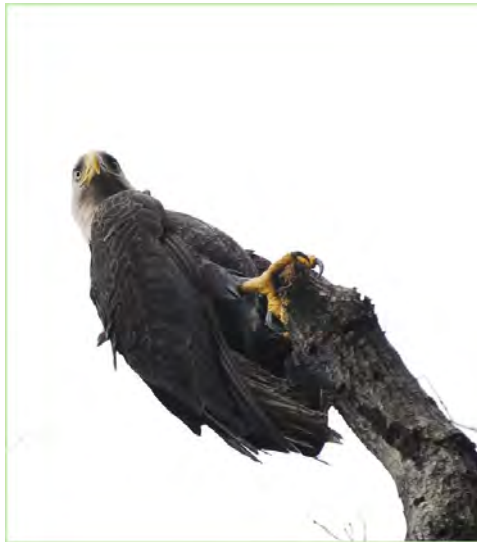
2. Continued efforts are being made to manage invasive plants invading natural communities along the MWSR. The top priority remains the monitoring and removal of existing and new



infestations of cogongrass and Old World climbing fern. When possible other invasive plants such as Brazilian pepper encountered on the river are also targeted. Sarasota County staff and volunteers assisted in several exotic workdays in 2014. Most of these activities took place between Laurel Road and Snook Haven.

#### **E. Wildlife Monitoring**

1. River Inspection data from 1990 through 2014 has been entered into the Myakka Wild and Scenic River Wildlife Database.
  2. Throughout the year, several interesting wildlife sightings were observed during regular monthly inspections. These sightings include:
    - January – 9 bald eagles were observed between the Lower Myakka Lake (LML) and the Dam, including 3 immature eagles that were on snags at Deep Hole. Wading birds and shore birds were numerous especially in marshes along the entry to the Lower Lake down to the area just south of Deep Hole. Including:
      - 27 black-necked stilts and 15 avocets
      - 355 American white pelicans, and
      - 1 Wilson’s snipe was observed in the Rocky Ford area
- The Rookery regained numbers with 137 wood storks, some were observed bringing in nest material.



Giant airplant, *Tillandsia utriculata*, were surveyed within 25 feet of the river on each side.

- From Border Road to I-75; 145 giant airplants were counted with only one being stressed without a spike, and 31 of these airplants had spikes.
- From the I-75 to Snook Haven; 199 giant airplants were counted, and 35 of these airplants had spikes.

- February – 10 bald eagles were observed between the LML and the Dam, including 3 immature eagles that were on snags at Deep Hole. Wading birds and shore birds were numerous especially in marshes along the entry to the LML down to the area just south of Deep Hole. Including:
  - 18 black-necked stilts,
  - 7 American white pelicans, and
  - 5 black skimmers.



The Rookery was active with at least 107 wood storks. 68 great egrets, 3 great blue herons, and 3 brown pelicans were also present.

- March – 155 alligators were sighted with only 24 alligators at Deep Hole,
  - 3 Swallow-tailed kites were seen at the LML,
  - 45 glossy ibises,
  - 55 white ibises,
  - 5 roseate spoonbills, and
  - 6 black skimmers.
- April – 148 alligators were sighted with 29 alligators at Deep Hole,
  - 4 swallow-tailed kites were seen at the LML down to the Dam,
  - 2 adults limpkins with 4 chicks were observed on the river bank just south of S.R. 72,
  - 10 indigo buntings were seen,

The Rookery contained 66 wood storks: some were observed bringing in nest material. 60 great egrets, 1 snowy egret, and 4 anhingas were also present.
- May – 100 alligators were sighted with only 13 alligators at Deep Hole,
  - 3 swallow-tailed kites were seen,
  - 1 adult yellow-crowned night heron with two chicks in the nest were seen on the small mangrove island just off Senator Bob Johnson's Landing.

The Rookery contained:

  - 75 adult wood storks with at least 6 chicks.

- 90 great egrets with at least 6 chicks.
  - 3 snowy egrets, 1 great blue heron, 2 cattle egrets, and 26 anhinga were also present
- June – 183 alligators were sighted with 46 alligators at Deep Hole,
  - 8 deer were observed on the west side of the Lower Lake,
  - A least tern was seen close to Deep Hole.
  - 22 native apple snail egg clusters were seen in a small area well below LML
  - 1 adult yellow-crowned night heron with two chicks in the nest were seen again this month on the small mangrove island just off Senator Bob Johnson's Landing.

The Rookery contained:

  - 59 adult wood storks with 35 chicks,
  - 58 great egrets,
  - 7 great blue herons, 4 cattle egrets, and 24 aningas were also present.
- July – 129 alligators were sighted with 22 alligators at Deep Hole,
  - Only 1 IAS (*Pomacea maculate*) egg case was observed on bulrush on the LML.

The Rookery contained:

  - 115 wood storks (including 69 chicks observed),
  - 16 great egrets,
  - 17 snowy egrets,
  - 1 great blue heron, 2 cattle egrets, and 14 aningas were also present.
- August – A pygmy rattlesnake was observed sunning on fallen cabbage palm just south of Deep Hole.
 

The Rookery contained:

  - 42 wood storks (only 6 adults with 36 juveniles),
  - 22 great egrets,
  - 3 great blue herons, 13 aningas, 1 black-crowned night heron and 1 cattle egret were also present.
- September - 45 invasive Island Apple Snail (*Pomacea maculate*) egg cases were observed most before the LML. The majority were on invasive grasses and floating vegetation including water hyacinth.
  - Many tarpon were observed through the survey especially south of the dam.
  - 2 dolphins were seen just above the rookery,

The Rookery was nearly empty with only a single great blue heron.
- October – No alligators were seen at Deep Hole due to high water,
  - Many bird species were in abundance with 146 white ibises, 22 great blue herons, 19 great egrets, 85 snowy egrets, and 28 green herons, 31 tricolored herons, 34 black-crowned night herons, and 52 aningas observed during the survey,

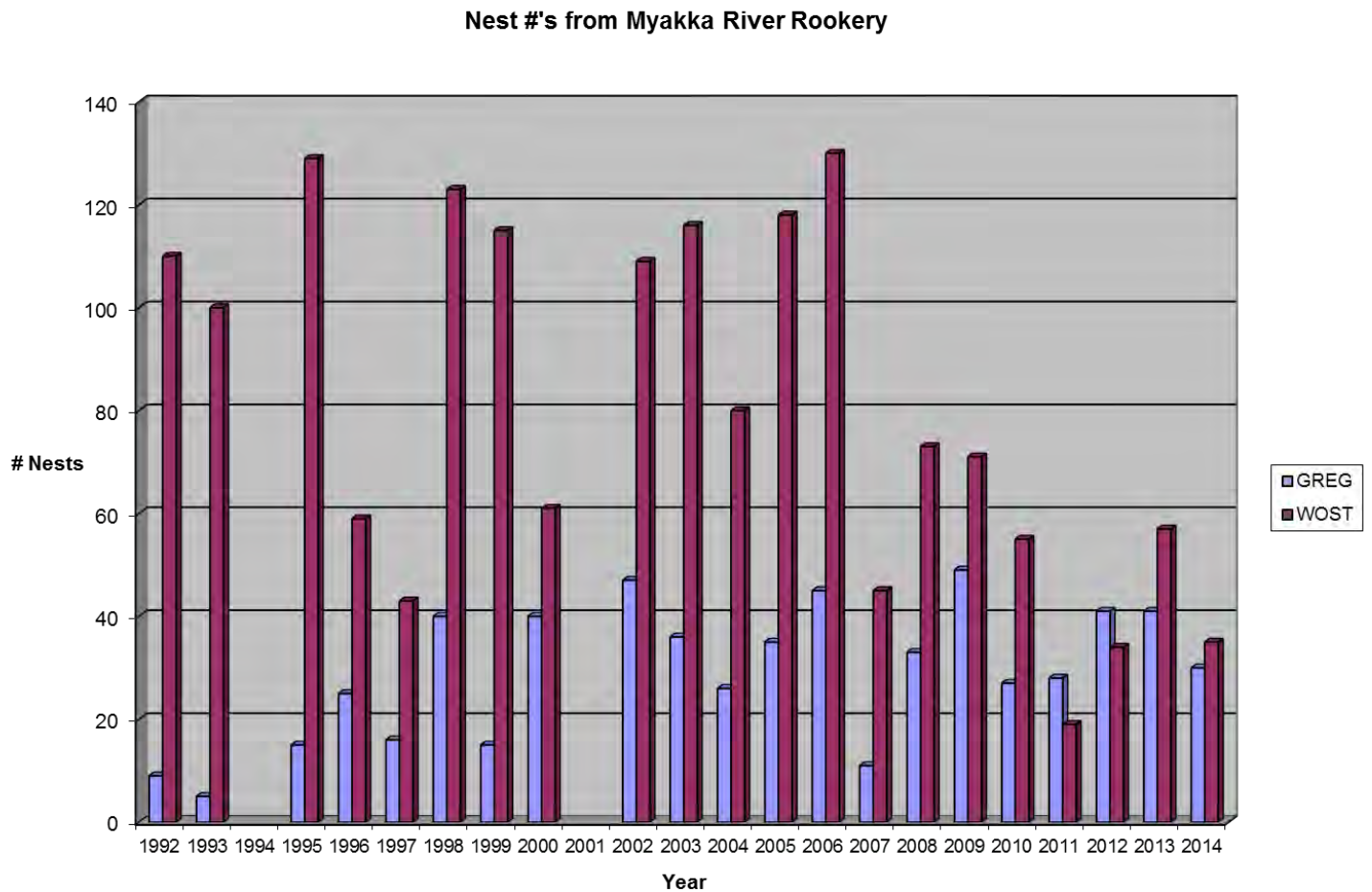
- 37 invasive island apple snail (*Pomacea maculate*) egg cases were observed. The majority were on invasive grasses and floating vegetation including water hyacinth.
  - November - 39 alligators were seen at Deep Hole,
    - 140 alligators in the other sections of the inspection,
    - Many bird species were in abundance with 27 white ibises, 25 great blue herons, 18 great egrets, 21 snowy egrets, 36 green herons, 14 tricolored herons, 32 black-crowned night herons, and 40 anhingas observed during the survey,
    - 2 raccoon families, 8 individuals, were seen sleeping in trees on the river bank and
    - 4 white-tailed deer.
  - December - 27 alligators were seen at Deep Hole, with
    - 176 alligators in the remaining portions of the survey,
    - 5 ospreys, 3 bald eagles, 12 red-shouldered hawks and a northern harrier were also counted.
    - Some bird species, especially shorebirds and ducks, were less numerous than in prior years perhaps due to the relatively high water level for December. Observations during the survey included:
      - 6 greater yellowlegs,
      - 7 black-necked stilts,
      - 5 limpkins,
      - 55 white ibises,
      - 9 roseate spoonbills,
      - 32 black-crowned night herons,
      - 24 great blue herons,
      - 18 great egrets,
      - 41 snowy egrets,
      - 3 wood storks,
      - 1 Wilson's snipe,
      - 1 American bittern and
      - 2 manatees – an adult and calf were observed 1000 feet southwest of the inflow of Myakkahatchee Creek.
3. Manatee use in the upper river to Upper Myakka Lake.
- As noted in the prior reports, many manatee observations have occurred in 2012 through 2014. During the second half of 2014 there were 12 credible reports several included photographs.





- On January 17<sup>th</sup>, just north of the Dam, MRSP staff and FWC rescued a juvenile manatee (weight: 216 lbs., length: 173 cm). His temperature was 77 °F on arrival at the zoo so he was in pretty critical condition but by January 27<sup>th</sup> the manatee was in stable condition at Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa. They named him Myakklamore.
- First confirmed sighting in MRSP was on August 1<sup>st</sup> above the FPL lines south of UML.
- The last confirmed report was on November 18<sup>th</sup> just south of the UML weir.

4. Wood Stork nesting at the Rookery south of U.S. 41 remained low compared with historic averages. A graph depicting the number of nests by year for great egrets and wood storks, the 2 species that nest most frequently at the Rookery, can be found below.



## Appendix

**Table 1: summary of Apple Snail observations and collection**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Observed IAS Egg Clusters</b>	<b>IAS Egg Clusters Collected</b>	<b>Observed Native Apple Snail Egg Clusters</b>
2/22/2014	near SR72	3	2	0
4/4/2014	Vanderipe to Howard Creek	45	12	3
4/16/2014	Eastside of Lower Myakka Lake to Deep Hole	40	0	1
5/16/2014	SR72 into LML	21	10	0
5/16/2014	eastside of LML to Deep Hole	14	10	0
5/16/2014	1000 yards south of Deep Hole, east side	0	0	1
5/28/2014	Pavilion area south to SR72 bridge	100	95	0
5/28/2014	SR72 south half to LML	100	90	0
5/28/2014	Pavilion to LML	30	10	0
6/4/2014	Pavilion area south to SR72 bridge	7	2	0
6/4/2014	SR72 south half to LML	25	15	0
6/4/2014	MRSP From above to LML	23	18	0
6/4/2014	eastside LML	68	68	0
6/4/2014	MRSP LML (north rim)	40	10	1
6/13/2014	Pavilion area south to SR72 bridge	8	3	0
6/13/2014	1 mile south of Deep Hole	0	0	22
7//18/14	LML area	1	1	0
8/9/2014	SR72 to LML	12	0	0
8/21/2014	Above MWSR, Triangle ranch to CR780	30	0	0
8/21/2014	MWSR CR780 to MRSP UML	16	0	0
9/24/2014	Pavilion area south to LML	30	5	0
9/24/2014	LML to just past Deep Hole	10	0	0
9/24/2014	half mile past Deep Hole	5	0	0
10/23/2014	Pavilion area south to LML	15	0	0
10/23/2014	LML to just past Deep Hole	12	0	0
10/23/2014	half mile past Deep Hole	10	0	0
12/4/2014	MWSR CR780 to MRSP UML	5	0	0
<b>totals</b>		<b>670</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>28</b>



