

Myakka Wild and Scenic River Program 2015 Annual Report



A. Myakka Wild and Scenic River (MWSR) Program Updates

1. The Park Service proposal to transfer Myakka River Permitting to the FDEP Regulatory Office in Ft. Myers is in process.

B. Permitting Program

1. Construction continues on the bridge replacement at C.R. 780. (MRP030314 was issued to Sarasota County on March 19th 2014 for the replacement of the bridge over the Myakka River.)
2. The Snook Haven Park Addition planned construction was delayed in 2015 and now scheduled for phase one in Spring 2016. MR112514 was issued to Sarasota County on December 22nd 2014 for several improvements at Snook Haven Park.
3. Discussion continues with Sarasota County staff related to the future development and potential recreation activities at Senator Bob Johnson's Landing near U.S. 41. No formal plans or applications have been submitted to the Florida Park Service.
4. FWC conducted a compliance review for signage in the river area under their Uniform Waterway Markers permit.
5. An application for a proposed dock for 36 Riverfront Drive was submitted and will be processed by the South District Office in Ft. Myers. (ERP# 0339376-001)

C. Incidents

1. Blatant non-compliance with posted Myakka Wild & Scenic River (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 to other recreational users.
2. Continued unpermitted camping and fires, and the illegal removal of vegetation remains a serious issue impacting wild and scenic values on private and public conservation properties. Most activities occur from just above Down's Dam to just below the Laurel Road area.
3. In October it was noted that the tips of two red mangrove islands in the MWSR were cut low just above mean waterline. The area impacted is called the "Spice Islands" which is listed as state land (TIITF/DEP). The closest residential area is Lazy River which is just southeast of the U.S. 41 Bridge over the Myakka River. The incident has been referred to DEP South District Office for review.

D. Nuisance and Exotic Plants and Animals

1. Island apple snail (IAS), *Pomacea maculata*, eggs began showing up on Upper Myakka Lake (UML) in September 2011. In August 2013 one egg mass from the invasive IAS 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.
 - No native apple snail egg casings were seen during surveys. Increasing numbers of IAS casings began appearing in the river section below the LML in 2015. In late 2015 the first observation of egg casings occurred below Downs' Dam.
 - In addition to efforts from MRSP staff and volunteers; MWSR volunteers and staff removed more than 431 IAS egg casings in 2015 (see Table 1: 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 2015. Most of these activities took place between Laurel Road and Snook Haven.

E. Wildlife Monitoring

1. River Inspection data from 1990 through 2015 has been entered into the Myakka Wild and Scenic River Wildlife Database.
2. Throughout the year, several interesting wildlife sightings took place during regular monthly inspections. These sightings include:
 - January – 5 bald eagles were observed between the Lower Myakka Lake (LML) and the Dam. A single short-tailed hawk was observed. 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:
 - 33 Black-necked Stilts,
 - 80 American white pelicans,
 - 2 American bitterns, and
 - 1 Wilson's snipe.
 - February – 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. The Rookery was active with 54 wood stork, 32 great egrets, 6 anhinga and 1 brown pelican present. Two immature eagles were observed about 300 Feet from the Rookery. More than 800 lesser scaup were observed grouped in the main stem just before the County line.
 - March – The upper bird count was relatively low. One caracara was seen.

The Rookery contained 104 wood stork, 73 great egret, 3 great blue heron, and 2 anhinga. An eagle was seen feeding a juvenile at the nest on Myakkahatchee Tract of Myakka State Forest.



- April – 186 alligators were seen during the upper survey. 2 sora and 1 American bittern were observed before the LML. 2 bobcats were seen. The Rookery contained 130 wood stork with 14 young chicks and 67 great egret.
- May – 248 alligators were seen during the upper survey. A single Florida water snake was seen. South of Laurel Road 2 dead alligators, 3 and 4.5 feet respectively, were found with no obvious signs of poaching. 2 manatees, an adult and calf, were observed above the Rambler's Rest area. The Rookery contained at least 271 birds including 160 wood stork. One dolphin was seen at Tarpon Point.



- June – 216 alligators were seen during the upper survey. One dolphin was seen going upriver at Border Road. The Rookery contained at least 304 birds. It was determined

that of approximately 200 wood storks, there were approximately 84 adults, 110 juveniles, and 6 chicks.

- July – The Rookery dropped off to about 145 birds. 110 were wood storks and it was determined that approximately half were juveniles.
- August – Water level over 9 feet with strong flow reduced observations. One spotted sandpiper was seen. The Rookery contained at least 48 birds.
- September – 3 manatees actively feeding above Down's Dam. A large manatee was seen coming more than a foot out of the water to eat paragrass (*Urochloa mutica*) which was a dense monoculture along the west riverbank. They were also observed eating water paspalum (*Paspalum repens*) and water-lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*). They slowly worked upriver against strong flow about 500 feet in thirty minutes (see map).



- October – 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. 1 least bittern and a clapper rail were seen. An eagle was seen on the nest on Myakkahatchee Tract of Myakka State Forest.
- November – 4 manatees were encountered just after the survey began. The manatees were actively eating (mostly water hyacinth) and interacting with each other while travelling slowly down river. Wading birds were numerous especially in marshes along the entry to the LML down to the area just south of Deep Hole.



- December – 186 alligators were seen during the upper survey. The Rookery was nearly empty with only two birds.
3. Increased observations of manatee activities in MRSP (and above). As noted in the prior reports, many manatee observations have occurred in 2012 through 2014.
 - 2015 has been best year of documented manatee activity in the upper MWSR including several notables:
 - Twice manatees were observed at the C.R.780 bridge replacement site which is about 3 miles upriver from the northern most record in the UML.
 - With help from staff, visitors, and a couple of enthusiastic volunteers the program documented more than 25 observations including several observations of mating and extensive feeding on floating and bank vegetation.
 4. Myakklemore, a juvenile manatee calf, who was stranded above Down's Dam January 2014 has been schedule for a January 29th 2016 release.

5. In June 2015, FWC conducted an aerial survey while at the same time the MWSR Program conducted a survey by boat. At least 304 birds were on the Rookery. It was determined that there were 200 wood stork; of which, there were approximately 84 adults, 110 juveniles, and 6 chicks. (See below graph of estimated seasonal peak nesting by MWSR Program.)

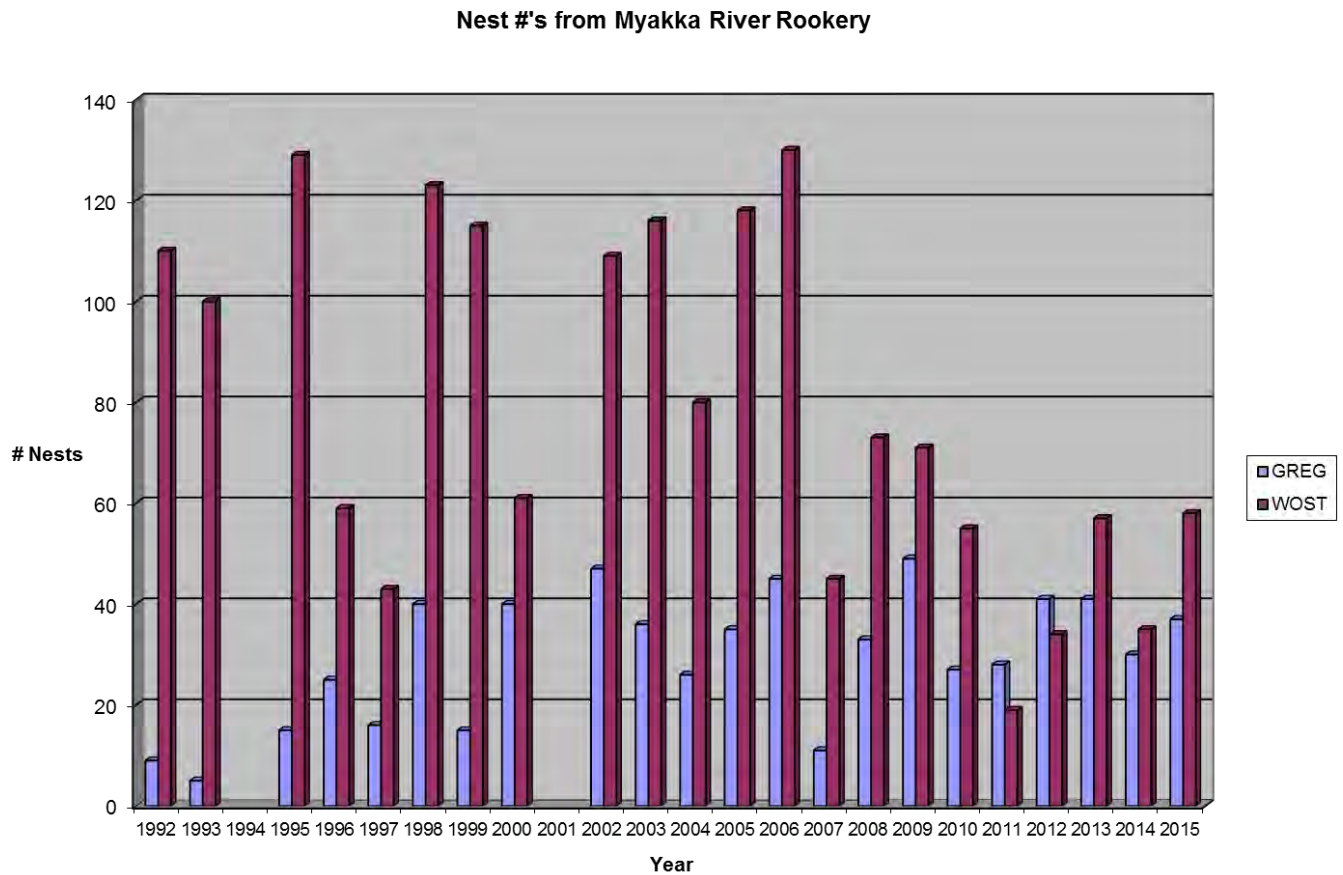


Table 1: Summary of Island Apple Snail Activities

| Date | Observer(s) | Location | Exotic Egg Clusters Present | Exotic Egg Clusters Collected | hours spent * |
|--|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 3/12/2015 | Chris Oliver, Karen Schanzle | south of Pavillion area | 13 | 0 | 0.5 |
| 3/12/2015 | Chris Oliver, Karen Schanzle | just above Down's dam (<i>1st observation in this area</i>) | 3 | 0 | 0.5 |
| 5/11/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | south of Pavillion area | 8 | 4 | 0.5 |
| 6/9/2015 | Chris Oliver, Logan Lantrip | south of Pavillion area | 10 | 5 | 0.5 |
| 6/9/2015 | Chris Oliver, Logan Lantrip | LML (east rim) | 5 | 0 | 0.5 |
| 6/9/2015 | Chris Oliver, Logan Lantrip | south of Deep Hole | 2 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 7/10/2015 | Chris Oliver, Michelle Keirse | south of Pavillion area | 3 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 7/22/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | From C.R. 780 to UML (north area) | 75 | 15 | 1 |
| 8/4/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | UML (most observations were in north marsh inlet area) | 100 | 10 | 0.5 |
| 8/4/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Weir to park bridge | 50 | 20 | 0.5 |
| 8/6/2015 | Chris Oliver | Park bridge to S.R72 | 50 | 30 | 1 |
| 8/7/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Fisherman's loop to park bridge (about half in paragrass, other half on oaks and popash) | 200 | 110 | 1.5 |
| 8/11/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Pavillion to LML | 35 | 20 | 0.5 |
| 8/13/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | LML | 5 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 8/13/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Deep Hole to Dam | 50 | 10 | 0.5 |
| 8/13/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | south of Down's dam (south of MRSP, <i>1st observation in this area</i>) | 10 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 8/20/2015 | Chris Oliver | Below UML | 90 | 60 | 1 |
| 8/22/2015 | Bain Ball | Below UML | 60 | 50 | 1 |
| 8/23/2015 | Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg | Below UML | 50 | 25 | 2 |
| 8/28/2015 | Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg | Park bridge to FPL | 50 | 25 | 1.5 |
| 9/14/2015 | Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg | Pavillion to LML | 120 | 15 | 0.25 |
| 9/14/2015 | Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg | LML to just past Deep Hole | 50 | 0 | 0.1 |
| 9/14/2015 | Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg | Deep Hole to Dam | 50 | 10 | 0.25 |
| 9/14/2015 | Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg | below Down's dam | 20 | 0 | 0.1 |
| 10/14/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Pavillion to LML | 45 | 8 | 0.25 |
| 10/14/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Deep Hole to Dam | 5 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 11/6/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | From C.R. 780 to UML (north area) | 4 | 2 | 0.1 |
| 11/6/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | UML | 5 | 0 | 0.1 |
| 11/6/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Weir to park bridge | 5 | 2 | 0.1 |
| 11/12/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | Park bridge to LML | 3 | 0 | 0.1 |
| 11/12/2015 | Chris Oliver, Bain Ball | just above Down's dam | 2 | 0 | 0.1 |
| 12/21/2015 | Chris Oliver, John Sarzoky | Park bridge to LML | 15 | 8 | 0.25 |
| 12/21/2015 | Chris Oliver | below Down's dam, near Green Trust (far point location south on MWSR) | 2 | 2 | 0.25 |
| TOTALS: | | | 1195 | 431 | 16.7 |
| Note: * time spend is an approximation of time spent searching for, documenting presence, or removing IAS casings or monitoring the native apple snail. No native egg cases were seen in 2015. | | | | | |