

**Myakka Wild and Scenic River Program
2016 Annual Report**



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

1. The Florida Park Service proposal to transfer Myakka River Permitting to the South District FDEP Regulatory Office (SDO) in Ft. Myers was completed.

B. Permitting & Regulatory issues

1. Construction continues at 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. Construction is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2017.
2. A permit (MR112514) was issued to Sarasota County on December 22nd 2014 for several improvements at Snook Haven Park. As of December 2016, the concession dock area and canoe launch area were nearing completion.
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. An application for a pilot rowing program may be requested (to the SDO) in early 2017.
4. The FPS District IV attempted to acquire funding to conduct a feasibility study related to restoration of the Upper Myakka Lake (UML) Bypass/Weir Area as directed in the adopted MWSR Management Plan, under Action 2.4. (During the first rains in May the UML Bypass area was washed out and discussions began about replacement, restoration, and permitting options.) In October an application was submitted to request funding through the SWFWMD Cooperative Funding Initiative (CFI) to conduct modeling in an effort to identifying the best solution to this long-standing issue. In December, the CFI application was withdrawn. FPS and SWFWMD staff are still discussing options for the Bypass/Weir Area; as well as, Down's Dam for potential improvement projects.

C. Incidents

1. Blatant non-compliance with posted MWSR and manatee speed limits remains a serious issue with paddlers, fisherman, and tour 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 including listed species remains an issue impacting wild and scenic values on private and public conservation properties.
3. New signage was posted in common use areas within MRSP to advise patrons of the presence of alligators as-well-as prohibitions on harassing or feeding alligators. However, during peak use periods (i.e., weekend, holidays) there is a significant level of non-compliance.

D. Nuisance and Exotic Plants and Animals

1. Island apple snail (IAS), *Pomacea maculata*, egg masses began showing up on the UML in September 2011. In August 2013 one egg mass from the IAS was observed south of the S.R. 72 Bridge which appears to be the first report in this section. Increasing numbers of IAS masses began appearing in the river section below the Lower Myakka Lake (LML) in 2015. In late 2015 the first observation of egg casings occurred below Downs' Dam.
 - In 2016, the IAS range extended down river to Border Road. (Portions below Border Road become more tidally influenced and the long-term establishment of the IAS is unlikely past this point.)
 - MRSP staff and the MWSR Program use volunteers each spring through the summer to locate and remove these snails and egg masses.
 - In 2016 the MWSR Program removed more than 1,300 egg masses. (See Table 1: Summary of Apple Snail Activities).
 - For second consecutive year, no native apple snail eggs were seen during surveys.
2. The majority of Big Flats Marsh, south of UML, was aerial treated for paragrass (*Urochloa mutica*) that formed a dense monoculture, through FWC's Aquatic Habitat Restoration/Enhancement (AHRE) Program.
3. Continued efforts are being made to manage invasive plants in the 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.

E. Wildlife and Plant Monitoring

1. River Inspection data from 1990 through 2016 has been entered into the MWSR Wildlife Database.
2. A second endangered Giant Air Plant (GAP), *Tillandsia utriculata*, survey was conducted with Mike Owen, Fakahatchee Strand Park Biologist. This was an attempt to update and expand 2014 GAP survey data. During the 2016 survey the number and condition of GAPs were record that could be visually observed within 25 feet of each side of the MWSR from the Park Bridge in MRSP to the U.S.41 Bridge in North Port. We noted 1,068 viable GAP with 37 stressed or dead GAP.
3. Throughout the year, several interesting wildlife sightings took place during regular monthly surveys. A sampling of these sightings includes:
 - During the January survey, 16 alligators were seen at Deep Hole with an additional 59 alligators in the remaining portions of the survey. Also observed were:
 - 1 brown water snake (*Nerodia taxispilota*),
 - 1 Florida water snake (*Nerodia fasciata pictiventris*),

- 12 red-shouldered hawk,
- 3 osprey,
- 2 bald eagle,
- 1 short-tailed hawk,
- 1 northern harrier, and
- 1 American bittern.



- During the February survey, it was noted that the Myakka Rookery regained numbers with at least 100 birds including 66 wood stork. Several wood storks were observed flying in with nest material. Also, two separate observations of manatee occurred. A group of at least 3, that include a calf, were observed south of Tarpon Point and headed away from Warm Mineral Springs (WMS) downriver. The second brief observation was made of a manatee near the outlet of Big Slough which appeared to be headed toward the WMS area.
- On the March 7th survey of the area south of U.S. 41 to the County line was surveyed with assistance from FWC Imperiled Species staff, Amy Clifton and Brendan O'Connor. The Myakka Rookery continued to gain numbers with at least 183 birds including 123 wood stork, 56 great egret, 3 anhinga and a single white ibis.
- In April, observations were recorded of a second area on a mangrove island 0.33 miles north of the Myakka Rookery and has become active over the last two months. The southern tip of this island now has several stork nests.
- During the May survey, 30 alligators were seen at Deep Hole, with 231 alligators in the remaining portions of the survey to Border Road. Other observations during the survey included:
 - 5 osprey,

- 2 bald eagle,
 - 1 northern harrier,
 - 1 swallow-tailed kite,
 - 17 black-necked stilt,
 - 17 roseate spoonbill and,
 - a single yellow-billed cuckoo.
- The July trip showed the Myakka Rookery in the normal seasonal decline (from May's nesting peak). Now hosting only 101 birds, of which, most were immature birds.
- During the August survey, 4 manatee were seen just above the LML.

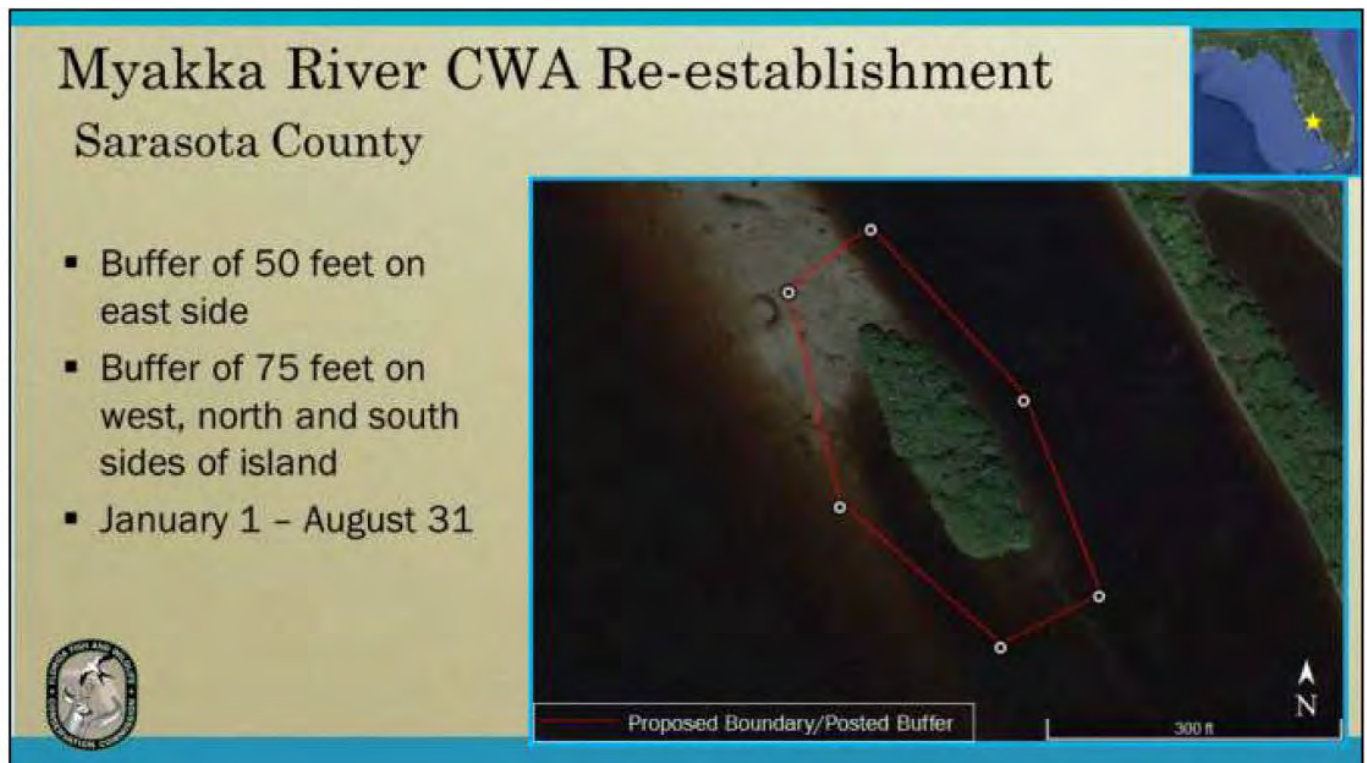


- During the September survey, 4 manatee were observed during the survey (2 near S.R.72 and 2 immediately east of Deep Hole).
- During the November survey, 148 alligators were seen at Deep Hole with another 122 alligators in the remaining sections of the survey to Border Road. Seven water snakes were seen during the trip including; 2 Florida green water snakes, 2 brown water snakes, and 3 Florida water snakes.

4. For the fifth consecutive season, there has been an increase in documented manatee sightings above the tidal Myakka River where manatees are using areas within MRSP and upriver into Manatee County.
 - With help from staff, visitors, and a couple of enthusiastic volunteers from the MWSR Program there were 28 recorded observations on 20 separate days between mid-June to the end of September. Manatees appear to be present a minimum of 106 days in MRSP aquatic habitats. Based on previous year's data and water level data manatees had the potential to utilize MRSP for more than 5 months (156 days).
 - For the second consecutive year manatee were observed above MRSP near the C.R.780 Bridge. On July 28th, 5 Manatees were seen. A group of 3 manatees south of C.R.780 and second group of 2 in middle of the UML.



5. The Myakka Rookery was designated as a Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) in 1987. The FWC Commissioners met in November 2016 and approved the widened buffer zone around the CWA. The new protection area is 75 feet on the north, west and south sides and 50 feet on the east side. The commission took this action to reduce the potential impacts to nesting birds from any disturbance from recreational activities. The protected season is January 1 through August 31, during which most of the nesting season occurs. Until permitted regulatory signage is installed around the CWA to create the buffer zone, no change will occur in boat regulations. MWSR staff plan to work with FWC and Sarasota County toward acquiring the necessary permits and install these signs. (See map below.)



As in previous years, the CWA (Myakka Rookery) was monitored during monthly wildlife surveys. (See graph of estimated nesting by MWSR Program on the following page.)

Nest #'s from Myakka River Rookery

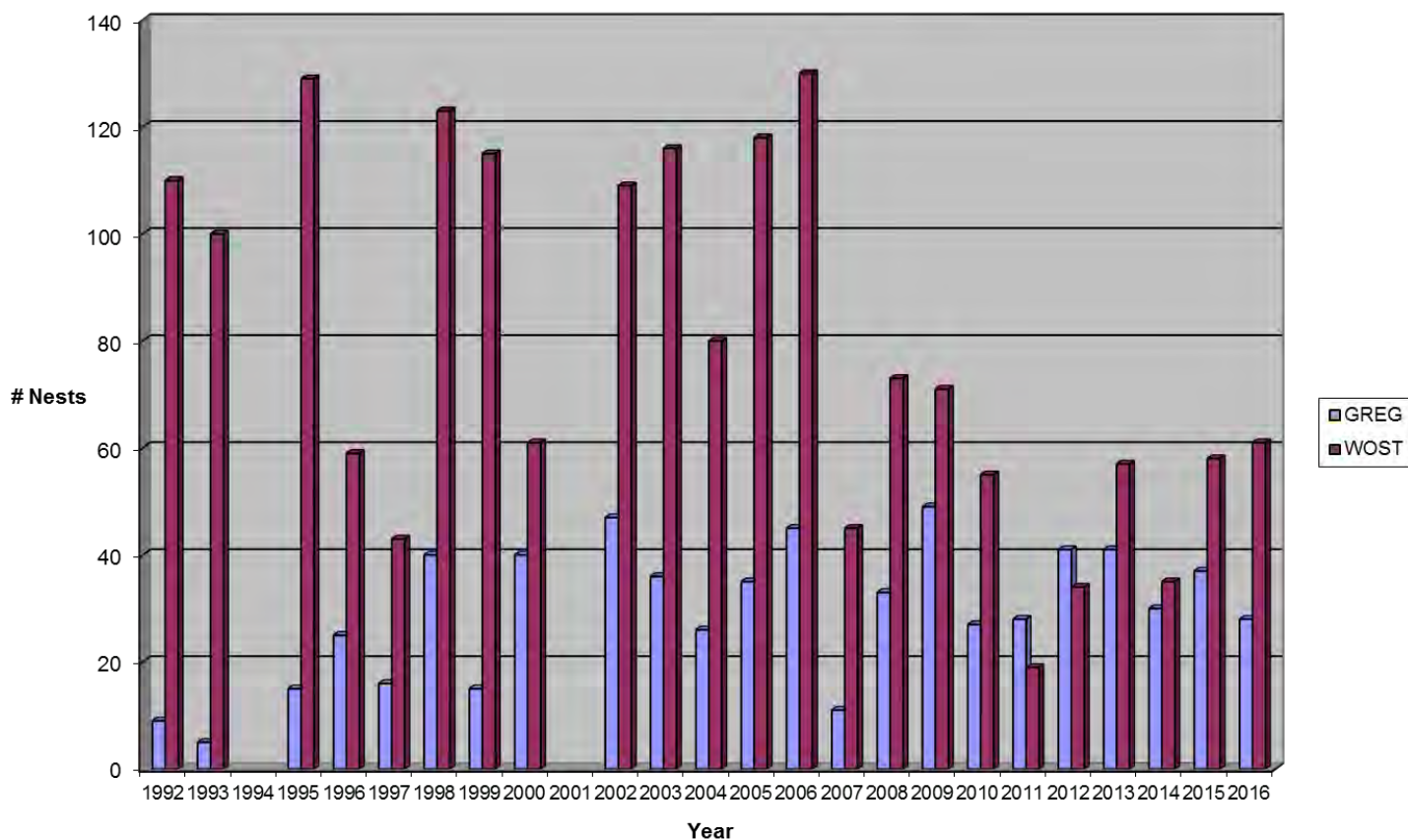


Table 1: Summary of Island Apple Snail Activities

Date	Observer(s)	Location	Exotic Egg Clusters Present	Exotic Egg Clusters Removed	hours spent*
3/31/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	CR780 to UML	3	0	0.125
4/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Deep Hole to (Down's) Dam	1	1	0.125
4/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	52	48	1
5/11/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Pavilion area to LML	1	1	0.125
5/11/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	16	10	0.25
5/18/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	CR780 to UML	80	10	0.25
5/18/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Weir to park bridge	10	0	0.125
6/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Park Bridge to Pavilion area	3	2	0.125
6/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Pavilion area to LML	6	5	0.125
6/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Deep Hole to (Down's) Dam	3	2	0.125
6/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	1	1	0.125
7/8/2016	Bain Ball	MRSP Powerline area	200	100	1.25
7/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Park Bridge to Pavilion area	20	10	0.25
7/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Pavilion area to LML	29	12	0.25
7/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Deep Hole to Down's Dam	30	10	0.25
7/15/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	12	7	0.25
7/28/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	CR780 to UML	150	50	0.5
7/28/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	UML to UML weir	50	25	0.5
8/2/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball, Kris Fehlberg	UML weir south to West Marsh area (aerially treated in fall)	1000	280	2
8/2/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball, Kris Fehlberg	FPL area down to park bridge	180	80	1
9/13/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball, Kris Fehlberg	Park bridge to Pavilion area	50	10	0.125
9/13/2016		Pavilion area to LML	100	20	0.125
9/13/2016		LML to Deep Hole	500	25	0.5
9/13/2016		Deep Hole to Down's Dam	500	0	0.125
9/13/2016		Chris Oliver, Bain Ball, Kris Fehlberg	south of Down's Dam	100	0
9/27/2016	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball, Kris Fehlberg	UML weir south to Big Flats (MRSP IAS workday with 10+ volunteers. These numbers only MWSR vol. group)	1000	600	4
9/20/2016	Chris Oliver	Park Bridge south	20	20	0.5
10/11/2016	Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg, Wayne Douchkoff and Bain Ball.	Pavilion area to LML	50	20	0.5
10/11/2016		Deep Hole to Down's Dam	15	2	0.125
10/11/2016		south of Down's Dam	10	5	0.125
TOTALS:			4192	1356	15