

## **Myakka Wild and Scenic River Program 2017 Annual Report**



**A. Permitting & Regulatory issues**

1. Construction continues at the bridge replacement at C.R. 780. MRP030314 was issued to Sarasota County on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014 for the replacement of the bridge over the Myakka River. Physical construction was completed in late 2017 and restoration of impacted areas is currently underway.
2. Permit MR112514 was issued to Sarasota County on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 for several improvements at Snook Haven Park. Phase one included the concession dock area and canoe launch area and were completed in early 2017. Phase two, started in late 2017 with the revamping on the Decker Property boat ramp and associated parking. Site meeting for phase two activities will happen in early January.
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.
4. The FPS District IV continues to seek funding to conduct a feasibility study related to restoration of the Upper Myakka Lake (UML) Weir/Bypass Area as directed in the adopted MWSR Management Plan, under Action 2.4. In October 2017 an application was submitted to request funding through the SWFWMD Cooperative Funding Initiative (CFI) to conduct modeling to identifying the best solution to this long-standing issue. FPS and SWFWMD, and FWC's Aquatic Habitat Restoration/Enhancement (AHRE) Program continue to explore options for the Weir/Bypass Area; as well as, Park Drive culverts, and Down's Dam for potential improvement projects.

**B. Incidents**

1. Blatant non-compliance with posted MWSR and manatee speed limits remains a serious issue with residents, paddlers, fisherman, and tour operators reporting observations to this office and Law Enforcement (LE). All 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.

**C. 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 2017 the MWSR Program removed 345 egg masses. (See Table 1: Summary of Apple Snail Activities).
  - The prescribed fire in Big Flats Marsh (BFM) notably may have been the largest (indirect) control event for this problematic species. In addition to a large number of egg masses being destroyed, it is estimated that several thousand adult snails were baked by the fire. For the next couple of days all manner of wildlife feasted on the cooked snails.
  - For the third consecutive year, no native apple snail eggs were seen during surveys.
- 2. The second area of BFM was aerial treated with herbicides in November 2016 for paragrass (*Urochloa mutica*) that formed a dense monoculture, through FWC's AHRE Program. (See brown area in photo below.)



Later, that area was burned by MRSP Staff on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.



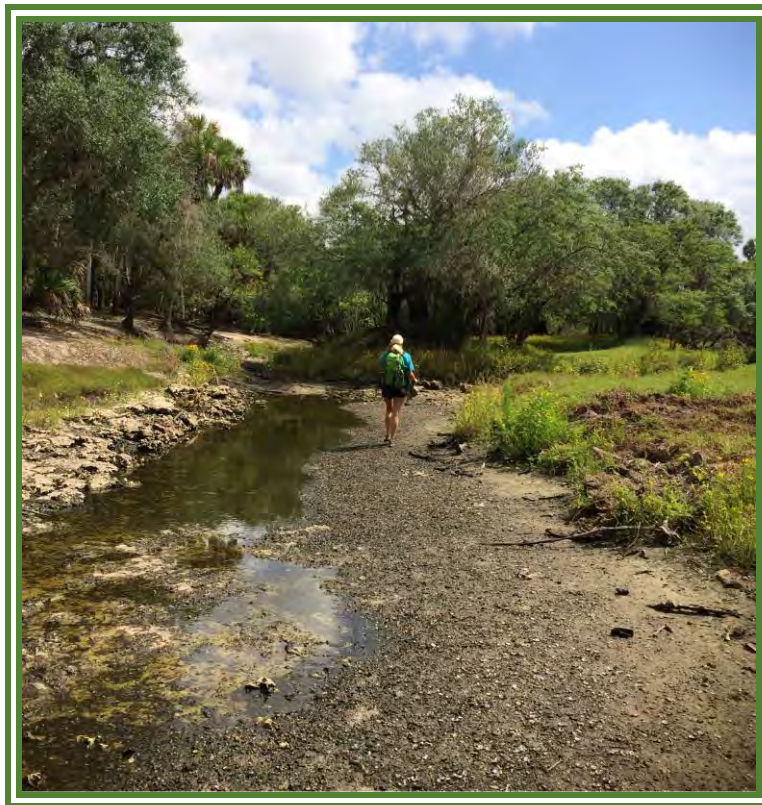
3. Continued efforts are being made to manage invasive plants in the natural communities along the MWSR. The top priority remains the monitoring and removal of infestations of cogongrass, paragrass, West Indian marsh grass and Old World climbing fern.

**D. Wildlife and Plant Monitoring**

1. River Inspection data from 1990 through 2017 has been entered into the MWSR Wildlife Database.
2. Throughout the year, several interesting wildlife sightings took place during regular monthly surveys. A sampling of these sightings includes:
  - During the January survey, 451 alligators were observed which included with 111 alligators of that total seen at Deep Hole. Three brown water snakes and one Florida green water snake were seen.



- During the February survey, in the lower portion toward the County line two manatee observations occurred. The Critical Wildlife Area (CWA), also known as the Myakka Rookery, was active with multiple species showing courtship behavior and bringing in nest materials. There were at least 214 birds present on the island. This included 160 wood stork, 32 great egret, 18 anhinga and 4 great blue heron. The mangrove island 0.33 miles north of the CWA, has also increased in nesting activity. This included 32 wood stork on nests.
- In April the survey counted 380 alligators, 5 osprey, 5 bald eagle, 2 swallow-tailed kite, 50 long-billed dowitcher, 12 black-necked stilt, 7 avocet, 3 spotted sandpiper, a Caspian tern, a black skimmer, and 2 otters in the portion above Border Road.
- During the May survey period, USGS gage above the park indicated lower than 1 foot and near zero flow for an extended period. To complete the non-tidal portions much of the area within MRSP to the Rocky Ford area was walked. On the portion from S.R. 72 to Down's Dam 224 alligators, 2 eagles, 125 American white pelican, and 24 wood stork were observed. On the portion down to Laurel Road, another 21 alligators and 2 river otters were seen.



- During the July trip observations included one manatee, south of the Rocky Ford area.

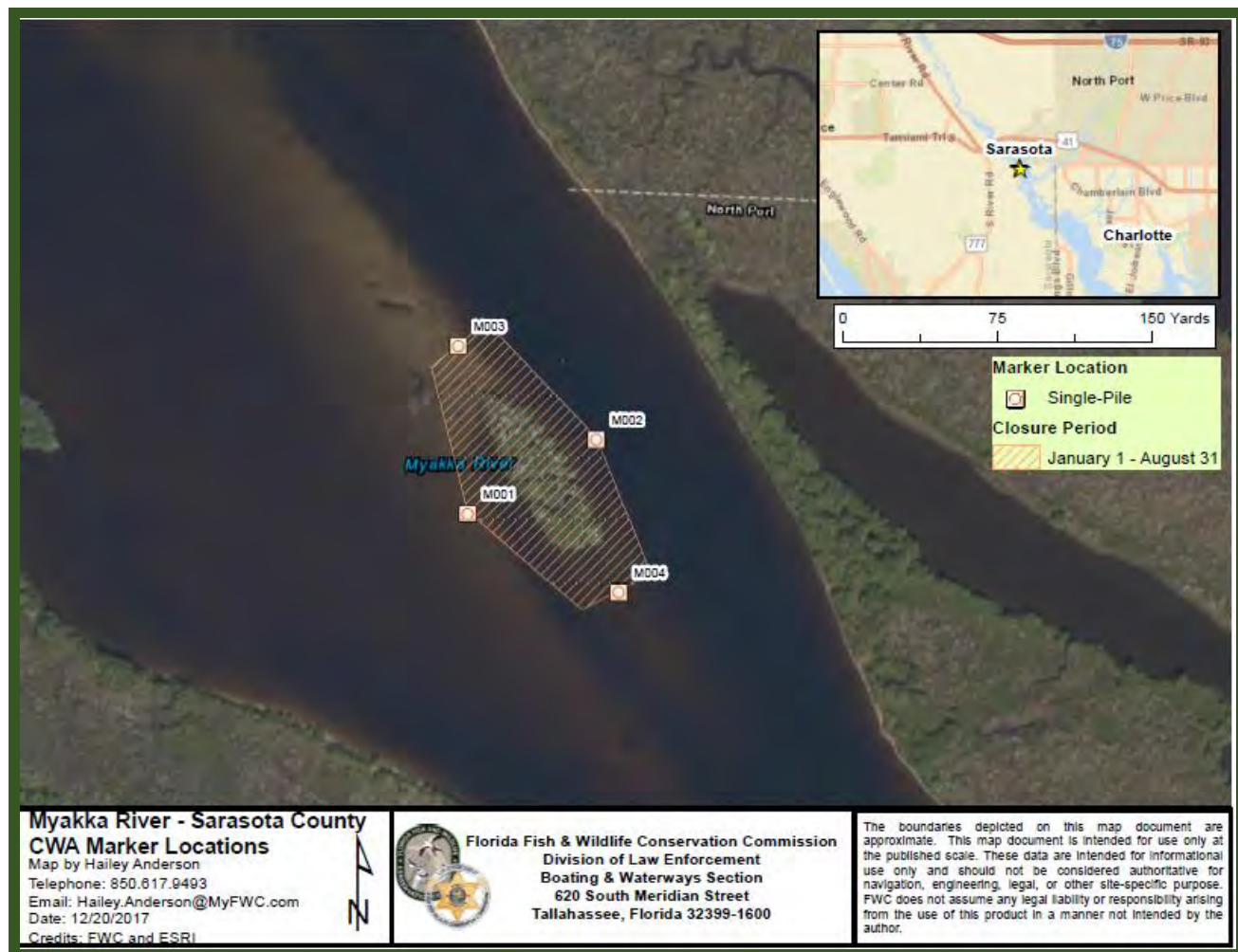
- During the August 30<sup>th</sup> survey from C.R. 780 down to the UML three manatee were observed (0.7 miles south of C.R. 780).



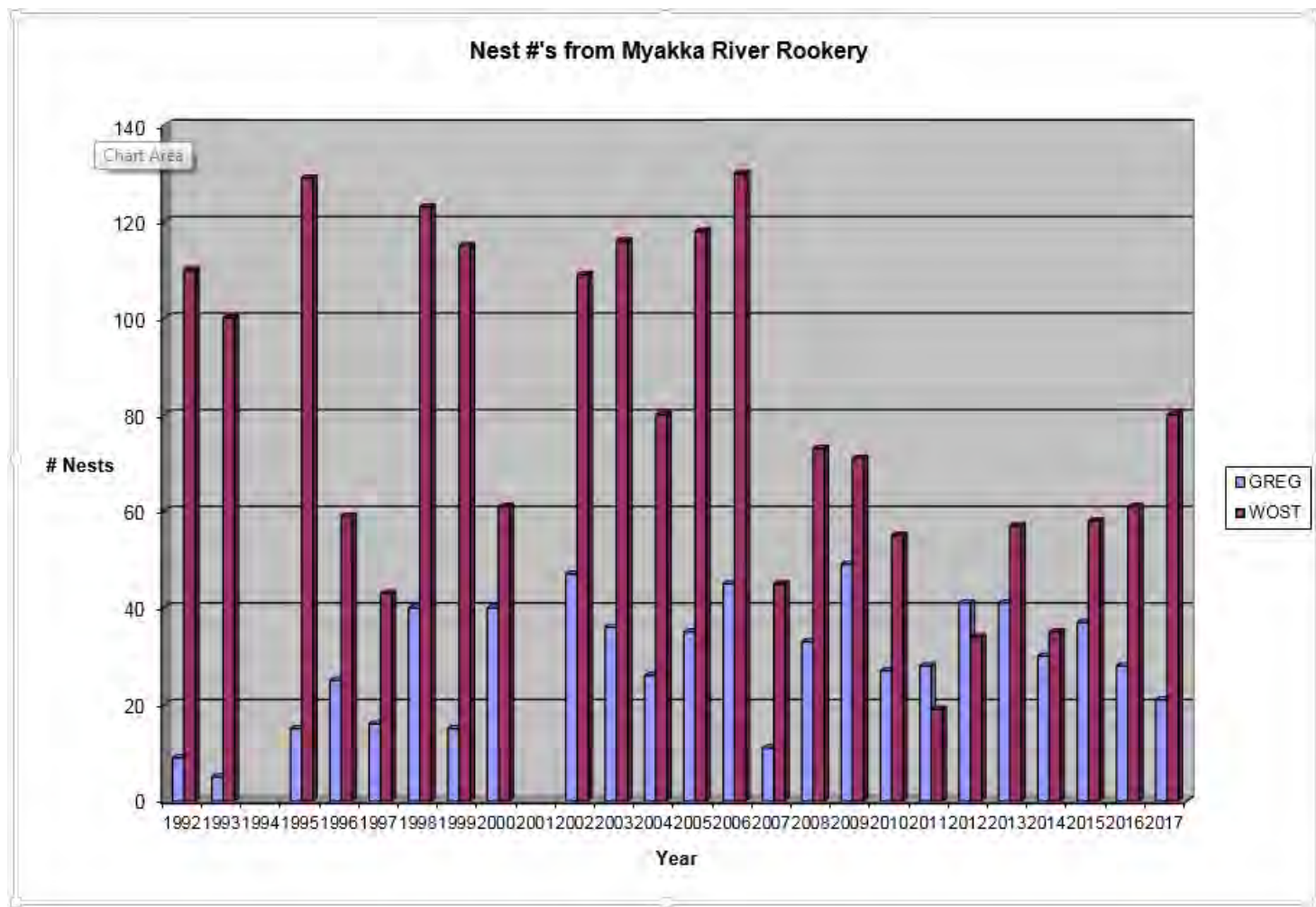
- In October one river otter was seen in the Rocky Ford area.
- Seven snakes were seen in the November, all in the southern portion of MRSP down to Laurel Road. (3 Florida water snakes, 3 brown water snakes, and a Florida green water snake.)



3. In late January and February, bat monitoring events occurred at three locations within MRSP. This was primarily an attempt to assist a FWC program to locate the bonneted bat (*Eumops floridanus*). While no bonneted bat calls were captured, other species were identified. The current MRSP Unit Management Plan (2004) animal list only includes the Brazilian free-tailed bat. The station on the Lower Myakka Lake in the wilderness preserve had the highest counts. Five total species were recorded and identified by experts. They were Brazilian free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis*), tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*), Seminole bat (*Lasiurus seminolus*), and northern yellow bat (*Lasiurus intermedius*).
4. For the sixth consecutive season, numerous documented Florida manatee sightings above the tidal Myakka River indicate that manatees are using areas within MRSP and upriver into Manatee County for many months when water levels and temperature are favorable. Observations suggest that manatees utilize a large area that extends at least 15 miles above the areas those are currently labelled as Manatee Habitat and considered under the Sarasota County Manatee Protection Plan (2011).
  - With help from staff, visitors, and volunteers, the MWSR Program documented at least 18 recorded observations from June to the end of September. Manatees appear to be present a minimum of 104 days in MRSP aquatic habitats. Based on previous data and water level data manatees had the potential to utilize MRSP for more than 4 months.
  - For the third consecutive year manatees were observed above MRSP near the C.R.780 Bridge. In late August, a group of 3 manatees was observed just south of C.R.780.
5. The Myakka Rookery was designated as a Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) in 1987. The FWC Commissioners met in November 2016 and approved a 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. (Signage was installed in late January 2018. See map on the following page.)



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.)



**Table 1: Summary of Island Apple Snail Activities**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Observer(s)</b>	<b>Location (Upper Lake, River north of Park Bridge, Lower Lake) As much information as possible.</b>	<b>Number of Exotic Snail Egg Clusters Present</b>	<b>Number of Exotic Snail Egg Clusters Removed</b>	<b>hours spent (total* hours)</b>
3/8/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Pavilion area to LML	2	2	0.125
3/8/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	1	0	0.125
3/28/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	CR780 to UML	5	3	0.25
3/8/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	1	0	0.125
4/3/2017	Chris Oliver	Big Flats Marsh (BFM)	40	30	0.5
4/18/2017	Chris Oliver	Big Flats Marsh (BFM)	20	20	0.35
4/25/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Clay Gully are	10	5	0.225
April	Bain Ball	UML to S.R.72		100	1
5/2/2017	Chris Oliver	Deer Prairie Slough	15	7	0.125
5/10/2017	Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg, Lee Amos	Dam to Border Road	8	6	0.25
5/26/2017	Chris Oliver	Big Flats Marsh (BFM)	15	15	0.25
May	Bain Ball	UML to S.R.72		50	0.675
6/16/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	CR780 to UML	38	18	0.5
6/16/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Weir to park bridge	10	2	0.125
6/17/2017	Chris Oliver, Kris Fehlberg, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	25	12	0.25
7/13/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Weir to park bridge	2000	0	0.5
7/21/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball, Jenny Jones	Park Bridge to Pavilion	300	0	0.25
8/17/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Park Bridge to Pavilion	20	0	0.125
8/17/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Pavilion area to LML	150	40	0.25
8/17/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Deep Hole to (Down's) Dam	25	5	0.125
8/17/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	10	0	0.125
8/30/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	CR780 to UML	2	2	0.125
8/30/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Weir to Park Bridge	10	7	0.125
9/20/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Pavilion area to LML	50	16	0.25
9/20/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Deep Hole to (Down's) Dam	10	5	0.125
9/20/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Dam to Border Road	5	0	0.125
11/1/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	CR780 to UML	5	0	0.125
11/1/2017	Chris Oliver, Bain Ball	Weir to park bridge	8	0	0.125
<b>TOTALS:</b>			<b>2785</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>7.25</b>