

Mark your calendars...

- May 18-20 Wild Amelia Nature Festival—Amelia Island—see <http://www.wildamelia.com/> for details
- May 25-28, 2007 Florida Folk Festival, Stephen Foster State Park, White Springs, FL. See www.floridastateparks.org/folkfest/
- June 16—A Day with Nature—Anastasia State park, 9 am—2 pm. Call 904-461-2033 for information.
- More on back page!

Summer's just around the corner!

The kids are anticipating the end of school, and summer camp providers are gearing up for a busy couple of months! I'll be offering summer camps in Fernandina Beach and at the Whitney Lab this year—check out page 2 of this newsletter for dates and contact information. I'll be heading to Grand Rapids, MI for the National Association of County Agriculture Agents conference, then to Portland, ME for the National Marine Educators' annual conference in July. Before we know it, it'll be fall and we'll be wondering where the year has gone!

M. P. McGuire

Maia McGuire, PhD
Marine Extension Agent



A "sand turtle" found at Fort Matanzas during March's Exploring our Environment" class

What's happening with manatees?

'What's going to happen to the manatees?' is a question that many people are asking following recent announcements by both the state of Florida and the US Fish and Wildlife Service about potential changes in the classification of manatees as an endangered species. In June, 2006, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) decided that manatee populations in Florida better fit the state's description of a "threatened" species, rather than an "endangered" species. In April 2007, biologists from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) recommended that the federal listing status of the West Indian manatee also be changed from endangered to threatened. These proposed downlistings have received some criticism from the public, however neither change will result in a decrease in protection for the marine mammal.



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Florida Master Naturalist Program

The Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP) is an adult education extension program developed by the University of Florida (UF) and provided by participating organizations. FMNP training will benefit persons interested in learning more about Florida's environment, seeking educational contact hours, or wishing to increase their knowledge for use in education programs as volunteers, employees, and ecotourism guides.



The FMNP includes courses in 3 subject areas – Freshwater Wetlands, Coastal Systems, and Upland Habitats. Students receive 40 educational contact hours including classroom learning, field trips, and practical experience in interpretation. Cost per course is \$200. Students receive detailed course manuals and, upon completion, UF certificates, patches, and pins denoting their area of expertise (e.g., Wetlands Naturalist) and are registered in the UF database of Florida Master Naturalists.

For residents of Northeast Florida, classes are offered in Clay, Duval, St Johns, Flagler and Volusia Counties. The scheduling of each class varies—some are offered on weekends, others during the week. To find out when classes are scheduled, check out the Master Naturalist website at <http://www.masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

Summer camps!

I will be teaching several day camps this year:

- Marine Camp for girl scouts will be offered June 11-15 from 9-noon each day at the University of Florida's Whitney Laboratory. This camp is open to girl scouts aged 8-13 and costs \$25 for the week. Register by contacting Jessica Mysterly at 904-461-4014 or Jessica@whitney.ufl.edu.
- Two days of the 4-H Environmental Camp in Fernandina Beach (10 am—3 pm June 18-22) will focus on marine science topics. Sign up for this camp by contacting Amanda Thien in the Nassau County Extension Office at 904-879-1019 or athien@ufl.edu
- Marine Science Camp for youth ages 8-13 will be held at the University of Florida's Whitney Laboratory the week of August 6-10 from 9 am—noon each day. Cost for the week is \$25. To sign up for this camp, contact Melissa in the St Johns County 4-H office at 904-209-0430. Youth enrolled in 4-H can register now; if space is available after May 25, non 4-H members will be able to register at that time.

Additionally, Marineland's Dolphin Conservation Center is offering summer programs for youth ages 7-12. The *Seaside Eco-Adventures* (SEA) Camp will run Monday – Thursday, 8:30am – 3pm. A new camp session begins each Monday from May 28 – July 30, 2007. The program promises a fun-filled week of science, activities, exploration, beach combing and of course...DOLPHINS! The camp costs \$250 and includes drinks, snacks, activities (including dolphin encounters) and t-shirts. To register or for more information, see www.marineland.net.

Manatees (cont.)

In both cases, agency biologists conducted a five-year review of the West Indian manatee populations to determine whether the populations better fit the definition of an endangered or a threatened species. Both agencies used biological models to predict future population declines of the manatee. However, both agencies use slightly different criteria for determining whether a species should be listed as threatened or endangered. To view the state's rule 68A-1.004 (definitions), visit <http://myfwc.com/imperiledspecies>. To view Federal definitions, see <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa.html>. Both agree that an endangered species is one that is at risk of becoming extinct, while a threatened species is one that is in danger of becoming endangered. Criteria used include estimated rate of population decline over time, predicted changes in geographic range, and population size.

Manatees are considered "one of the most researched and well studied of all marine mammals," according to the FWC's manatee management plan. Population data from the past 18 years were used by the FWS in conducting their five-year review. It is the ultimate goal of both agencies to see the manatee populations in Florida and the Caribbean increase to levels high enough that manatees can be removed completely from the endangered species list. However, neither agency has officially changed the status of manatees yet—the West Indian manatee is still an endangered species on both the state and federal lists.

What will happen next? The state (FWC) is working on developing a manatee management plan, which is currently (April 2007) in its second draft form, and can be viewed at <http://www.myfwc.com/manatee>. During the public comment period on the first draft (late 2006), over 900 comments were submitted. The second draft of the plan incorporates changes suggested by many of these comments. Once the manatee management plan is approved by the FWC Commission, the state will be able to reclassify manatees as threatened. The plan contains six main objectives aimed at minimizing manatee mortalities and maintaining manatee habitats. These include managing human-caused threats, including watercraft, water-control structures and entanglement as well as implementing sound methods of estimating manatee population size. Currently, manatee populations statewide are estimated using aerial surveys, which rely on clear water and clear skies in the areas being surveyed. On days when the water is turbid, or when there are high densities of manatees at a single location, accurate counts are not possible.

The FWS identified the two top threats to West Indian manatees as potential loss of warm water habitat and collisions with boats. One of the state's objectives is to work with electric utilities to prevent significant manatee mortality resulting from changes in power plant operation (resulting in cessation of warm water discharges during winter months). Manatees have learned to come to power plant discharge areas in the winter to find warm water. If/when the discharges from traditional power plants cease, hundreds of manatees could potentially become cold-shocked and need to be rescued or risk death. Red tide was listed as the third greatest threat; it is primarily a concern in southwest Florida. Before the FWS can reclassify manatees as threatened, a separate rulemaking process will have to occur, and public review and comment will be allowed at that time. Currently, there is no planned timeline for this reclassification rulemaking process. Interested persons can find the most current information at <http://www.fws.gov/northflorida>.

Current rules that are in place to help protect manatees will stay in place, even if/when manatees are reclassified as threatened. These rules include boating speed and no-wake zones and prohibitions on interacting with manatees (e.g. feeding, offering water to and petting these animals in the wild). The state and federal agencies have similar goals and will work together as much as possible in implementing manatee management plans.



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More “Mark your calendars”

- May 28-Aug 3—Summer camp program at Marineland’s Dolphin Conservation Center. See page 2.
- June 11-15—Marine camp for girl scouts at Whitney Lab. See page 2.
- June 18-22—Environmental camp in Fernandina Beach. See page 2.
- July 23-26—National Marine Educators Association annual conference. See <http://gommea.org/downeast2007/> for more information. Early registration deadline is May 30
- August 2—Duval Environmental Educators Network meeting; 3 pm at MOSH. Contact Andy (aeto1@ufl.edu for information).
- August 6-10—Marine science camp at Whitney Lab. See page 2.
- October 8-12—Exploring our Environment—from the river to the ocean. Adult “day camp” based at the GTMNERR Marineland classroom. Contact Maia for more information (904-209-0430 or mpmcg@ufl.edu).

Please check the calendars at <http://calendar.ifas.ufl.edu> and www.enviroedjax.org for other environmental education programs around the state.

Aqua Notes is provided as one of the many services relating to educational programs offered by the University of Florida/IFAS cooperative extension service. This publication is available on the Web at <http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu> or in an alternate format on special request. In compliance with ADA requirements, participants with special needs will be reasonably accommodated with 5 days advance notice by contacting the St. Johns County Extension Service at 904-209-0430. Those needing telecommunications assistance, please call the Florida Relay Service (TDD) at 1-800-955-8771. The use of websites or product names in this publication is not a guarantee, warranty or endorsement of the sites/products named and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For more information about this document, contact Maia McGuire at the St. Johns County Extension Service at 904-209-0430.