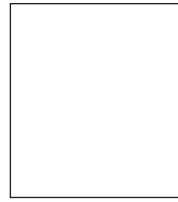




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NATURE MATTERS

THE FISH & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA

The Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida is a nonprofit organization that seeks to protect our outstanding animals and plants and the lands and waters they need to survive.

A SOMEWHAT BETTER YEAR FOR MANATEES



Andrew Walker,
President & CEO

It's been brighter for manatees so far this year. Two winters ago, severe seagrass loss in the Indian River Lagoon caused widespread starvation among the several thousand manatees that winter in the 150-mile-long estuary. Hundreds died, prompting an emergency feeding effort this past winter. By the time manatees began leaving the Lagoon at the end of March, our Foundation had bought 200,000 pounds of romaine lettuce—12.6 million calories worth—that state wildlife biologists fed manatees near the Cape Canaveral Clean Energy Center. More than 1,300 people in 49 states and 5 countries contributed to the lettuce fundraising effort, and we thank you all.

Through September 9th, 689 manatees have died this year statewide versus 942 to this date in 2021. Although significantly lower than last year, we're still above the normal range of 380 to 500 manatee deaths for this point in the year. While difficult to prove, biologists with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) believe the supplemental feeding saved the lives of many manatees. As many as 830 manatees were being fed daily at the height of winter.

FWC and its private partners have also expanded their capacity to rescue and rehabilitate injured or malnourished manatees. In July we made \$35,000 gifts to ZooTampa at Lowry Park and the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens to support their manatee rehab work, thanks to a \$103,616 gift from donors to Greater Good Charities, based in Seattle, Washington. Meanwhile, Florida Power & Light and the NextEra Energy Foundation contributed \$125,000 to our Foundation for a new climate-controlled FWC manatee rescue truck. Ferman Automotive Group of Tampa, thanks to Foundation Board member Preston Farrior, wrapped the truck *pro bono* with educational signage just days before its first middle-of-the-night rescue.

Most donations, however, have been for the restoration of aquatic vegetation on which manatees and many other coastal creatures depend. Karen and Rob Hale made a \$1 million gift via their **Fox Rock Foundation** for restoration after reading about the manatees' plight. The Hales also made a \$1 million gift to the Save-the-Manatee Club.

"Our family feels called to manatee conservation not only because manatees are intelligent, curious creatures, but also because of the critical role they play in aquatic ecosystems," said Karen Hale.



Manatees

"We were proud to partner with both of these incredible organizations that are working tirelessly to protect manatees and improve the health of our oceans and other waterways," she said.

ONE PLANT AT A TIME

We've begun investing these generous gifts in 10 eel and seagrass restoration sites within the Lagoon where the water quality is high, in partnership with FWC, the St. Johns River Water Management District, and seagrass restoration companies Sea & Shoreline and Aquatech. Sixty thousand eelgrass seedlings were planted this spring in the Loxahatchee River, which feeds into the Lagoon. Plants are protected initially by cages to allow them to take root and send out runners; one plant can spread up to seven feet in all directions in one year. Seagrasses support the entire ecosystem. "Two-and-a-half acres of seagrass can support as many as 100,000 fish and 100 million invertebrates, in addition to providing manatees with a crucial food source," said Foundation Board Chair Carlos Alfonso.

In addition to the Hales, funding has come from Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund, the Coastal Conservation Association, the Coypu Foundation, the Arthur L. & Elaine V. Johnson Foundation, Mr. Daniel Maltz, Garner and Connie Koons, Informa Markets, the Nancy P. and Richard K. Robbins Foundation, and many others.

Continued on pg. 2

STAND WITH THE WILD



Support Florida Conservation. Buy your plate today at wildlifefl.org.



A Somewhat Better Year for Manatees continued

WHAT'S NEXT?

At the time of this writing, a decision has not been made about feeding manatees in the Indian River Lagoon again this winter. One is expected soon. If FWC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) move forward with another supplemental feeding, we hope to help more manatees sooner, which would require substantially more than the 200,000 pounds of lettuce we purchased last year. We have begun talking with lettuce growers about locking in the best possible prices should the project be greenlit.

Habitat restoration will continue, with October through February being the ideal eel—and seagrass—planting season. We're also exploring two ways—one technological, the other economic—of taking restoration to a much greater scale. We hope to say more about those in early 2023.

But in the meantime, If you're out and about, there's one more way to support manatees: **World of Beer Bar & Kitchen**, thanks to Foundation Board member Paul Avery, has made beer drinking for manatee conservation a reality. One dollar from every purchase of their Secret Llama Oh The Hu-Manatee! Imperial Hazy IPA at select locations will be donated to our Foundation to help us plant seagrass. We can personally attest that it's delicious. As always, thank you for everything you do for us and conservation.

Andrew Walker,
President & CEO

BRAND NEW CORAL BABIES

The 2,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art Florida Coral Rescue Center (FCRC) in Orlando is the largest holder of rescued Florida corals in the world. It is now also the proud home to new rough cactus, grooved brain, and spiny flower corals. Their reproduction, known as larval release, happened in the spring and again in late summer. The rough cactus coral babies were the first documented occurrence of this threatened species propagating in human care.

Rough cactus corals are brooders, which means the embryos fertilize within the coral colony and are released as swimming larvae. Within a few days after release from the parent colony, the larvae settle down onto hard surfaces like the small tiles FCRC aquarists placed near them in their nursery pools, where they attached and began growing into corals. 20 are currently growing in the facility, which is providing caretakers with valuable lessons for future spawnings. Sadly no grooved brain corals settled and began growing, but the spiny flower corals have already begun to settle and grow.

Our Foundation, Disney Conservation, and the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) provide funding, while SeaWorld manages FCRC, its team of aquarists providing care for rescued Florida corals and advancing the science of coral care. FCRC has 18 species of coral from Florida's Coral Reef, including species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. These corals are expected to be part of a large-scale breeding effort and produce offspring that will be used to eventually restore the reef. Today, the FCRC has around 700 corals in its care. And these corals are thriving, growing, and breeding, causing the need for more space.

"These offspring are very important to the future of this threatened species and to the health of our oceans," said Jim Kinsler, Aquarium Manager at SeaWorld Orlando.

"Our team of experts understands that the work we are doing is critical to protecting an entire ecosystem and by ensuring these corals survive and grow to become a part of a healthy and abundant population, future generations of ocean enthusiasts will be able to enjoy them when visiting Florida's Coral Reef," he said.

"Many of Florida's coral species had never been managed in captivity before. Learning what optimum care is for a species you know little about presented a challenge for the team. They have excelled at that challenge," said Beth Firchau, AZA's Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project Coordinator.

All 18 species at FCRC are affected by stony coral tissue loss disease in the wild, prompting their rescue from the Keys by FWC in 2019 and 2020 ahead of the disease spread. Each week team members share lessons learned with coral caregivers across the country. The team is shaping the future of these corals and supporting the advancement of coral science.



IF EARS COULD TALK

Meet Florida panther FP263, or as researchers affectionately call him, No Ears. FP263 was first spotted in 2018 by trail cameras along the Cypress Dome Trails in Collier County. He was dubbed "No Ears" by a volunteer due to his ears having been mangled, likely fighting with other male panthers. Young males will search for their own territories after leaving their family units, but due to habitat loss and fragmentation, it is not uncommon for males to fight over territory.



FWC panther veterinarian Hollis Stewart checks a tranquilized FP263's vital signs. He was radio-collared and released shortly after this photo was taken.

While most of our very small panther population is limited to southwest Florida, males range widely and have been documented much further north. One male Florida panther was tragically shot in 2008 in western Georgia.

Believed to be eight years old and still ruling his territory, No Ears was recently radio-collared by FWC's panther research team, which performed a full veterinary physical exam and infectious disease screening. Biologists also measured him and collected hair and skin samples for genetic testing.

Studying an individual animal's health and genetics helps assess the entire population, which has a current population of 120-230 panthers. To be considered "fully recovered" under the Endangered Species act, three stable populations of at least 240 panthers each must exist.

Our Foundation has for many years been a principal funder of Florida panther conservation and most recently received \$500,000 for panthers from **Garner and Connie Koons. The Knopf Family Foundation** has been one of our most generous and dedicated panther donors. In the coming months, we'll share news about the next big step in panther recovery.

In the meantime, you can support panthers via a donation, including us in your estate planning, or by "adopting" one of our plush Florida panthers for a child—or yourself!



It is the most personal and thoughtful gift of all: a commitment to ensuring Florida remains a place of outstanding natural beauty and diversity for generations to come. Leave a wild legacy by naming the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida in your estate plans through a will, trust, prepaid life insurance policy, or other estate planning vehicles. And thanks to our partnership with FreeWill, estate planning has never been easier! FreeWill is a free, online will-writing tool that guides you through the process of creating your will and legacy in 20 minutes or less.

For more information about leaving a wild legacy, please visit wildlifeflorida.org.

All inquiries will be kept confidential.

MEET THE NEXT GENERATION OF FLORIDA CONSERVATIONISTS

Amelia

Instilling a love for wild Florida in the next generation is crucial to conservation. Luckily, we have Amelia of Naples as a model. A student and quite possibly our youngest donor, Amelia was compelled by her love of the Florida burrowing owl to donate \$5 to our Conserving Florida Wildlife fund.

“I was looking up Florida’s endangered and threatened creatures and found out about the Florida burrowing owl,” Amelia scrawled in pencil in a handwritten letter. “I want to help you save them.”

The Florida burrowing owl lives most of its life on the ground in and around their burrows, hence the name. They can be found throughout the Florida peninsula. Much of their habitat of open prairies and scrublands has given way to highways and development, and the owl is now considered a threatened species in Florida. “I think owls are really cool,” Amelia wrote. We agree and think her drawing of two burrowing owls rivals any textbook illustration.

Holly

If it was not for nine-year-old Holly’s grandparents enacting a “no television” rule one afternoon, she may not have gotten the chance to draw and design a flyer to fundraise for Florida’s manatees.

An ambitious third-grader at Boyette Springs Elementary School in Riverview, FL, Holly set up a donation bucket in her classroom in hopes of collecting her friends’ spare lunch money to help feed manatees in the Indian River Lagoon. Holly loves all animals but thought manatees seem particularly vulnerable. She decided she wanted to be a helpful human like the characters in Suzanne Tate’s nature books for children. In no time, the small donation bucket had gathered \$14.

“I didn’t know Holly had set it up in the class until her teacher let me know,” said Holly’s mom Julianne. “I was so proud of her.” The generous donation will be used to help restore eelgrass in the Indian River Lagoon, replenishing the manatee’s food source.



Holly followed her impromptu fundraiser with a school report on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef before leaving school for summer break, which we’re sure was filled with many marine activities.

West Towson Elementary

Towson, Maryland may be almost 1,000 miles from the Indian River Lagoon, but that didn’t stop a group of dedicated fourth-grade students from helping Florida’s official state marine mammal. Ms. Mohr of West Towson Elementary School in the small town outside of Baltimore asked her students to research a social issue and write opinion paragraphs on their selected topic. Many students chose to research Florida’s manatees but took their projects one step further. “When the students learned that the manatees [in the Indian River Lagoon] were starving, they wanted to raise money to help,” said Mohr. And they did: \$468.37 was raised to replant eelgrass in the Lagoon, which will provide food for manatees and improve water quality in the Lagoon for hundreds of other species.

Suncoast Youth Conservation Center

FWC’s Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network is also creating the next generation of Florida conservationists through outdoor exploration. At Suncoast Youth Conservation Center in Apollo Beach, young anglers continuously hook fish from the pier spanning the campus’s five-acre brackish pond; the wheelchair-accessible boardwalk and pier were completed in 2019 thanks to Foundation support. Each of the 74 campers in June 2022’s saltwater fish camp caught a fish, with redfish dominating the first week. “Creating the next generation of fish and fishing enthusiasts is what we do,” said Dr. Kathy Guindon, the Camp Director. Except for two “experts,” fishing knowledge among the youngest campers increased by 35% on average, and campers left with a fishing rod, reel, and tackle box full of basic tackle to bring their new skills, confidence, and love of wild Florida home.

“We are humbled and honored by the commitment and generosity of these young conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts,” said Andrew Walker, Foundation President & CEO. “It gives me hope not only for the next generation but the future of wild Florida.”

LITTLE BIRD, BIG MILESTONE

It was not the most dramatic animal release of all time—no one played “Born Free”—but it was a milestone nonetheless for North America’s most endangered bird. On June 1st, the 501st Florida grasshopper sparrow was released into the central Florida wilds with 12 friends, sparrows 502 to 513.

Once common throughout the dry prairies of central Florida, the Florida grasshopper sparrow began disappearing in the late 20th century as humans took over more and more of its habitat. By 2018, the situation was dire: only 30 nesting pairs remained. That’s when the Service, FWC, White Oak Conservation, and our Foundation launched a conservation breeding program while stepping up restoration of its prairie habitat.

The first release of sparrows bred at White Oak Conservation took place in May 2019, and the wild Florida grasshopper sparrow population has slowly increased since then. A year following, biologists found released birds successfully pairing and breeding with the remaining wild sparrows. Two-thirds of all successful nests, in fact, had at least one captive-reared parent. The sparrow population has increased 140 percent at the release site since 2019.

“Along with other important conservation measures, such as habitat management and nest protection from predators, the conservation breeding and release program has had a clear impact on the grasshopper sparrow population at the release site,” said Juan Oteyza, FWC’s lead sparrow biologist. “We are delighted with these results, which are an important step in saving this critically endangered bird.”

Our Foundation has funded the conservation of the Florida grasshopper sparrow for the past ten years via grants from the Service, donations from many private

donors, and proceeds from our Conserve Wildlife specialty license plate. The program has grown in recent years with the addition of breeding centers at the Avian Preservation and Education Conservancy and Brevard Zoo. The Welaka National Fish Hatchery has also provided space and logistical support, essentially serving as a staging location for birds on their way to be released into the wild. In 2021 99 sparrows from these partners were released at a second site, where biologists have seen similar successful results.

“We are excited about the progress the program has been making over the last few years,” said Mary Peterson, endangered species recovery biologist for the Service.

“Many of the lessons learned with the Florida grasshopper sparrow could be applied to other imperiled birds, including Florida’s endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow,” she said.

Last year, we worked with the University of Florida and Ducks Unlimited to preserve 27,000 acres near release sites, a gift of land from the DeLuca family. This has brought 6,000 additional acres of prairie habitat containing a small sparrow colony into conservation ownership. “This was a once-a-generation gift of land,” said Foundation President & CEO Andrew Walker. “We will work with our partners to improve this habitat and grow this population of sparrows.”



WATCH THE WORLD WAKE UP.

Like fishing, hunting is for early risers—those who find contentment and peace in getting out into nature early. But that’s not all you’ll find in wild Florida. From the Panhandle to the Everglades, Florida has some of the most accessible and affordable public hunting lands in the country. Six million bountiful and beautiful acres are closer than you think. So if you’re already an early riser, rise to the exciting challenge of hunting today.

wildlifeflorida.org/world-wake



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THANK YOU TO ALL THE INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHO DONATED FROM JANUARY 1, 2022 THROUGH THE END OF AUGUST TO HELP US ACHIEVE OUR IMPACT.

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- Bass Pro Shops & Cabela's Outdoor Fund
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- The Shoemaker Family Giving Fund
- World of Beer Bar & Kitchen

MAKING A TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT ON WILD FLORIDA

This spring the St. Petersburg-based couple Garner and Connie Koons made a transformational gift to our Foundation, helping fund a diversity of projects. Starting with a donation for Indian River Lagoon habitat restoration, the Koons are also supporting the creation of artificial reefs, panther research, FWC Law Enforcement, FYCCN camps, and so much more. Their generosity is going to impact wild Florida for future generations, and we are grateful they trusted us to partner with them.

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**Conservation Champion (recurring donor)*



Florida Bonneted Bat

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

FLORIDA BONNETED BAT

The Florida bonneted bat, *Eumops floridanus*, is the largest insectivorous (insect-eating) bat in Florida. It's the United States' rarest bat—fewer than 1,000 are believed to remain—and is known to live only in southern Florida.

Florida bonneted bats can reach a body length of six and a half inches with a wingspan of up to 20 inches. Their hair color varies from black to brown to grayish or cinnamon brown, and their large, rounded ears give them the appearance of wearing a bonnet, hence the name. And another very cool thing: the Florida bonneted bat is the only bat in North America that uses an echo-location frequency people can hear when the bats are hunting for moths and other flying insects over the rooftops of Miami and the pine flatwoods of southern Florida.

While significant strides have been made to learn more about the ecology of the Florida bonneted bat, more studies are still needed to better understand their home range size, abundance, and movements between populations. Miami's few remaining pine rocklands appear to attract them, and they've been found to roost in woodpecker-created tree cavities, Spanish tile roofs, and bat houses designed for their larger size. The largest known population is at FWC's Babcock/Webb Wildlife Management Area near Punta Gorda.

As is true for most species of bats, the greatest threats to Florida bonneted bats are loss of habitat, including the destruction of natural roosts via development and sealing up building cavities where bonneted bats live. Hurricanes can eliminate local roosting populations and are a serious threat to the species as a whole because one hurricane can impact the bat's entire range. Pesticides may also threaten the bonneted bat by diminishing the population of insects it eats to survive.

The lack of scientific information about what this species needs to survive is also a serious concern, as biologists lack a basic understanding of its life history and habitat requirements to inform management decisions. We are helping fund efforts by Bat Conservation International, FWC, the Service, and the University of Florida to locate and study Florida bonneted bat colonies and determine how we can ensure their continued survival.

Bats have been given a bad rap by horror movies and popular culture, but bats really want to avoid humans and not harm us. Bats benefit humans and nature in many ways. Bats around the world eat trillions of insects every night; scientists estimate bats save U.S. farmers alone at least \$3 billion/year in reduced crop damage and lower pesticide use. Other species of bats are important pollinators of cacti and agave plants (from which mescal and tequila are made), while tropical fruit-eating bats spread seeds across many miles in a single night, making them important to the regeneration and diversity of the world's rainforests.

LAKE|FLATO CHOSEN TO DESIGN NEXT GENERATION OF YOUTH CAMPS

Ten years ago, FWC formed the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, a partnership between FWC and many of the state's private summer and year-round camps. **The network now includes 400 partners providing some 284,000 children and teens with transformative outdoor experiences throughout the year.** In addition to providing partners with training, STEM-based nature study curricula, and other resources, FWC maintains six youth-oriented properties of its own. The Everglades Youth Conservation Camp in Palm Beach County and the Ocala Conservation Center and Youth Camp in the Ocala National Forest offer week-long overnight camps. The other four, Chinsegut Conservation Center in Brooksville, Suncoast Youth Conservation Center in Apollo Beach, Tenoroc Youth Conservation Center in Lakeland, and Joe Budd Youth Conservation Camp near Tallahassee, offer day programs. Each camp specializes in one or more aspects of nature study and outdoor recreation based on the ecosystem in which it's located.

Our Foundation is Florida's largest private funder of youth outdoor education, and we've supported FYCCN since its inception. Now plans are afoot to turn Tenoroc and Joe Budd into full-fledged overnight camps, while making improvements and expanding capacity at several others. With the help of New York and Palm Beach-based Zubatkin Owner Representation, a family-owned company specializing in the development and management of capital construction projects for not-for-profit organizations, we held an architectural design competition among three selected firms.

The winner is the architectural firm of LakelFlato of San Antonio, Texas. Since its founding in 1984, LakelFlato has developed a national reputation for designing buildings that respond to the culture and climate of each unique place. Among the award-winning firm's past Florida projects is the Naples Botanical Garden entrance and visitor center complex. For the design competition, they partnered with StudioOutside, a Dallas-based landscape architectural firm with experience in planning camps in Florida.



One of LakelFlato's Florida past projects: the Naples Botanical Garden entrance and visitor center complex.

“We were impressed with LakelFlato’s understanding of the interplay between buildings and the terrain and habitats in which they exist, and the educational opportunities provided by their innovative buildings themselves,” said Foundation Board Chair Carlos Alfonso. “The firm also understands the challenge of building when construction costs in Florida are at an all-time high. We believe LakelFlato’s deep experience and creativity are our best bet for designing and building effective, affordable camp buildings.”

Designing the overnight Tenoroc Center and making improvements to the Everglades Youth Conservation Camp will be LakelFlato's first priorities, Foundation President & CEO Andrew Walker added. He expressed gratitude for Zubatkin Owner Representation's managing the design competition on a largely *pro bono* basis. “Jason Zubatkin and his team have already saved us considerable sums of money through their firm's generosity and by helping us think creatively about how buildings can serve many purposes.”



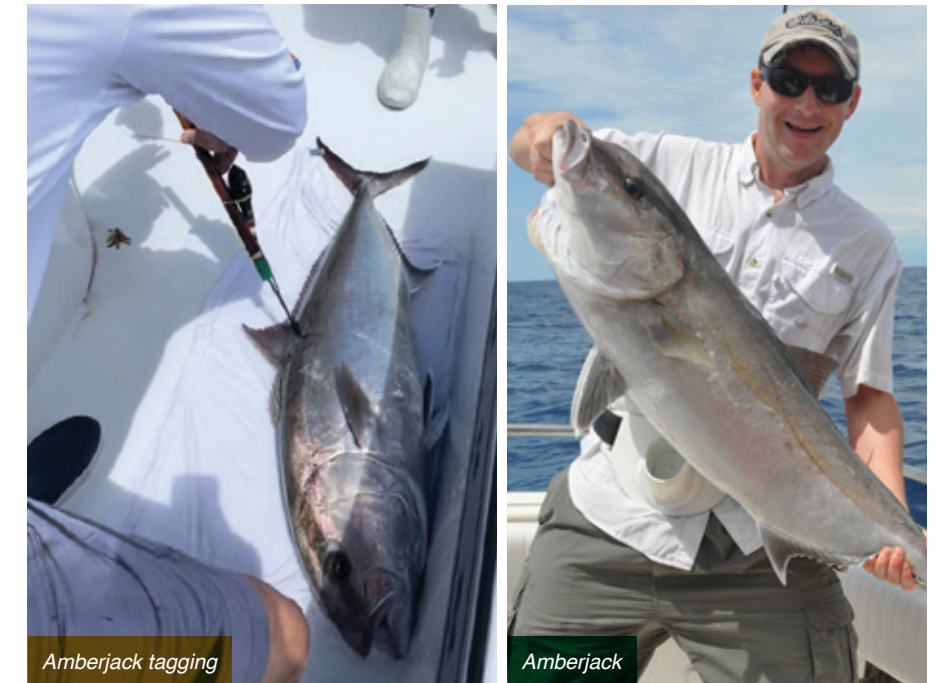
LakelFlato previous project: River Camps at Crooked Creek in Panama City, FL.

MAKING AMBERJACK HISTORY

Thanks to a recent \$15,000 grant from our Foundation via our Discover Florida's Oceans specialty license plate, Pompano Beach-based nonprofit Gray FishTag Research launched the first-ever study of amberjack migration via satellite tags at the end of May.

Gray FishTag Research, which promotes the worldwide conservation of marlins and other large billfish, conducts its work by creating lasting relationships with Florida charter captains, supplying them with free tags. In fact, our grant purchased 3,000 such tags. But they're not just reeling in fish and slapping on tags. When the captains engage their boats full of anglers from around the world in the tagging work, they are also raising awareness about marine conservation. And they're breaking records for numbers of tags placed, fish recaptured, and types of species tracked, including swordfish and striped marlin.

Their amberjack study is the first to use satellite tracking to study the migration and other behaviors of this prized sportfish. Amberjack are fast-moving predators that feed on smaller fish and crustaceans. Although an important sport and food fish, little is known about their movements. Gray FishTag Research used our grant to tag amberjack in cooperation with a number of Florida fishing charter boat captains, who catch and release the fish. Satellites will track some; others will be recaptured by fisherman, who will report their location back to Gray FishTag Research prior to re-release.



Amberjack tagging

Amberjack

A trip in late May with several Foundation staff in the Keys led to the tagging of a perfect 50-inch candidate. The satellite tag is programmed for four months and will be collecting data by three sensors: light (geo-location), water temperature, and depth during the tag's duration. Once the tag releases, it will begin transmitting the collected data to the Argos satellite overhead. **By filling in key gaps in our scientific knowledge, this research will lead to an improved picture of the amberjack's migration throughout the Caribbean and Atlantic, providing important information to manage their population sustainably.**

THE GREAT FLORIDA OUTDOORS RAFFLE IS UNDERWAY!

25 prizes = 25 chances to win, including a Contender 22 Sport fishing boat, Lifetime Gold Sportsman's licenses, and Gator Trout Inshore rods and reels.

Proceeds from the raffle will contribute to important conservation projects benefiting species like coral and sport fish, as well as enhancing access to wild Florida.

