

The Shellcracker

FLORIDA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY



February 2026

Hello Florida Chapter!

It looks like winter may be over after a cold snap reminded several species of the dangers of drifting too far north. Hopefully the record cold won't be immediately followed by record heat and drought... While the frequency, magnitude, and diversity of stressors on FL fisheries may (should?) be of concern, rest assured that FL Chapter advice on how to tackle tough fisheries topics such as this has been published! **Check out the November 2025 issue of *Fisheries* for the essay on workflow in fisheries projects**, which summarizes FL Chapter member recommendations from our 2025 annual meeting survey.

Hopefully you are not waiting until the last minute to register for the 2026 annual meeting and submit an abstract. Spread the word, forward the meeting emails, make your plans now! **We are in need of volunteers to facilitate breakout sessions.**

If you have an idea for a session topic that will interest other Chapter members, contact Summer and try to rally folks from around the state. Breakout groups will discuss priorities for each topic over a long lunch on day 2 of the meeting.

Regarding everyone's favorite annual meeting event: the business meeting. This year we'll have some big items to address, including separating the Secretary/Treasurer position, electing our first Secretary, and allocating funds from the Jack Dequine Estate Settlement. Exciting times, stay tuned!

I'm headed to the Southern Division AFS meeting next week and Florida will be well represented. It's always great to share all that we accomplish and learn what other chapters are doing. Please check out our report to SDAFS at the end of the newsletter. Thank you for your involvement with the FL Chapter, and the best of luck to you in your fisheries endeavors and beyond!



Sincerely,

Steve Beck

FL-AFS President



Getting in Touch

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University Liaison

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University of Florida
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Upcoming Events

March 5 – 8, 2026 :
AFS Southern Division
Meeting: New Orleans,
LA



Interested in contributing something to the Shellcracker? Email: Bridgette Froeschke at bfroeschke@ut.edu with any articles or information that you would like to be included in the next issue. Prize will be awarded for the best, and worst fish jokes submitted.

Getting Involved!

Committees Seeking members:

Award Committee

Rich Caiteux/Outstanding Achievement Awards
Eric Nagid
Eric.Nagid@myfwc.com

Continuing Education Committee

Planning future continuing education workshops
Allison Durland Donahou
adurland@flsouthern.edu
Rachel Liebman
rachel.liebman@myfwc.com

Membership Committee

New membership ideas in recruitment, retainment, and reactivation of members
Sara Menendez
Sara.Menendez@swfwmd.state.fl.us

Policy Committee

Keep members informed on local to national policy issues on aquatic resources
Ed Camp
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Community and Engagement Committee

Chelsey Crandall
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Feature your research:

Shellcracker Newsletter

Feature articles or other AFS content
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Website

Updates, articles, content
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Student Scholarships and Travel Grants

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Student Sub-unit

Swag sales, blog updates, student chapter involvement
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Raffle/Silent Auction

Assistance with raffle collections, auction items
Sarah Torre
swebb2021@fau.edu

Bob Heagey
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John Davis
John.Davis@MyFWC.com

Positions

Code of Conduct Officer

Searching for officers to represent FL AFS code of conduct
Daniel Nelson
Daniel.Nelson@myfwc.com

Apprentice webmaster

Owen Bayindirli
Owen.bayindirli@myfwc.com

OR!

We are excited to invite you to share your favorite fishing stories and/or pictures for the next edition of the Shellcracker. Whether it's a tale of your biggest catch, an unforgettable fishing trip, or a moment that made you laugh, we want to hear about it! Please submit your stories and photos to bfroeschke@ut.edu. Your contributions will help make this edition truly special.



46th Annual Meeting of the Florida Chapter American Fisheries Society



We invite you to submit abstracts for the 46th annual meeting of the Florida Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. The meeting will take place May 12th-14th at the Guy Harvey Resort in St. Augustine Beach. We hope you can join us! **Registration Opens: Jan 1st, 2026.** The meeting format will be similar to previous years, notable changes include: single occupancy lodging available, tiki-bar socials (sorry no bonfire, but there are multiple gas firepits), and a beach!

The symposium topic will be:

“Progress and Priorities in Florida's Fisheries: What fisheries and aquatic science projects should we maintain or invest in to apply meaningful results and make positive impacts for the people, fish, and aquatic habitats in Florida? ”

As fisheries professionals and students who care deeply about Florida's fisheries, how do we create impactful goals for the near future and for generations to come? Which projects should we continue or begin so the results help provide a bright future for fisheries in Florida? We encourage oral and poster presentations related to the symposium topic but will also accept other fisheries and aquatic science topics.

Deadline for abstract submission extended:

Monday, March 9, 2026



AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY

FLORIDA CHAPTER

ANNUAL MEETING INFORMATION

MAY 12-14, 2026

Meeting Information

Meeting Details

The 2026 meeting will be held at the Guy Harvey Resort St. Augustine Beach. The address for the Resort is 860 A1A Beach Boulevard, St. Augustine Beach, FL, 32080. Maps and directions will be available in the next issue of the Shellcracker or can be found on the Guy Harvey Resort Website at <https://guyharveyresortstaugustinebeach.com/>

The meeting schedule will be similar to past years, beginning on Tuesday, May 12th at 1:00 pm with the *Progress and Priorities in Florida's Fisheries* symposium, followed by a poster session after dinner; the symposium will continue Wednesday morning, with the business meeting and raffle after dinner Wednesday night, and contributed papers on Thursday morning, followed by lunch and awards. **Based on Chapter feedback, several updates have been made, including an extended lunch on Day 2 to allow for breakout sessions, the Continuing Education Committee's workshop moving to the morning of Day 3, and an increase in lightning talks in place of full-length presentations. The extended lunch breakout sessions are intended to bring together participants with shared fisheries interests to identify current priorities across diverse fields, and the Executive Committee is seeking at least 10 facilitators; interested individuals should send discussion topics (e.g., *Snook Research* or *Age and Growth of Fishes*) to Summer, who will organize table signage for attendees.**

Registration

Registration period opens Jan 1st, 2026. The link for online registration will be provided via email. Registration includes all meals. State employees can discuss payment with their supervisor. Registrations will still be accepted at the meeting (late fees applied). We can accept VISA, MASTERCARD, AMEX, DISCOVER, cash, or check at the meeting.

	Early	Late
Full	\$260	\$290
Day 1 –2	\$220	\$250
Day 2 –3	\$195	\$225
Day 1	\$85	\$115
Day 2	\$135	\$165
Day 3	\$60	\$90

This link to the registration website will also be made available on our chapter's website at <https://units.fisheries.org/fl/>. There will be no mail-in registration forms this year, however, you can still mail a check for your meeting costs.

Lodging

A block of rooms has been reserved for this event and **you must make your own lodging arrangements with the Resort.** There are single or double bed options available for \$140 per night, and you must mention you are attending the American Fisheries Society meeting to get this rate.



AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY

FLORIDA CHAPTER

ANNUAL MEETING INFORMATION

MAY 12-14, 2026

Meeting Information

Presentation Details

Abstract Submission Process

Abstracts will be submitted online via the [Abstract Submission Form](#) on the Florida Chapter website. [Florida Chapter Meeting Abstract Submission | Florida Chapter \(fisheries.org\)](#)

Abstract Submission Form Opens: January 1st, 2026

Abstract Submission **Deadline** (Oral and Poster Sessions) : March 9th, 2026

Oral Session:

Speakers will be given 15 minutes for full talks (12 minutes for presentations and 3 minutes for questions/discussion), speakers will be given 5 minutes for speed talks (no time allotted for questions/discussion). We will have PowerPoint on a laptop capable of accepting your presentation on a flash drive or other device.

Important note: Please use **widescreen PowerPoint slide format** for all presentations.

Poster Session:

All posters will be presented on Tuesday evening, May 12th and can be left up for the entire meeting. Posters should be no larger than 150 X 100 cm (60" X 40"), but they can be set up either as portrait or landscape format on an easel.

Opportunities for student support

As in previous years, student travel awards will be available for the annual meeting. The recipients will be notified by early February to allow for early registration. Master's and doctoral students are also eligible for the Roger Rottmann Memorial Scholarship. More information and the application materials are available on page 8 of the Newsletter.

2026 Student Raffle

We need your help to make this meeting's raffle a great one. If you are interested in helping or donating items, please email Sara Torre (swebb2021@fau.edu) or Bob Heagey (Robert.Heagey@MyFWC.com). Remember all proceeds fund our student travel grants for the following year's meeting. Please contact us to get involved!

We look forward to seeing everyone in St. Augustine Beach for our 2026 annual meeting!

Call for Thesis and Dissertation Highlights

Call for Thesis & Dissertation Highlights

Are you defending your thesis or dissertation this semester? We want to celebrate your work!

The Shellcracker is inviting graduate students to submit their **thesis or dissertation defense dates** and/or a **brief summary of their research** to be featured in an upcoming issue. This is a great opportunity to highlight your hard work, share your research with the broader community, and recognize this important milestone.

To be featured, please submit:

- Your name and program
- Thesis or dissertation title
- Defense date, time, and location (if public)
- A short summary of your research (150–250 words)



Please email all submissions to **Bridgette Froeschke** at bfroeschke@ut.edu

We look forward to showcasing the outstanding research and achievements of our graduate students!

2025 Rottman Winners

Congratulations to the 2025 Rottman Winners

We are proud to recognize this year's recipients: Logan Masterson and Jessica Keller

From the Recipients:

Jessica Keller

I grew up in a small Wisconsin town, where my dad introduced me to fishing at a young age and my family took many long road trips to the ocean. Many years later, I attended Coastal Carolina University in South Carolina for a bachelor's degree in marine science to combine my love of science and the ocean. After graduating, I worked on a liveaboard dive sailboat for a couple years in the Caribbean, where I was able to see many coral reef systems and the variety in coral and fish health among these locations. That job taught me a lot and opened my eyes to just how diverse our oceans are. However, I found my true love was research and pivoted to attend the University of the Virgin Islands in St. Thomas, USVI for a master's degree. That experience was also full of beautiful coral reef ecosystems and eye-opening opportunities. After job hunting and a few shorter stints, I ended up working for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in the Florida Keys, focusing on reef fish research. After several years of contributing to research that directly informed management, I loved what I did, but decided I wasn't done with continuing my education. I wanted to expand my skillset to conduct the best science possible and better contribute to improving how we manage fisheries. I enrolled as a PhD student in the School of Forestry, Fisheries, and Geomatic Sciences at the University of Florida in Susan Lowerre-Barbieri's lab, studying marine fish movement.



2025 Rottman Winner

Jessica Keller Continued:

My dissertation focuses on the movement strategies of marine fish and involves tracking multiple teleost and elasmobranch species in the southeastern US using acoustic telemetry and satellite tracking. Fish movements can be described on a range of spatial and temporal scales. The scale of movement, and variability in movement patterns, affects a population's resilience to localized stressors such as fishing pressure or habitat degradation and larger scale impacts like climate change. Fish that make annual migrations across ocean basins face different stressors compared to fish that have high-site fidelity to a particular location. The scale and type of movements also impacts what harvest regulations are most effective for a particular fishery. While incorporation of movement data in management has increased over the years, we do not yet have well-defined quantifiable movement traits that can be compared across species and over time.

I am analyzing tracking data of fish that span different movement strategies, with a focus on the Florida Keys and Gulf of Mexico. Species range from Mutton snapper that are residents to a particular location for most of the year but aggregate to spawn in high densities, to large-bodied sharks that display annual migration patterns along the US east coast and into the Gulf of Mexico. My research topics include: 1) reviewing commonly reported movement traits in marine fish and developing a conceptual model to better link these traits to management strategies, 2) examining space use of White Sharks and Atlantic bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico, 3) investigating the variability in migratory behavior of marine fish in the Florida Keys, and 4) determining spawning site fidelity of Mutton snapper to a recently protected fish spawning aggregation. I am particularly interested in the intra-variability of movement patterns as individual fish, like individual humans, do not all behave the same, which is increasingly evident as tracking technology has advanced. My dissertation chapters incorporate environmental and spatial variables with acoustic telemetry and satellite tracking data to better understand drivers of movement, the extent of intra species variability, and the consequences of different movement traits on fisheries management.



2025 Rottman Winner

Logan Masterson:

My fisheries career began as a marine biologist with a strong focus on fish ecology and conservation during my undergraduate studies at Coastal Carolina University. While there, I actively participated in a diverse range of research projects, including fish age estimation, microplastic pollution studies, sea turtle conservation, and ghost crab behavior. These experiences provided me with a solid foundation in fieldwork, laboratory analysis, and data analysis. Upon graduating into a worldwide pandemic I took any role I could find remotely associated with fisheries. Thankfully, I was able to join the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission a short while later. I had initially joined in a short-term role, but I quickly transitioned to a full-time Fisheries Biologist position. Driven to further my fisheries expertise, I am pursuing a Master's degree in Fisheries and Aquatic Science at the University of Florida. Throughout my career, I have continuously developed my skills in field research, laboratory analysis, data analysis, and scientific communication. I have had the opportunity to present my research findings at numerous conferences and workshops, sharing my knowledge with peers and experts in the field. I have shared in several non-scientific presentations that allow me to share my current research with the general public and support scientific communication. My combined academic pursuits and practical experience have positioned me as a well-rounded fisheries scientist, and I am eager to make significant contributions to the field of freshwater fisheries science.

My current research endeavors focus on three distinct projects examining Grass Carp, Black Crappie, and Largemouth bass. My thesis project delves into the movement, habitat use, emigration, and survival of Grass Carp in large Florida lakes to gain a better understanding of their potential as a biological control tool for invasive hydrilla. Stakeholder concerns over chemical control of hydrilla have prompted this examination of other potential tools for managing invasive hydrilla.



2025 Rottman Winner

Logan Masterson Continued:

From these concerns, Invasive plant management and Freshwater fisheries needed to further understand the potential consequences of utilizing Grass Carp as a biological control tool for this invasive Hydrilla by better understanding their movement, habitat use, and emigration post-stocking. The overall goal was to provide fisheries managers with more information on Grass Carp as a biological control tool in large open systems by utilizing radio-telemetry. This research aims to examine stocking strategies to manage hydrilla while minimizing unintended ecological impacts. This research will provide vital data for informed decision-making regarding Grass Carp introduction into larger Florida lakes for invasive hydrilla control.

In addition to my work on Grass Carp, I am involved in the development of co-parentage genetic analysis for Black Crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*). This research stems from a decade-long decline in Black Crappie angling effort at Tenoroc Fish Management Area, which managers attribute to decreasing populations in historically productive fishing pits. To address this concern, we initiated a stock enhancement research project aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of hatchery stocking in restoring Black Crappie populations. My role focuses on developing and implementing advanced genetic techniques to assess the genetic contributions and, potentially, the reproductive success of hatchery-raised Black Crappie released into Tenoroc. Through co-parentage genetic analysis, we will determine the percentage of the population derived from stocked fish, providing a direct measure of stocking success. Beyond Tenoroc, this research has the potential to equip fisheries managers across the state with a valuable genetic tool for evaluating and optimizing Black Crappie stocking programs in other water bodies.



2025 Rottman Winner

Logan Masterson Continued:

Lastly, I am investigating the potential of utilizing various water bodies, including private and agency-managed lakes, for bass stocking and management. This project explores the feasibility of expanding stock enhancement programs for largemouth bass by leveraging partnerships with private landowners and other agencies. This research has already partnered with Orlando International Airport (MCO), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), and the Central Florida Expressway (CFX). Together, these partners represent an essentially unlimited number of small to large ponds, each of which contains thousands of fish that have been sheltered from public interference. These fish could potentiate an untapped resource for stock enhancement programs, we plan to investigate the ponds for use in potential trophy bass initiatives. We will also look at the survival and vulnerability of stocked bass from these unfished donor waterbodies. Currently, biologists are going around the state and providing each of these partner waterbodies with rapid assessments. These rapid assessments provide an initial quick overview of the bass populations as well as other fish present in the ponds. In the future, we hope that our partners' ponds can be used for multiple research projects as well as donor ponds for shock and stock locations for other recipient water bodies around the state of Florida.



Feature Research

Collaborative Effort to Evaluate a New Fish Sedative for Fisheries Management and Stock Enhancement

Elizabeth “Nami” Pruitt¹, Kaitlyn O’Neil¹ and Cortney Ohs²

¹Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

²University of Florida, Center for Conservation

Anesthetics are used worldwide to minimize stress during fish handling and transport—essential practices in fisheries management and stock enhancement programs. However, no FDA-approved sedative is available in the U.S. that allows for immediate release. Currently, Tricaine-S® (MS-222) is the only approved anesthetic and has a mandated 21-day withdrawal period. Even small fish (1-2”) reared for stock enhancement are not permitted by FDA to be exposed to sedatives prior to release, significantly reducing survival post-stocking. Fisheries professionals in the U.S. need a sedative approved for immediate release.

Florida Bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) and Red Drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*) are important sportfish in Florida that are grown by the state and sensitive to live transport procedures. AQUI-S®20E (10% eugenol) is an experimental anesthetic for fish currently authorized for limited use under the FDA’s Investigational New Animal Drug (INAD) exemption while additional studies are conducted to confirm its safety and effectiveness.

Interest in using AQUI-S®20E (10% eugenol) at FWC’s fish hatcheries to enhance stocking success prompted researchers from FWRI to partner with the University of Florida and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service AADAP program to fill data gaps and advance FDA approval for immediate release. Such gaps include demonstrating the efficacy of eugenol in producing and maintaining light sedation for up to 8 hours, as required for practical use during harvest and transport.

2024-2025 Research

Objective: Determine the efficacious concentration of AQUI-S®20E to produce light sedation in Florida Bass and Red Drum

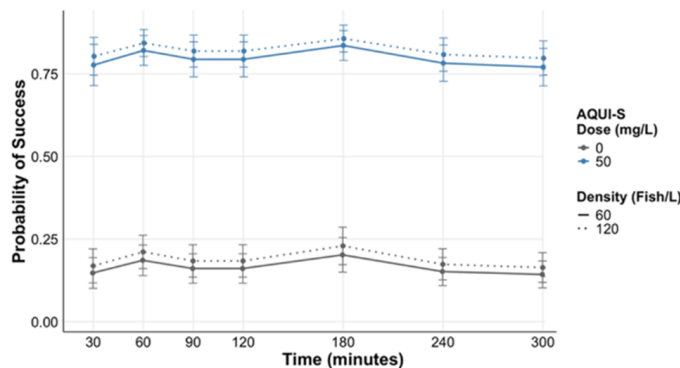


Figure 1. Probability of catch success (\pm SEM) of *M. salmoides* at two different densities in either control (0 mg/L AQUI-S) or anesthetic-treated (50 mg/L AQUI-S) tanks across eight different timepoints.

Feature Research Continued

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Methods

Florida Bass trials were conducted at FWC’s Florida Bass Conservation Center in Webster, Florida, while Red Drum trials were conducted at the FWRI’s Marine Fisheries Enhancement Center. Sixteen buckets were stocked with fish at densities typical for live transport; half were treated with AQUI-S®20E and the other half were left untreated as controls. For these trials, light sedation was defined by two criteria: (1) all fish maintained equilibrium and (2) treated fish could be easily captured by hand (>80% of the time), whereas control fish could not. Double blind procedures were used for researchers recording water quality and fish behavior.



Figure 2. FWRI-MFEC staff preparing a sample for eugenol concentration determination

Results and Discussion

AQUI-S®20E concentrations of 50 mg/L (mg/L eugenol) for Florida Bass and 40 mg/L for Red Drum were determined to be efficacious for producing light sedation. Lightly sedated fish were less active and easier to capture by hand compared to control fish (Figure 1). Control fish were more apt to evade capture and never met the criteria of light sedation. At practical transport densities, eugenol concentrations depleted to ≤ 50% of the target concentration within 2 hours.

Eugenol is known to be rapidly metabolized and eliminated as waste by fish. This is problematic when the goal is to maintain light sedation for long time periods. However, quicker depletion of eugenol during live fish transport may be beneficial. For stock enhancement purposes, hatchery-reared fish must be coherent at the time of release. Further research is necessary to determine the potential benefits of lightly sedating fish with eugenol during harvest and live transport conditions which are currently underway.

Feature Research Continued

Collaborative Effort to Evaluate a New Fish Sedative for Fisheries Management and Stock Enhancement

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Acknowledgements

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Figure 3. Sedated broodstock Largemouth Bass at the FBCC.



Figure 4. FWRI-MFEC staff observing Largemouth Bass during AQUI-S®20E light sedation

Feature Research Continued

Collaborative Effort to Evaluate a New Fish Sedative for Fisheries Management and Stock Enhancement



Figure 5. Juvenile Red Drum in an AQUI-S®20E light sedation trial conducted by the project team.



Figure 6. Stock Enhancement Research staff sampling the Red Drum population in Tampa Bay.



Figure 7. Research team from the University of Florida and Florida Fish and Wildlife conduct light sedation efficacy research on Florida Bass exposed to AQUI-S®20E (10% eugenol).

2025 Florida Chapter Report to Southern Division AFS:

What goals did your chapter establish for the year?

The FL Chapter continues to encourage member involvement primarily through hosting a productive annual Chapter meeting, associated efforts to support students and student travel to FL Chapter/higher level meetings, providing at least one workshop, and sending quarterly newsletters. The Chapter also regularly covers expenses for aquatic cleanups. The Executive Committee also began regular contributions to a fisheries internship program and begin the process of separating the Secretary and Treasurer Positions and updating Chapter Bylaws and Procedures.

What progress did you make in achieving your goals?

A successful annual Chapter meeting was held, which was followed by an in-person workshop. The Chapter covered all meeting expenses for all student travel grant applicants (19 students) through 2024 meeting raffle/auction earnings and an annual recurring donation from the West Palm Beach Fishing Club. Two scholarships were awarded to a deserving MS and PhD student. The Chapter also continued the practice of covering all meeting expenses for the Best Student Paper Award winner to attend a higher-level meeting, and they will attend SDAFS 2026. A student-mentor lunch has become part of the regular program each year. New this year was using an e-judging system for presentations and posters to streamline this process, which was largely successful. The student subunit ordered Chapter hats as a fundraiser and posted student work on their “Reefs to Rivers” blog. The practice of providing the FL Chapter Student Subunit president a travel stipend was continued for the second year to motivate student involvement in leadership, and they will use this to support travel to SDAFS 2026. The Chapter also contributed to a student fisheries internship with the FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Steidinger Program over the summer of 2025. Four newsletters were also sent to Chapter members quarterly. In fall 2025, aquatic cleanups were held at (waiting on update from Nick). Chapter Bylaws and Procedures were updated to separate the Secretary/Treasurer positions, handle “dormant” jobs (social media/job announcements), and to equitably distribute the ExComm workload. Chapter Bylaw changes are ready for National AFS review.



2025 Florida Chapter Report to Southern Division AFS:

Are there any additional activities completed by your chapter that you would like to report?

A survey was sent to Chapter membership prior to the 2025 annual Chapter meeting to inform the symposium topic: "Workflow in Fisheries Projects." Among other things, this survey requested best practices for project development, management, and evaluation. Given good Chapter participation in the survey, these survey results were published in the Nov 2025 issue of Fisheries.

Did you hold a meeting? If so, please provide registration numbers (please differentiate virtual vs in-person attendance).

The 2025 Annual FL Chapter Meeting was held May 13-15, 2025.

2025 FL-AFS Annual Meeting Attendance (100% in-person, no virtual option):

Total: 144

Institutions: 24

Students: 39

Oral Presentations: 55

Posters: 33

Did you host any continuing education courses? If so, please list course titles, contact hours, and delivery method.

One in-person workshop was held after the annual Chapter meeting titled: "Net your next job: resume building and job application preparation." This was a 3-hour panel discussion with representatives from academia, state gov, fed gov, and private sector.

What is your chapter doing to promote AFS membership?

The FL Chapter promotes National AFS membership via FL Chapter newsletters, forwarding emails from National AFS (webinars and virtual workshops/trainings seem popular), and at the annual Chapter meeting (distributing materials, when addressing attendees, and allowing time for SDAFS and/or National AFS representatives time to address attendees).

