

The Shellcracker

FLORIDA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY



August 2025

President's Message:

I hope you all have had some productive and/or restful months since our annual meeting. We have been busy! At the annual meeting I promised to send out the Workflow Symposium survey results to the Chapter, but we ended up submitting these to Fisheries magazine and our manuscript was accepted. Stay tuned in the coming months for an essay with the grandiose title: "Workflow in Fisheries Projects: Lessons learned from almost 1000 years of experience". Many thanks to Chapter Past-President Chelsey Crandall for spearheading this publication effort and to Chapter members for completing the survey. FL Chapter experiences and recommendations will reach an international audience and hopefully improve fisheries projects elsewhere! Perhaps your team would benefit from reviewing these as well!

The ExComm also held a meeting in July to discuss separating the Secretary/Treasurer officer into two positions, which will more equitably distribute the workload and follow the example of other state chapters. This process involves changing the Chapter Bylaws, which will involve a Chapter vote and approval from National AFS. We will send out the proposed changes to the Chapter for review well before the vote. Sara Menendez will likely stay on as Treasurer and we would then have an election for Secretary and President at our 2026 meeting. We are also taking the opportunity to update our Chapter Procedures, which further define tasks for officers and committees.

Hopefully some of you were able to attend Sara Geis' internship presentation. This position was the Chapter's first (partially) funded internship supporting the Steidinger Scholarship Program. Sara worked with the FWC-FWRI Fisheries Dependent Monitoring Program and helped with several other projects. The current plan is to continue Chapter support of this program each year.

The Continuing Education Committee is already hard at work planning future workshops. Materials from several past workshops can be found on the Chapter Website under the "Past Workshops" tab. Topics include fish ID/preservation, Program R, Open Science (Quarto publishing system), and Critical Thinking/Problem solving. Check it out!

Florida was extremely well represented in early August at the National AFS meeting in San Antonio, TX, where numerous Chapter members gave some of the highest quality presentations (several non-FL folks made this comment). Several Chapter members helped organize the 3rd Black Bass Symposium, an event held every 25 years.

As you proceed with your work, if you hit a conceptual, logistical, or analytical snag, don't forget that a diverse network of FL Chapter members is here and just might be able to help you out. Feel free to reach out and we'll try and connect you with the best people or resources.

Sincerely,
Steve Beck
President, Florida Chapter AFS



Getting in Touch

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Vice President

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Secretary/Treasurer

Cameron Atkinson
Florida International University
Email: catki016@fiu.edu

University Liaison

Tommy Domohowski
University of Florida
Email: Tommy.Domohowski@ufl.edu

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
edvcamp@ufl.edu

Community and Engagement Committee

Chelsey Crandall
Chelsey.Crandall@myfwc.com

Feature your research:

Shellcracker Newsletter

Feature articles or other AFS content
Bridgette Froeschke
bfroeschke@ut.edu

Website

Updates, articles, content
Jason O'Connor
Jason.Oconnor@myfwc.com

Student Scholarships and Travel Grants

Assistance with student scholarships and future scholarship opportunities:
Rottman Awards:
Dan Nelson
Daniel.nelson@myfwc.com

Dennis Panches Student Travel Grants:

Allison Durland Donahou
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David Kerstetter
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Student Sub-unit

Swag sales, blog updates, student chapter involvement
Angela Barreto
angela.barreto@icloud.com

Raffle/Silent Auction

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

Bob Heagey
Robert.Heagey@MyFWC.com

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.



Press Release!



Endangered Sawfish Trapped in Tampa Bay Saved by Scientists

Palmetto, Florida. August 13, 2025. An endangered smalltooth sawfish that had been trapped in a lower Tampa Bay wetland was safely relocated on August 9 thanks to a team effort by researchers and concerned citizens. Following reports from anglers of a sawfish in the area, a team of experts from Havenworth Coastal Conservation (HCC), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and NOAA Fisheries, along with several volunteers, successfully captured, tagged, relocated, and released the sawfish in open waters of Tampa Bay.

“The sawfish got in the tidal pond either through the culvert grating when it was a small two-foot-long newborn and then grew too large to swim back out or, more likely, swam in when Bishop Harbor Road was flooded during Hurricane Helen,” explained HCC President, Tonya Wiley, who leads the [U.S. Sawfish Recovery Team](#) and Tampa Bay sawfish research. “Given the dire state of the sawfish population, it was critical that we relocate this individual to ensure its ability to adequately forage and resume its natural migration.”

The 7.4 foot (227 cm) female sawfish was fitted with an acoustic transmitter that will send signals to listening stations throughout Florida’s coastal waters and thereby record its movements in Tampa Bay and beyond. In addition to the tagging, researchers collected small biological samples that will be analyzed by experts at Ripley’s Aquarium, [the Field Museum](#), and [Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi](#).

The smalltooth sawfish was once plentiful from Texas to North Carolina but today is found almost exclusively in Florida. Ongoing threats include incidental catch in fishing gear, particularly shrimp trawls, as well as the destruction of key habitats. The smalltooth sawfish was listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in 2003. Since the winter of 2023, South Florida’s “[spinning fish](#)” phenomenon has hit sawfish particularly hard, resulting in more than 60 confirmed mortalities of large juveniles and adults and hundreds of reports of abnormal behavior.

“The precise cause of the spinning sickness and its long-term effects on sawfish are still unknown,” said [Adam Brame](#), the NOAA Fisheries U.S. Sawfish Recovery Coordinator. “Given the already depleted state of the population, we are very worried about their ability to reproduce and fend off extinction and are grateful for efforts like this to maximize the chances for survival of each and every sawfish.”

The successful relocation of the trapped sawfish highlights the importance of public outreach and engagement. The [U.S. Sawfish Recovery Team](#) encourages the reporting of all sawfish encounters through www.SawfishRecovery.org, 1-844-4SAWFISH, sawfish@myfwc.com, and/or the FWC Reporter app.



From left: Lukas Heath, Tonya Wiley, and Emily Sapp releasing the smalltooth sawfish into Tampa Bay at the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp. Lukas is a Fish Biologist with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute Charlotte Harbor Field Laboratory, Tonya is President of Havenworth Coastal Conservation and Lead Investigator for sawfish research in the greater Tampa Bay Area, and Emily Sapp is a Biological Scientist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Fisheries Independent Monitoring Program in Jacksonville. Credit Angela Collins. All activities were performed under the authority and guidelines of NMFS ESA permit #21857 and FWC Special Activities License #1918 issued to Havenworth Coastal Conservation.

Press Release!



Endangered Sawfish Trapped in Tampa Bay Saved by Scientists

All activities were performed under the authority and guidelines of NMFS ESA permit #21857 and FWC Special Activities License #1918 issued to Havenworth Coastal Conservation.

Media contacts:

Tonya Wiley: 941-201-2685, tonya@havenworth.org
President, Havenworth Coastal Conservation, Palmetto, FL

Kane Mcree: 941-900-6485

One of the anglers who caught the trapped sawfish and reported it to the U.S. Sawfish Recovery Team. He has video of the sawfish when he caught it.

Drew McDougall: 352-514-3476

Underwater camera and drone operator who spotted the sawfish in the southeast corner of the pond and directed the rescue team to the location.



Lukas Heath (left) and Tonya Wiley preparing to release the smalltooth sawfish into Tampa Bay at the Bishop Harbor Boat Ramp. Lukas is a Fish Biologist with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute Charlotte Harbor Field Laboratory and Tonya is President of Havenworth Coastal Conservation and Lead Investigator for sawfish research in the greater Tampa Bay Area. Credit Angela Collins. All activities were performed under the authority and guidelines of NMFS ESA permit #21857 and FWC Special Activities License #1918 issued to Havenworth Coastal Conservation.



Raffle and Silent Auction!

Thank you!

We received over \$5680 in donations for our 2025 raffle from artists, businesses, and chapter members. We also had a number of silent auction items and packages including original artwork, guided fishing charters, and getaway packages valued at over \$4050 for a total of over \$9730 in donations. Congrats to all of the winners!

A big thank you to all of our donors and volunteers! Together we raised over \$4930 to support future student travel awards to our annual meeting!

Your past Raffle Committee: Amanda Croteau, Geoff Smith, and Chelsey Crandall

If you're interested in helping out with next year's raffle and silent auction, please reach out to the new Raffle Committee: John Davis, Bob Heagey, and Sarah Torre.

	 wetlands Platinum: <u>≥\$500</u>	 Alan Collins Capt. Rick Spratt	
		<u>Gold: ≥\$250</u>	Dr. Ellery Lennon 
			
			
			
			
		<u>Silver: ≥\$100</u>	
			
Thank you raffle and silent auction donors!			
			
			



UF IFAS HERNANDO ANNUAL COASTAL CLEANUP

SATURDAY
September
20

8: 00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Check-in: Linda Pedersen
6340 Shoal Line Blvd.
Spring Hill, FL 34607

Save the Date



First 150 to check in will receive a free t-shirt!

Pre-registration link:

<https://forms.office.com/r/rKFr9YGm30>



If you have any questions, contact Brittany Scharf (bhallscharf@ufl.edu)

The Chilean Sea Bass Dilemma!

I am writing to urge seafood distributors, restaurant owners, chefs, and consumers to avoid Chilean Sea Bass (the scientific name is *Dissostichus eleginoides*). First, let me tell you that the name “Chilean Sea Bass” is not the correct common name for this piscine species. The common name recognized by the scientific community is “Patagonian Toothfish.” Not a very appetizing name. The seafood industry coined the name “Chilean Sea Bass” for the sole purpose of attracting consumers. Not surprisingly, restaurants and supermarkets have been happy to oblige using this false nomenclature. After all, names are but names. The falsification with respect to naming this species is not the reason to avoid serving/consuming this fish. I will use the false name henceforth to avoid confusing the reader.

Chilean Sea Bass sells directly from the fishers for up to \$30 per pound. Individual fish can attain weights up to 220 pounds. Any wonder as to why the seafood industry refers to the flesh of this fish species as “white gold?” The Chilean Sea Bass is a tasty high-protein, low-calorie white fish served in many high-end restaurants. So, besides the expense, what are the downsides? Those will become clear once you learn about this species’ biology and life history. The Chilean Sea Bass fishery is located a great distance from the South American continent. The adult fish primarily live at the bottom of the Antarctic Sea at depths of 1200 feet or more. They converge into mass numbers as they feed on other fish, squid, and crustaceans. They do not reach sexual maturity until 10 to 12 years of age. The flesh of sexually immature Chilean Sea Bass is still “white gold.” Are they vulnerable to overfishing? When was the last time you spotted Orange Roughy on a restaurant’s menu? They too are deepwater fish that congregate to feed and reproduce, in their case off the coasts of Australia and New Zealand. So, what happened to Orange Roughy? They were overfished to the point that few of the population survived to reach sexual maturity. No reproduction—no fish. Is the Chilean Sea Bass fishery on the same path? Let me provide some additional information so you can be the judge.



The Chilean Sea Bass Dilemma Cont!

According to the Monterrey Bay Aquarium's SeafoodWatch.com website, Chilean Sea Bass should be avoided due to overfishing in their home range. The species stocks around Prince Edward Island and Marion Island have been decimated by overfishing. In the deep waters further off the South American coast, Chilean Sea Bass are relentlessly being snagged via trawlers utilizing long lines. Other fish, sea mammals, and even birds are also being ensnarled (referred to as "by-catch"). The fishery is being regulated by national and international agencies, but the value and demand for the "white gold" makes the species highly vulnerable to Illegal, Underreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

So, if the endangerment of Chilean Sea Bass by serving/consuming it is not reason enough for you to avoid it let me provide one more concern. Due to concerning levels of mercury, The Environmental Defense Fund recommends adults only consume two portions of Chilean Sea Bass each month and children be limited to one portion. That's right, Chilean Sea Bass, due to their long life-spans and carnivorous food habits, are subject to bioaccumulating high levels of mercury much as do tuna.

I will end by stating what should now be obvious to the reader. The Chilean Sea Bass dilemma can be resolved by consumers not only avoiding it, but also for them to inform all those serving this species that it is unacceptable. Lastly, be aware that less costly fish are often claimed to be Chilean Sea Bass and priced and sold as if they are "white gold."

Chris Kohler, PhD

Professor Emeritus, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Fellow and Past-President of the American Fisheries Society

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