

FOWA 2010 CONFERENCE SUMMARY

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA
AUGUST 18-22, 2010

The 2010 Florida Outdoor Writers Association (FOWA) Conference was held August 18-22 in Tallahassee, Florida. The event was hosted by **VisitTallahassee** and headquartered at the **Hotel Duval** near Florida's State Capitol Building. Approximately 95 FOWA members and guests attended the event.

Following registration at the hotel on **Wednesday**, attendees took buses to the **Mission San Luis Living History Site and National Historic Landmark**, located near downtown Tallahassee. There, they were given tours of the site, followed by a 'Welcome to Tallahassee' banquet. After a brief welcome by **Lee Daniel, Executive Director** of **Visit Tallahassee**, the attendees were treated to a keynote speech, *'The Future of the Printed Page'* by **Derek Dunn-Rankin**, Owner and Publisher of **Sun Coast Media Group**.

Thursday began early, with the morning program, *'Climate Change Impacts to Florida Fish and Wildlife'*. The program offered opinions and presentations from **John Cooper (Bipartisan Policy Center)**, **Rodney Smith (Anglers for Conservation)**, **Nick Wiley (FWC Executive Director)**, **Dr. Mike Allen (UF/IFAS)** and **Jon Oetting (Florida Natural Areas Inventory)**. The morning program represented the release of the study and book, *'Beyond Seasons' End—A Path Forward for Fish and Wildlife in the era of Climate Change'*. Based on the number of questions asked by FOWA members, there will certainly be lots of stories generated by this program. At lunch (sponsored by **FWC** and the **Bipartisan Policy Center**), **Greg Holder, FWC's** Assistant Executive Director, spoke on the subject of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill event and its impact to Florida's Natural Resources. That presentation, like many of those at this year's conference, dealt with subject matter of immediate interest to FOWA writers and their audiences. A special thanks is in order to FOWA Board Member **Bob Wattendorf (FWC)** for his help coordinating the morning's program.

The afternoon programs didn't give attendees much time to slow down, physically or mentally. Freelance outdoor writer **Mike Holliday** presented many fresh ideas on how to survive as a freelance writer in tough economic times. **Lee Crockett and Holly Binns** of the **Pew Charitable Trusts** spoke on 'Ending Overfishing and Rebuilding Depleted U.S. Fish Populations' with a particular emphasis on Gulf of Mexico long-lining. **(Soon to be Dr.) Kathy Guindon, FWC/FWRI's** 'tarpon lady' talked about how the species had survived the 'big freeze' of 2010 and **Rusty Chinnis (FOWA Past-President and Founder/President of Sarasota Bay Watch)** spoke about starting one's own non-profit conservation organization.

Following the daytime events, FOWA members moved to the annual **Corporate and Tourism Showcase**, and were treated to displays and samples from leading tackle, outdoor gear, and kayak manufacturers and tourism groups from across the state.

The evening ended late, with a presentation on High Dynamic Range Photography presented by photographers **Rusty Chinnis** and **Tommy Thompson**.

Friday is typically the day FOWA conference attendees venture 'into the wild' to fish in a 'fun tournament' or kayak a stretch of local wilderness. This year was no exception. Anglers left from the St. Marks area and fanned out across this deserted stretch of Florida's Big Bend. Several fishermen, used to crowded central and south Florida waterways, were astounded by the sheer state of 'undevelopment' in Wakulla and Jefferson Counties. Local anglers often state that seeing another boat within a mile of them makes them feel 'crowded'. Most of the fishermen left from Jimmy Bevis' **Shell Island Fish Camp**. In fact, the three 'tournament' winners all fished in Shell Island boats, but on the other hand they were all licensed USCG Captains and should have done well. At least they can bait their own hooks! Winners **Ralph Allen, Ray Markham** and **Tom Van Horn** received **Shimano** Symetre spinning combos and some neat **Shimano** T-shirts for their efforts. Even the winning guides took home prizes. Others fished in kayaks with Capt. Mike McNamara from **St. Marks Outfitters** and David Brown and Charles Fitzgerald (e21 Fishing) headed out early in **Capt. Rusty Jenkins'** flats skiff to chase redfish. **Capt. Jody Campbell**, columnist for the Wakulla News, also took a few folks out from his place at Shell Point, just west of St. Marks. I doubt much fishing really took place, as Jody was stuck with rowdies and tall-tale-tellers Rodney Smith, Rick Davidson, Eric Johnson and Jerry Gerardi that morning.

Other FOWA Conference attendees spent the morning kayaking down the beautiful Wakulla River from the Wakulla State Park boundary to the US98 Bridge. FOWA is grateful to the folks at **The Wilderness Way** outfitter in Wakulla and to **TnT Hide-a-Way** outfitter in Crawfordville for the donation of their boats and transport that morning. Also, the paddlers were glad to see lots of Florida spring water, bottled on the Santa Fe River at High Springs, at their launch location, compliments of **Coca-Cola, North America**.

Everyone's morning was timed in order to reach **Shields' Marina** in St. Marks by noon--and most did. There, **The Original Florida Tourism Task Force/Visit Natural North Florida**, an organization formed of 12 north central Florida counties that encourages regional tourism, hosted a lunch and press event. Lunch was catered by **Posey's Restaurant** in Panacea, a local favorite, featuring fried shrimp and grouper. Drinks and dessert, as well as the excellent location, were provided by **Pam, Chuck and Brett Shields and Shields Marina**.

As lunch ended, **Dr. Steve Otwell from Florida Sea Grant** in Gainesville talked about seafood safety, especially in light of the Deepwater Horizon event. Otwell brought samples of Gulf shrimp that he had intentionally contaminated with oil from the Deepwater Horizon and demonstrated 'sniffing' techniques to everyone. This press event brought local reporters and news crews to cover the event, and FOWA members were featured on the evening news in Tallahassee. After Otwell's presentation, a raffle was held and attendees were able to win the table centerpieces furnished by Original Florida's member counties. Included in those centerpieces were items such as a stay at the **Steinhatchee Landing Resort** (Taylor County), a fishing trip and stay at Lake Talquin's **Whippoorwill Lodge** (Gadsden County), as well as local knick-knacks and even some Florida Gator or FSU Seminole memorabilia.

FOWA's St. Marks attendees were also treated to demonstrations of kayaks by one of the associations' newest Corporate Members, **Hobie Kayaks**. **Ingrid Niehaus** and her crew, aided by **Georgia Ackerman** from **The Wilderness Way** in Wakulla, spent most of the lunch hour overseeing paddling (really 'pedaling') demonstrations in the St. Marks River in front of **Shields Marina**.

As if there was nothing to do for the rest of the afternoon (naps might have been appropriate for many attendees), **Eric Johnson** gathered up a bunch of folks and took rods, reels, and hula-hoops to Waller Park, behind the State Capitol Building in Tallahassee, for the annual **SKISH competition**. SKISH is a

FOWA tradition that involves casting 'dummy' plugs into hula hoops—the winners receiving prizes. The 'Grand Skisher' (this year it was **Eric Johnson** himself) has his or her name engraved on a silver tray. Prizes (rod and reel combos) for this year's event were graciously donated by **Daiwa Corporation**.

In an effort to make Friday a 'full, 16-hour day', cocktail hour began at 6:30 and was followed by FOWA's annual Fund-Raising Auction. The dinner was sponsored, in part, by **Charlotte Harbor and the Gulf Islands Visitors Bureau** and was a tremendous success. Despite hard economic times, many of our Corporate and Tourism Members came through with some excellent auction items and FOWA attendees spent a whopping \$5300 that evening. It's events like this one that allow FOWA to continue its Educational Outreach and Scholarship programs. FOWA thanks the Auction Committee (**Frank and Kathy Morello, Mike and Pam Richards, RC and Kathy Barker, Ron and Karen Presley, Alligator Bob Young and Rick Davidson**) for helping with setup and money-gathering. And a special thanks to **Eric Johnson**, who took over **Jim Wilson's** job of auctioneer at the very last minute.

Saturday began early with a buffet breakfast at the Hotel Duval honoring FOWA's Corporate and Tourism Members. And despite the late night at the Auction (and many chocolate martinis), most officers, board members and corporate/tourism representatives made it to the event. **Ralph Allen** thanked those present for their ongoing support of FOWA.

Conference **Saturdays** mean 'business' in terms of the **Annual Membership meeting** and the new Board's first official **Board of Directors'** meeting. One of the most important activities at the Membership Meeting is the election of new officers and board members. This year, the membership affirmed **Ralph Allen** as Board Chairman and **Bob Bass** as President; then voted, **Sandy Huff** as 1st Vice-President, **Jill Zima Borski** as 2nd Vice-President, **Susan Young** as Secretary and **Frank Morello** as Treasurer. They also elected **Eric Johnson, Mike Holliday** and **Bob Wattendorf** to serve 2 years as Board Members. **Jennifer Huber's** election as Tourism Liaison/Board Member was affirmed, as she was voted on by her Tourism Member peers. **Kathy Barker** and **Rusty Chinnis** were also elected from the general membership to serve on the Nominating Committee, which will be chaired by **Ralph Allen**. 2010/2011 President **Bob Bass** will also appoint two members. Following the Membership Meeting, the new Board and officers heard presentations from three potential conference hosts (**Orlando, Central Florida and Florida's Space Coast**) for 2012. **Florida's Space Coast** (Titusville) was chosen as 2012 host and runner-up **Central Florida VCB** (Polk County) was considered, pending their willingness to do so, as 2013 conference host. Of course, **Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB** will be hosting the FOWA 2011 Conference.

On **Saturday** afternoon, one final Craft Improvement seminar, *The Trials and Tribulations of Having an Outdoor Book Published*, was held at the Hotel Duval. Author **Tommy Thompson** led the round-table discussion, which also included book authors **Ron Presley, Doug Alderson, Charlene Rose Johnson** and **Sandra Friend**.

Saturday's events ended with FOWA's **Annual Awards Banquet**, sponsored by **Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB, the Conference Host for the 2011 FOWA Conference**. Next year, FOWA will be gathering at **GreenLinks Resort**, south of Naples (near Marco Island and the 10,000 Islands) for what everyone expects to be an excellent event. There are many outdoor activities promised by **JoNell Modys** from the CVB and there are already several press events being considered. **Be sure to put the dates August 24-28, 2011 on your calendar—right now!**

Not only did FOWA honor its outgoing President, **Ralph Allen** with a special plaque holding a custom-engraved Buck knife from **Buck Knives**, but **Ron Presley** was awarded the **Horace Carter Award** for outstanding service to FOWA. **Rodney Smith**, longtime FOWA member and founder of **Anglers for Conservation**, received **Bass Pro Shop's Pass-it-On Award** represented by a plaque and a \$300 check.

Saturday evening's banquet is always centered about the **Excellence-in-Craft Awards**. This year's entries were judged by our peers at the **Texas Outdoor Writers Association**, and some of their comments are included below with a list of winners. First place winners received \$100 and second and third received \$50 and \$25 respectively. First and second-place winners received framed certificates. Third place winners received certificates.

The results of FOWA's annual **Conference Photo Contest** were also announced at the banquet. Sponsored by **Canon USA**, who provided prizes and technical help from **Chuckie Luzier** and his lovely wife **Maresa**, the contest had many entries. **FOWA Secretary Susan Young** did a great job of organizing the images and putting together a PowerPoint show for the banquet. Photography Contest winners were : **David Brown**, 1st & 2nd. **Peggy Goldberg**, 3rd. The Spirit of Tallahassee (fun contest)winners were: **Bill Goldberg**, 1st & 2nd, and 3rd, **Doug Alderson**. The winner in the Humor Category was 'JoNell's Junior Jaws' (squeezing the shark) by **Ralph Allen**.

Last, but not least, one final award, the '**Best from Conference Award**' was presented to **Sue Cocking** of the **Miami Herald** for '*A Tale of Two Rivers*'. This award, which includes a \$500 check, is sponsored by the previous year's Conference host to encourage stories about their location. This year's award was presented on behalf of the **Ocala/Marion County Visitors and Convention Bureau**. Thanks to all the FOWA members who entered this important competition.

Everyone who attended the **2010 FOWA Conference** in Tallahassee remarked that the event was a total success. FOWA owes a great deal of thanks to all the folks (**Katie Bell Kole, Kerri Post, Lee Daniel and Janet Roach**) from **Visit Tallahassee** who put in lots of hours helping organize the event, as well as the individual, tourism and corporate sponsors who donated time, energy, merchandise--and dollars. And the results have already started to come in, with several online stories already published during the first week following the Conference--and lots of others in the works.

A big 'THANKS' to everyone who participated and helped is in order!

FOWA Excellence-in-Craft Results 2010

Category 1, Magazine Feature or Column (Sponsored by Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB)

First – **Ron Presley** “Crazy About Crustaceans.” Florida Sport Fishing Magazine, Sept/Oct 2009

Judge’s Comment – This is an easy-to-read piece about a different sort of fishing that effectively blends quality how-to information with colorful comments and observations from the overnight shrimpers. Creative presentation about what appears to be a family fishing fun activity that may have been overlooked by other members of the angling community.

Second – **Rusty Chinnis**, “History of Homosassa. A Stroll Through the Years in the Land of the Silver Mermaid" Fly Fishing in Salt Water March/April 2009

Judge’s Comment – An interesting read that effectively weaves historical background with personal reflections from a solid collection of anglers and other sources. Informative and entertaining at the same time. This piece properly showcases the tale of tarpon at Homosassa.

Third – **Mike Holliday**, "Ethanol." Florida Fishing Weekly, March 20, 2009

Judge’s Comment - It is hard to try to imagine the time and effort required by the author to put together this very informative presentation of data that probably should be a must read for both recreational and commercial boaters. Covers all the bases of the subject in an understandable format. Good use of multiple sources presented in this hard news feature.

Category 2, Newspaper Feature or Column (Sponsored by Sun Newspapers)

First – **Jim Sutton**, 17 is cause for alarm – The Times-Union, Sept 13, 2009

Second – **Jim Sutton**, No Pier Pressure Here – The Times-Union, Nov 22, 2009

Third – **Matt Stevens**, Monster Man and the Brothers Paxton – The Sun, Feb 4, 2009

Category 3, Photography/Photojournalism

First – **Rusty Chinnis**, The Permit Whisperer

This photo spread takes the reader on an exotic journey. I especially liked the photo of the boat docking at a shanty lodge. It illustrates the culture of the location. The photographer put thought

and effort into showing permit flies with detailed images, along with the more expected fishing photos and action shots.

Second – **Rusty Chinnis**, Perspective - Forty Plus Club

I'm a sucker for a big permit photo. And this one is well done and dramatic. Everything is right, including the light and angle, right down to the angler's smile and red cap. Very impressive.

Third – **Dale Sanders**, Think like a lobster

As a scuba diver myself I can appreciate what it takes to shoot a good underwater photo. I like the opening shot and I particularly like the shot of the diver and the porkfish. Lots of good detail in the smaller images round out an excellent photo package.

Category 4. Electronic Media and Special Communications (Sponsored by Naples, Marco Island, Everglades CVB)

First – **Ron Presley**, www.florida-guides.com

Judge's Comment – Excellent site. Great information.

Second – **Benjamin Dyall**, www.americandefensegunsandammo.com

Judge's Comment – Difficult domain name. Well set up. Good site for shop.

Third – **Larry Thornhill**, www.onlinefishermen.com

Judge's Comment – Great material on site.

Category 5, Self-Promotion

First – **Peggy Goldberg**, www.goldenimages-photo-scuba.com

Second – **Tommy Thompson**, www.saltwateranglersguide.com

Third – **Benjamin Dyall**, www.floridashootingvideonline.com

Category 6, Outdoor Book (Sponsored by Taylor County Fly Fishing Guides)

First – **Doug Alderson**, New Dawn for the Kissimmee River

Second – **Ron Presley**, Secrets from Florida's Master Anglers

Third – **Sandra Friend**, Exploring Florida's Botanical Wonders

Category 7, Outdoor Travel/Destination Story

First – **Doug Alderson**, “Forgotten Coast headwind”

Judge’s Comment – This piece delivers description and sense of place so expertly, I practically felt the strain on my shoulders from paddling a sea kayak into the headwind and a sunburn on my nose. Interwoven with the kayaking action are morsels of natural and cultural history, biology, discovery and vivid in-person observations. Clean, concise prose provides the mortar throughout, as the author intersperses his direct-timeline travel/adventure tale with segues into the area’s rich historical past and his own youth.

Second – **Rusty Chinnis**, “History of Homosassa”

The ultimate primer for any visitor to the Homosassa River, and an expertly handled history of tarpon fly fishing lore. Conjuring up such legendary gents as painter Winslow Homer and baseball star Ted Williams as well as a veritable “Hall of Fame” of fly anglers, the author proves this thesis admirably that the Homosassa was, at one point, the Camelot of fly fishing.

Third – **Doug Alderson**, “Hiking the Aucilla Wilds”

Expert observation and crisp, first-person prose combine to take the reader along as the author explores both ancient civilizations of 14,000 years past and current flora and fauna of the Aucilla Wildlife Management Area.

Category 8, Conservation Story (Sponsored by VisitGainesville)

First – **Doug Alderson**, “Mussel Power.” Florida Wildlife, May/June 2009

Judge’s Comment – The information in this piece is fascinating. The article is informative and the photos illustrate the text perfectly. I had no idea mussels could be so interesting. Outstanding job.

Second – **David Brown**, “Keeping Tabs on Tarpon.” FLW Outdoors, May 5, 2009

Judge’s Comment – Very informative article about what we can learn from tarpon DNA, and what can be done with the information. Gives the reader a look into the technical aspect of conservation. Interesting and enlightening.

Third – **R.G. Schmidt**, “Let’s make sure fish will still be there.” The Great Outdoors, January 29, 2009

Judge’s Comment – Very informative article that gives the reader a look into the history of a fishery, and what it means for anglers today. Encourages us to all do our part to ensure the future of fishing. Very good read.

Category 9, Family Participation (Sponsored by Woodies Rattlers)

First – **Mike Holliday**, “Half a Man and Then Some.” Florida Fishing Weekly, June 5, 2009

Judge's Comment – This story tugs at the sleeve of every parent who has ever taken their child fishing. It exemplifies what the outdoors is all about for those of us who would pass the ethics and traditions of our heritage on to our kids. Very good read.

Second – **Ralph Allen**, “Thanks for the Memories, Dad.” Waterline, June 18, 2009

Judge's Comment – We all learned our outdoor skills and ethics from a mentor, usually a dad who took the time to pass his skills and beliefs on to us. This story captures that and gives us a look into the author's childhood. Outstanding.

Third – **Ralph Allen**, “Gone Fishin'” Waterline, January 15, 2009

Judge's Comment – The reader is invited along on an afternoon father/daughter fishing trip to a local honey hole. No great adventure, no huge catch, no wild ride. Just the pleasure of time spent with a loved family member. Can't beat that.

Category 10, Humor (Sponsored by TTI/Blakemore)

First – **Mike Holliday**, “Freaks of nature.” Florida Fishing Weekly, May 8, 2009

Judge's Comment – Some people have a knack for looking on the lighter side of any subject, and this writer seems to have it. It is obvious he or she enjoys fishing, and has a sense of humor that makes any outing a fun trip. Great comparisons and a very enjoyable read overall.

Second – **Dale Sanders**, “Hi-Tech Tackle for Bottom Chompers.” Coastal Angler Magazine, April 2009

Judge's Comment – It seems most anglers are always looking for the new and improved gadgets, gear, and equipment. The author takes a humorous look at what's new, and takes the reader along to try it out. Good read.

Third – **Ralph Allen**, “Castnet Catastrophes.” Waterline, April 2, 2009

Judge's Comment – Anyone who has ever tried to use a castnet, without knowing exactly how it is done, can relate to this story. Since the real source of humor is not joy but sorrow, this story definitely captures the humor of castnetting. Reminds us that when fishing, we don't always catch what we intend to. Very enjoyable.