

Overview of Proposed Rule Changes for Hunting and FWC-Managed Areas



Proposed Rules
December 2022



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This report covers the major proposed rule changes related to hunting and FWC-managed public areas. Full summaries of all proposed rule changes, including minor technical changes and annual calendar adjustments, are included in the additional background material.

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Unless otherwise noted, images throughout the presentation are by FWC.

Rule Development

April – August 2022: reviewed proposals received from staff, the public and cooperators

September – December 2022: solicited and assessed stakeholder input

★ **December 2022: Commission review; approval to advertise**

December 2022 - January 2023: advertise in Florida Administrative Register; communicate with stakeholders

February 2023: Commission considers adoption



FWC staff received over 300 requests for changes from the public, staff, and cooperators. Some of these ideas were proposals for changes to publications, policies, or other nonrulemaking issues. Staff has recommended 126 of the ideas for rule changes. We gathered public input through online commenting, via email and by phone.

Public Input

- Rule summaries made available online for commenting
- Stakeholders notified through email and social media
 - Sent to more than 312,000 email addresses
- Over 13,974 responses



Summaries of all rule proposals regarding hunting and FWC-managed areas were provided to the public online for commenting beginning September 14. The opportunity to comment was publicized through email blasts sent via GovDelivery (FWC's email news group service) to over 312,000 subscribers, FWC's HuntFlorida Facebook page, the Hunting Hot Sheet, and a banner at MyFWC.com/Hunting. These efforts have resulted in almost 14,000 responses.

Specific Area Rule Changes

Expand Hunting Opportunities:

- 35 Areas: add hunts, days, methods of take or species to existing hunts, or remove quotas
- Establish 2 new public hunting areas
 - Garcon Point WMA (~3,245 acres) in Santa Rosa County
 - Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge WMA, Okeechobee Unit (~1,865 acres) in Okeechobee County



New Hunting Opportunities – Adding new hunts, increasing the number of days of hunting, or adding methods of take or number of species to hunt or removing quotas:

Southwest Region (68A-15.006): Babcock Ranch Preserve Tier I Hunt Area, Babcock Ranch Preserve Tier II Hunt Area, Kissimmee River Public Use Area **(68A-15.061):** Lower Hillsborough

North Central Region (68A-15.062): Flying Eagle, Nutrien – White Springs, Twin Rivers

Northwest Region (68A-15.063): Aucilla, Beaverdam Creek, Blackwater, Box- R, Escambia River, Lafayette Creek, Pine Log, Point Washington, Plank Road, Tate's Hell, Tate's Hell – Womack Creek Unit **(68A-17.005):** Apalachicola River, L. Kirk Edwards

South Region (68A-16.064): Allapattah Flats, Dinner Island Ranch, Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Everglades Headwaters WMA, Kissimmee Bend Unit, Fisheating Creek, Holey Land, Okaloacoochee Slough, Picayune Strand, Rotenberger, Spirit-of-the-Wild; **(68A-17.005):** DuPuis, Hungryland, Southern Glades

Northeast Region (68A-15.065): Bull Creek, Caravelle Ranch

Garcon Point WMA – **(new)** – establish a new wildlife management area (~3,245 acres) in Santa Rosa County. The Northwest Florida Water Management District is the lead land manager of this property. The hunt format would include a: 16-day archery season, 3-day muzzleloading gun season, 12-day general gun season, 34-day small game season, 3-day archery/muzzleloading gun season, and a 12-day spring turkey season. Limited entry quota permits would be required for the archery, muzzleloading gun, general gun, archery/muzzleloading gun and turkey seasons.

Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge WMA, Okeechobee Unit – **(new)** – establish a new wildlife management area (~1,865 acres) in Okeechobee County. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead land manager of this property. The hunt format would include a: 16-day archery season, 3-day muzzleloading gun season, 9-day general gun season, 102-day small game season, 3-day family hunt, 2-day youth turkey season and a 12-day spring turkey season. Limited entry quota permits would be required for the archery, muzzleloading gun, general gun, family hunt, youth turkey and spring turkey seasons.

Specific Area Rule Changes

Other Rules:

- 23 Areas: roads, access, vehicles, hunting equipment, check stations or camping
- 28 Areas: dates, bag limits, antler point regulations or use of dogs



Other Rules:

Roads, access, vehicles, hunting equipment, check stations or camping –

Southwest Region (68A-15.006): Babcock Ranch Preserve Tier I Hunt Area, Babcock Ranch Preserve Tier II Hunt Area **(68A-15.061):** Croom, KICCO, Orange Hammock

North Central Region (68A-15.062): Bayard, Camp Blanding, Hatchet Creek, Thomas Creek – Kings Road Unit **(68A-17.005):** Santa Fe Swamp

Northwest Region (68A-15.063): Blackwater, Box-R, Econfina Creek, Eglin Air Force Base, Flint Rock, Yellow River

South Region (68A-15.064): Allapattah Flats, Everglades Headwaters – Kissimmee Bend Unit, Fisheating Creek, J.W. Corbett, Picayune Strand

Northeast Region (68A-15.065): Dunns Creek, Triple N Ranch

Dates, bag limits, antler regulations or use of dogs –

Southwest Region (68A-15.006): Babcock Ranch Preserve Tier II Hunt Area **(68A-15.061):** Everglades Headwaters – Hatchineha Unit, Hilochee, Hilochee – Osprey Unit, Upper Hillsborough **(68A-17.005):** Bullfrog Creek, Chinsegut, Crooked Lake, Hickey Creek, Little Gator Creek, Moody Branch, Perry Oldenburg, Platt Branch

North Central Region (68A-17.005): Bell Ridge Longleaf, Brannon Field, Fort White, Lafayette Forest, Suwannee Ridge, Watermelon Pond

Northwest Region (68A-15.063): Apalachicola, Box- R, Tate's Hell **(68A-17.005):** Apalachicola River

South Region (68A-15.064): Okaloacoochee Slough, Picayune Strand

Northeast Region (68A-15.065): Three Lakes, Triple N Ranch **(68A-17.005):** Split Oak

Specific Area Rule Changes

Other Rules:

- 4 Areas: sustainability measures to address habitat damage caused by off-highway vehicles



Other Rules:

Sustainability Measures - We occasionally need to take measures to ensure the sustainability of hunting opportunities in cases where there are resource concerns, landowner requests or stakeholder concerns that cannot be addressed using nonregulatory means -

Southwest Region (68A-15.061)

Babcock Webb WMA: prohibit vehicular access to the management area, except for the Bird Dog Training Area, during periods closed to hunting and during the raccoon and opossum season. This proposal is the result of a two-year stakeholder engagement and education process to address habitat damage due to off-highway vehicle use.

South Region (68A-15.064):

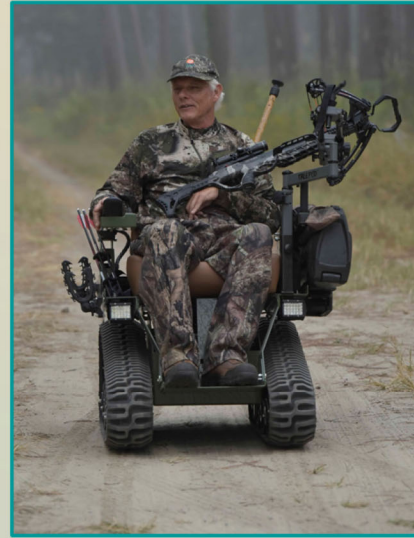
Everglades and Francis S. Taylor, Holey Land and Rotenberger: prohibit off-road use of motor vehicles, except swamp buggies and tracked vehicles, outside hunting seasons and associated scouting periods.

Holey Land and Rotenberger: Prohibit off-road use of swamp buggies and tracked vehicles from April 15 through two weeks prior to the opening of archery season.

These proposals are in response to significant reoccurring habitat destruction caused by off-road vehicle use during the dry season.

Statewide Rule Changes

- All-terrain vehicle definition
- Bow/crossbow definition
- Alternative mobility permits
- Crossbow permits
- Nonhunting guests during veteran and youth waterfowl hunts



All-Terrain Vehicles – delete the current definition of all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and replace with the definition of ATV as defined in Florida Statutes 317.0003.

Definition of Bows and Crossbows – clarify the definitions of “bow” and “crossbow” to ensure commonly used, commercially available bows and crossbows are allowed for hunting.

Alternative Mobility Permits – expand the criteria that allow individuals to qualify for an alternative mobility permit (AMP) to also include possessing a valid permanent disabled parking placard or a statement from a licensed physician certifying individuals have a condition that prevents them from walking 200 feet without stopping to rest.

Crossbow Permits – allow bows equipped with devices that mechanically hold the string in the drawn position to be used for taking game by disabled crossbow permit during archery season.

Nonhunting Guests – allow nonhunting guests with required licenses and permits to actively participate (set up decoys, call and retrieve birds, etc.) during Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days and Veterans and Active Military Waterfowl Hunting Days, provided they may not take wildlife with a gun.

Statewide Rule Changes

- Expand shooting hours during dove season on WMAs
- Allow dogs when hunting non-native birds on WMAs
- Public Small Game Hunting Area Regulations:
 - Remove shoulder height restriction for dogs
 - Allow take of non-native birds
 - Expand shooting hours for doves and waterfowl



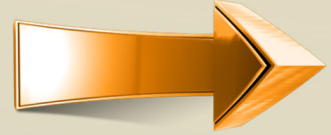
Shooting Hours for Doves on WMAs – allow the take of mourning and white-winged doves from a half hour before sunrise until sunset during Phase 1 of the statewide mourning and white-winged dove season on wildlife management areas, unless otherwise specified by area-specific regulations.

Use of Dogs for Non-native Doves on WMAs – allow dogs to be used for hunting non-native, nonprotected birds during any period in which taking migratory birds with dogs is allowed on wildlife management areas.

Public Small Game Hunting Area Regulations:

- Remove the 17-inch shoulder height restriction for dogs used for hunting.
- Allow take of non-native, nonprotected birds, such as collared doves and Egyptian goose, during established area seasons, with no bag or size limit, using methods of take as allowed by season.
- Allow the take of mourning and white-winged doves and ducks, geese, and coot from a half hour before sunrise until sunset unless otherwise specified by area-specific regulations.

Staff Recommendation



- Approve proposed rule amendments for advertising in the Florida Administrative Register
- Provide direction or guidance to staff as we continue working with the public

If proposed rule amendments are approved, staff will return to the February 2023 Commission meeting for final hearing.



If approved as final rules in February 2023, most rules would take effect July 1, 2023.