

LAKE OKEECHOBEE

Goals and Objectives

The draft goals and objectives were prepared by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Inwood Consulting Engineers, Inc., based on input received from stakeholders and subject matter experts within the FWC. Stakeholders were given several opportunities throughout 2020 to provide input on FWC management programs. The information gathered from stakeholders led to the identification of FWC focal areas, which correspond with core functions of the FWC's management of freshwater aquatic systems. From there, the FWC developed goals and objectives that describe specific, measurable, and time-oriented management of the system. The FWC will be gathering feedback on these draft goals and objectives through virtual and in-person focus groups with stakeholder throughout June and July 2021.

Prepared by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,
and Inwood Consulting Engineers, Inc.



Focal Area 1	Fish and Wildlife Management
Goal 1	Manage wildlife resources for their long-term benefit, maintaining balance within the ecosystem and enjoyment by the public.
Objective 1	Through partnership with other agencies, continue population surveys for wading birds to assess the health and biodiversity of the lake.
Objective 2	Coordinate monitoring and research with agency partners to guide management actions for Everglade snail kites and their nests.
Objective 3	Support the early detection and rapid response (EDRR) of invasive and/or non-native wildlife.
Objective 4	Support high quality hunting opportunities within Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 5	Maintain the desired alligator population to 17,800 in Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 6	Work with partners and stakeholders to monitor black rails and manage appropriate habitats for Black Rails in the Northwest Marsh.
Goal 2	Manage fish communities to promote a healthy ecosystem with continued viability for recreational and commercial activities.
Objective 1	Ensure that black crappie do not undergo recruitment overfishing by maintaining a Spawning Potential Ratio of 30%.
Objective 2	Maintain a 3-year average for relative abundance of largemouth bass > 0.3 fish/minute during fall electrofish sampling, with angler catch success rate > 1 fish/hour.
Objective 3	Maintain a 3-year average for relative abundance of black crappie > 4.0 fish/minute during January trawl sampling, with angler harvest success rate > 1.5 fish/hour.
Objective 4	Enhance fishing opportunities on Lake Okeechobee through stock enhancement, fish attractors, and other novel ideas.
Objective 5	Maintain a low relative abundance (< 0.02 fish/min during electrofish sampling and 200 lbs./day commercial catch rates) of non-native fish species such as tilapia and sailfin catfish.
Objective 6	Achieve ≥ 60 annual TrophyCatch approvals per year for Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 7	Maintain a 3-year average for relative abundance of bluegill above 0.80 fish/minute during fall electrofishing sampling.
Objective 8	Incorporate the enforcement of black crappie regulations during peak season and times of day as part of a priority patrol plan within the Division of Law Enforcement.

Focal Area 2	Plant and Habitat Management
Goal 3	Manage native habitat in Lake Okeechobee for optimal fish and wildlife resources, access and navigation, cost effectiveness, and stakeholder support.
Objective 1	Achieve and maintain >11,000 acres of vascular submersed aquatic vegetation (SAV), with a preferred target >20,000 acres in the littoral zone.
Objective 2	Achieve and maintain a lake-wide coverage of >4,700 acres of bulrush; ≤ 3,700 acres of lilies; ≤ 19,800 acres of cattails; and 7,400-12,400 acres of willow.
Objective 3	Mechanically enhance ≥ 500 acres of the littoral marsh when hydrologically feasible.
Objective 4	Conduct prescribed fires within each burn unit (see Figure 5 of the Lake Okeechobee Fire Management Plan), with a 2-5 year return interval for the upper marsh and 3-8 year return interval for the lower marsh.
Objective 5	Consider disruption to wildlife and stakeholders prior to and during habitat enhancement projects by considering timing, area, and season.
Objective 6	Consider effectiveness, stakeholder concerns, and cost efficiency when selecting the most appropriate management tool.
Objective 7	Pursue innovative habitat management techniques to enhance the spatial extent and functional value of native vegetation.
Goal 4	Manage invasive plant species within Lake Okeechobee to levels that allow for optimum fish and wildlife habitat, while maximizing stakeholder access and navigation, cost effectiveness, and stakeholder support.
Objective 1	Increase annual harvesting acreage by at least 20% above the current 5-year average (2015-2020) on Lake Okeechobee through innovative means while maintaining management efficiency and feasibility.
Objective 2	Maintain invasive floating plant (e.g., water hyacinth and water lettuce) cover < 500 acres to reduce overall herbicide use.
Objective 3	Support early detection and rapid response (EDRR) programs to identify and eradicate newly discovered invasive aquatic plants before they expand and displace native vegetation.
Objective 4	Allow hydrilla cover to fluctuate based on environmental conditions until stakeholder feedback suggests that it has become an impediment to access and navigation.
Objective 5	Ensure that flood protection structures, boat ramps, and navigational channels remain free from vegetation hazards.
Objective 6	Minimize potential impacts from herbicide treatment to native fish and wildlife and stakeholder use to the greatest extent feasible by considering the timing, season, and location of treatments.
Objective 7	Use prescribed fire 3-6 months after herbicide treatments to reduce cover of torpedo grass, phragmites, or other non-native plant species.

Focal Area 3	Communication and Interagency Coordination
Goal 5	Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of coordination with interagency partners related to fish, wildlife, and habitat management on Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 1	Ensure that fish and wildlife are being adequately considered by partner agencies through active participation on interagency teams, technical advisory groups, and public forums related to Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 2	Create an environment where partners can collaborate on management activities that improve fish and wildlife resources within Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 3	Coordinate with federal, state, university and other interagency partners conducting research and monitoring to exchange information.
Objective 4	Cooperate (e.g., cost/resource sharing, etc.) on aquatic habitat restoration and enhancement projects that will positively impact fish and wildlife and their habitats.
Goal 6	Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of external communication related to fish, wildlife, and habitat management on Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 1	Enhance FWC's online resources to provide information regarding monitoring, management activities, and upcoming stakeholder involvement opportunities.
Objective 2	Utilize organized in-person or virtual public engagements twice annually to share and receive information regarding FWC's management and monitoring efforts on Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 3	Promote open dialogue between the public and biologists to ask questions and provide input and feedback regarding management on Lake Okeechobee.
Objective 4	Collaborate with partners to build positive advocacy for Lake Okeechobee that supports scientifically sound fish and wildlife management and promotes the resource at local, regional, and national levels.