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ADAM H. PUTNAM, COMMISSIONER
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

Florida Aquaculture

State officials learn art of oyster tonging

Recently, Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam, U.S. Representative Steve Southerland and State Senator Bill Montford participated in an oyster relay in waters off Wakulla County.

The oyster relay is the relocation of adult oyster from waters that are classified as Restricted or Conditionally Restricted to waters classified as Conditionally Approved or Approved.

“Relaying oysters supports the continued harvesting of Florida oysters by creating both jobs and economic opportunities for harvesters,” said Commissioner Putnam. “It also benefits consumers, generating an abundant source of oysters for all to enjoy.”

In Florida, numerous productive oyster reefs are located in waters where harvesting for sale is prohibited to avert public health problems associated with actual or potential pollution. Because oysters filter large

volumes of water while feeding and respiring, they are capable of concentrating waterborne contaminants that may be of public health concern.



U.S. Representative Steve Southerland (holding oyster), Commissioner Adam Putnam (wearing hat) and State Senator Bill Montford discuss relaying oysters with Jim Nichols, Wakulla County oysterman.

However, oysters will lose contaminants and cleanse themselves when pollutant levels are reduced or when oysters are relocated to areas with good water quality.

Since relaying requires removing oysters from potentially polluted waters, stringent supervision is required to ensure public health is protected.

Relaying is most often accomplished during closed harvesting seasons so the oysters have adequate time to cleanse (typically 14 days) prior to being harvested. The only acceptable method of moving these oysters is by tonging or handpicking in shallow areas.

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Division of Aquaculture, using a federal grant through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, contracted with the Wakulla County Oystermen’s Association to relay

over 22,000 bushels of live oysters in four days. These oysters will be available for harvest when waters open this winter.

Revisions to Florida Aquaculture Plan in the works

The Aquaculture Review Council is revising the Florida Aquaculture Plan in anticipation of the Legislative Session that begins on January 10, 2012.

Council members (see companion article on page 2) have been working with Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Division of Aquaculture

staff to expand and refine their list of research and development priorities. These priorities are included in the Florida Aquaculture Plan which will be distributed to the agriculture committee of the Florida House and Senate.

These priorities will also guide the aquaculture researchers in

public and private laboratories as to the technical and production challenges that must be solved to help Florida farmers compete in national and international markets.

Florida aquaculturists are encouraged to contact their Council representative and suggest priorities for the plan.

Commissioner Adam Putnam appoints two new members to the Aquaculture Review Council

Commissioner Adam Putnam welcomed two new members, Pierre LaPochat and Barry Hurt, to the Aquaculture Review Council. The council, created in 1984 when the Florida Legislature passed the Aquaculture Policy Act, consists of nine members representing the major segments of Florida aquaculture. The council meets quarterly to provide information to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Aquaculture on the opportunities and challenges facing each sector of Florida aquaculture. In particular, the council annually reviews research proposals designed to address concerns identified by the council.

The council met on September 7th to discuss priorities identified by members to be part of the Florida Aquaculture Plan. At that meeting, Gene Evans, Food Fish Representative, was elected Chair and Allen Register, Alligator Representative, was elected Vice-Chair. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 4 from 10:00 AM to noon at the UF-Tropical Aquaculture Laboratory.

Please contact your individual sector representative or the Division if there are issues you would like to see on the upcoming agenda.

The new members are:

Pierre LePochat replaces longtime member and Council Vice-Chair Brad McLane, Florida Aquatic Nurseries, Inc., to represent aquatic plant growers.

Barry Hurt replaces Jim Michaels, Mote Marine Center for Aquaculture, as the at-large representative.

Current and new members are:

Alligator Representative: Allen Register, Gatorama, phone 863-675-0623, allen@gatorama.com.

Aquatic Plant Representative: Pierre LePochat, WaterScapes Aquatic Plant Nursery, phone 813-986-2503, info@waterscapesnursery.com.

At-Large Representative: Barry Hurt, Placida Gold Aquafarms, LLC, phone 863-604-1891, bhurt@tampabay.rr.com.

Commercial Fishing Representative: Heath Davis, Davis Seafood, phone 352-543-5450, hdavis@drummondbank.com.

Food Fish Representative: Gene Evans, Evans Farms, phone 386-749-0392, geneevans@mpinet.net.

Shellfish Representative: Daniel Solano, Cedar Key Aquaculture Farms, Inc., phone 888-252-6735, dans@cedarkeyclams.com.

Tropical Fish Representative: Art Rawlins, Rawlins Tropical Fish, phone 813-737-3418, rawlins@ij.net.

State Agriculture Advisory Council Representative: Marty Tanner, Aquatica Tropicals, Inc., phone 863-660-3391, jmtanner@gte.net.

Aquaculture Interagency Coordinating Council Representative: Leslie Palmer, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, phone 850-488-5471, Leslie.Palmer@FreshfromFlorida.com.

For additional information about the council, please visit: www.floridaaquaculture.com and click on "Advisory Groups."

Farm Service Agency working to improve NAP

Florida tropical fish farmers met with Tom Hockert, Farm Program Chief, USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), on September 6, 2011, in Ruskin to discuss methods to make the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) more credible, efficient and equitable for tropical fish farmers and to create an improved NAP application process that will allow farmers eligibility for the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payment Program (SURE). SURE offers assistance to farmers who have lost expected revenue as a result of a natural disaster. In most cases, farmers who wish to utilize the SURE program must be enrolled in the NAP.

Art Rawlins, President – Florida Tropical Fish Farms Association, hosted the meeting and a preceding on-farm tour with Mr. Hockert. Mr. Rawlins noted that the effort was a great first step to accommodate tropical fish in a program that was developed to provide a risk management tool to farmers producing crops that are not covered by crop insurance.

FSA representatives acknowledged that NAP procedures are not conducive to ornamental fish production and this presents challenges for aquaculturists and FSA staff handling loss claims. The central issue is the lack of a verifiable method to calculate beginning and ending inventories.

Inventory determination and authentication is complicated by tropical fish production characteristics, which include: species variety (livebearers and egg layers), multiple crops per season, variable carrying capacities across pond types, season specific stocking densities, culturing multiple species in the same pond, variation in market value across age classes, difficulties in evaluating fish losses and cascading losses from stress, disease and predation that follow extreme cold weather events.

Tropical fish producers will continue to work with FSA staff to explore the nuances of ornamental aquaculture and to streamline NAP.

Reminder: Completing the annual aquaculture lease audit is mandatory

Annual audits are conducted by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Aquaculture on all marine aquaculture leases. They are used to determine compliance with the terms and conditions of the aquaculture lease, and are in conformity with the provision in the lease which states "Lessee shall maintain complete and accurate production documents and provide same to Lessor upon request." The information provided by the leaseholder is also entered into a lease database to create a production history of that particular lease.

For the 2011 calendar year audit, which will be conducted in early 2012, leaseholders will discover that the annual audit form has been changed to be more user friendly. The questions have been numbered

to help the leaseholder easily navigate the form and some questions now require the checking of a box beside the appropriate response. It is important to remember that you are certifying that your responses are true and correct to the best of your ability. All audit responses must be notarized. A notary is available to you at all Division of Aquaculture offices.

As stipulated in all aquaculture lease agreements, each leaseholder must pay the lease fees when due and must maintain a current Aquaculture Certificate of Registration, which must be renewed every July 1st.

If you are not current with your Aquaculture Certificate of Registration, not paying the lease fees and/or not returning of your audit, your lease may be considered as "non-compliant" and at risk for cancellation.

By keeping good records, which should include a copy of all receipts for any purchase of seed (or rock for live rock leases) and the amount of product harvested/sold, the completion of the audit form should not be a burdensome effort.

An important benefit to keeping good records, maintaining a current certification and promptly paying lease fees is that you will have documentation readily available to apply for any available help in the event of a natural disaster.

If you have any questions when completing your audit form, please contact Deborah Harvey at 850-488-5471 or Deborah.Harvey@FreshfromFlorida.com with the Division of Aquaculture for assistance.

Florida farmers happy with 2011 alligator egg collection

By Allen Register, Public Waters Egg Collection Coordinator

Annually, Florida alligator farmers collect alligator eggs from the wild for grow out on the farm through a cooperative program with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).



The 2011 egg collection was surprisingly good. Following a dry spring there was concern by the farmers that alligator nesting would be scarce, especially in the larger systems like Lake Okeechobee and the Water Conservation Areas (WCA). The WCA's had, as anticipated, very little nesting be-

cause of the lack of water, even in some of the better locations. A total of 673 eggs were collected from the WCA's as compared to 3,739 eggs in 2010.

Lake Okeechobee surprised everyone with 13,653 eggs collected, which is the highest number of eggs ever taken there.

Some of the other systems were hit and miss, but overall Florida alligator farmers feel pretty good about a total collection of 36,640 fertile eggs.

Nick Wiley, Executive Director of the FWC, reduced the egg fees for 2011



due to the down economy and the Governor's vetoing of funding for the Florida Alligator Marketing and Education Committee. Florida alligator farmers are very grateful to Mr. Wiley for that consideration.

Egg cost to the farmers will be roughly \$9.91 per egg.

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Mission

*Regulating and supporting aquaculture
production and growth for economic
development while protecting the
environment.*

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Winter weather: Dryer and warmer

The Southeast Climate Consortium and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association have issued a La Niña watch, predicting that La Niña will redevelop in the Pacific Ocean in the next one to three months.

La Niña refers to Pacific Ocean surface water temperatures turning colder than normal in a equatorial region from South America to the central Pacific.

La Niña typically brings fall and winter weather patterns to parts of the Southeast that are warmer and drier than normal. Historically, the peninsula of Florida averages rainfall 40% to 60% below normal in the months of November through March during La Niña events. Temperatures over the entire area average 3 to 4 degrees warmer than normal. The onset of warm and dry conditions normally begins in September and the pattern intensifies as the season progresses.

While mild freezes can be expected every year in North and Central Florida, La Niña reduces the risk of severe freezes in the citrus and vegetable belts.

For more detailed information about La Niña and climate forecasts, visit www.coaps.fsu.edu/climate_center or www.agroclimate.org.

The Division of Aquaculture's responsibilities include certifying all legitimate aquaculturists through an annual registration, implementing on-farm Aquaculture Best Management Practices to meet the State of Florida's environmental protection goals, managing 1.4 million acres of coastal waters for the harvest or culture of wholesome shellfish, implementing the National Shellfish Sanitation Program through periodic inspection of shellfish processing plants and product, and managing sovereignty submerged land leases for aquacultural purposes.

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