

One for all and all for one!

It's a busy season for anglers. The Expo is just around the corner and Fall fishing is heating up. The mullet run has started. Bait is schooling up inshore and I've seen fish blitzing on them. Tarpon with be migrating south and we are beginning to catch bluefish again. My sweet water buddies are reporting good catches of bass and bream. Fortunately or unfortunately, the exotics in South Florida including cichlids and peacocks are making a comeback and my buddy Skip Mackey reported catching a snakehead in the Fort Lauderdale area on fly. But snook populations are down and I'm not seeing them in many of the usual spots.

On the issue of snook, according to the Snook Foundation, in the past 50 years Florida's population has grown from 5 million to 18.3 million residents. Since 1960 Florida has lost 60% of its mangrove habitat. That habitat is a vital part of the snook's life cycle as well as over 200 other inshore species. Combine the loss of habitat, increase population and corresponding fishing pressure and it is easy to understand the magnitude of the problem fisheries are facing now and in the future.

Florida recently raised the snook stamp from \$2 to \$10. With the vast winter kill the species is in trouble as their numbers have declined. In spite of the fact that the season has been shortened, limits have been reduced, and a slot was established to ensure a viable brood stock the winter kill has put the species in jeopardy. It's the position of the Council that snook season should remain closed to ensure their recovery and future viability as a game fish species.

The snook stamp is the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's source of funding for snook research and conservation. I have always been an advocate of catch and release fishing since my days with Trout Unlimited where I acted as a spokesperson in our intervention with the State of Connecticut DEP. We convinced them they actually had viable wild populations of trout in the state. They did the research and issued special catch and release regulations on streams with self sustaining trout populations. Any cold water trout fisherman will tell you the best fishing is in catch and release areas.

The striped bass population also recovered due to catch and release and the striper fishery is probably the greatest fishery for inshore sportsmen in the world. We need to allow snook to recover by using catch and release too. For that matter, I believe that if every angler in Florida practiced 100% catch and release for 5 years we would rebuild all our fisheries and have the world class fishing Florida enjoyed 50 years ago not just its reputation. But only angler participation in catch and release can do this. If you play tennis and eat your tennis balls play ends and the game is over. We cannot have our cake and eat it too.

I was amazed to learn that the FWC receives calls every day from licensed Florida fisherman demanding their \$2 back because they cannot kill a snook. That seems penny wise and dollar poor to me. I also learned about the funding being dedicated to snook research and conservation. In the past I did not buy

a snook stamp because I am a 100% catch and release sport fisherman. But now that I know how the money is used I will be buying a stamp every year. I encourage you all to do the same even if you do not fish for snook. For all of us catch and release and buying a snook stamp is the best help we can give this species in their time of need.

It's a busy season for the Florida Council too. The annual Fly Fishing Expo is scheduled for October 22nd and 23rd at the Ramada Celebration Resort on Route 192 in Kissimmee. Our Expo last year was a great event enjoyed by members from the keys to the panhandle. And it's open to the public, so bring your friends who are not FFF members or are bait and artificial anglers who may be interested in learning about fly fishing.

This year's Expo will have more to offer you all than last year as the committee has gained experience and feedback from members to make this event even better. Program Director Ruth Stokes has arranged many, many programs including casting instruction, workshops and fishing seminars and the four seminar rooms will all be busy this year.

The Expo will feature an 80 foot a casting pond. Show Director Dave Olsen has filled our trade show with fly fishing shops and vendors. Casting Chairman Dusty Sprague will be leading our effort to certify casting instructors. Fly Tying Director Tom Logan has arranged for a great pool of talent to provide fly tying instruction and demonstrations. Auction/Raffle Chairman Ken Hofmeister has collected a great variety of tackle, fly fishing supplies, guide charters and art work for our raffles and auctions.

Last but not least, Expo Chairman Pete Greenan has the banquet set for Saturday night with a live auction. The Banquet will feature Steve Kantner, the world famous Land Captain, as our guest speaker. Steve is one of the most knowledgeable fisherman in Florida and his presentations are not only informative, but they are also witty, entertaining and simply outright fun. Steve is one of the Backcountry Fly Fishing Association of Brevard, my home club's favorite speakers.

The Florida Council Expo is the premier fly fishing event in Florida. The council was formed in 2007 to unify clubs in Florida and bring all the FFF has to offer closer to our membership. Our leadership has an all inclusive and accessibility policy. While most Councils use their expo, fair or conclave primarily as a fund raising venue by charging for every seminar and event in addition to your admission, our policy is to make the event easy and accessible.

To achieve this goal we centrally locate in the state and have a low cost of admission. Again this year admission is just \$10 for both days. Kids under 16 are free. Admission includes all the seminars and workshops. The banquet and auction is extra but well worth the price. The hotel is affordable and if you only attend one day please make your stay Saturday night to attend the Banquet and Auction.

This year in Florida, FFF members and clubs have worked on conservation issues and projects, founded and started youth programs, worked with Casting for Recovery and Project Healing waters and shared our knowledge and skills with each other. We have taught fly casting and certified casting instructors.

In the past, fly fishing was a secret passion tightly held by its fraternity and becoming skillful and knowledgeable in the sport required a mentor willing to share. But with the founding of FFF, and its commitment to promoting the sport as the most enjoyable way to catch fish, that all changed. FFF members and clubs have taught each other the skills and shared the local knowledge needed to enjoy the sport and be more successful anglers. When I travel FFF members are always willing to share with a fellow Federator. Sharing that fraternal bond with other fly fishers makes membership a bargain.

My flat's boat's first mate and wife Ronda and I attended the FFF National Fly Fishing Fair in West Yellowstone in August where I represented the Florida Council at the meetings and programs. I'd like to take a moment to share what I learned about FFF's current position and direction.

The Federation of Fly Fisherman began as a loose affiliation of fly fishing enthusiasts formed 43 years ago. It was run by its members and council presidents until a few years ago. FFF was a bottom up run organization. That changed with the creation of an executive director position and it became more of a bottom down organization. Last year the FFF switched back.

At the national meeting we learned that FFF is fiscally sound with a sizable surplus in excess of a quarter million dollars. Currently, there are individual members, affiliated clubs where members need not be members of FFF, 100% clubs where all members must be members of FFF, and Charter Clubs that are owned by FFF and all members must be members of FFF.

Our volunteer leaders have recognized for a long time the flaw in how FFF is organized. With so many issues challenging our sport including environment, conservation, fishing access, and proper resource management, it has never in history been more important for us to organize and unify fly fisherman. FFF is the only national and international organization dedicated to promoting, teaching and representing the interest of fly fisherman on such important issues as conservation, environment, fisheries management and regulation, and access issues. And it's the only organization where one can gain the benefits of FFF through membership in an affiliated club without paying dues to the organization.

There are many active sportsmen's groups such as Trout Unlimited, BASS, The Wild Turkey Federation and Ducks Unlimited. There are numerous other organized groups representing professions including such groups as The American Medical Association, Realtor, the American Nurses Association and BAR are good examples. They all require membership in the organization.

Why do like minded people organize? To have a voice! If a fly fisherman intervenes in an important local environmental issue that individual carries the weight of one. If the BAR or FFF intervene they carry the weight of their membership

Here's the flaw in FFF. And I'll use TU in comparison because TU and FFF are the same age. TU has about 88,000 members. FFF has 12,000 because we do not require affiliated clubs to be members of FFF. When I became president I spent a lot of time pondering this and it did not make sense to me because TU, while most of its membership are fly fisherman, TU really don't offer much to their members other than working on a local conservation project which is a local initiative anyway. Yet every local club or chapter member must be a member of TU. People join because of the clout and the cause.

Because FFF is member driven, it offers an opportunity to organize under the FFF international umbrella. Local FFF clubs and members can intervene in local conservation using weight of its full membership. Members and clubs can work local issues just like TU. And FFF offers clout by association. In today's world, with all the threats to our sport, I believe this association is too valuable to overlook. This year, the FFF board of Directors has taken a giant step to make FFF a much more powerful representative of our interests. I commend them for their bold move and support them 100%.

What has changed is this. Beginning in 6 months, all new clubs who join FFF must be 100% clubs or Charter Clubs. They have removed the flaw in our organization that has made us 43 years old with only 12,000 members. TU being the same age has almost 8 times the membership, and considerably more clout when intervening in issues affecting our sport.

This new model of operation will help FFF grow. Any club that is currently an affiliate member is grandfathered in and will be allowed to continue as a FFF affiliate club. Any existing clubs that are not affiliated with FFF have until March 31st 2011 to join the FFF as an affiliated club. Clubs who affiliate with FFF by the March 31st 2011 deadline will also be grandfathered. As of April 1st, 2011, all new clubs must be 100% clubs or Charter Clubs.

There has been some negative feedback mostly from non members who don't recognize the values of FFF and the strength of association and organization. Sadly, fishermen do not have a mall effect mentality. Many fly fishermen have a my fishing hole mentality and are only willing to work toward protecting and improving their favorite fishing hole. It's this small mindedness, out of sight, out of mind ostrich mentality that enables them to ignore the threats around them and enables them to avoid personal responsibility for us all to promote the greater good for our environment and sport as a whole. Many American fly fishermen don't respect and recognize the value of FFF even though they respect and value TU and DU where national membership is mandatory.

In West Yellowstone I learned that around the world, people have much more respect and admiration for the Federation of Fly Fishers than American fly fisherman often do. A perfect example of this is the Europeans.

Many European governments closely regulate fishing and teaching. Across the pond, in order to teach fly casting one must have a government issued license. Anyone can teach here in America. But over there you can obtain a license only after a costly and rigorous program of teaching the teacher, taking and passing testing before you obtain a license to teach fly fishing.

However, European governments will issue you a license without education and testing if, get this one, you are a Federation of Fly Fishers Certified Casting Instructor. That's right! Believe it or not they waive their requirements if one is FFF trained and certified.

When I attend FFF events I see people from all over the world seeking FFF casting instructor certification so they can get licensed and teach in their own countries. And, many say it's cheaper to travel to the US and get certified than it is to do it locally.

It really impressed me that that government around the world has such great respect for the Federation that they waive their regulations in favor of our certification programs. At the same time it saddened me that here at home so many fly fishermen have little interest or respect for FFF and so few are members. I hope that changes real soon.

But let's get back to looking at FFF in America and TU, the other organization with a large fly fisherman membership. TU offers you a chance to work on conservation locally using TU's name and membership clout. But that is pretty much the extent of what TU does for its members. Any other local chapter programs are home grown.

On the other hand, FFF does all of the above too. And FFF teaches. We teach and certify casting instructors to increase their effectiveness and shorten new fly fisher's learning curve. We teach fly tying, and fishing techniques. We share knowledge of entomology for trout anglers and prey for saltwater game fish. We organize to protect the environment, work on conservation and regulation and offer clout by affiliation.

The Federation of Fly Fishers is focused on fly fishing as a whole, worldwide, any fish and any water. In my view FFF has the most to offer those of us who have an interest, love or passion for wild places and the sport of fly fishing. We are broadly focused on the interests of fly fishermen around the world. To me it's more a fraternity with a shared interest and I'm proud to be a member and your president. I only hope you will all continue to renew your memberships, spread the word, and recruit your friends and fishing buddies to join us.

So when fly fisherman ask me why they should join FFF I have many answers, but none as important as this. If you fly fish, joining the FFF, our worldwide Fraternity of Fly Fishers, is simply the right thing to do.

When you travel to the Expo this October please look me up. I'd love to meet and chat with my fellow fly fishers. And I'll take the time to tell you about the big one that got away.

See you in Kissimmee!

Stay hooked,

Bill Gunn

2009-2010 President, FFF Florida Council