

## **FWC Proposed CWA's in Southwest Florida Could Impact Boating**

CWAs (Critical Wildlife Area's) are established by FWC to protect important concentrations of wildlife and manage human activities to minimize and avoid disturbances during critical periods of their life cycle. Currently, there are 20 CWAs in Florida. Based on Commission direction at the April meeting, FWC staff have begun exploring additional sites that may meet the criteria for establishment as new CWAs. FWC Staff proposes to continue to meet with owners and partners to finalize proposals and proposed CWA boundaries for each site. FWC will then hold public meetings to assess support and make changes as necessary. Most of these sites are owned by the state of Florida, so FWC is also meeting with State Lands to garner support and letters of concurrence for each site. FWC can provide an update, if warranted in September and bring the final establishment orders for approval in November.

Contact Kyle Good with the Southwest Florida Marine Industries Association, [kyle@swfmia.com](mailto:kyle@swfmia.com) to express concerns of proposed CWA's in Southwest Florida and their impact on boating.

### **Alafia Banks, Hillsborough County (extending current CWA to include Sunken Island)**

Alafia Banks in Hillsborough County is currently a CWA which includes Bird Island and is closed seasonally. The two islands are owned by Mosaic Company and Port Tampa Bay but managed by Audubon under an agreement from the property owners. Audubon is working with the property owners to pursue adding Sunken Island to the CWA boundary, add a buffer, and include a year-round closure. Thousands of nests of sixteen species are documented each year on these islands, including reddish egret, roseate spoonbill, and American oystercatcher. Authorization from Mosaic and Port Tampa Bay is required.



\*Information obtained from "Critical Wildlife Area Proposals" written by Carol Rizkalla and published by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission division of Habitat and Species Conservation

### **Dot-Dash-Dit, Manatee County (newly proposed CWA)**

The Dot-Dash-Dit colony refers to 3 mangrove islands at the mouth of the Braden River, in Manatee County. The islands are owned by the state and authorization from the Department of Environmental Protection is required. Several hundred wading birds nest on the islands, and it is the only coastal colony of wood storks in the Tampa Bay area. The islands are managed by Audubon. Disturbance occurs as photographers, boaters, and fishermen get too close to the islands. A year-round closure with a buffer for all three islands is under consideration.



### **Robert's Bay, Sarasota County (newly proposed CWA)**

Roberts Bay in Sarasota County consists of 3 small islands and a breakwater just south of Sarasota. Owned by the state, but managed by Audubon, the islands are important for a variety of wading birds and shorebirds, including pelicans, egrets, herons, spoonbills, and American oystercatchers. Nests or young are present every month of the year. The County built a break water in 2007 in order to protect the islands from erosion. Audubon recommends a year-round closure and in-water buffer to provide separation of the bird colony from eco-tour operators, photographers, and boats. Authorization from the Department of Environmental Protection is required.

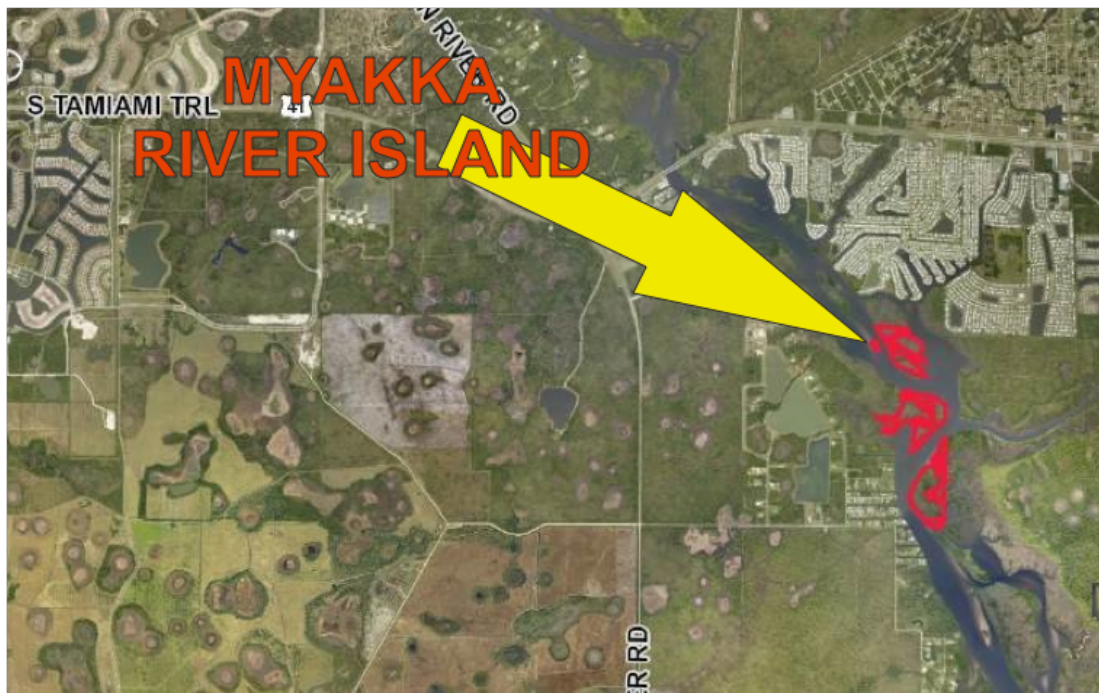
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**Myakka River, Sarasota County (amending CWA from seasonal closure to year round closure)**

Myakka River CWA was established in 1987 with a seasonal closure to protect nesting wood storks, egrets and herons. It occurs in the middle of the river channel and between two marinas. The island is managed by DEP as part of the Wild & Scenic River Program. Re-establishing the CWA with a buffer and a year-round closure due to a shift in nesting dates. Is being considered. Authorization from the Department of Environmental Protection is required.



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### **Pine Island South, Lee County (newly proposed CWA)**

Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge staff monitor several nesting islands within the refuge boundary and in neighboring Pine Island Sound. 3 sets of islands have both high levels of wading bird nesting and disturbance, and thus meet the criteria for CWA designation. The islands support herons, egrets, pelicans, and cormorants. Broken Islands and Useppa Island Oyster Bar are within the Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve. Hemp Key is owned by the refuge. Given the distance between the 3 islands, these would likely be 3 separate CWAs. Authorization from Department of Environmental Protection and the Refuge Manager is required.



### **Estero Bay, Lee County (newly proposed CWA)**

Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve monitors 25 nesting islands within their boundary. They have determined that 3 islands have both high levels of wading bird nesting and disturbance. From north to south: Matanzas Pass Island is a spoil island located northwest of the Matanzas Pass Bridge in Fort Myers Beach, Florida. The island is currently under a spoil easement held by the Army Corp of Engineers. Big Carlos Pass W of M-52 is a natural mangrove island where American oystercatchers have been documented, and is managed by the Estero Bay Preserve State Park. Coconut Point East is a natural mangrove island managed by the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve. Given the distance between the 3 islands, these would likely be 3 separate CWAs. Authorization from Department of Environmental Protection and possibly the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is required.

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**Rookier Island, Collier County (extending current CWA to include neighboring islands)**

Rookery Island CWA (Island 0), part of Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, was established in 1993 for the protection of nesting and roosting wading birds year-round. Over the years, bird activity shifted to two other islands (Islands 1 and 2). More recently, nesting has declined, but hundreds of birds roost on these islands at night. Increased use of Rookery Bay has led to increased disturbance of birds on these islands. A re-establishment to include all 3 islands, and then post those with current bird use with a buffer is being considered. Authorization from the Department of Environmental Protection is required.



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