



For immediate release
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Success Story at Skyway Pier is a result of a Collaborative Partnership

St. Petersburg, FL – The Skyway Bird Protection Committee will commemorate the success of reducing marine debris issues and bird entanglements, which are down 80%, at the Skyway Fishing Piers, by installing an educational sign on responsible fishing on Monday, October 31 at 10 am. The Skyway Bird Protection Committee is a partnership between the Department of Environmental Protection’s Florida State Parks system, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Skyway Pier Associates which manages the fishing piers, Tampa Audubon Society, Manatee County Audubon Society, Audubon Florida’s Coastal Island Sanctuaries, Palma Sola Veterinary Hospital, local bird rehabilitation organizations, and Tampa Bay Watch. **The Committee’s mantra, “Don’t Feed the Birds and Don’t Cut the Line”, is key to this success.**

Fishing line poses a serious threat to birds and other wildlife in the Tampa Bay area and throughout Florida. Improperly discarded fishing line from popular fishing spots or boats can entangle birds and then be inadvertently transported to bird roosting and nesting areas, where birds and other wildlife can easily become entangled or hooked. In the Tampa Bay Region, bird nesting sites, including Audubon Florida’s Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, National Wildlife Refuges, and State Parks, are home to over 75,000 breeding pairs of birds of 30 species, half of which are state-listed as “endangered”, “threatened”, or “species of special concern”. Since fishing line can take over 500 years to decompose, improper disposal resulting in fishing line in the habitats of Tampa Bay continues to pose a threat to wildlife for a very long time. Biologists have identified entanglement in fishing line as the main cause of death for Brown Pelicans in Florida, but other birds, fish, and wildlife, including dolphins and sea turtles, often become entangled and killed as well.

Five signs on responsible fishing, which will provide angler education, will be installed at the North and South Skyway Fishing Piers. Additional signs are being installed around Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties at popular fishing spots and boat ramps. Sea World Busch Gardens Conservation Fund and Restore America’s Estuaries funded the signs, fishing line recycling tubes installed at piers, and fishing line cleanups of the Skyway Fishing Piers by boat.

The Skyway Fishing piers, with over 2.7 million visitors annually, are one of the most popular fishing spots in the Tampa Bay area. The piers experienced record entanglement and marine debris issues in 2014 with over 550 serious entanglement incidents of birds, mostly Brown Pelicans.

Concern about these entanglements led to the formation of the Skyway Bird Protection Committee, a cooperative partnership between state and local agencies, conservation groups, and concerned citizens. The Skyway Bird Protection Committee implemented a variety of measures including community outreach, angler education, fishing infrastructure improvements, and expanded cleanups, through a

cooperative approach. These actions have markedly improved the situation at the Skyway Fishing Piers, as demonstrated by an 80% decrease in entanglement incidents, improved trash and fishing line disposal, and a reduction in the number of birds roosting on the Skyway Fishing Piers.

Informing fishermen to avoid feeding birds on the pier has been a key factor. This reduces the number of birds attracted to the pier area and helps fishermen avoid accidentally hooking the birds.

Raising awareness of the FWC Statute that prohibits the feeding of Brown Pelicans is a major factor that reduces the number of birds attracted to areas where there is active fishing, therefore reducing the risk of entanglement. Feeding pelicans is prohibited by law (F.A.C. 68A-4.001).

In addition, to educate fishermen and help protect birds, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has implemented the RRR Program, "Don't Cut the Line: Reel, Remove, and Release". See <http://myfwc.com/news/news-releases/2016/march/02/hooked-bird/>.

Committee members also taught fishermen how to safely remove line and hooks from birds accidentally tangled or hooked at the pier, saving the lives of the entangled animals. See Audubon's brochure: http://docs.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/audubon_hookedpelican_brochure.pdf.

Tampa Bay Watch is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) stewardship program dedicated exclusively to the charitable and scientific purpose of protecting and restoring the marine and wetland environments of the Tampa Bay estuary encompassing over 400 square miles of open water and 2,300 square miles of highly- developed watershed. Tampa Bay Watch involves more than 10,000 youth and adult volunteers each year in hands on habitat restoration projects. For more information, visit www.tampabaywatch.org, or call 727-867-8166.

The Tampa Audubon Society is a non-profit conservation organization established in the 1940's serving the Tampa Bay area including Tampa, Brandon, Odessa, Riverview, and Seffner. Tampa Audubon Society is an active chapter of the National Audubon Society and Audubon Florida, with a mission to conserve and restore our ecosystems, focusing on birds, wildlife, and their habitats, through education, advocacy, and community involvement. For more information, visit <http://www.tampaaudubon.org>.

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Photo opportunities: Media is welcome to join us at the sign installation on Monday, October 31 at 10 am. Day of event contact will be Melinda Spall 813-220-2032. Those in attendance will be Melinda Spall from Tampa Bay Watch, Sandy Reed from Tampa Audubon, Jamie Foster from Skyway Pier Associates and Kevin Kiser from the Department of Environmental Protection's Florida State Parks system. The meeting location is Blackthorn Memorial Park located on the North Pier of the Skyway Fishing Pier State Park. Blackthorn Park is the first exit if you are heading southbound on I-275 just before going over the Sunshine Skyway bridge.