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## **FWC EMERGENCY MEETING WILL FOCUS ON OIL SPILL RESPONSE**

**TALLAHASSEE**— Commissioners of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will hold an emergency meeting May 19 in St. Pete Beach to discuss the agency's ongoing response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Chairman Rodney Barreto called the meeting to make sure the FWC is fully prepared to handle any potential impacts to Florida's fish and wildlife resources. Since the oil spill incident occurred in late April, the FWC has worked closely with county, state and federal agencies to help prepare a coordinated response.

"The FWC will do everything possible to protect Florida's fish and wildlife," Barreto said. "We've called this meeting because this is an unprecedented situation. Not only could the oil spill affect our natural resources, it's already affecting the livelihoods of our commercial fishermen, guides and charter boats and other tourism-related businesses."

State officials and stakeholders are concerned about the mistaken impression that Florida is "closed." In fact, it is business as usual; there are no beach closures, and all Florida waters in the Gulf remain open to commercial and recreational fishing.

The FWC has contributed to the response through a variety of activities. FWC scientists are mapping high-priority fish and wildlife habitats to help focus protective measures. They are also conducting biological assessments to establish a baseline for measuring the severity of potential impacts on fish and wildlife.

"We are moving into the best possible position to take care of our fish and wildlife resources as this crisis unfolds," said Nick Wiley, the FWC's executive director. "This is truly a well-coordinated team effort in Florida. We are grateful for the leadership and cooperation coming from of the Department of Environmental Protection and the Division of Emergency Management through our State Emergency Operations Center. "

The meeting will be held at the Tradewinds Island Resorts beginning at 10 a.m. Anyone requiring special accommodations to participate should advise the FWC at least five days prior to the May 19 workshop, by contacting the FWC's Office of Human

Resources at 850-488-6411. If you are hearing or speech-impaired, contact the FWC using the Florida Relay Service at 800-955-8771 (TDD) or 800-955-8770 (voice).

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