

The 2005 Annual Meeting of the Florida Chapter will NOT be in Brooksville!

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Why? The Brooksville Withlacoochee Training Center (WTC) – and their excellent staff – have been very popular and consistently met our needs, with one important exception: the number of beds of the WTC declined in recent years and our registrations have increased! Overcapacity registrations have been met in a variety of creative ways, for several years now, and the Executive Committee felt that change was necessary. Moving this meeting to another facility has become not a matter of “if”, it’s a question of “when”, so we searched for a site that would meet all the needs of the Chapter and keep the meeting activities intact. This should come to no surprise to anyone, actually, since this problem has been discussed repeatedly at recent Annual Business Meetings (you did come to the Business Meetings, didn’t you?). The 2005 meeting – which will be our 25th annual meeting – is an auspicious time to move forward to a larger facility. So how did we come to our final decision?

The size of the facilities was a critical issue. We have settled on the Ocala 4-H Camp that has a conference hall rated for 180 people. The dining hall is rated for a similar size. Most importantly, this new facility can sleep 120 comfortably (1.5X the WTC; and there is spillover sleeping capacity for a total of 240 sleepy fish biologists). In the short and long term, this facility meets our needs to grow. In addition, the gymnasium hall is highly suitable for our poster session, which is welcome news. Posters have been increasing in importance for presentation of research and management activities.

The location was a very important consideration. Florida is a large state and we regarded Ocala as a natural mid-point to our state. Moving from Brooksville to Ocala may make the location more accessible to the largest number of people. Although we could not expect the venue to be exactly like the WTC, we found an environment that is adjacent to the Ocala National Forest. As an added bonus, the bonfire area is in view of a lake.

The cost was also very important, and the WTC was judged as a great value. We considered it critical that the meeting venue be affordable, and even for those that are supported through institutional funds, we want as many people from each institution to be supported for travel. Fortunately, this new facility will not be more expensive than the WTC.

The new facility will accommodate the social activities that we know are important. After a full session of talks, there is a need to walk by the lake, shoot hoops, or relax with a beverage of your choice by the bonfire. This facility will accommodate all of those needs! You may take a look at the facility on their web site: <http://4h.ifas.ufl.edu/ocala.htm>.

You were our most important consideration. Many people said they liked the ambiance and level of luxury that the WTC offered. We listened to you and reviewed your suggestions for new venues. We searched the internet, we compiled the details, and we made site visits. We went through this effort, because we were concerned that people might avoid future meetings if we did not expand to meet the number of registered attendees. It was a challenge, but we believe we have found a venue that has the feeling of the WTC site that we loved, but will meet the Society’s need for a larger facility, for now and the future.

We have done our best; so what is there left to do? Come to the silver anniversary meeting of the Chapter, which is set for February 22-24, 2005! Preparations are being made for an engaging symposium on diadromous fishes that incorporates freshwater, estuarine, and marine themes. As always, we anticipate varied and stimulating contributed paper and poster sessions as well. We look forward to this meeting every year and we hope to see you there in 2005.