

# **Florida Chapter of the American Fisheries Society Membership Survey Summary Report**

**Chelsey Crandall**

Fisheries and Aquatic Science Program  
School of Forest Resources and Conservation  
University of Florida

**Nick Trippel and Stephen Jones**

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

## **Introduction and Methods**

One of the goals of the Florida Chapter's Marketing and Membership Committee is to "promote the FL Chapter AFS to universities, agencies, and the private sector to increase membership and participation in our annual meeting." A first step in accomplishing this goal is to better understand the perspectives of our current members, as well as to identify barriers to participation in our chapter and our annual meetings.

With this in mind, the Florida Chapter Marketing and Membership Committee implemented a survey in Spring 2020 to capture the attitudes and perspectives of members, general demographics of membership, and how well the Chapter was meeting the needs of fisheries professionals in the state. The survey was created and distributed using the Qualtrics software. A first draft of the survey was pilot tested with members of the Committee as well as selected members of the Florida Chapter. This led to editing and the addition or removal of questions/items.

The final survey questionnaire was distributed via email to all 220 individuals on the most recent Florida Chapter membership list. As an incentive to complete the survey, recipients were told there would be a drawing and one respondent would be randomly selected to win a \$100 gift card to West Marine. The survey was first sent out in early February 2020; a first and then second reminder email were then sent to those who had not yet completed the survey over the following weeks.

## **Results**

In total, 104 individuals completed the survey, for a response rate of 47%. This report summarizes the responses of those respondents. Nonresponse bias assessments have not been conducted, therefore it is possible that these 47% differ in significant ways from the remaining 53% who did not respond to the survey, and we cannot necessarily generalize the results to the entire Chapter. However, these results can be assumed to reflect the characteristics and perspectives of almost half of Florida Chapter members.

### WHO ARE THEY?

Two thirds of respondents identified as men (66%) and one-third as women (34%). Average age of respondents was 42, with a range of 22-80. One quarter (25%) of respondents were under the age of 30.

Almost half of the respondents (46%) identified as "established in their career", with most of the remaining respondents identifying as either a "graduate student" (25%) or early in their career (26%). There was also representation from those who are retired (8%) or an undergraduate student (3%).

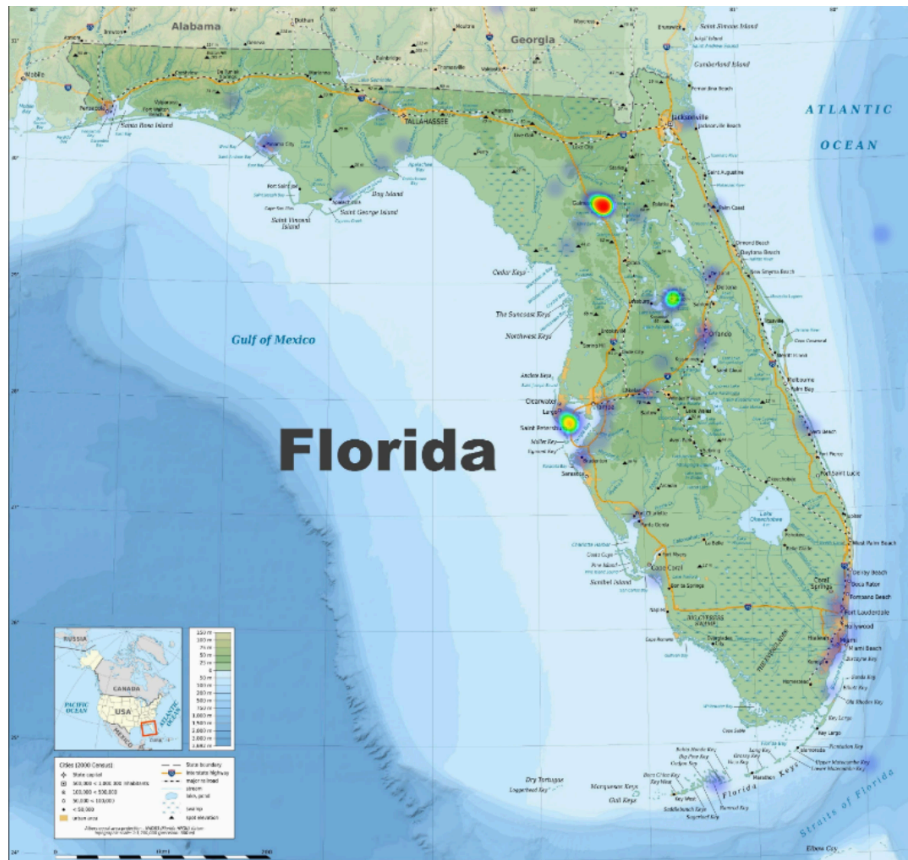
Around a third of respondents are employed in academia (38%) or at a state agency (37%). More than half (56%) of those employed in academia were students. Fewer respondents were employed by a Federal Agency (6%), an NGO (5%), or a consulting firm (2%), with 9% not currently employed. Twelve percent selected “other”, and their write in responses were as follows: teacher, self-employed, aquaculture farm owner, public aquarium, FWRI, teaching assistant at university, private company, retired from elsewhere but currently self-employed, Federal contractor, and currently looking for jobs post-graduation.

Students were also asked what career(s) they aspire to. Most (86%) selected Agency. This was followed by NGO (66%), Academia (48%), Consulting (24%), and Extension (17%). Three percent selected “other” (write in: private industry aquaculture).

Two-thirds (65%) of respondents work in marine fisheries, with half (50%) in freshwater fisheries (note that respondents could select more than one option, and some selected both freshwater and marine for example). Sixteen percent work in diadromous fisheries, with 11% selecting “other” (free text responses to “other” included estuarine fisheries, aquaculture, ornamental aquaculture, habitat monitoring, fish biology, finfish health, habitat and invertebrates, leadership and communication training for NR professionals, coastal avian ecology, and restoration).

A diversity of fields of work were represented among respondents. The majority (68%) selected “fisheries research”, with more than half (54%) selecting “ecology”. Biology and fisheries management were also well-represented (42% each). This was followed by field biologist (38%), data management (28%), stock assessments (21%), water quality (21%), aquaculture (20%), habitat enhancement (20%), and research/fisheries administrator (20%), teaching/education (18%), biostatistician (13%), human dimensions (12%), and genetics (2%). The option “other” was selected by 12% of respondents; free response write-ins included behavior, fisheries dependent monitoring, aquatic animal health laboratory, consultant (retired), habitat restoration and conservation, physiology, nonnative species, retired, natural history collections management, disease, and modeling.

Respondents work in all areas of the state. Almost half (40%) work in SW Florida, with 35% in South Florida, 31% working in NE Florida, 30% in North Central Florida, and 25% in Northwest Florida. In addition, they live across the state, with hot spot areas in St. Petersburg and Gainesville (see map below).



## PARTICIPATION IN CHAPTER

Respondents had been chapter members for an average of 10 years, with a range of 1-44 years. Almost half (45%) had been participating for fewer than 5 years. More than half (55%) had last attended a chapter meeting in 2019 (the most recent meeting).

Almost all respondents read the Shellcracker (83%), with about two-thirds attending the annual meeting (68%). Fourteen percent are members of committees, with 7% indicating they participate by serving on the leadership board, and 7% selecting “other”. Ten percent indicated that they have never participated in the Chapter, and 4% said they no longer participate. These individuals were then asked why they have stopped participating; responses included lack of time as well as life changes (graduation, retirement).

## MEMBERSHIP EVALUATION

Respondents were asked to rate how important different items were with regard to their FLAFS membership, on a scale of 1: Not at all to 5: Extremely important. On average, all items were rated as relatively important. The highest on average were “opportunities to learn about other research going on in the state” (4.45) and “networking” (4.4), followed by “professional development” (3.93) and “opportunities to share my research” (3.88).

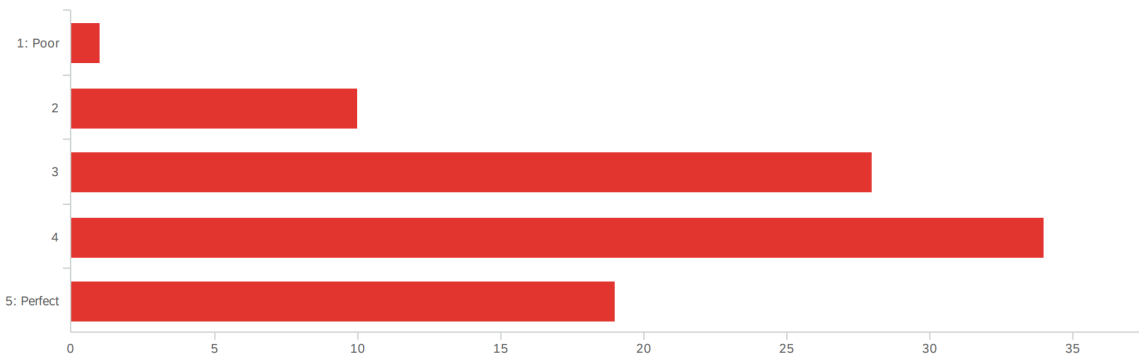
Respondents were also asked how well the Florida Chapter facilitates each of these things, on a scale of 1: Not at all to 5: Extremely well. The highest on average was “opportunities to learn about other research going on in the state” (4.41), followed by “opportunities to share my research” (4.26), “networking” (4.09), and “professional development” (3.43).

Respondents on average agreed with the statements “The focus of FL AFS is relevant to me” (4.06 out of 5.0) and “Being a member of FL AFS is beneficial to me” (4.11 out of 5.0).

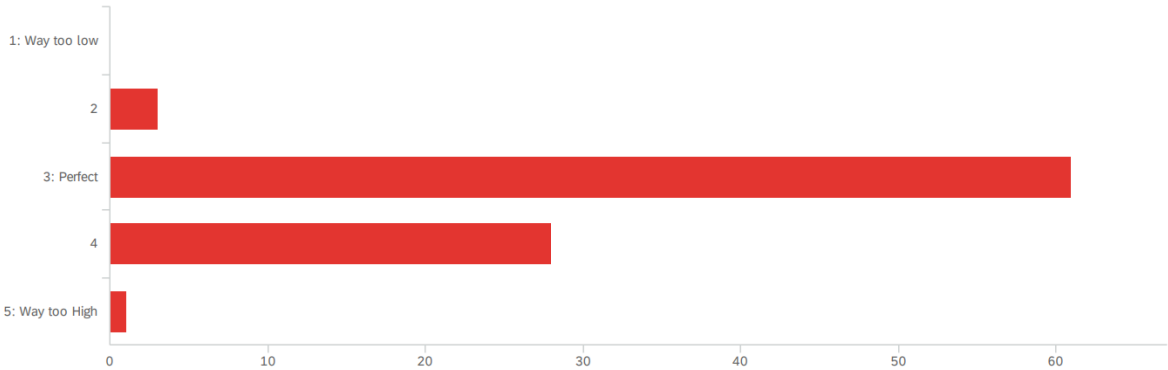
MEETING EVALUATION

Respondents were asked a series of questions to get at their perspectives about current meeting specifics and logistics. The following graphs summarize responses to these questions. The numbers on the x-axis correspond to the number of individuals who selected each response option.

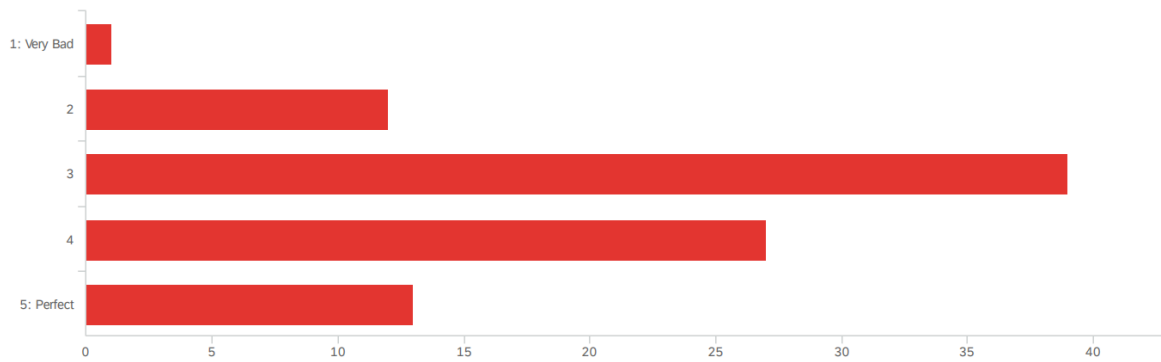
Q46 - On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the current meeting location?



Q47 - The cost of attending the meeting (registration and lodging) currently is:

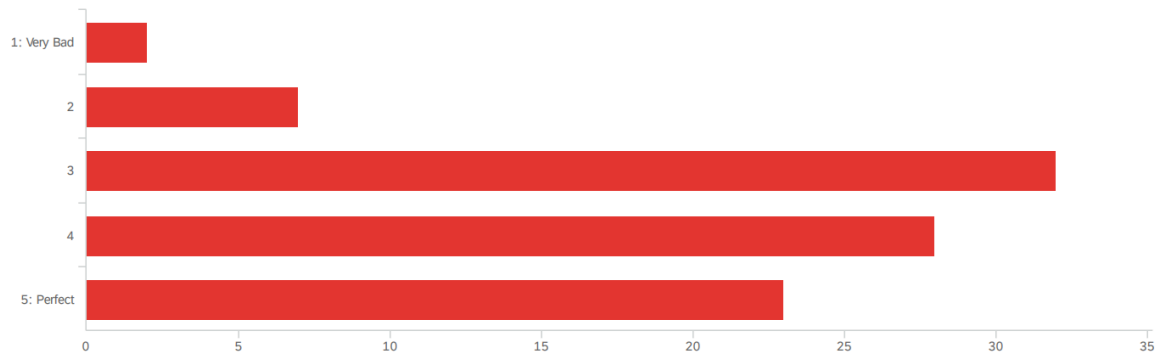


Q48 - The time of year of the meeting is:

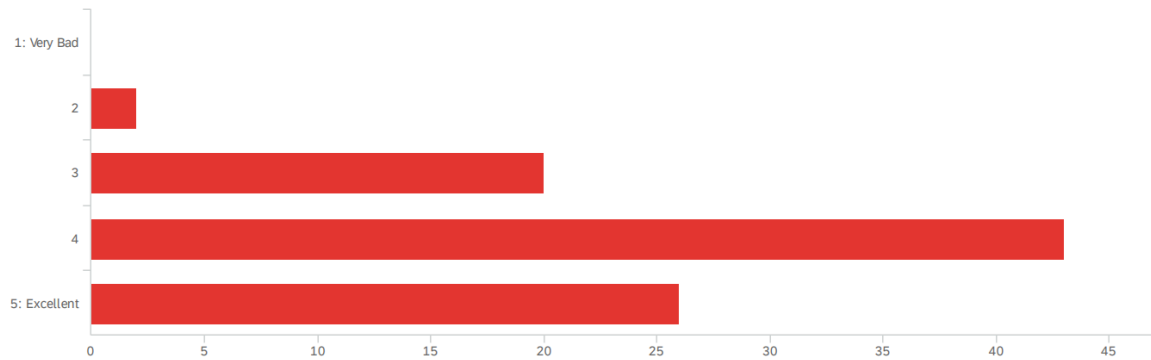


Q49 - The days of the week on which the meeting is currently held (Wednesday-Friday)

is:



Q50 - The content of the annual meetings is:



Most respondents (91%) indicated that their leadership supports meeting attendance, with two-thirds (67%) indicating that their leadership promotes meeting attendance. In addition, 90% responded “yes” when asked “If you are in a leadership position: do you promote and support meeting attendance”.

Most respondents hear about annual meetings from a FLAFS email (81%) and/or the Shellcracker (73%), with 38% selecting “word of mouth” and 16% finding out via the website.

### WHAT WOULD THEY CHANGE?

The survey included open-ended questions about the chapter and our annual meetings. These free-responses were grouped to identify general themes. The bold below represents the general theme, followed by verbatim text of the responses given in the survey.

Question: Is there anything you would like to get out of membership in the Chapter that we do not currently provide/facilitate?

#### **Mentoring**

- Mentoring opportunities at lunches, socials, and in the workplace. Establish a way to get students mentored on-the-job in professional's work places .... via volunteer, internships, or mentorships.
- I think that more career/ job consulting with mentors in the field would be beneficial. Linking up to go over resumes and cv's and sharing job opportunities would be beneficial
- More student oriented activities would be nice. At the chapter meetings it would be nice to have a career panel for instance or pair mentors and mentees for the duration of the meeting so students can learn from the more established scientists.

#### **Bring In/Connect With Others**

- Some symposia might bring in politicians at all levels of government to bring a reality check about how politics impact fisheries.
- Interactions with agency leadership
- Not necessarily something AFS can do anything about, but I would like to see more non-FWRI biologists at the annual meeting. The meetings are research dominated but it is important for fisheries managers to attend the meetings as well.
- Expand and recruit members from other underrepresented universities/research groups

#### **Do More Throughout Year**

- possibly sponsor CE workshops outside of the annual meeting on various topics
- more workshop or training opportunities, may be worth even offering something at times other than during the annual meeting. Also, would be good for the chapter to do things to give back more other than just getting together for a meeting once a year.

There are a lot of other state chapters that do some really neat projects throughout the year which give back and help promote their chapter.

- We need to be more than just an "annual meeting." The meeting facilitates being able to share research, but could do a better job on professional development. We need to begin to make the Chapter more relevant outside the meeting.

### **Change Location**

- I was disappointed to learn that the FLAFS Meeting is always held at the same venue each year. I did not like the location.
- Meetings in South Florida

### **Other Ideas/Suggestions**

- I would like to see more profiles of specific research programs around the state
- The opportunity for more people to attend the continuing education workshop
- Keep the balance between marine and freshwater sciences.
- Not sure, probably networking.
- list of job postings/opportunities especially in Florida, better facilitation of students/early career professionals in finding jobs that pertain to them
- Some symposia should involve current State of Florida Issues that not only educate our members about the issue but bring in people from other agencies to improve networking opportunities and increase membership. (harmful algal blooms, State of Florida's resources from water quality standpoint and how the water quality impacts our fish and fisheries, etc. etc.).
- Make Chapter members more aware of what is going on in AFS at the regional and national level. Possibly send student winner to SDAFS or AFS meeting with the requirement that they have to present a talk the following year about the benefits she or he received by participating at the meeting.

Question: Has anything made it difficult for you to attend our annual meetings?

### **Cost**

- Accommodations are expensive for their quality. \$100/bed in a double occupancy room is too much
- As a semi-retiree, I now pay out of my own pocket. More retirees might attend if they had reduced cost and you reached out to them. However, I don't think this is a big deal because retirees are not the core group that AFS should focus on.
- Cost
- I usually pay out of pocket so that I can still request attendance at larger national meetings. The lodging at Haines City has made it too costly for me to stay overnight, so I usually ride up for one day, but I miss the social aspect of networking in the evening.



### **Distance**

- Distance
- and distance from South Florida

### **Timing**

- conflicts with other meetings
- I've been able to attend, but the timing is difficult with seasonal field work and other conferences.
- It is the end of the semester for us, so it is hard to get away from exams and everything else
- I normally have some field work going on but I understand most people have an easier schedule by April
- Last year I had field work so I could not attend, but I think for the most part it is a good time of year.
- Scheduling
- The time of year is way too busy
- The timing of the meeting directly conflicts with those involved in fish culture operations. A later spring or early summer date would possibly allow fish culture folks to participate
- occurs only during the weekdays, which is hard if you work someplace other than FWC. The symposium takes up the only full day of the meeting so hard to present anything else on that day that is not "symposium material."

### **Approval/Support**

- attendance is only approved for presenters
- Conference travel approval
- Employer travel limits and need to prioritize other meetings over FLAFS
- Prior lack of involvement was due to state budget issues, not due to FLAFS issues. Current meeting time is better for my office's work, as the February meetings were at a time when our field season was starting to really get going.

### **General logistics:**

- Logistics
- Lack of transport

### **Other commitments:**

- child care
- Childcare
- Having a child
- Having kids!

- I would love to attend more meetings, but a combination of teaching/research responsibilities and young children at home has made it challenging. As my children get older, I fully intend to attend more FL-AFS annual meetings.
- Juggling 3 jobs while being an active student
- Just my busy schedule
- My travel schedule for teaching continuing education workshops
- Personal event this year that means I can't make it, but shouldn't be a problem in the future
- Sometimes hard with school commitments.
- teaching responsibility
- Time constraints.
- too many scheduling conflicts!
- Work schedule

**Not relevant to me:**

- I did not have much work in FL (and none since I retired) so most of the proceedings were not relevant.
- topics not relevant

**Not enough information:**

- I can't remember if I even get an information on the annual meeting
- I don't receive adequate notice of schedule

Question: Is there anything we should change about our annual meetings?

**Change Location**

- Better location that's less campy
- Changing location year to year would be a welcome change.
- Consider moving the location around the state to involve more folks at the ends of the state.  
I like the addition of the CE opportunity this year
- Hold it in a less isolated, preferably coastal location
- I know there is a challenge in finding venues cheap enough and large enough that also have ok accommodations nearby. But I'd like to try.
- Location? It's pretty tough for us to travel from S. FL to locations North of Ft. Lauderdale
- Mix up the meeting location.
- Rotate Location Occasionally
- Think about new locations every once in a while

### **Change Timing**

- I prefer the Tuesday through Thursday meetings. And February or March instead of April. But if most members prefer Wednesday through Friday in April, I have no big problem with it.
- Timing
- Possibly consider holding it over a weekend? Or don't make the symposium a full day so that some people not associated with the symposium topic could do an oral presentation on Thursday too.
- We met for years on Tuesday through Thursday. Not sure why we changed to Wednesday through Friday. With a shorter distance, I was able to get to class at UF for my Thursday afternoon lab... Given the greater distance to Haines City from prior meeting sites, it may not matter.

### **Costs Support**

- consider costs for those that have to pay out of pocket
- continuing to provide support for students is key I believe.

### **Structure/Topics:**

- Consider more focus on habitat related research and management and related topics.
- Equal opportunity for marine and freshwater. I often feel that it's very freshwater-focused
- I appreciate that the themes usually cross marine and freshwater fields, but this year's theme is not clear and tries to encompass too much.
- I think some sort of group discussion would be good. Sometimes these happen during the symposiums. With all of the bright minds together in the room together it would be good just to have some open conversation about current events, the status of things in florida, etc..
- more emphasis on Florida fishing and management problems
- Could consider going to a concurrent talk format (similar to larger meetings), to open up more time slots for workshops, networking, or working group meetings. This could help break up the monotony of sitting in a large dark room through 8 hours of talks.

### **Continue Continuing Ed:**

- Continuing ed workshops every year (I know there is a committee working on this, but making sure we have one every year AND the topics rotate and include information that is inclusive of the Chapter membership; i.e. not only relevant to fisheries biologist).
- More professional development workshops.

### **Other Ideas/Suggestions:**

- Be more inclusive of new people and students by maintaining an inclusive mindset at all times and actively engaging new people and being NICE to them.
- Try to get DFFM involved

## **Closing and Next Steps**

This report summarizes the results of a survey of current Florida Chapter members. The next step in this work is to extend the survey non-members, to further identify barriers to engagement with the chapter and ensure that the Chapter is meeting the needs of fisheries professionals across the state.