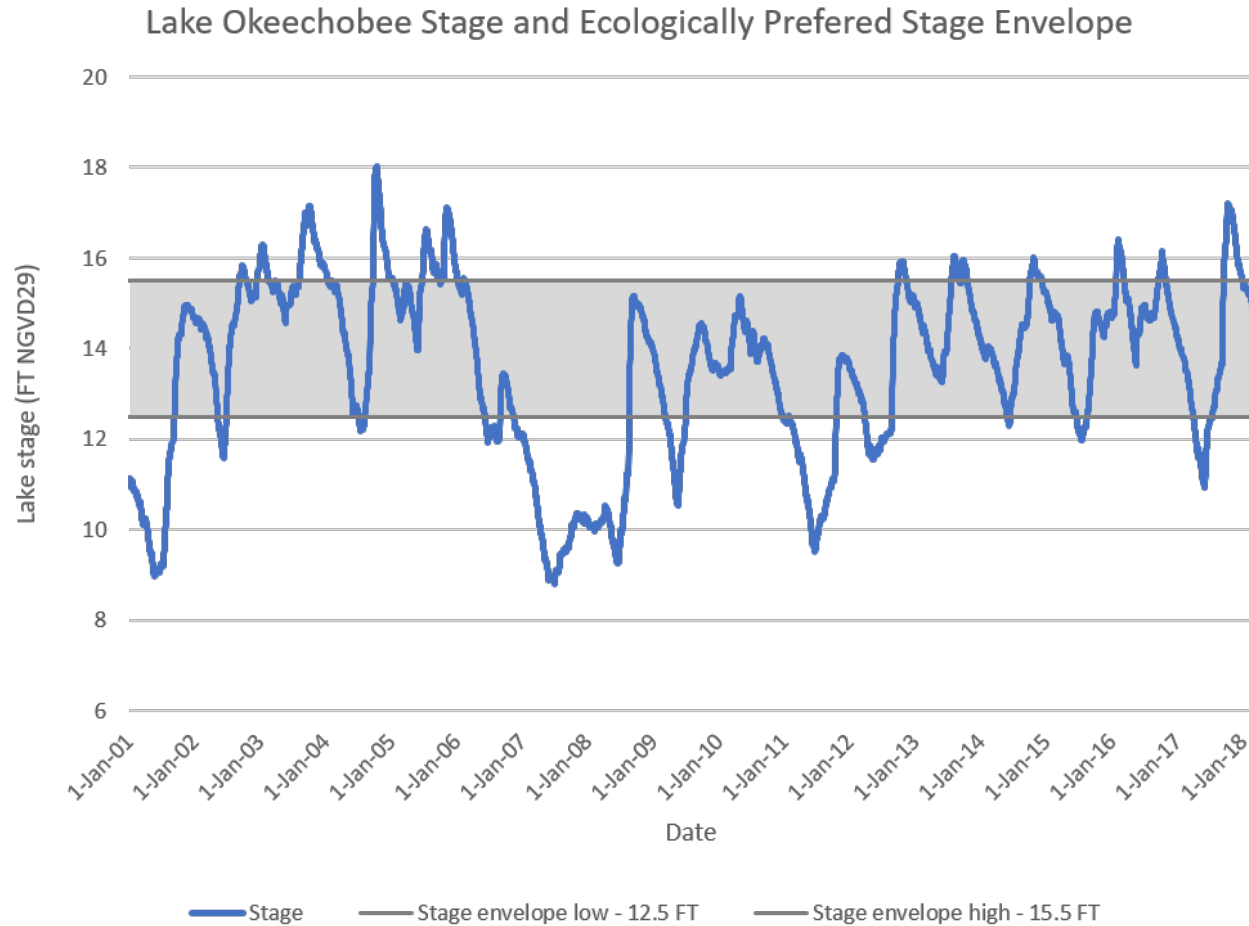


# Dipping a Toe in the Big Water – Chronicling Recent Water Level Impacts on Lake Okeechobee Ecological Conditions

Brent Bachelder  
NRLI Class XVII  
Florida Fish & Wildlife  
Conservation Commission

# Lake Stage & Ecology

- Lake stage is primary driver of ecological conditions
- High lake stages → marsh vegetation uproots
  - Reducing fish & wildlife habitat
  - Reducing water quality within remaining marsh
- Ecological impacts well documented from previous high water periods
- Abundant, yet unconsolidated data for 2012-2018 high water period





# Lake Stage & Ecology



# Manifest Conflict

- Recent Lake Okeechobee ecological condition data has been collected
- Limited data distribution
- Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule revision





# Stakeholders – Lake Okeechobee Habitat

- Freshwater sport anglers
- Freshwater commercial fishers
- Waterfowl hunters
- Wildlife watchers
- Airboaters
- United States Army Corps of Engineers
- United States Fish & Wildlife Service
- South Florida Water Management District
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Universities
- Audubon of Florida
- Other NGOs
- Lake Okeechobee resource-based economies
- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission

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- Saltwater sport anglers
- Saltwater commercial fishers
- Estuary recreationists
- Seminole Tribe of Florida
- Estuaries resource-based economies
- Permitted water supply users
- Agricultural producers
- Residents of South Florida
- Estuarine waterfront property owners
- Drainage districts

# Techniques

- Individual interviews with FWC Leadership
  - Live & phone
  - Confidential
  - Funneling
- Individual interviews with FWC field staff
  - Very open
  - Informal
  - Funneling
- Focus group
  - Concise & welcoming briefing
  - Initiate conversation
  - Let the group talk
  - Light facilitation
  - Summarize discussion
  - Seek consensus

# Outcome

- Increased communication within FWC
- Established leadership support
- Working on plan for how to engage with stakeholders



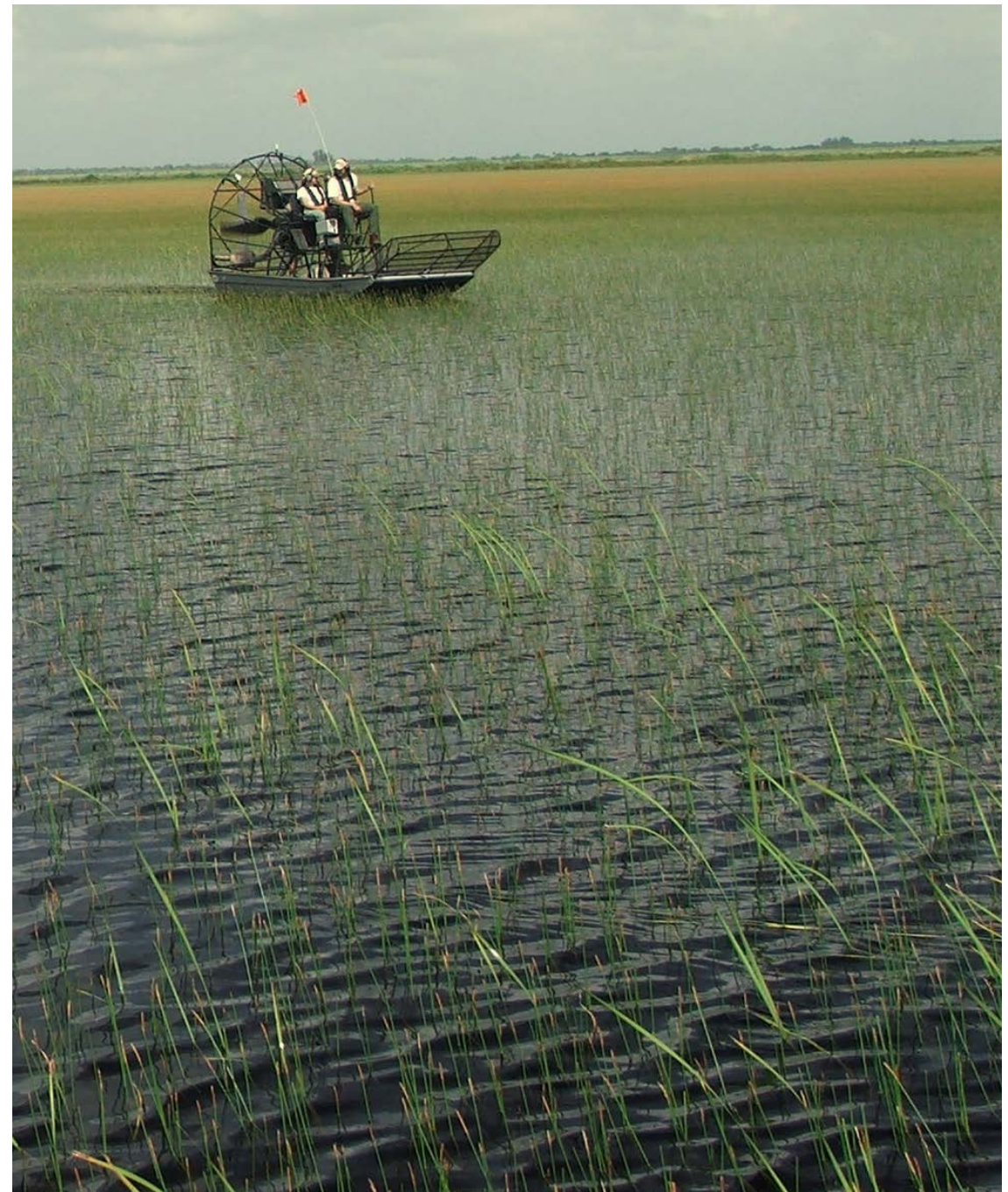


# Lessons Learned

- Slow & measured steps are necessary in high profile cases
- FWC is a large multi-faceted agency
  - Incorporating interests of various Divisions & Offices is important
  - Important to ensure agency's interests are conveyed consistently
- Working with internal stakeholders
- Producing a document addressing a high profile & contentious issue takes forethought

# Next Steps

- Identify goal of interagency collaboration
- Begin providing Lake condition updates to leadership
- Dip a toe in the water – think big & start small





# Discussion



Brent Bachelder  
NRLI Class XVII  
Florida Fish & Wildlife  
Conservation Commission