

Town of Fort Myers Beach
Agenda Item Summary

Blue Sheet Number: **2012-040**

1. Requested Motion: Approve Town staff to submit an application
For the Florida Municipal Achievement Awards Program

Meeting Date: May 21st, 2012

Why the action is necessary: Provides Town Council approval to submit an application on the Town's behalf

What the action accomplishes: Allows staff to prepare an application for the Florida Municipal Achievement Award in the Environmental Stewardship category

2. Agenda:

Consent
 Administrative

3. Requirement/Purpose:

Resolution
 Ordinance
 Other

4. Submitter of Information:

Council
 Town Staff
 Town Attorney

5. Background: The *Florida Municipal Achievement Award Program* is designed to recognize innovations and excellence in municipal government. It provides municipalities with an opportunity to receive recognition for superior and innovative achievement in three award categories—*City Spirit*, *Citizenship* and *Environmental Stewardship*. The Town is submitting an application in the Environmental Stewardship category for its work with development and implementation of the Beach Nesting Bird Program. This program has been developed under the leadership of the Town and is based on extensive work by the Town of Fort Myers Beach to develop a partnership for the purpose of fostering the conservation of imperiled beach nesting birds in an urban landscape on private property. The partnership includes beachfront private property owners, the Town, Audubon of Florida and two state agencies, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Through significant efforts and the cooperation of all partners, the Town was able to secure DEP permits that allow the property owners to rake their beaches after the annual bird nesting season. Town staff was honored by Audubon of Florida with the 2011 Guy Bradley Award for Stewardship in the Face of Threats to Birds and their Habitats for this program.

6. Alternative Action: Do not approve Town staff to submit an application

7. Management Recommendations: Approve Town staff to submit an application.

8. Recommended Approval:

Town Manager	Town Attorney	Finance Director	Public Works Director	Community Development Director	Parks & Recreation Director	Town Clerk
						

9. Council Action:

Approved Denied Deferred Other

Town of Fort Myers Beach Bird Conservation Partnership

This application is based on extensive efforts by the Town of Fort Myers Beach to develop a partnership fostering the conservation of imperiled beach nesting birds in an urban landscape on private property. The partnership includes beachfront private property owners, the Town, Audubon of Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Through these efforts and cooperation of all partners, the Town was able to secure DEP permits allowing affected property owners to rake their beaches after the annual bird nesting season. Securing those permits was pivotal in gaining the cooperation of property owners.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach is situated on a 7-mile long barrier island located in Lee County, Florida. The island is fully built out and the beach retains little native dune and coastal strand habitat except for what lies within the 1.5 miles of shoreline that comprise the Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area (CWA). The Little Estero CWA was established in 1992 by the FWC. Critical Wildlife Areas are designated to protect significant populations of wildlife from disturbance by human activity and pets. In the case of Little Estero Island CWA, several State-listed beach nesting birds, primarily least tern, Wilson's plover, and snowy plover are protected. All of these species prefer to nest either on bare sand or sparsely vegetated areas that provide camouflage for the pale, speckled eggs and chicks. To protect these birds and to minimize or prevent human disturbance, these beach nesting areas are posted to limit public access between April 1st and August 31st.

The Carlos Point residential area is a privately-owned mix of single-family homes and condominiums just south of the CWA. The beach at Carlos Point is mechanically raked to maintain an owner preferred manicured or "groomed" appearance. Beach raking is a process that constantly disturbs and rearranges the sand and sediment on a beach to prevent growth or spread of vegetation. This mechanical raking creates a beach that mimics the bare sand created by natural beach overwash events and coincidentally is a landscape much preferred by beach-nesting birds.

Mechanical beach raking is prohibited within the CWA and there has not been a significant beach overwash event to affect Fort Myers Beach since Hurricane Charley (2004). As a result, the CWA is now dominated with vegetation in comparison to the beach at Carlos Point.

Beach nesting birds began to nest on the raked beach at Carlos Point in 2008. Since then, a greater number of the birds were nesting there as compared to the heavily vegetated habitat inside the Little Estero Island CWA. This is a unique situation in Florida where listed species prefer highly disturbed property over conservation areas in a natural condition.

Management of beach nesting birds in an urban landscape on private property requires an innovative approach that balances the presence of human activities and the nesting requirements of protected species. A preference for sandy beaches and a low tolerance for disturbance during nesting place these species in conflict with human use of the beach. In order to protect beach-nesting birds from disturbance and trampling, Town staff, with the assistance of the FWC, post the nests with informational signs in order to reduce nesting bird and flightless chick disturbance. Posting nests on private property at Carlos Point requires owner cooperation and an agreement to cease raking within and near the posted areas to further reduce disturbance during the nesting season which can last from April through August. The posted area is then maintained, monitored, and expanded as needed. During the five month nesting period, vegetation rapidly establishes onto the beach where raking ceased. After the confirmed end of nesting season, postings are removed.

Beginning in April of 2009, we worked with the DEP and FWC to secure permits that allowed property owners to remove the vegetation once the birds completed their nesting. The removal of vegetation returns the beach to its owner preferred groomed condition and in turn creates the preferred nesting habitat for the next nesting season. If the vegetation is not removed, the birds fail to nest successfully or may not nest in the area at all.

At the beginning of this program, the Town approached private property owners for permission to post the area for beach nesting birds. The property owners granted permission to post with the condition that once each nesting season concluded they would be allowed to remove all new vegetation and return the beach to its vegetation free, groomed condition. Town and FWC staff viewed this as an effective and innovative opportunity to manage habitat for beach nesting birds. During the peak of the 2009 nesting season, over 120 least terns and three snowy plover nests were counted at Carlos Point. Unfortunately, in August of 2009, when nesting season ended, DEP stated that it would not issue a permit for vegetation removal due to statutory concerns. Two months later, after extensive efforts by the Town, the DEP reluctantly issued a permit but advised they would not do so again. As a result, Carlos Point owners advised they would not cooperate with posting efforts during the 2010 nesting season without a legally-binding permit from DEP before the

start of that nesting season. Without property owner cooperation, posting the area by Town and FWC staff become a legal difficulty. The combined effects of protected species disturbance and continued raking without a permit would likely result in a “take” of state listed species, a serious violation of the law.

To insure property owner cooperation for the 2010 nesting season, the Town took the lead in working with DEP and FWC staff to secure a permit in late 2009. After overcoming significant legal obstacles we secured vegetation removal permits in April 2010, just before nesting season. With permit in hand, we then brokered an agreement with private property owners to again receive their cooperation. Because of this, the 2010 was even more successful, with over 335 least tern nests (Florida’s second largest tern colony) and 5 snowy plover nests.

Due to continued efforts of all partners, a Five Year DEP permit was acquired by the Town in 2011 allowing post-nesting season vegetation removal. The 2011 nesting season produced several hundred least terns and at least 8 snowy plover nests. As of May 14, 2012 over 125 least tern nests and 9 snowy plover nests were already active.

Property owners can now cooperate for years to come without fear of losing the right to rake their property after nesting season. We also partnered with Audubon of Florida to develop a volunteer outreach program to educate beach goers about the importance of sharing the beach with these birds.

This program is so successful and has set such a precedent for imperiled species adaptive management that Audubon of Florida presented the 2011 Guy Bradley Award for Stewardship in the Face of Threats to Birds and their Habitats to Environmental Sciences Coordinator, Keith Laakkonen. Additionally, the Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute used this partnership as a practicum for its 2012 class to help rising leaders in the environmental community enhance their skills to effectively manage conflict arising from natural resource issues.

Fort Myers Beach supports several State listed beach nesting birds, including least terns and snowy plovers, which nest within a privately owned area where property owners rake the beach to maintain a “groomed” bare sand beach and prevent vegetation. Beach nesting birds require bare sand beaches for nesting success requiring balancing human activities with species conservation. To protect nesting birds, Town staff post the nests with informational signs. Property owners cooperate to cease raking within posted areas during which vegetation rapidly grows in the posted area. After nesting, property owners desire the vegetation removed to restore the beach to its groomed condition. If vegetation isn’t removed, the birds will not nest again. The Town partnered with property owners to secure DEP permits that allow beach raking after bird nesting season. This area is now home to a successful tern colony and property owners cooperate and can keep their groomed beaches.

Contact:

Keith Laakkonen
Environmental Sciences Coordinator
Town of Fort Myers Beach
2523 Estero Blvd
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
(239) 765-0202 Ext. 136
Keith@FortMyersBeachFL.GOV

2012 Florida Municipal Achievement Awards Program

Nomination Form

Category (Please check one)

See Award Criteria for more information. Please print or type.

Only submit one nomination per form. A city may submit one nomination in each category; however, each nomination must be for a different project.

FLORIDA CITY SPIRIT AWARD

Name of Project _____

Nominated by _____

(Name of City/Town/Village)

FLORIDA CITIZENSHIP AWARD

Name of Project _____

Nominated by _____

(Name of City/Town/Village)

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Name of Project Town of Fort Myers Beach Bird Conservation Partnership

Nominated by Town of Fort Myers Beach

(Name of City/Town/Village)

Contact Person

Please print or type. (The contact person below will be listed in the best practices publication and must be an elected city official or city staff person.)

Name Keith LAAKKONEN Terry Stewart

Title Environmental Sciences Coord. Town Manager

Government Town of Fort Myers Beach

Address 2523 Estero Blvd, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931

Telephone Number 239-765-0202 Fax 239-765-0591

Email Address Keith@FortMyersBeachFL.GOV

[OVER]



301 South Bronough Street, Suite 300 ♦ Post Office Box 1757 ♦ Tallahassee, FL 32302-1757
(850) 222-9684 ♦ Fax (850) 222-3806 ♦ Web site: www.flcities.com

February 13, 2012

Dear Municipal Colleagues:

The Florida League of Cities is pleased to announce the 4th Annual Florida Municipal Achievement Awards program.

As municipal officials, we know about the hard work of our public servants to develop programs that improve the quality of life for residents and for the future of our cities. The goal of the Florida Municipal Achievement Awards program is to focus public attention on excellent, innovative projects that address a local need, promote active municipal participation by residents, and improve environmental conditions.

There are three award categories:

- City Spirit Award,
- Florida Citizenship Award and
- Environmental Stewardship Award.

The nomination deadline is Friday, May 25, 2012. The Florida Municipal Achievement Awards program brochures, with rules and instructions for entry, are enclosed and are also available online at www.floridaleagueofcities.com

We encourage you to nominate your city's, town's or village's successful projects so they can be recognized and showcased statewide. All nominations will be included in a "best-practices" publication that will highlight the innovative projects entered in this year's awards program.

Winners will be announced in July and they will receive a beautiful "*Muni Award*," be recognized in the League's magazine, *Facebook* page, website and be invited to the Florida League of Cities Annual Conference, August 23-25, 2012—Westin Diplomat, Hollywood to be honored.

For more information about the awards program, call Sharon Berrian at the League's Tallahassee office at (850) 701-3660 or e-mail sberrian@flcities.com.

Sincerely,

Pat Bates, FLC President
Mayor, Altamonte Springs

Enclosure

Narratives

In the 1,200-word narrative, please be clear and concise, using the Award Criteria to support the selection of your nominated program. Please type up to 1,200 words, double-spaced on white 8 1/2" x 11" paper.

Please include a word count:

1,200

Number of words

In the 150-word narrative, summarize your program for use in the best practices publication.

Please include a word count:

150

Number of words

Supportive Information

- Please include additional supportive materials, such as newspaper clippings, photographs, letters from constituents, or other items that help document the nominated program.
- No more than 10 pages (on 8 1/2 x 11" paper, one-sided ONLY) of supportive material can be accepted.
- Please DO NOT staple nomination packets or use presentation folders. DO NOT include videotapes, DVDs, CDs, or PowerPoint presentations.

Contact Sharon Berrian at (850) 701-3660 or sberrian@flcities.com for more information.



Town of Fort Myers Beach Bird Conservation Partnership

This application is based on extensive efforts by the Town of Fort Myers Beach to develop a partnership fostering the conservation of imperiled beach nesting birds in an urban landscape on private property. The partnership includes beachfront private property owners, the Town, Audubon of Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Through these efforts and cooperation of all partners, the Town was able to secure DEP permits allowing affected property owners to rake their beaches after the annual bird nesting season. Securing those permits was pivotal in gaining the cooperation of property owners.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach is situated on a 7-mile long barrier island located in Lee County, Florida. The island is fully built out and the beach retains little native dune and coastal strand habitat except for what lies within the 1.5 miles of shoreline that comprise the Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area (CWA). The Little Estero CWA was established in 1992 by the FWC. Critical Wildlife Areas are designated to protect significant populations of wildlife from disturbance by human activity and pets. In the case of Little Estero Island CWA, several State-listed beach nesting birds, primarily least tern, Wilson's plover, and snowy plover are protected. All of these species prefer to nest either on bare sand or sparsely vegetated areas that provide camouflage for the pale, speckled eggs and chicks. To protect these birds and to minimize or prevent human disturbance, these beach nesting areas are posted to limit public access between April 1st and August 31st.

The Carlos Point residential area is a privately-owned mix of single-family homes and condominiums just south of the CWA. The beach at Carlos Point is mechanically raked to maintain an owner preferred manicured or "groomed" appearance. Beach raking is a process that constantly disturbs and rearranges the sand and sediment on a beach to prevent growth or spread of vegetation. This mechanical raking creates a beach that mimics the bare sand created by natural beach overwash events and coincidentally is a landscape much preferred by beach-nesting birds.

Mechanical beach raking is prohibited within the CWA and there has not been a significant beach overwash event to affect Fort Myers Beach since Hurricane Charley (2004). As a result, the CWA is now dominated with vegetation in comparison to the beach at Carlos Point.

Beach nesting birds began to nest on the raked beach at Carlos Point in 2008. Since then, a greater number of the birds were nesting there as compared to the heavily vegetated habitat inside the Little Estero Island CWA. This is a unique situation in Florida where listed species prefer highly disturbed property over conservation areas in a natural condition.

Management of beach nesting birds in an urban landscape on private property requires an innovative approach that balances the presence of human activities and the nesting requirements of protected species. A preference for sandy beaches and a low tolerance for disturbance during nesting place these species in conflict with human use of the beach. In order to protect beach-nesting birds from disturbance and trampling, Town staff, with the assistance of the FWC, post the nests with informational signs in order to reduce nesting bird and flightless chick disturbance. Posting nests on private property at Carlos Point requires owner cooperation and an agreement to cease raking within and near the posted areas to further reduce disturbance during the nesting season which can last from April through August. The posted area is then maintained, monitored, and expanded as needed. During the five month nesting period, vegetation rapidly establishes onto the beach where raking ceased. After the confirmed end of nesting season, postings are removed.

Beginning in April of 2009, we worked with the DEP and FWC to secure permits that allowed property owners to remove the vegetation once the birds completed their nesting. The removal of vegetation returns the beach to its owner preferred groomed condition and in turn creates the preferred nesting habitat for the next nesting season. If the vegetation is not removed, the birds fail to nest successfully or may not nest in the area at all.

At the beginning of this program, the Town approached private property owners for permission to post the area for beach nesting birds. The property owners granted permission to post with the condition that once each nesting season concluded they would be allowed to remove all new vegetation and return the beach to its vegetation free, groomed condition. Town and FWC staff viewed this as an effective and innovative opportunity to manage habitat for beach nesting birds. During the peak of the 2009 nesting season, over 120 least terns and three snowy plover nests were counted at Carlos Point. Unfortunately, in August of 2009, when nesting season ended, DEP stated that it would not issue a permit for vegetation removal due to statutory concerns. Two months later, after extensive efforts by the Town, the DEP reluctantly issued a permit but advised they would not do so again. As a result, Carlos Point owners advised they would not cooperate with posting efforts during the 2010 nesting season without a legally-binding permit from DEP before the

start of that nesting season. Without property owner cooperation, posting the area by Town and FWC staff become a legal difficulty. The combined effects of protected species disturbance and continued raking without a permit would likely result in a “take” of state listed species, a serious violation of the law.

To insure property owner cooperation for the 2010 nesting season, the Town took the lead in working with DEP and FWC staff to secure a permit in late 2009. After overcoming significant legal obstacles we secured vegetation removal permits in April 2010, just before nesting season. With permit in hand, we then brokered an agreement with private property owners to again receive their cooperation. Because of this, the 2010 was even more successful, with over 335 least tern nests (Florida’s second largest tern colony) and 5 snowy plover nests.

Due to continued efforts of all partners, a Five Year DEP permit was acquired by the Town in 2011 allowing post-nesting season vegetation removal. The 2011 nesting season produced several hundred least terns and at least 8 snowy plover nests. As of May 14, 2012 over 125 least tern nests and 9 snowy plover nests were already active.

Property owners can now cooperate for years to come without fear of losing the right to rake their property after nesting season. We also partnered with Audubon of Florida to develop a volunteer outreach program to educate beach goers about the importance of sharing the beach with these birds.

This program is so successful and has set such a precedent for imperiled species adaptive management that Audubon of Florida presented the 2011 Guy Bradley Award for Stewardship in the Face of Threats to Birds and their Habitats to Environmental Sciences Coordinator, Keith Laakkonen. Additionally, the Florida Natural Resources Leadership Institute used this partnership as a practicum for its 2012 class to help rising leaders in the environmental community enhance their skills to effectively manage conflict arising from natural resource issues.

THE NEWS-PRESS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2010 PUBLISHED SINCE 1837

FINAL 75¢

BEACH FIGHT SETTLED



A juvenile semipalmated plover chases off after a bath Tuesday on Little Estero Island.

Owners can rake, but will they allow birds?

BY KEVIN LOLLAR
kollar@news-press.com

An environmental Catch-22 has been resolved — sort of.

At issue is a group of Fort Myers Beach property owners who did a good thing for the environment but they were on the verge of being denied permits by a state environmental agency because they had done a good thing for the environment.

This week, however, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection issued beach raking permits, which, if everything works out, will help nesting shorebirds and make property owners happy.

"It's been a long battle to get to this point," said Keith Laakkonen, Fort Myers Beach's environmental science coordinator. "DEP really worked with us on this. I can't describe how much better I was able to sleep last night."

Here's how the whole thing came down.

Loss of nesting habitat has caused declines in some shorebird populations, and the Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area on the south end



Connor Stephens, 14, on spring break from Fort Wayne Ind., files a line boarding taking life Tuesday on the beach in front of Carlos Pointe. The area was a nesting site last year for shorebirds which include the snowy plover and least tern. See a gallery of shorebirds at the Fort Myers Beach nesting area at news-press.com.

of Estero Island is an important shorebird nesting area during the summer.

Every year, scientists from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Fort Myers Beach and Lee County rope off a 1-mile section of the wildlife area to protect nests, eggs and chicks.

Just south of the wildlife area are Carlos Pointe and Castle Beach condominiums, whose owners had DEP permits to rake their beaches,

which keeps vegetation from

growing, thus making the beaches more user-friendly. Least terns and snowy plovers, both threatened species, like to nest on raked beaches because the lack of vegetation lets them see approaching predators.

In March 2009, least terns and snowy plovers started nesting on the beach by the condos, so the owners asked scientists to rope off the nests on their property.

See PERMITS A3

PERMITS

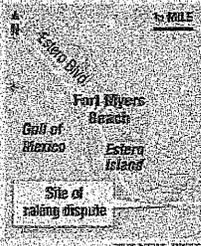
Continued from A1

"The property owners became real champions of the birds," Laakkonen said. "When new birds started nesting, they'd call and say, 'Keith, we have a bird,' and I'd have to go change the posted area."

At the height of nesting season, 220 least tern nests and two snowy plover nests were in the condo area.

After nesting season, stakes and rope came down, but vegetation had grown because the property owners had stopped raking.

Beach vegetation is an important part of the



ecosystem, and DEP said the property owners couldn't rake their beach because vegetation was growing there, even though vegetation wouldn't have grown there if the property owners hadn't allowed FWC and the city to post the nest

sites. "It was very frustrating," said Laurie Satterfield, president of the Castle Beach Condo Association. "Even though we have great respect for protecting the birds, we got very discouraged about how the state wouldn't cooperate."

Without the property owners' permission, the scientists can't rope off shorebird nests by the condos, and the property owners aren't inclined to give their permission this nesting season if DEP won't let them rake the beach after the birds are gone.

"Working for state government, I can understand the constraints DEP is under," said Nancy Dou-

glas, an FWC non-game biologist who monitors shorebirds at Little Estero Island. "But sometimes we have to learn to work outside the box, to be creative, especially when there is a clear, obvious need that ultimately benefits everybody — the residents and the wildlife."

Meanwhile, Laakkonen negotiated with DEP to find a solution.

Eventually, DEP said property owners could rake the beach if the city, at its own expense, planted vegetation at another beach location, which didn't please city officials. How much this might cost has not been determined.

When word got out

about the issue, environmental groups, including Audubon of Florida, contacted DEP.

"It's unusual for us to weigh in and ask anyone to issue permits to rake, but we felt we had to jump in," said Eric Draper, Audubon of Florida president. "Shorebirds are in trouble all over, and we're doing everything we can to get agencies to do more to protect the remaining habitat."

This week, DEP issued permits for the private property owners to rake vegetation on their beach.

DEP officials could not be reached for comment.

But that's not the end of the story: The property owners still need to give

permission for anyone to rope off nests on their beach.

"We're very, very hesitant about allowing them to do it again," Satterfield said. "If they can show us in good faith that we'll get the beach back to its proper status, then we may consider allowing them to do the posting."

Laakkonen's job now is to convince the property owners to allow the beach to be posted.

"They want to do the right thing," he said. "It's a matter of convincing them the permit is going to help them. Then we need a long-term solution. This permit is for one year. The saga will continue."

**Florida's Special Places Award
 Henry Dean**

For a Lifetime Protecting the
 Places that Make Florida Special

**Theodore Roosevelt Award
 Senator Bill Nelson**

For Resilience, Resolve and Courage
 on Behalf of Florida's Environment

**Champion of the Everglades Award
 Colonel Alfred A. Pantano, Jr.**

For Standing Up for America's Everglades

**Lifetime Champion of the Everglades Award
 Thom Rumberger**

The Fight Continues, the Cause Endures
 (Awarded Posthumously)

**Guy Bradley Award
 Keith Laakonnen**

Stewardship in the Face of Threats to
 Birds and their Habitats

**Guy Bradley Award
 Missy Christie**

Stewardship in the Face of Threats to
 Birds and their Habitats (Awarded Posthumously)

**Florida Woman in Conservation Award
 Victoria Tschinkel**

An Early Voice for the Environment and for
 Inspiring Generations of Floridians

**Distinguished
 Corporate Philanthropy Award
 Rayonier**

Stewardship of Florida's Forests,
 Water and Wildlife Resources

**Distinguished
 Foundation Philanthropy Award
 Chingos Foundation**

For Commitment to Audubon Center for Birds of Prey
 and the Conservation of Florida's Raptors

**Distinguished
 Individual Philanthropy Award
 Louise Courtells**

Protecting Florida for Future Generations

**Volunteer of the Year
 Barbara Walker**

For Outstanding Service and Dedication to the Audubon
 EagleWatch Program and Florida's Raptors

**Volunteer of the Year Award
 Lucy Tobias**

For Outstanding Service to Audubon and
 Florida's Special Places

**Artist of the Year Award
 Jackson Walker**

For extraordinary artwork, *Grave of Feathers*, inspiring
 thousands of people to care about and conserve our
 natural environment, birds and other wildlife

**Nature Photographer of the Year Award
 Rod J. Wiley**

For extraordinary nature photography generously donated
 to Florida Audubon inspiring thousands of people to care
 about and conserve our natural environment, birds and
 other wildlife

**Exceptional Nature Cinematography Award
 Mac Stone**

For extraordinary wildlife cinematography generously
 donated to Florida Audubon inspiring thousands of people
 to care about and conserve our natural environment, birds
 and other wildlife

**Board Leadership Awards
 Doug Warns
 Diane Reed
 Jens Tripson**



OCTOBER 12, 2011

Summerset sets sail

Page 21



Shopper Inside

Audubon to honor Town's Laakkonen with award

By BOB PETCHER

rpetcher@breeze.net
Keith Laakkonen, Environmental Sciences Coordinator at the Town of Fort Myers Beach, is the 2011 recipient of the Audubon Society's prestigious Guy Bradley Award.

Laakkonen, who has been at his Town post since 2008, is being recognized for "his groundbreaking and innovative work in creating a plan and partnership to enable birds to nest on private beach areas," according to Town Manager Terry Stewart.

The 1998 University of Florida graduate will be honored at an awards banquet at the Audubon of Florida's

annual state conference called the Audubon Assembly. It is being held in Lake Mary near Orlando this Friday (Oct 14).
"It's a humbling," said Laakkonen. "It's an individual award, but I believe it recognizes the efforts of a lot of people who have worked very hard with the property owners at the south end of Fort Myers Beach. I may be getting the award, but it's because of the cooperation and partnership with the property owners, the Town and Audubon to find a way to deal with the conservation of these active bird colonies on the beach behind their properties."



"The significance of this award recognizes the cooperative relationships we have established at Carlos Point."
— Keith Laakkonen, Environmental Sciences Coordinator Town

visors and Town Council for their efforts in recognizing the importance of the areas and the birds.
"I think our Comprehensive Plan is great at recognizing how important this is," he said. "Through the support of the Town manager and Town Council, I have proceeded to find a creative way to come up with this partnership."
The environmental sciences coordinator also cited Eco-Tourism for helping out.
"We have a lot of birders who will come in during nesting season just to see these birds. I think that is important," he said.

Laakkonen, who was born and raised in Fort Myers, has been monitoring birds at Little Estero Island Critical

Audubon award from page 11

Wildlife Area and the beaches at the southern terminus of Estero Island for three years while employed at the Town. This process involves long hours of monitoring as well as the staking and posting of areas for the bird nesting season from April through August each year.

However, snowy plovers can start nesting as early as February or March, he said. "So, come that time, I am out daily to monitor these families to see when they are setting up territories and building nests. There is a lot of daily monitoring involved."

This year posed a more difficult time for the Town's birding as the actual broke his hand posing the Critical Wildlife Area.

"I had to get through the rest of posing season with a broken hand that basically required posting with one hand," said Laakkonen.

During this time, some nesting birds have branched off Little Estero Island and have camped south in front of Beach condominiums to require more posting. In 2009, Carlos Pointe property owners gave the Town of Fort Myers Beach start permission to post nesting areas provided that they could remain beach nesting at the end of the nesting season. The DEP, the agency that issues tracking permits, advised this could be accomplished with a "field" permit.

"The significance of this award recognizes the cooperative relationships we have established at Carlos Pointe," said Laakkonen. "These birds used to nest primarily in the Critical Wildlife Area but, due to the acquisition and Beach making, it has created the perfect habitat for these birds right in front of those condos."

After graduating from UF, Laakkonen began his career managing coastal resources with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Aquatic Preserve program. Through those assignments, he has worked in Crystal River, Charlotte Harbor and Rockledge Bay.

"I've been lucky to be on Fort Myers Beach where I can use some of my experience in a very natural setting," he said. "This is a very different sort of environment. Laakkonen has credited the Town manager, his super-

Beach Council, the Southwest Florida Policy Advocate for Audubon of Florida, nominated Laakkonen with a submitted list that included persistence, creativity, courage and expert leadership for protecting one of the most important beach bird nesting areas in the state.

Keelin has been zealous in organizing and leading a whole group of us volunteers to educate beach goers to tell them all area of beach is closed. As you can imagine, there have been a few eyebrows raised and a few tempers over why the staking has taken place over private beach," said Cornell. "When people realize that it is to benefit nesting birds and that the area is one of the most important beach bird nesting areas in the state, they seem to understand better."

The prestigious award is considered one of the highest honors bestowed by Audubon. In 2009, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologist Nancy Douglas was selected for the award.

Nancy has worked hard for many, many years for the conservation of the Critical Wildlife Area. It is a very important area for migratory, enlisted birds. Ever since I arrived here, the Critical Wildlife Area has really popped up as one of the real needs for stewardship for my post here. I think it even draws more attention to the importance of our small island in the bigger scheme of conservation," said Laakkonen.

Stewart applauded his environmental sciences coordinator's efforts through an email to the local media.
"We are so proud of this accomplishment with the shore bird nesting program and extremely pleased that the

is the recipient of this award," said Stewart. "This is an individual award and justly deserved by Keith. At the same time, our wonderful Town of Fort Myers Beach can only great satisfaction in having provided Keelin both the opportunity and assistance to accomplish this groundbreaking work."

The award is named after a wildlife warden and Morone County Deputy hired by the Audubon Society in 1902 to protect South Florida's rookeries and wading birds from human encroachment.

Unfortunatley, Guy Bradley was killed in the line of duty while attempting to protect birds from poachers in 1905.

The mission of Audubon of Florida and National Audubon Society is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, while focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.



BOB PETCHER
Laakkonen led a Bird Walk during a program sponsored by the San Carlos & Estero Island Waterfront Partnership Board of Trade on June 21.



PHOTOS PROVIDED
A snowy plover sits on a second nest with a chick from her first brood nesting in a volleyball court at Carlos Pointe Condominiums.

Audubon honors SW Florida bird savior

BY CHRISTINA CEPERO
ccepero@news-press.com

Shorebirds and snowbirds coexist on the south end of Fort Myers Beach thanks in part to one man.

Keith Laakkonen, the town's environmental services coordinator, will be recognized tonight at Audubon of Florida's annual assembly in St. Mary, near Orlando, with the Guy Bradley award, one of its highest honors.

Laakkonen was instrumental in ensuring least terns and snowy plovers, both threatened species, can safely nest on the beach behind the condominiums on Carlos Pointe.

After he negotiated with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, it issued a permit to property owners to rake the beach to remove vegetation.

"It was a response to a complex problem," said Laakkonen, 37, a biologist.

The Carlos Pointe and Castle Beach condos are south of the Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area, where scientists close a one-mile section by posting "no trespassing" signs from April 1-Aug. 31 for nesting season.

"These birds have evolved to where they like open beach because vegetation, a lot of

AUDUBON AWARD WINNER

Who: Keith Laakkonen

Education: Graduated from the University of Florida in 1998 with a degree in wildlife ecology. He is working on his master's degree in environmental policy at FGCU, where he's looking at the policy implications of sea level rise on wetland- and beach-dependent species.



LAAKKONEN

Background: He grew up in Cape Coral. "I spent a lot of time just riding my bike and watching things like the burrowing owls," Laakkonen said.

times, can hide predators that will come up and take their eggs," Laakkonen said.

The birds began nesting in force on the open beach behind the condos in 2009 since a major storm, which would naturally wash away vegetation in the

wildlife area, hasn't hit in years. The condo owners allowed Laakkonen to close off areas of the beach for the birds.

During nesting season, vegetation grew in the posted areas,

See **AUDUBON B2**

heldon Zoldan.

AUDUBON

Continued from **B1**

and after the season was over, DEP didn't allow property owners to rake the beach anymore because vegetation is an important part of the ecosystem.

Laakkonen, with the help of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and town officials, convinced DEP to issue a one-time beach raking permit in April 2010 and a five-year permit last April.

So property owners get their beach back in the fall and winter.

"There's a new statewide master program that's going to come along to take care of problems like this," Laakkonen said. "What we reached this April was the beginning of a permanent solution."

Brad Cornell, Audubon of Florida's Southwest Florida policy advocate, recom-

mended Laakkonen for the accolade named for Bradley, a wildlife officer and Monroe County deputy killed in 1905 attempting to protect birds from poachers.

"Keith has taken it upon himself to go way beyond the call of duty to protect these nesting birds," Cornell said. "He's shown great courage and creativity and perseverance."

In the 2010 nesting season, Laakkonen helped start a group of Audubon volunteers who educate weekend beachgoers about shorebirds so they stay clear of the nests.

This year, Laakkonen broke his hand putting in stakes to mark the nesting area. "He kept on working," Cornell said.

Town Manager Terry Stewart said he's proud of Laakkonen for what he's done for Fort Myers Beach.

"His experience and expertise is invaluable," Stewart said.

9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday

What's Inside

- Letters: pg 2, 4, 11
- Island Wild Flower: pg 4
- Editorial: pg 7
- October FFI: pg 8
- Tale of the Town: pg 4
- Fishing Report: pg 10
- Beach School: pg 12
- Film Fest: pg 13
- World Sand: pg 15
- Signs Review: pg 18
- Forbes: pg 22
- Archival/Adoption: pg 22
- Beach Birds: pg 23
- Wildlife: pg 23
- MSGAR: pg 28
- Wildlife: pg 28
- MSGAR: pg 28
- Wildlife: pg 28

Bird Man Honored

Last Friday evening, as many islanders celebrated the advent of another weekend, Town Environmental Science Coordinator Keith Laakkonen was in the little central Florida town of St. Mary, where he received the prestigious Guy Bradley Award at the Audubon Society's Annual Assembly held that weekend, October 14-15 in Orlando, The Guy Bradley Award - named after a Monroe County deputy who was killed in the line of duty in 1905 while attempting to protect birds from poachers and is considered to be one of the environmental movement's first major - is considered one of the highest awards bestowed by Audubon and was being presented to Laakkonen for his work protecting nesting birds on the south end of Fort Myers Beach.



Audubon Executive Director Eric Danner (left) and President Bird Council (right) present Town Environmental Science Coordinator Keith Laakkonen with the Guy Bradley Award in St. Mary, Florida, last Friday night.

"I am so very humbled to even have my name mentioned in the same sentence as Bradley's," said Laakkonen, when he interviewed him before the trip last week. "When Mary Ann Korsch - who works Assembly like I did." Cont'd pg. 31

October 21st, 2011

The Island Sand Paper

Bird Man Honored,

cont'd from pg. 1

last year. When she told me about the award, I was so shocked I dropped the phone!" Audubon President Brad Cornell told us that the award was a well-deserved one for Keith's tireless pursuit of a solution for the snowy plover population who decided to make the south end of the island - including some private property - their home.

"Keith is being recognized for his persistent, painful, creative and courageous defense and protection work for the beach nesting birds at Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area and the big colony in front of the Carlos Point Condominiums (on private, raked beach)," he said.

The award-winning project Keith worked on involved some snowy plovers that decided to forego their traditional nesting area of dunes in favor of pristine, white raked beach in front of several private property owners and condominiums. Every year, imperiled shorebirds nest on Florida beaches from about April 1, through Aug. 31 in the Little Estero Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) and other nearby nesting sites on Fort Myers Beach. These areas are posted during this critical period to help protect the nests of

these highly vulnerable species and the beach left unraveled. When that ruffled the feathers of some of the property owners, Keith set to work finding a solution and the result has become a template that other communities faced with similar situations may follow.

Keith credits his boss, Town Manager Terry Stewart (who was with him in St. Mary, Town staff, the property owners and condominium associations, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) for working together on the solution.

"This is not really an individual award - this would not have been possible without the hard work of staff, and everyone who came together to make this work - especially the condo associations of Castle Beach and Carlos Point and all the individual property owners involved," he said. "We now have our 5-year permit, so we don't have to go through this every year and the project is a great success - we've made a lot of birds in the past couple of years!"

"This is the biggest thing that's happened to me in my profession since I graduated college!" Stewart told us he couldn't be happier with Keith's work. "Keith is receiving this award in large part due to his ground-breaking and innovative work in creating a plan and partnership to enable birds to nest on private beach areas," he said. "We can all be proud that Keith is being recognized with this award. This is an individual award and justly deserved by Keith. At the same time, our wonderful Town of Fort Myers Beach can enjoy great satisfaction in having provided Keith both the opportunity and latitude to accomplish this ground-breaking work."

Past Bradley Award recipients include Nancy Douglass (2009). At this year's Assembly in beautiful St. Mary, Senior Florida Senator Bill Theodore Roosevelt Award, Henry Dean was given the award for "A Lifetime Protecting the Places that Make Florida Special," Victoria Tschinkel for "Florida Woman in Conservation Award" and Army Corps of Engineers Commander Colonel Alfred A. Pantano was given the Champion of the Everglades Award - among other recipients.

Colonel Pantano gave a really cool speech where he likened saving the Everglades to being at war after a few of his staff - upon returning from Iraq - told him that, in a way, fighting in Iraq was easier because at least they knew who the enemy was."

Laakkonen told us, "I spoke with him after the dinner, and I can tell you that man really knows what his projects are and does everything he can with the system he's stuck with."

Though unable to meet the senator as he received his award at luncheon, Keith told us he was thrilled to receive a letter from Nelson commending him for his work. In the letter, Nelson lauded Laakkonen for the years of dedication and commitment.

"The preservation of beach nesting birds in Southwest Florida is a laudable pursuit of which you should be proud," Nelson wrote. "It is one of my distinct pleasures as a United States Senator to congratulate and encourage Floridians to strive for excellence in all they do."

Keri Hendry



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

October 3, 2011

Mr. Keith Laakkonen
Environmental Sciences Coordinator
Town Of Fort Myers Beach
2523 Estero Boulevard
Fort Myers Beach, Florida 33931

Dear Mr. Laakkonen:

Congratulations! I am happy that you are being recognized and rewarded for your many years of commitment and dedication to so many worthwhile projects in and for the community. The preservation of beach nesting birds in Southwest Florida is a laudable pursuit of which you should be proud. It is one of my distinct pleasures as a United States Senator to congratulate and encourage Floridians to strive for excellence in all they do. Thank you for your continued service to your community, the State of Florida, and the nation.

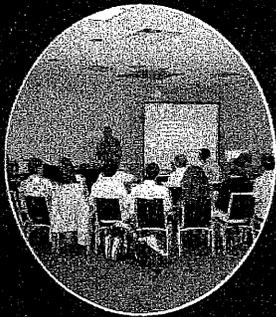
Best wishes for continued success. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson



**Florida Natural
Resources
Leadership
Institute**



A University of Florida/
IFAS Extension
Leadership Training
Program in
Collaborative
Solutions for Natural
Resource Challenges



**FLORIDA
NATURAL**

**RESOURCES
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE**



For further information contact us
at delaneyb@ufl.edu
352-846-1511 (phone)
352-392-1646 (fax)
PO Box 110240
Gainesville, FL 32611-0240

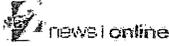
2011-2012 Schedule

Location	Topic	Dates
Daytona Beach	<i>Species Protection: Sea Turtle Habitat and Coastal Development</i>	August 11-13
Wakulla Springs	<i>A Springs Restoration Planning Process</i>	September 8-10
Port St. Lucie	<i>The Treasure Coast—After the Boom</i>	October 13-15
Santa Rosa Beach	<i>Coastal Dune Lakes: Management of a Unique Natural Resource</i>	November 3-5
Key Largo	<i>The Impact of the Everglades on Florida Bay</i>	January 12-14
Ft. Myers Beach	<i>Beach Management for Migrating Shore Birds and Human Recreation</i>	February 9-11
Lake Placid	<i>The Value of Environmental Services Provided by Agriculture</i>	March 15-17
Gainesville	<i>Practicum Presentations and Graduation</i>	April 12-14

Apply Now for NRLI Class XI at <http://nrli.ifas.ufl.edu>



[<< Back](#)



Powered by Google

Raking approved for Fort Myers Beach

Posted: Apr 11, 2011 5:03 PM EDT

Updated: Apr 11, 2011 10:22 PM EDT

FORT MYERS BEACH, FL - The Department of Environmental Protection approved a request to rake a stretch of Fort Myers Beach. Raking keeps the beach clear of vegetation, a perfect environment for the snowy plover.

Raking is something environmentalists say does more harm than good, but biologists and business owners agree with the approval.

Keith Laakkonen, an environmental sciences coordinator with Fort Myers Beach, says the raking is necessary to keep the beach looking beautiful.

"It actually constantly disturbs the soil, constantly disturbs the sand. It does change the nutrient balance of the beaches and the sand balance of the beaches," he says.

Biologists say that these changes are vital for the threatened snowy plover, which nests on this stretch of sand.

"As far as the birds are concerned, perfect white sandy beach with no vegetation is their primary nesting requirement," Laakkonen says.

After two and a half years of asking the Department of Environmental Protection for approval, they finally gave the town permission to rake behind Castle Beach and Carlos Pointe Condominiums for the next five years.

"This is a balancing act between managing for people, recreation, and tourism, which drives the economy and a balance of managing a protected species," Laakkonen says.

With the approval, the beaches can be raked at any time except during nesting season.

The goal is to keep the beach looking nice, rather than let the vegetation take over during the rainy season when the birds are nesting.

Ralph Bartley, a tourist to Fort Myers Beach, says he's happy to share the beach.

"We gotta share this planet with the inhabitants that are here. The birds have a right to be here I think," he says.