

Maxwell to manage 2 aquatic preserves



Katie Maxwell holds a lesser electric ray (*Narcine bancroftii*) caught in an FWC trawl on Apalachicola Bay.

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The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Coastal Office recently received a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to re-establish the management of the St. Andrews Bay and St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserves.

The Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve (ANERR) will oversee this position and has hired Apalachicola resident Katie Maxwell as the new manager to fulfill the grant requirements at each of the preserves, allowing for further protection of the environment.

"We are thrilled to be able to re-establish this crucial position and continue to protect Florida's beautiful natural resources," said Jennifer Harper, manager of ANERR. "Hiring a manager for these two aquatic preserves will allow the Florida Coastal Office to better manage the state's unique ecosystems."

This project will protect and preserve 97,117 acres of fragile submerged resources through implementation of a comprehensive management program, seagrass monitoring, and education and outreach to boaters and local communities. This re-established position will coordinate with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Northwest Florida Water Management District, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, local governments, and federal agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, as well as other non-governmental organizations involved in the watershed.

The St. Andrews Bay and St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserves are located in the Florida Panhandle, which is identified as one of the nation's six biological hot spots that contain many rare species only found in these areas. The highest biodiversity of species in the United States is found specifically within the central Florida Panhandle, so the protection and restoration of these interdependent habitats is crucial to the health of this vibrant ecosystem.

Maxwell, who will oversee both the St. Andrews Bay and St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserves, earned a bachelor's degree in zoology from Marshall University and a master's in marine biology from Coastal Carolina University. Originally from Sistersville, West Virginia, she worked with FWC's Fisheries Independent Monitoring Program as a biological scientist for the past four years.