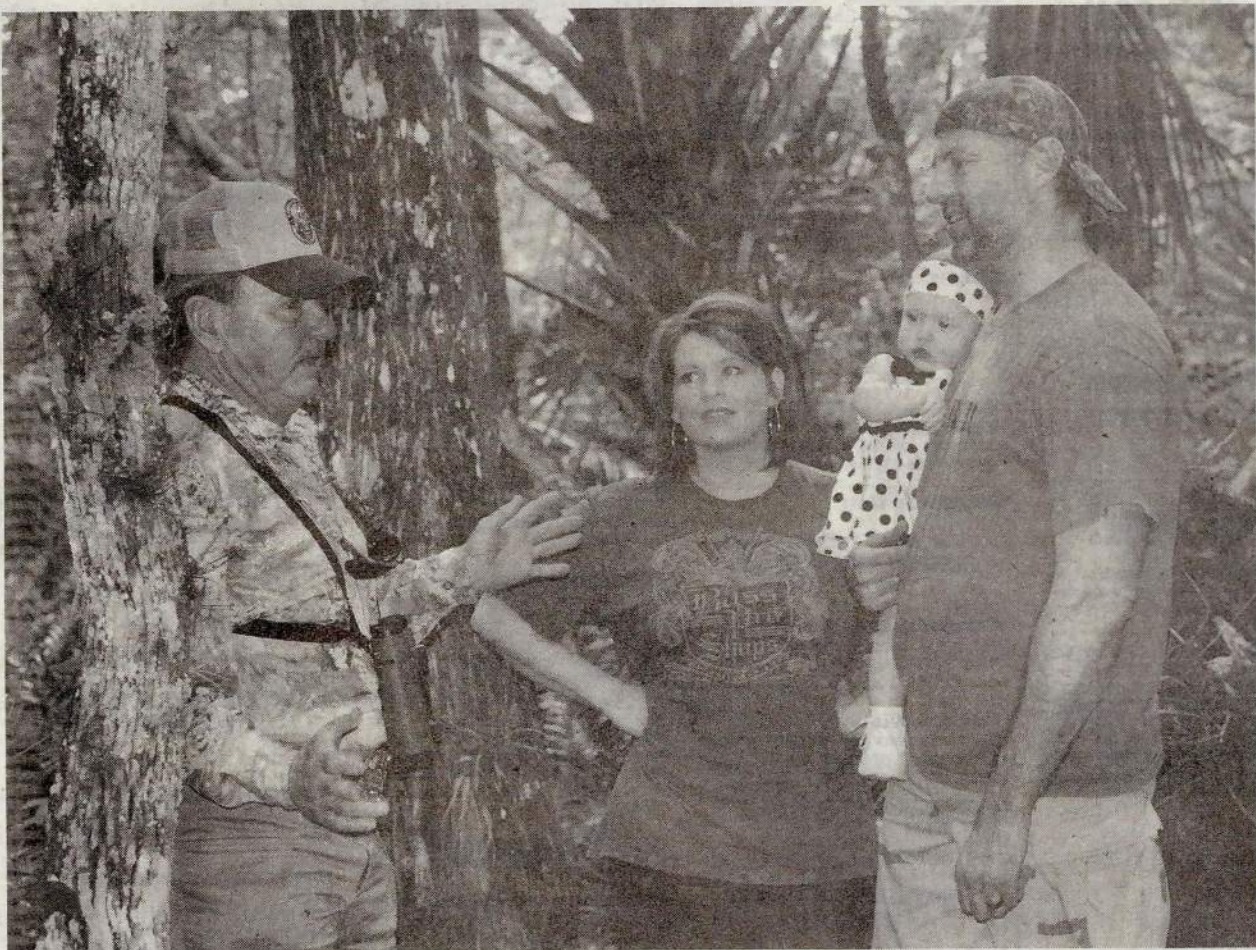


Waterfronts

FOR LOVE OF THE WILDERNESS LIFE



Steve Waters, Sun Sentinel photos

Ron Bergeron, left, a commissioner with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, chats with country singer Darryl Worley and wife, Kimberly, and their daughter Savannah on Bergeron's Green Glades West property.

Wildlife commissioner promotes, shares virtues of outdoors

In addition to being a good businessman, a big-hearted philanthropist, a skilled outdoorsman and a lifelong conservationist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission commissioner Ron Bergeron is one heck of a turkey hunting guide.

Following the 13th annual Ranch Roam charity event at his home in Weston, where 1,200 guests helped raise half a million dollars for the Boys and Girls Club of Broward County, Bergeron put me on one of the best turkey hunts I've ever had.

"I was hunting at Green Glades West, Bergeron's property just north of the Big Cypress National Preserve. He was there with his girlfriend, Ali Waldman, son J.R. and his wife, Michele, and their daughter Brooke. They were joined by several friends, including country singer Darryl Worley, who performed his hit songs such as *Have You Forgotten?* at the Ranch Roam, Worley's wife, Kimberly, and their daughter Savannah.

Bergeron told me to set up along a narrow strip between two prairies that turkeys like to travel. After a white-tailed deer and a hen turkey walked by me, a gobbler and two hens appeared in one of the prairies about 250 yards away.

My soft clucks, purrs and yelps were ignored for the next hour, so I started cutting loudly on my mouth call, and the gobbler started strutting and slowly heading my way. One of the hens didn't like that and she started yelping loudly at me, but I didn't stop calling until she came looking for me, passing within 15 yards of where I sat.

She continued around the corner into the other prairie, where she apparently saw another hen. Judging by the squawks and sounds of flapping wings, they got into a fight. Figuring he'd hook up with the winner, the 3-year-old gobbler took the same path as the hen and, despite the thumping in my chest, I dropped him at 17 yards.

While all successful turkey hunts — and even many unsuccessful ones — are memorable, this one was special because of



An owl keeps an eye on things at Green Glades West. Bergeron's land is also home to wild hogs, alligators, black bears, bobcats and panthers.

the location.

Green Glades West is as remote and wild as it gets in South Florida. Besides healthy populations of Osceola turkeys and deer, Bergeron's land is home to wild hogs, alligators, black bears, bobcats and panthers, as well as cypress swamps, oak hammocks, pine uplands, wild orchids and expansive prairies.

Worley, one of the most down-to-earth celebrities you'll ever meet, lives on a farm in Tennessee, loves to hunt and fish and was right at home at Green Glades West. Although the songs he sings about the thankless job done by members of the U.S. military, such as *I Just Came Back (From A War)*, and his trips to Iraq and elsewhere to entertain the troops have been criticized by some, the unapologetic Worley just keeps doing what he believes needs to be done.

So does Bergeron, whose appointment to the FWC commission by Gov. Charlie Crist in 2007 was criticized by people who said he's a developer.

A fourth-generation Floridian, Bergeron started his business career with \$200 that he used to buy land. He bought and sold more land, most of which was developed by others. Some of that land, in fact, now has homes on it that are owned by Bergeron's critics.

Perhaps people get confused because one of Bergeron's many companies is Bergeron Land Development, which prepares sites

that are going to be built on by developers, and he admitted he could have come up with a better name.

As far as a commissioner, Crist could not have come up with a better choice.

When the rain dumped in South Florida by Tropical Storm Fay last year threatened to drown the Everglades, Bergeron got every agency involved with the Everglades together and got them to agree on an unprecedented plan that lowered the water level one foot in 30 days, which spared countless animals from a horrid death.

While he continues to push for protection for the Everglades, Bergeron also is trying to get the Addition Lands of the Big Cypress National Preserve open to the public.

Those lands were added to the preserve in 1988 by Congress, which mandated that fishing, hunting, camping and off-road vehicle use be allowed, but bureaucratic indifference on the federal level has kept them closed.

Like Worley, Bergeron has not forgotten, and he's working with preserve and National Park Service personnel to get them to do what should have been done 20 years ago.

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