

Fisherman; please give a “HOOT” about discarded monofilament!

By John Wakeman

It was like any other Wednesday paddle for the 27/80 Paddlers Club based in Stuart. On that day, twenty-four paddlers set sail from Hosford Park in Stuart and meandered down the South Fork of the St. Lucie River to the Okeechobee Waterway and through the St. Lucie Locks. The passage through the locks was to be the big adventure of the day, however, on the return trip the real adventure began.

About a mile into the return trip, several paddlers spotted a large bird dangling above the water from a piece of monofilament fishing line that was wrapped around the branch of a tree. Upon closer inspection, they were able to identify the bird as an owl. Assuming it was dead, they began to paddle away but the owl opened its eyes and looked right at them! The grizzly scene



had now turned into a rescue operation. Working together, several paddlers were able to cut the monofilament line and the owl fell into the water with a splash! Thinking quickly, a paddle was extended and the owl was boosted out of the water. Using its last ounce of strength, the owl stumbled onto the back of Tom

Yen's kayak. Exhausted from the ordeal but relieved to be free of the monofilament line, the grateful owl remained perched on the back of Tom's kayak for the remaining four miles of the journey; eyes closed most of the time except for an occasional wide eyed glance around. Paddler Jerry Appell



called the Treasure Coast Wildlife Hospital (TCWH) and alerted them to the situation. Upon arriving back at Hosford Park, TCWH wildlife specialist Tim Brown was there to meet the flotilla.



The thankful owl was taken back to TCWH for a complete examination where it was determined that the wing was not broken but badly strained. After several weeks of rehabilitation and much needed R&R, the owl will be set free during one of the 27/80 Paddler's weekly Wednesday paddles.



The next time you are at your favorite fishing hole, look around at the trees and shrubs and you will see how much fishing line is snagged in the vegetation or on the ground. Do your part to protect wildlife and always take all of your line with you when you leave.

The 27/80 Paddlers are a Stuart based recreational kayak and social club. To learn more about this group visit www.27-80paddlers.com