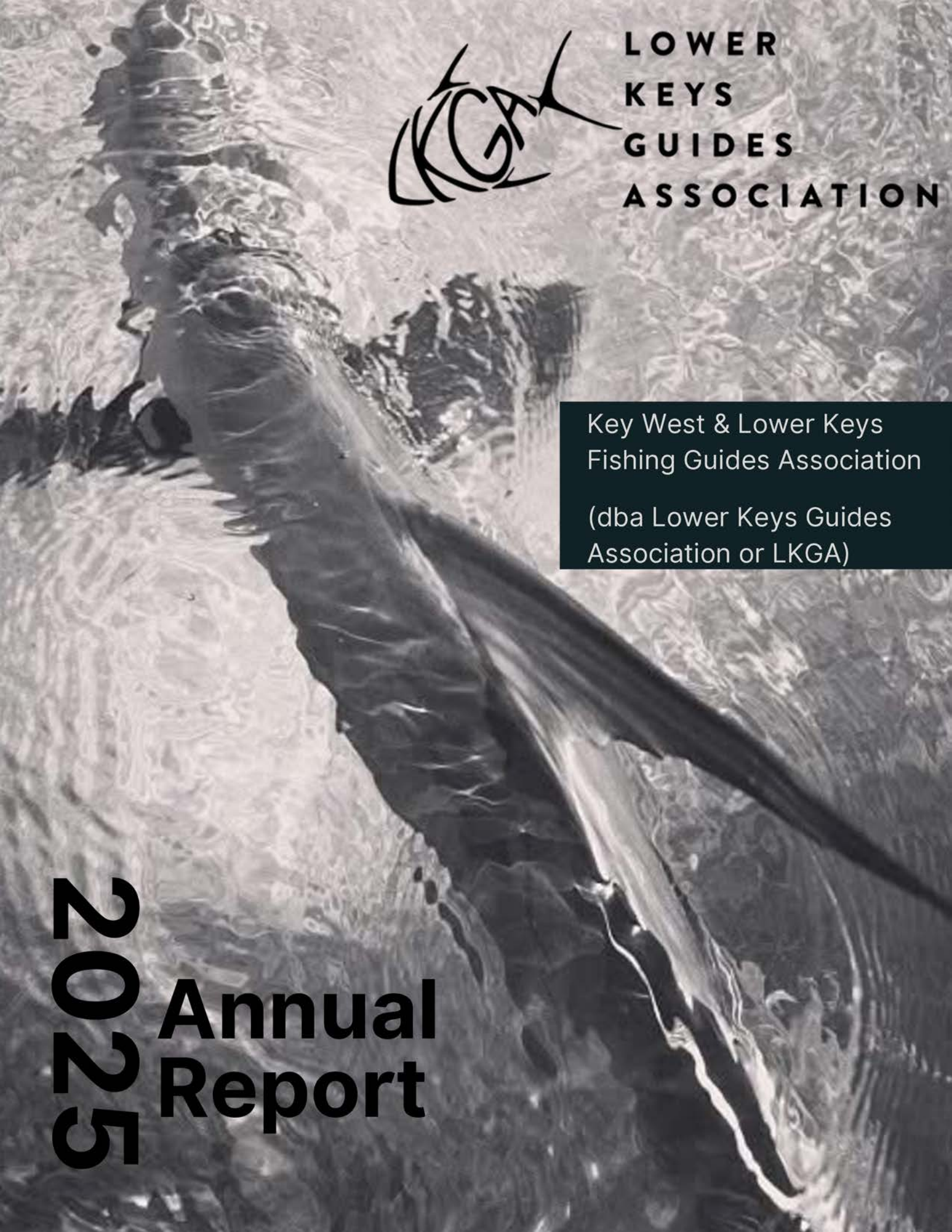


LOWER KEYS GUIDES ASSOCIATION

Key West & Lower Keys Fishing Guides Association

(dba Lower Keys Guides Association or LKGA)

2025 Annual Report

About Us

The Lower Keys Guides Association (LKGA) is more than a voice for fishing guides—we are a force for the Florida Keys. Every day, our members live on the water, serving as early warning sentinels for the health of the fishery while connecting thousands of anglers to the Keys experience. We partner with scientists to advance critical research, stand shoulder-to-shoulder with agencies and nonprofits to protect our ecosystem, and advocate at every level—from local meetings to Tallahassee—for the fishery and the families who depend on it. We don't just care about clean water—we care about the future of our community, from housing to infrastructure to preserving the way of life that makes the Keys unique. We are the front line and the back end, the first to notice when something changes and the last to give up fighting for this place. We love our fishery, our community, and our work. We are LKGA.

Founded in 2004 and reconvened in 2011, the LKGA has a long-standing commitment to the conservation of the Florida Keys' marine ecosystem. For over 20 years, we have hosted the March Merkin Invitational Permit Tournament and the Sugarloaf Showdown for 12 years, along with annual marine debris cleanups for more than a decade. Our group of conservation-minded guides and small business owners is dedicated to preserving sport fishing through sustainable practices, advocating for resource protection, and maintaining access for fishermen. Our membership spans both flats fishing and light tackle fishing, and we proudly serve as ambassadors for the ecosystem, sharing its beauty with visitors while ensuring its health for future generations.

Our Vision

LKGA's vision is to solidify LKGA's identity as a cornerstone of the Lower Florida Keys fishing community, fostering positive growth and retention among our members. We aspire to strengthen partnerships with scientific organizations and management agencies at local, regional, and federal levels, while refining our events to achieve excellence and generate higher revenues, ensuring our efforts continue to benefit both our members and our cherished marine ecosystem.

2025 Anchor Events

1. LKGA's Get Trashed Marine Debris Clean-up Community Event
2. Annual Membership Meeting
3. 20th Annual March Merkin Permit Tournament Invitational
4. 12th Annual Sugarloaf Showdown Tournament

A Letter from the President of the LKGA Board

As we look back on 2025, I'm proud to share that the Lower Keys Guides Association continued to grow—not only in membership, but in the strength, professionalism, and consistency of our work.

This year, LKGA made it a priority to be present in every room where decisions are made—whether those decisions involve access, water quality, fisheries management, enforcement priorities, or the policies that shape our guiding businesses and the future of the Florida Keys fishery. We don't claim to be policy experts, but we do take seriously our responsibility to stay informed, ask the right questions, and ensure the guide community is represented early—before decisions are made without us at the table.

At the same time, we continued to strengthen what we're known for: top-tier events planned with precision. Our tournaments are more than competitions—they are a reflection of our community, our standards, and our commitment to conservation. In 2025, we continued refining our flagship events through detailed planning, strong sponsor engagement, and a focus on delivering a professional experience for anglers, families, and supporters.

None of this work happens without partnership. We are grateful for the agencies, conservation organizations, and community leaders who collaborate with us, and we deeply appreciate the sponsors and donors who invest in LKGA's mission and long-term strength.

Most importantly, thank you to our members. Your support—showing up, participating, donating, volunteering, and staying engaged—is what makes LKGA effective. We're proud of what we accomplished in 2025, and we're focused on the work ahead. LKGA will continue to show up, speak up, and lead with professionalism—on the water and beyond.

Tight lines,
Captain Brian Stilley
President, Lower Keys Guides Association

A Note from our Executive Director

As I reflect on 2025, I keep coming back to one word: focus.

LKGA has always been powered by passion—the passion of our guides, anglers, and supporters who care deeply about this fishery and the future of the Florida Keys. This year, our goal was to ensure our operational execution matched that passion. Not just in spirit, but in the details: the planning, communication, follow-through, and consistency it takes to lead a growing organization in a fast-changing environment.

In 2025, LKGA stayed laser focused on what matters most: protecting our fishery, supporting our guide community, and showing up—early and often—where decisions are made. Whether the issue was on the water or in a meeting room, our role remained the same: pay attention, ask the right questions, build the right relationships, and make sure the Lower Keys guide voice is present, professional, and impossible to overlook.

That same focus carried into our events and fundraising. Our tournaments are more than annual traditions—they are proof points. They demonstrate what this community can build when we operate with purpose and precision. This year, we continued strengthening our events into top-tier experiences that reflect the standards of the guide community: organized, high-quality, and mission-driven.

The truth is, LKGA's work today is bigger than ever. The issues are more complex, the pace is faster, and the need for steady representation continues to grow. We don't claim to have every answer—but we are committed to doing the work, staying engaged, and being ready when it counts.

Thank you to our Board, our members, our partners, and our supporters for trusting LKGA to carry this responsibility.

Our work is growing because the stakes are growing—and we intend to meet the moment.

Allison Delashmit
Executive Director, Lower Keys Guides Association

Directors & Staff

Brian Stilley
President

Brandon Cyr
Vice President

Bob Beighley
Secretary

Chad Huff
Treasurer

Jared Cyr
Outreach Coordinator

Nick LaBadie
Director

Lenny Leonard
Director

Bear Holeman
Director

Nicholas Calabro
Director

Zach Stells
Alternate Director

Shawn McKay
Alternate Director

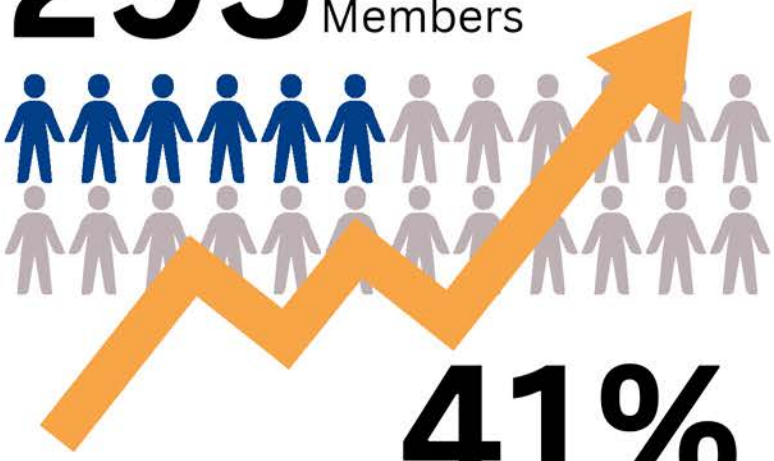
Scott Christian
Alternate Director,
Associate Delegate

Jessyca LaBadie
Operations Manager &
Tournaments Director

Allison Delashmit
Executive Director

A Snapshot of Membership in 2025

295 Total Members



41%

Increase in memberships since 2023

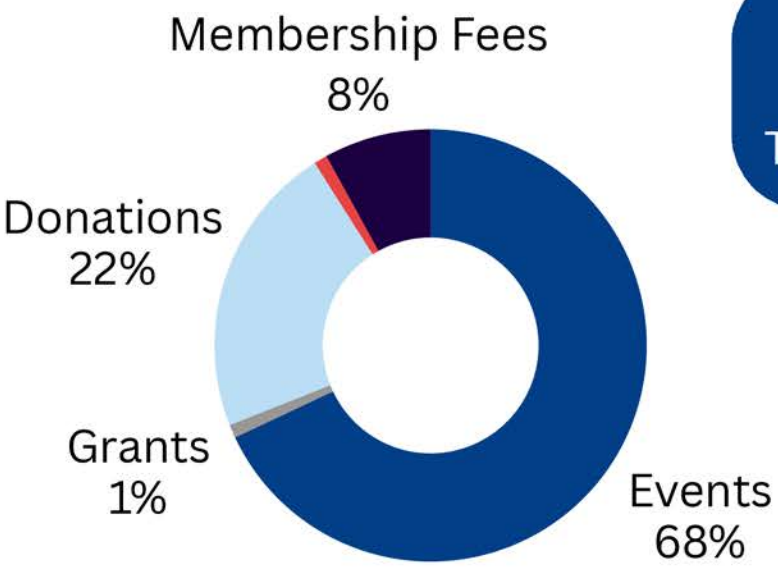
Added **58** New Members

- [x] **Membership Revenue Increase by 10%**
- [x] **9 New Lifetime Members (7 were upgrades**
- [x] **10 New Guide Members**

Steady gains in paying members and continued investment in lifetime memberships underscored the organization's long-term strength in 2025.

2025 Financial Review

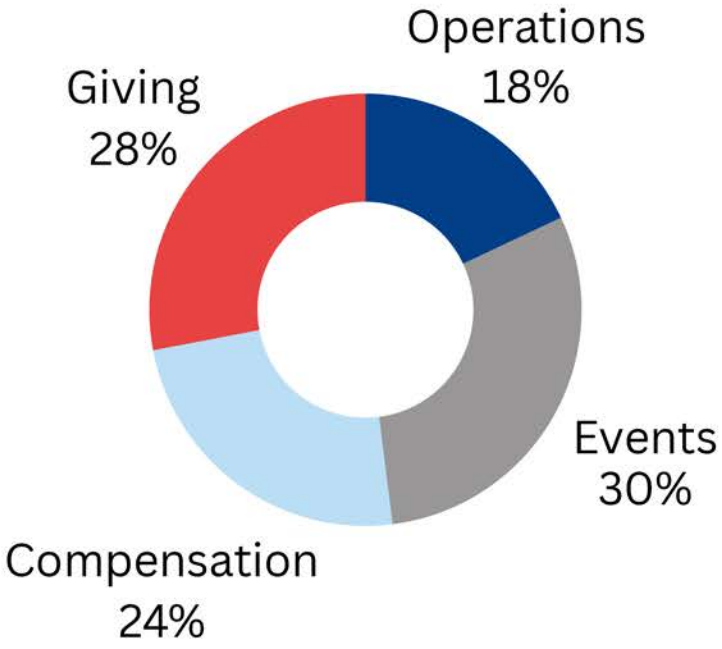
Revenue Distribution



Total Revenue: $308,821.95
vs.
Total Expenditures: $320,461.32

- ☑ Revenue stability allowed LKGA to remain operationally sound.
- ☑ Expense growth was intentional and mission-driven, not structural or administrative.

Expenses Distribution



- ☑ Investments prioritized science, stewardship, industry partnerships, and community impact.
- ☑ Tournament success enabled increased giving without compromising organizational health.
- ☑ LKGA chose impact over accumulation — reinvesting in the fishery we depend on.

2025 March Merkin

Grand Champion:
With 114 centimeters total
Angler, David Mangum
Guide, Greg Dini

Largest Permit:
Angler, Jose Ucan
Guide, Justin Rea
69 centimeters

1st Runner Up (2nd Place):
Angler, Jose Ucan
Guide, Justin Rea

Runner Up (3rd Place):
Angler, Clint Packo,
Guide, Simon Becker

Net Profit: $ 76,444
Donation to BTT: $38,222

% change from 2024: 23%
Net Profit Growth & Donation

Auction revenue was highest ever (again) w/ 15.5% increase

Total cost per team: $881, a 43% decrease!
($1,554 in 2024,$1851 in 2023)

2025 Sugarloaf Showdown

Youth Division:
Grand Champion Angler: David Ragsdale
Grand Champion Guide: Luke Benson
1 species, 100 points

Fly Division
Grand Champion Angler: Stone Sacco
Grand Champion Guide: Cameron Sharp
2 species, 1200 points

Spin Division
Grand Champion Angler: Zach Huff
Grand Champion Guide: Chad Huff
3 species, 850 points

Tournament Highlights:

- 79 Anglers & Guides, 34 Teams
- 138 fish were caught and released on the flats
- Of the three target species: 62 barracuda, 74 bonefish and two permit were caught in two days
- Registration closed within 48 hours of opening
- Two auctions benefiting Guides Trust Foundation and a special honorary auction for local fishing family, the Harnetts, who faced an unimaginable loss just weeks prior to the tournament.

Net Profit: $29,974.71
Donation to GTF: $10,000
Legacy Donation to the Harnett family: Over $12,000

% change from 2024:
Donation to GTF: -15%
LKGA Earnings: -25%
*Results reflect a special charitable auction benefiting a local family and reduced corporate sponsorships

Total cost per team: $381.20
(Over 8% decrease from 2024)

Get Trashed with LKGA ‘25

Annual Membership Meeting ‘25

Key Hlighlights:

24+ Partners Engaged: Expanded collaborations across science, academia, and state and federal agencies.

Science on the Water: FIU bonefish research shared real-time insights shaping fishery management.

Growing Impact of LKGA: Membership up by 31%; strong tournaments revenue and launched the Guide Rapid Response Network (130+ research hours by 30+ guides).

Unveiled new Free Fly Pro Programfor all LKGA Members.

LOWER KEYS GUIDES ASSOCIATION

2025 Annual Membership Meeting

Tuesday, Febuary 18, 2025
6:00 PM - 9:00PM

The Lost Kitchen
6810 Front Street, Unit B
(Stock Island, behind Hogfish)

Remarks start at 7 p.m., featuring:
Allison Delashmit, LKGA Executive Director
Introduction of 2025 LKGA Board, Allison Delashmit
Brief Bonefish Study Presentation: Dr. Jenn Rehage, FIU

LKGA Advocates

Legislative, Policy, and Stewardship Advocacy

Legislative and policy advocacy remained a central component of LKGA's work in 2025, reflecting our commitment to being both on the water and at the table in every conversation that affects our profession, our fishery, ecosystem health, water quality, and the angler experience.

For fisheries-dependent communities like the Florida Keys, decisions made far from the water often carry immediate and lasting consequences. Growth management, access policies, infrastructure investments, tourism strategy, and science priorities all shape the health of the fishery and the sustainability of the guide profession. LKGA exists to ensure those decisions are informed by the people who spend their lives on the water and see conditions firsthand.

Defining LKGA's Lane

LKGA occupies a unique lane at the intersection of professional fishing guides, scientific research, and fisheries management. Our role is not simply to advocate, but to translate field-based observations into meaningful input for science, management, and policy — and to ensure those outcomes remain grounded in real-world conditions on the water.

We engage strategically, prioritizing forums where guide knowledge can meaningfully influence outcomes. Rather than attempting to be everywhere, LKGA focuses its time and resources where decisions directly affect fisheries health, access, water quality, and the angler experience.

State-Level Advocacy

At the state level, LKGA conducted sustained outreach to legislators, executive leadership, and the Governor's office on a broad portfolio of issues, including ROGO allocations, broader growth management policy, large-scale development proposals such as the rock mine, and other matters affecting access and resource sustainability.

Legislative, Policy, and Stewardship Advocacy

Agency Engagement & Fisheries Management

LKGA also engaged directly with state and federal agencies on fisheries and resource management matters, including artificial reef support and funding, Special Activity License (SAL) policy, and Biscayne National Park bonefish spawning protections. In each case, LKGA contributed practical, on-the-water insight to complement scientific research and regulatory review, reinforcing the value of guide knowledge as part of effective fisheries management.

Local Government & Infrastructure

At the local level, LKGA maintained regular communication with county commissioners and municipal leaders on growth management, infrastructure, and access issues affecting working guides and anglers. Topics included US-1 four-laning discussions, water quality RFP priorities, vessel launch access and availability, guide use policies, and distinctions affecting full-time versus seasonal guide operations.

Representation Beyond Policy

In addition to formal advocacy, LKGA served in advisory and leadership roles across numerous committees, task forces, and working groups spanning conservation, science, tourism, and public safety. Our guides and board members also presented at conferences, participated in panels, and represented LKGA through media and public forums — ensuring the guide voice remained visible, informed, and credible.

LKGA leadership also remained actively engaged with the Tourism Development Council's regional branding initiative, participating in workshops, providing structured feedback, and serving on the branding task force to help ensure that the Florida Keys' fishing heritage, conservation ethic, and working-waterfront identity are accurately represented.

By the Numbers:

20+ Advocacy Letters Sent

10+ Advisory Seats Held

8 Science Panels Represented

50+ Policy & Ecosystem Meetings Attended

LKGA Collabs & Educates

NextGen Mariners & Ecosystem Stewards Education Program

We unveiled a first-in-kind NextGen Mariners curriculum to give teachers and students engaging, science-based lessons that connect directly to our local environment. This fills a gap in Monroe County classrooms by teaching responsible boating, sustainable fishing, and conservation practices. By empowering our youth with knowledge and skills, we are preparing the next generation of boaters, anglers, and community leaders to care for the ecosystems we all depend on.

Four free modules have been created and are being tested by Monroe County teachers with a full roll-out expected by the 2026-2027 start of the academic year. This was made possible by a grant from the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys and key partner Coastal Conservation Association of Florida.

Honoring the Guides, One Pour at a Time

LKGA partnered with Cayo Hueso Brewing to debut Skinny Water Lager — a crisp, locally brewed beer created to celebrate the Florida Keys fishery and the guides who know it best. Inspired by the shallow "skinny water" of the flats, the collaboration honors the guiding profession, local heritage, and a shared conservation ethic. More than a beer, Skinny Water Lager highlights the connection between place, people, and stewardship — and has quickly become one of the brewery's best-selling offerings.

LKGA Engages

Seminar Series for Members Continued

The LKGA Seminar Series is a premier initiative designed to deliver specially curated, exclusive content to LKGA Members and VIPs, reinforcing the value of membership by providing unparalleled access to insights and expertise that matter most to our community.

- ☑ **9 Seminars presented with YouTube replays provided**
- ☑ **Over 300 people attended online during the live presentations**
- ☑ **Unique diverse topics**

29 E-newsletters sent to all members

27 Email & text communications to guide members (specific updates)

LKGA on the Horizon

Advocacy & Representation

LKGA will continue active advocacy at the state, regional, and local levels — ensuring guide voices are present in every room where decisions are made that affect our fishery, profession, and access to the water.

Protecting the Guide Profession

We will focus on local pressures facing working guides, including out-of-state guide activity, increased fishery pressure, and access challenges that directly impact the sustainability of the profession.

Water Quality Outcomes

LKGA will stay engaged in water quality discussions while working to define clear goals, metrics, and action steps that move conversations toward measurable improvements.

Science, Stewardship & Partnerships

We will continue investing in science-based partnerships, guide-powered research, and community initiatives that strengthen fisheries management and ecosystem resilience.

Organizational Strength

LKGA will prioritize operational stability and budget growth to support long-term capacity, effectiveness, and consistent presence in policy, science, and community forums.

Connect with Us

info@LKGA.org

www.LKGA.org
www.MarchMerkin.com

@ Lower Keys Guides Association
@ March Merkin Permit Tournament

@LowerKeysGuides
@MarchMerkin

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