Every ten years the Florida Section of AWWA gets the opportunity to host the Association’s Regional Meeting of Section Officers (RMSO). It was our turn again this year, and on March 25-27, we took the opportunity to show off Florida and the section.

The AWWA structure has its 43 sections grouped into five regions in North America. Florida is a part of Region II, along with the following sections in the southeast region: North Carolina, South Carolina, Puerto Rico, West Virginia, Alabama-Mississippi, Georgia, Virginia, and Kentucky-Tennessee.

What is RMSO you ask? It’s a great opportunity! And it’s a yearly opportunity for section leadership to meet with AWWA staff and other section leaders from our region. These meetings are one of the most important tools for gaining updated information on AWWA and sharing ideas with other sections. This year was certainly no different.

Planning for this event started at the 2014 Florida Water Resources Conference and ramped up at our Fall Conference at the end of last year. With so many locations throughout the state to choose from for the meeting site, it was a difficult decision to settle on one. Grace Johns, the current FSAWWA vice chair, had such vision and passion to have the event in Key Largo that we choose it by a unanimous decision. Grace took the lead and treated everyone to a beautiful location and perfectly planned event. Thank you, Grace! Our guest section leaders and AWWA staff were given a front-row seat to some of the best natural scenery and entertainment Florida has to offer.

On Wednesday, March 25, as everyone arrived, the Florida Section hosted a meet and greet reception. We were trolleyed over from the hotel to a glass-bottom boat to take us to our destination. As we floated on top of the crystal clear water and glided across the Molasses Reef, we were treated to a beautiful display of coral, fish, turtles, and even a shark. There were a lot of oohs and aahs from all. It was a great opportunity to relax and get to know other section leaders in a casual, laid-back atmosphere.

The meetings kicked off first thing Thursday morning with an informative presentation by AWWA Treasurer David Rager on “AWWA 2020: A Path to One AWWA.” His talk was based on the AWWA strategic plan and its five main pillars:

- First, that sections are AWWA’s primary business partner.
- Second, that AWWA is a provider of total water solutions.
- Third, that while AWWA is a North American association, its impact is felt globally.
- Fourth, that utilities are core members.
- And lastly, that this would be a plan for all of AWWA.

Most of the rest of the day was dedicated to section members sharing ideas about membership and education. This is one of my favorite components of RMSO. These sharing opportunities have transitioned from annual reports of general section activities to topical, focused discussions. The quality of information shared has led to greater adoption of new ideas, programs,
and initiatives among the sister sections. These are the ideas and programs that work—the things that the other sections are doing that are successful and bring value back to the membership.

This is the true value of RMSO and why it’s such a successful event. You leave re-energized, with a handful of ideas and opportunities to serve your members. You build relationships with the other sections in your region that continue throughout the year. The ideas are not just shared; sections make them a reality by supporting and assisting each other to become “One AWWA.”

The evening was capped off with a reception and dinner at Snooks Bayside Restaurant. The weather was perfect, the sunset was gorgeous, the food was tasty, and the fellowship was enjoyed by all 96 attendees. It was simply a perfect location and a great event hosted by the section. Thanks again to Grace Johns for taking the time to plan and coordinate this event and to Hazen and Sawyer for supporting her.

Early Friday morning the sections assembled again for an informative presentation on branding and a legislative update from AWWA Deputy Executive Director Tom Curtis. Tom provided a recap of the recent DC Fly-In, which is held every year to inform new legislators in Washington about drinking water issues. He pointed out some the key issues on Capitol Hill, chanting his mantra “Free WIFIA.”

The event was capped off with a silent auction to raise money for Water For People. Barika Poole coordinated this effort and brought in many eclectic, Florida-made and Florida-themed items, from art work and jewelry to an autographed picture of Dale Earnhardt Sr. to craft beer and wine. We also offered items from some of the countries where Water For People has its projects. The Puerto Rico Section brought a bottle of Rum that kicked off a bidding war and was won by a Florida Section representative. This was a fun and successful event that raised over $1500.

On a side note, we missed seeing Christopher McGinness, our section services manager from AWWA. He was pulled away by a last-minute, but very welcome new addition to his family! Congratulations Christopher, from the Florida Section and all the members of Region II.

I’m looking forward to the meeting next year and the opportunity to renew old friendships, build new ones, and steal some more great ideas!