

The Pier Baithouse

St. Petersburg, Florida

Tuesday, July 1, 2008

On the feeding of the pelicans at The Pier

A rule set by the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission concerning the feeding of brown pelicans goes into effect today.

Section and rule number 68A-4.001 paragraph 4

The intentional feeding or the placement of food that attracts pelicans and modifies the natural behavior of the pelican so as to be detrimental to the survival or health of a local population is prohibited.

A news release from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission authored by Karen Parker explained that...“The intent of this rule is not to regulate the occasional or the casual feeding of individual pelicans. Individuals who are out fishing and happen to hand a scrap to a begging pelican will not be cited for their behavior. This rule provides an enforcement tool to resolve situations when large scale feeding could negatively influence the health or survival of a pelican.

“Another problem arises at fishing piers or other spots where people are cleaning fish or where fishermen toss the birds a few fish from time to time. The large bones left over after filleting a fish can get stuck in the throat of the pelican, eventually choking or starving the bird.”

While we understand the spirit of the law, we, too, have worked hard to protect the pelicans. We have rescued hundreds of pelicans that have been caught up in fishing line or hooks. From the early 1920s there have been pelican feedings at The Pier. It is part of our history here. We believe that we feed the pelicans in a responsible way. We buy fish from a supplier strictly for this purpose. The fish we buy are free of parasites and are used whole, so that no fish parts are being given to the pelicans. The pelicans are fed individually, one fish at a time by one person at a time. The fish supplied by the pier bait house for pelican feeding is small portion of the food needed by the local population.

We are presently in communication with Florida Wildlife officers to resolve the matter in a way that is satisfactory to all parties.