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### **Exemplary Project Award to Bryant Patton Bridge**

Like any other company or organization the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) likes to toot its own horn and give credit where credit is due. Long before the start of construction of the new St. George Island (Bryant Patton) Bridge from Eastpoint to St. George Island (over Apalachicola Bay) in 2002 there were a great number of environmental concerns.

After all, Apalachicola Bay is located smack dab in the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve (ANERR). Larger than all other of our nation's reserves combined. The Bay between Eastpoint and St. George Island is the nursery for hundreds of fish species as well as the harvesting grounds for World Famous Apalachicola Bay oysters. Toss in some great blue crabs and this is one of the greatest seafood melting pots in the country.

The FDOT had to do things right. They did and ultimately honored their own with an "Exemplary Project Award." Here's what the FDOT website had to say about this project:

"The other project to be awarded the Exemplary Project Award goes to the Bryant Patton Bridge, also known as the St. George Island Bridge. At the time this project was bid, the Bryant Patton Bridge was one of first and largest design-build projects undertaken. The location of this bridge created many environmental challenges. Apalachicola Bay is one of America's most environmentally sensitive bays due to shell fishing. Because of the environmental sensitivity of the bay, and the economic effect on the oyster harvesting the project utilized coordination and communication with all interested parties throughout the implementation of the project."

Like the London Bridge of lore, the old (built in 1965) St. George Island Bridge was wearing out and faced the possibility of falling down and so the new St. George Island Bridge was started in 2002 and completed in 2004. At the time it became the third longest bridge in Florida.

The original bridge consisted of a couple of "humps" that met at a causeway. That causeway was eliminated as a meeting place and this contributed to the exceptional length of the new continuous bridge. An added benefit of the new bridge was that the lives of many birds were saved. Birds used to nest on the sides of the road on the causeway and no matter how slow drivers would travel the birds would fly into the path of cars and trucks. Plus gawkers and photographers would park on the side of the road to get an up close and personal view of the nesters and caused unsafe congestion. The speed limit on the main portion of the new bridge is now 55 mph. And the only birds you are likely to notice are Brown Pelicans riding the wind currents alongside the bridge railing. And nesting birds on the freestanding causeway.

Besides a brand new bridge and less bird fatalities, Franklin County also gained a pair of fishing piers. The St. George Island pier (southern end of the old bridge) juts some 600 feet into the Bay and the free fishing is great. Access can be gained near the island end of the new bridge.

