

# Noxubee News



Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge News

Issue 26

September 09



*The chosen tree before...*



*Constructing the nest frame.*



*The finished frame and tree.*

## Friends Sponsor Artificial Eagle Nest

The bald eagles nesting along the Dynamite Shed Road have been successful at producing young for the past three years despite the tree having been dead since 2006. Significant signs of decay in the tree bole and limb breakage associated with the nest seem to indicate the end is just one more storm away. Thankfully, the young are gone and the nesting season is still several months away. In the interim, the Friends of Noxubee Refuge sponsored the creation of a “starter” nest in a pine adjacent to the present nest. This starter nest will, hopefully, keep the eagle pair at the same location for the public to see for years to come. A local tree-climber scaled the 110-foot pine with spikes and a rope to haul equipment. At the top he trimmed away the apex branch and a few side branches. Subsequently, he hauled loads of cedar and cypress branches to the top and fashioned a framework by nailing the sticks to the live limbs. More loads of smaller branches were raised and formed into the “starter” nest. The process took four hours to complete, and the results are very impressive. By early November, the eagles should be back looking to nest once more. This time a new nest is there for them to put on the finishing touches before laying eggs in late December.

## Forestry



Forest inventorying (*cruising*) has gone high tech over the past two years at Noxubee NWR. About two years ago the forestry staff obtained dataloggers. Dataloggers are small, rugged hand-held computers that allow tree plot data collection to be entered in the field and downloaded into a desktop computer for analysis later. Data plots are located using GPS technology, which is integrated with the datalogger.

In July our inventory software package was changed. The new package allows for better printed reports and is integrated with our GIS (Geographic Information System). GIS is used for spatial information analysis and mapping of the Refuge.



*This is one of our TDS Ranger dataloggers*

## Building Repairs Accomplished

During the summer, the Refuge staff and a volunteer AmeriCorps team based out of Denver, Colorado, completed several greatly needed repairs around the Refuge. The AmeriCorps team cleaned and water-sealed all of the boardwalks. The Refuge staff worked in conjunction with the AmeriCorps team to re-roof two Refuge quarters and the fire conference room. During the process of roofing, extensive termite damage was discovered and repaired. Also, because of previous leaks, the ceiling and flooring were replaced. Thanks to the teams help, the conference room is once again useable.



## A New Boardwalk on Bluff Lake

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge is completing a new boardwalk/fishing pier on Bluff Lake. The boardwalk is located across from Doyle Arm and is an approximately 500 feet in length. The walk meanders through the majestic cypress at the edge of the lake, then breaks into an opening that offers a terrific view of Bluff Lake. When the lake is open to fishing, the boardwalk will double as a fishing pier. Fishermen restricted to bank fishing will be able to use the new boardwalk to access a greater portion of Bluff Lake. Being handicapped accessible, the boardwalk will allow additional fishing opportunities to disabled sportsman as well. The opening ceremony for the new boardwalk will be held at Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge on October 3, during the Refuge Week Event. This public use opportunity is sure to be appreciated by everyone using the facility.

## Wildlife Factoids

The American alligator was an endangered species but has fully recovered and is legally harvested in many states including Mississippi. However, due to its similarity of appearance to crocodiles (that are endangered) they are still protected by law outside of these authorized hunts.

The American crocodile is the only other native crocodilian in North American - it is an endangered species - exists only in South Florida.

Alligators are descendents of much larger species that lived over 200 million years ago.

Female alligators grow to 9 feet, males may exceed 12 feet.

Alligators nest once a year, females build dirt/vegetation mounds and lay 25-50 eggs in the mound.

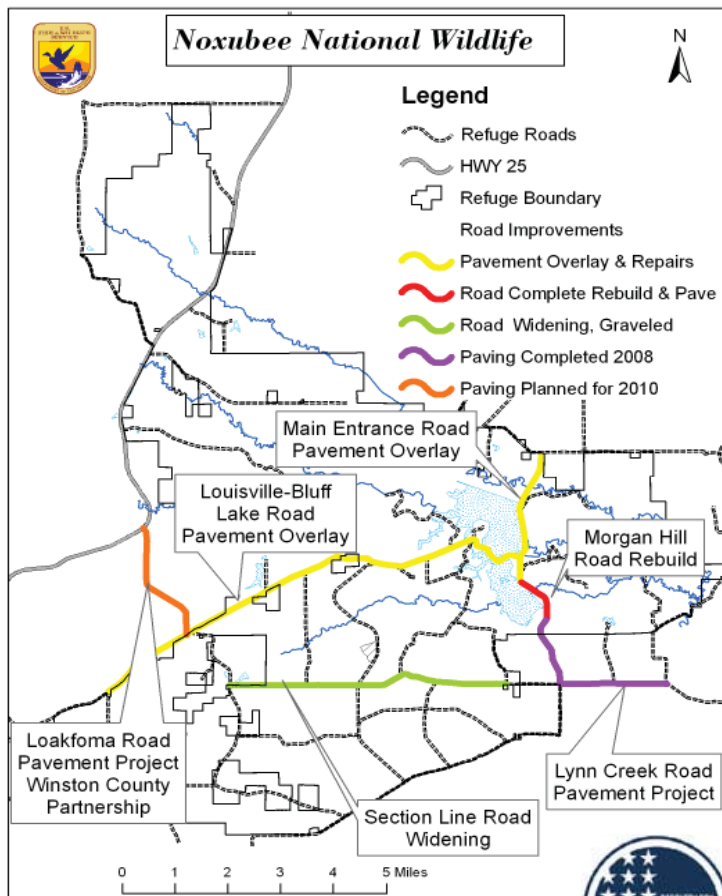
The eggs are incubated by the heat of decomposition and daily temperature; the female does guard the nest though.

Young alligators are often eaten by other larger animals and other alligators.

Alligators have a natural fear of man. Feeding alligators causes them to lose their fear and look to man for/as food.

Some alligators can go as long as two to three years without eating.





## American Recovery and Reinvestment Act comes to Noxubee



The ARRA has come to all corners of the United States in some form or fashion. The Refuge System was not left out of President Obama's Stimulus Package. The Refuge System received \$284 million to construct new visitor facilities, complete needed restoration and resource enhancement projects, and fund some roadwork through the Refuge Roads Program and the Federal Highway Administration.

When the call came for proposals, Noxubee Refuge's request package included invasive species eradication/restoration work, facilities repair and road improvement work. We were pleased when Noxubee received \$2.1 million for roadwork through the Federal Highways Administration. The additional funding has allowed us to move ahead towards completing the majority of the work that was began in 2006. The skyrocketing fuel and materials costs in 2007-8 severely deteriorated the expectations of what projects would be accomplished under our original plans. Many projects were reduced and some set-aside in hopes that one day we would receive additional funding. Thankfully it happened.

We are now on our way to repairing and rebuilding the majority of all of the paved roads leading into Noxubee Refuge by the end of 2010. The work includes rebuilding and repaving 13 miles of paved road and widening 5.2 miles of gravel road. The bid for the road work was awarded to Superior Asphalt, Inc. Hopefully, we will get some of the paving overlay completed this year, with the majority being completed by the end of next summer. Work already completed or started include the 3.2 mile paving addition from Morgan Hill to Lynn Creek Road and up to Edmonds Bridge Road and the partnership with Winston County to pave 2.1 miles of Loakfoma Road to Highway 25.



## Tree bits – Sassafras Trees

A tea brewed from the roots of sassafras was the original flavoring in the making of root beer. Powdered dried leaves of sassafras are used to make a spice called *file'* (pronounced *fee-lay*). *File'* is the main spice used in the making of a Cajun or southern soup called gumbo. The fruit are eaten by a variety of birds. The fruit leaves and stems are eaten by other wildlife species.

The most distinctive characteristic of sassafras trees are the leaf shapes. Sassafras can have four distinct leaf shapes: 1) no lobes, 2) two lobes, 3) one lobe on left side (left-handed mitten), and 4) one lobe on right side (right-handed mitten). The main stems of small sprouts are a dark green color, and these stems can be easily recognized in the winter with no leaves. The branches of the smaller trees are horizontal to the ground. The bark of the older trees is whitish in color and deeply furrowed.



*Sassafras root.*

## Calendar of Events

### **October 3** - National Wildlife Refuge Week Event

*Family Fun Day and Dedication of Boardwalk/Fishing Pier*

Come on out and join us for our biggest annual event! National Wildlife Refuge Week recognizes the wonders and significance of our nation's 548 Wildlife Refuges. Celebrations throughout the country are scheduled for this week. Noxubee Refuge will host a fun celebration, free to the public. Family Fun Day has something for everyone: crafts, face painting, activities such as canoeing, archery, rabbit stick throwing, or tomahawk throwing, live music, food, exhibits about Mississippi wildlife, all kinds of informative and enjoyable things to do and see. This event is held at and around the Visitor Center. 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Dedication and ribbon cutting of our new Boardwalk/Fishing Pier will be at 9:30 a.m. at Doyle Arm.

### **October 17** - *Canoeing at Bluff Lake*

Canoes, life jackets and paddles will be available for you to take out on Bluff Lake at no charge. This is a great opportunity to explore canoeing and the cypress stands. Canoes will be launched next to the Bluff Lake boat ramp near the spillway. 8:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

### **November 7** - *Pioneer Day*

The smell of dutch-oven cooking mingled with smoke from a fire will invite you to a visit of the Refuge's past. Try your hand at trades of the old days in the course of pioneer skill demonstrations such as bowl carving, shingle making using a cross-cut saw, throwing tomahawks, making a toy canoe or cutting a reed or feather quill and more! What used to be Choctaw Territory was settled in the 1800s by farmers and plantation owners. During the great depression, more than 100 impoverished homesteaders and farmers were forced to relocate, after most of the fertile soil had eroded. Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge was

### **November 21** - *CSI Fossils*

From "sea lilies" to petrified poop! Investigate fossils in this fun workshop by Dr Renee Clary and Dr. John Guyton of Mississippi State University. Get a hands-on overview of the different ways in which living things can be preserved, and learn what types of fossils to look for in our home state of Mississippi! We will be sorting through Mississippi gravel in our quest for ancient remains, so come prepared to get dirty! At the Visitor Center 2 p.m.

### **December 5** - *Nature Crafts For The Holidays*

Get in the holiday spirit by making wreaths, ornaments and birdfeeders with natural materials. We will have materials available and we encourage you to bring some materials you have collected to share with others. Help us decorate a Christmas Tree for Wildlife, an alluring reminder that Christmas is truly a holiday for all. There will also be a Cedar Christmas Tree Sale. The trees will be harvested from Osborn Prairie, where cedars are taking over one of the last remnants of the Black Prairie. Help improve the prairie ecosystem by purchasing a cedar Christmas tree at Noxubee Refuge. Proceeds will benefit Friends of The Blackbelt and Friends of Noxubee Refuge. Large trees \$10 and small trees \$5.

At the Visitor Center 9:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

### **December 19** - *Story Time For Children*

A great time to hear winter nature stories and take a break from the holiday hustle. At the Visitor Center at 2 p.m.



## Staff Notes

Nathan "Nate" Kerschner started as a forestry technician (firefighter) at Noxubee in May, coming from Port Louisa NWR in Iowa. He was born and raised in Coloma, Wisconsin, the middle child of five, three sisters and one brother. He went to college, studied structural firefighting and started working as a seasonal wildland firefighter for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources where he caught the "firefighting bug." He is a die-hard firefighter with the flaming red hair to prove it. He enjoys hunting and fishing along with other outdoor activities. With a ready smile and great attitude, he is a great asset to the Refuge. If you see Nate, give him a warm welcome and treat him to some good old southern hospitality.