U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

JUNE 2007 NEWSLETTER

2007 Okefenokee Swamp stamp. Photo by Jose' Azel.

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and Folkston Post Office celebrate release of new "Okefenokee Swamp" postage stamp

The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and the Folkston, Georgia Post Office held a special dedication ceremony on Friday, June 1, to commemorate the release of the U.S. Postal Service's "American Landscape Series: Okefenokee Swamp" 69-cent International Postage Stamp. Speakers included George Constantino, refuge manager, and Jennine Badenhorst, Post Master of the Folkston Post Office. The local event showcased the release of the international rate stamp, which features a photograph of the Okefenokee Swamp, taken by Jose' Azel. The new stamp represents the latest in the Scenic American Landscape series, which celebrates our public lands. Other landscapes featured in this series have included Nine-Mile Prairie in Nebraska, Yosemite National Park in California, and the Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina and Tennessee.

"This is a wonderful way of sharing with the world the captivating sense of wonder people experience every time they enter Okefenokee Swamp," said Constantino. "It's a place filled with breath-taking scenery and haunting beauty. Mr. Azel's photograph captures this, and we are truly grateful to the U.S. Postal Service for selecting his photograph to represent one of our most beloved and cherished scenic American landscapes."

Submitted by Shawn Gillette, Okefenokee NWR, Folkston, GA

Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge opens new headquarters, nature center to the public in June

The new headquarters and nature center. Photo by Margo Stahl.

Three years after the 1950 headquarters motel was destroyed by the hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in 2004, the Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge and Nature Center will be moving out of trailers and into a new building just in time for the 2007 hurricane season in June! A brand new diesel generator sits outside waiting to assist in the event of any power failures.

A dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 5, celebrated tthe beautiful, new building. The Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge and Nature Center is a unique partnership unprecedented in the Fish

and Wildlife Service. The Hobe Sound Nature Center, Inc., is a private non-profit organization, dedicated to promoting environmental awareness in the community. The Center is a cooperating association with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is co-located with the Service at the Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge. Over 35,000 children and adults participate in Nature Center programs every year. These folks attend the Fall and Spring Program Series, field trips and special presentations such as sea turtle walks. Others participate in onsite, specially designed environmental education programs for school, organizational, scouting and summer camp programs. Outreach programs for the community schools, organizations, clubs and professional associations reach 21,000 persons. A total of 13,493 volunteer hours were logged at the refuge by Nature Center staff and volunteers in 2006. MANGROVE NEWS, the Nature Center's quarterly publication is mailed out to hundreds of individuals, organizations, and schools in our community. The refuge itself hosts over 120,000 visitors a year at its various locations including its Jupiter Island beach. More photos in Photo Album.

Submitted by Margo Stahl, Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, FL

Behind the Scenes--

Manteo Middle School sixth graders shadowed Refuge employees. (L to R) (back row) Scott Lanier, Jon Powers, Eric Craddock (front row) Shelby Lanier, Frankie Powers, Jordan Doshier. Photo credit: Bonnie Strawser, USFWS.

Manteo Middle School Sixth Grade Shadows have a wild time on local National Wildlife Refuges!

On Thursday, April 26, many Manteo (North Carolina) MIddle School sixth graders had an adventurous day shadowing parents or other adults in the community- learning what a day is like in the working world. Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges were host to three of the students.

Deputy Refuge Manager Scott Lanier, whose daughter Shelby was one of the shadows, smiled when he talked about their day and added, "These kids got to see and do things in one day that some adults don't see or do in their entire lives!"

The trio's experiences varied, but all saw a variety of wildlife and learned much about how the refuge takes care of the land, so wildlife can thrive. Frankie Powers, who shadowed his dad, Refuge Maintenance Mechanic Jon Powers, found a deer skull, saw a black bear and a bald eagle, and helped the red wolf caretaker feed some of the wolves. Shelby Lanier helped feed the wolves and saw the bald eagle, but was at Pea Island identifying shorebirds when Frankie saw the bear. Shelby also attended a site meeting with the US Army Corps of Engineers to review plans for a boardwalk extension on the refuge.

Jordan Doshier shadowed Equipment Operator Eric Craddock. Jordan saw wildlife, as well, but spent a lot of his day learrning the in's and out's of heavy equipment and seeing how the refuge accomplishes so much of its work with specialized equipment.

"Many folks don't realize all the planning and work that goes into managing a wildlife refuge. I know these students had fun," said Refuge Manager Mike Bryant. " I hope they gained some appreciation and a little bit of insight into the workings of a refuge--appreciation and insight they'll share with their families and friends."

Submitted by Bonnie Strawser, Alligator River/Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges, Manteo, NC

Officers Eddie and Ajay to the rescue!

Officers Eddie Brannon and Ajay with second grade students on outdoor stage at Mt. Bethel Elementary School. FWS Photo.

"What would happen if someone broke into your home?" asked a second grader at Mt. Bethel Elementary School in Marietta, Georgia.

"I wouldn't even have to get out of bed," replied Zone Refuge Law Enforcement Officer Eddie Brannon. Canine Officer Ajay and retired Canine Officer Duke could easily handle any intruder. So began the second grade introduction to refuge law enforcement in the Service.

Four second grade classes were mesmerized by Officers Eddie and Ajay. Eddie explained the rigorous training that he gave Ajay in order to be a canine officer. He demonstrated Ajay's search and rescue capabilities, how Ajay only barks upon command and responds only to German orders. He spoke of how most of their time is spent in the woods and the importance of their roles with the Service.

As Ajay sat calmly, the kids were startled as suddenly the horn honked loudly, the lights flashed, Eddie's beeper went off and the fan turned on. Eddie's Law Enforcement vehicle is especially designed to protect Ajay from overheating once the temperature reaches 82 degrees. Eddie also has a first aid kit for Ajay and knows canine CPR. The students were happy to check out the vehicle/office, Ajay's kennel, all of the law enforcement equipment and the computer mounted on the center console.

The kids were amazed at how well Ajay obeys commands at only 18 months old. The rest of us marveled at how Ajay could sit still as 80 second graders lined up to pet him. It is hard to imagine how this beautiful dog can be a serious officer at work, a playful pet at home and such a valuable asset to the Service. Two hours later, the students with their Junior Canine Officer Badge stickers in hand, were dragged back into their classrooms, still thinking of the exciting life of Officers Eddie and Ajay. More photos in Photo Album.

Submitted by Ellen Marcus, External Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia

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T-Shirt logo designed by Ellen Marous.

Race for the Cure

Andy Berryman and Kristi Watkins at the beginning of the walk. Photo by Bruce Bohanon.

On February 25, 2004, I accepted the Congressional Affairs Specialist position with the Service after working at EPA for 12 years. In addition to my new job, I was also days away from taking my two nephews on their first plane trip to Disney World and a Braves spring training game.

Life was great or so I thought. Hours later, my life turned upside down, changed forever by a diagnosis.

I had breast cancer.

Words cannot describe the range of emotions I felt when my doctor called to tell me the news. I was in a state of shock and total

disbelief thinking this couldn't be happening to me, but it was. One of my first thoughts was how disappointed my nephews were going to be about missing our trip. I wondered how I could possibly start a new job when I was now faced with fighting for my life.

Sam Hamilton and Christine Eustis told me to take all of the time I needed and my job would be there when I was ready. At that moment, I knew I had made the right decision to become part of the Service family. Six months later, after undergoing surgery and chemotherapy, I began my job with the Service. My first six weeks were challenging because I had to leave early each day for radiation therapy. The outpouring of support from my co-workers was incredible and made things easier.

Last year, my nephews and I finally made our trip to Disney World!

I have yet to meet a single person who does not know of someone affected by breast cancer, so while life is great for me once again, I know there are others facing the same fight I encountered.

Deputy Regional Director Cindy Dohner recruited two of her neighbors to walk (left: Julie Beck and right: Lauren Beck). Photo by Kristi Watkins.

The Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure is an annual 5K walk to raise money for breast cancer research. In 2005, I formed "Kristi's Krew," because I wanted to do my part, however small, to help find a cure. Each year our team has grown and this year 23 members raised more than $1,600! I want to personally thank the following Regional Office employees for being part of the team: Gloria Bell, Erin Clark, Elsie Davis, Cindy Dohner, Ellen Marcus, Debbie Vess, and Debbie Young. What an amazing experience this has been for me.

I walk each year for many reasons: to honor all survivors including my mother who is a 20-year survivor; to celebrate my family and friends who give me love, strength and courage; and to remember friends who lost the fight but remain true inspirations.

This year's theme – "I Am The Cure"- resonated with me. How true that is.

Submitted by Kristi Watkins, External Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia

Bragging Rights --

A wood carving of a lake sturgeon at Bamboo Bend on the Wolf River, Wisconsin. Photo by Jaci Zelko.

Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery staff goes to Wisconsin to collect lake sturgeon eggs

Carlos Echevarria, Chad Shirey, and Jaci Zelko of Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery and Tom Sinclair from the Atlanta Regional Office recently traveled to Wisconsin to spawn lake sturgeon in the Wolf River. This is the seventh year that hatchery staff has traveled to the Wolf River to collect eggs and bring them back to the hatchery. Warm Springs also collected eggs that are incubated at two other hatcheries, Private John Allen in Tupelo, Mississippi and Genoa National Fish Hatchery in Genoa, Wisconsin. Even though the four-day trip is exhausting, the extraordinary effort will produce about 35,000 lake sturgeon fry to be distributed at four hatcheries. Fish will be raised for six months, then stocked at the Lower French Broad in the Upper Tennessee River; Cumberland River in Tennessee; and Coosa River, Georgia. These preservation and recovery efforts are part of collaborations with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Tennessee Wildlife Resource s Agency, Tennessee Valley Authority, the Service, and 12 other

agencies to begin restoring this species in portions of its historic range in the Southeast. More photos in Photo Album.

Submitted by Jaci Zelko, Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery, Warm Springs, Georgia

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Perquimans senior gets her hands dirty on North Carolina refuges

Perquimans senior Starla Newton and Wildlife Interpretive Specialist Ann Marie Chapman discuss refuge management techniques at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Scott Lanier.

Although she grew up in Perquimans County, North Carolina, Starla Newton has always been a beach-lover who has spent many summers with extended family on Hatteras Island. Earlier this year, when her senior class was assigned a research paper and investigative project, Starla didn't hesitate to choose her topic. She chose beach erosion and coastal development and has learned a lot in the process. Part of her assignment was a research paper; the other part was an on-the-job, shadowing/mentoring component. She chose to spend her shadowing time on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge.

On April 23, Starla helped with a regularly scheduled clean-up of litter from Oregon Inlet parking area on the north end of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. While there, Starla got a first-hand look at the impact human use can have on a natural area.

"Oregon Inlet is one of the most heavily-used areas on the Refuge," explained Wildlife Interpretive Specialist Ann Marie Chapman. "Volunteers like Starla are essential for helping the Refuge staff to keep it looking its best!"

The second day of her shadowing assignment, Starla met Specialist Chapman at Alligator River Refuge to see some of the Refuge's operations and maintenance in action. She saw Refuge staff mowing and disking fields in preparation for spring plant growth and other staff cleaning drainage canals deep in the Refuge.

"Big thanks to Ann Marie and Refuge staff who showed me the various types of work that conservation professionals do every day," said Starla. "It gives me an idea of what I want to do!"

Submitted by Bonnie Strawer, Alligator River/Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges, Manteo, NC

Americorps volunteers work hard to pick up debris. Photo by Pon Dixson.

National and Global Youth Service Day at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, May 21, was National and Global Youth Service Day. Americorps' National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC),Tulane university students, and the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges combined efforts to clean up Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. More than 70 volunteers picked up trash, mowed, and cut weeds as the refuge is being readied to reopen areas recently rebuilt from Hurricane Katrina. NCCC Regional and National directors attended the event. After working all morning, volunteers were treated to lunch provided by the Friends group, and then enjoyed a nature hike or canoe trip led by refuge staff.

Submitted by Doug Hunt, Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges, Lacombe, Louisiana

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Safari at Southeast Louisiana Refuges

Students learn about fire management. Photo by Pon Dixson.

For the second year, Southeast Louisiana Refuges complex hosted St Tammany Parish's annual event for their adaptive physical education students. During the week of April 16, buses brought more than 100 students to the refuge headdquarters each day. The students on the "Safari" went through a bear maze, took a hay ride, and met the area wildlife control officer and his scaly friend. Students also saw some of the creatures from the Audubon Zoo, learned about fire safety from the local fireman, and even learned about controlled fire and the differences between a wildfire fighter and a structure fire fighter. The weather held up for the entire event, as almost 600 students visited the refuge and learned about the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Submitted by Doug Hunt, Southeast Louisiana Refuges, Lacombe, Louisiana

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Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge celebrates Step Outside Day!

Kids line up to paint a decoy at the Service tent. Photo by Byron Fortier.

The Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge and its partners, The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hosted the fourth annual Step Outside Day on May 12. This event was started to offer outdoor opportunities to handicapped youth, although everyone is welcome. Kids can paint duck decoys, take a boat ride, see a rocket net shot, shoot at the skeet range, live the life of a bear, pet an alligator, and many other fun and educational activities.

Submitted by Doug Hunt, Southeast Louisiana Refuges , Lacombe, Louisiana

Many hands make light (but wet) work. Photo by Bryon Fortier.

Three-way partnership benefits Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

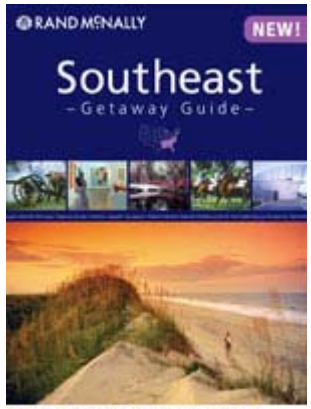
Conference attendees at the National Environmental Partnership Summit in New Orleans, along with local volunteers, spent the day restoring an area of Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge on May 11. The Summit is an interdisciplinary gathering bringing together environmental professionals and assistance providers from diverse sectors all over the country and the world. Under the direction of Assistant Refuge Manager Shelley Stiaes, an area impacted by the removal of a barge deposited by Katrina was replanted with smooth cordgrass (spartina alternaflora). The cordgrass was purchased by The New Orleans Mayor's Office of Environmental Affairs, a frequent refuge partner. More photos in Photo Album.

By Byron Fortier, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, Lacombe, Louisiana

Bon Secour Natitional Wildlife Refuge in Rand McNally Southeast Getaway Guide

The sea oat plants grow in numbers along the sugar sand shore and dunes continue to build with every grain nesting in it's own particular place. Recovery efforts at Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge seem to be nature's hands now. Roughly three years ago every primary and secondary dune was flattened by Hurricane Ivan, destroying habitat and the livelihoods of people along the Gulf Coast. Three years later in April 2007, the editors of America's largest map company, Rand McNally, have recognized Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge as the "Best of the Southeast" by including it in the Southeast Getaway Guide.

Submitted by Ron Hollis, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, Gulf Shores, Alabama



Cover of 2007 Rand McNally Southeast Getaway Guideby Rand McNally. Scanned image.

Students fromWest Blocton Elementary School search for invertebrates. Photo by Annette Harris.

ThinkQuest creative learning forum

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge hosted a group of fourth-graders from the West Blocton Elementary School who conducted benthic macro-invertebrate monitoring of a refuge stream for six months to determine water quality. The group created a website as part of the International ThinkQuest competition which becomes a permanent part of the ThinkQuest Library, a creative learning forum. The website brings attention to the importance of keeping local waterways clean. It also provides information about how kids can be involved in monitoring their own waterway. The project emphasizes the need to educate young people about being an active community member. Click on the following link: http://www.bibbed.org/wbes/CSI/index.html

Submitted by Eva Kristofik, Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, Anniston, Alabama

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Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge cleanup

Before the cleanup. Photo by Steve Miller.

Friends of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge held their first annual cleanup on the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge on April 21. Sixty-four volunteers from Bibb, Tuscaloosa, and Jefferson counties pulled over three tons of trash from various part of the refuge, including 200 pounds of recyclables and 68 tires. Many areas of the refuge were used as dumping points prior to acquisition. Refuge staff had not been able to clean up many of these areas prior to this event. The event was sponsored by Alabama Power as part of their Renew Our Rivers Program. Also supporting the cleanup were the Bibb County Commission, Cahaba River Society, AmServ, West Blocton Police Department, Bibb County Sheriff's Department, Sun Beam, Little Debbie, R. L. Zeigler, and Sav-Mor Associated Foods.

After the cleanup. Photo by Steve Miller.

Submitted by Eva Kristofik, Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, Anniston, Alabama

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Andy Harrison, president of the Charleston Audubon chapter, inspects dispersion of seed from native grass drill. Photo by Joe Cockrell.

Partners collaborate on upland habitat restoration project in South Carolina lowcountry

On a beautiful spring day in March , a Partners for Fish and Wildlife project site in the South Carolina lowcountry was bustling with activity. Several partners gathered, bringing with them equipment, materials, and expertise. The effort was planned and coordinated by staff of the Charleston, South Carolina Ecological Services Field Office. The Audubon state office provided a tractor and an operator to prepare the seedbed. Use of a cultipacker was donated by the local John Deere dealer. Partners Biologist Laura Fogo directed operation of a native grass no-till drill owned by the North Carolina Resource Conservation and Development Council. The drill was pulled by a tractor brought from Orangeburg National Fish Hatchery and operated by Byron Hamilton. Representatives from South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service were present to observe and assist. After the seed was drilled, representatives from The Nature Conservancy and BASF provided technical assistance and materials for the post-emergent herbicide application. A local contractor volunteered his time and heavy equipment for the application. The project's goal is to restore former agricultural fields to a mixture of longleaf pine and native ground layer vegetation, benefiting migratory birds and other wildlife on a sanctuary owned by the Charleston Natural History Society. More photos in Photo Album.

By Joe Cockrell, , Charleston, South Carolina Ecological Services Field Office

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Earth Day celebration at White River National Wildlife Refuge

White River NWR Earth Day volunteer t-shirts. Photo by Matt Conner.

On April 21, the Friends of White River NWR, Phillips Community College, DeWitt Bank and Trust, City of St Charles, Entergy Power Company, and the White River National Wildlife Refuge partnered together to help clean up the refuge and roadways in St. Charles Arkansas. The crews picked up litter along the Refuge roads and highway areas through St Charles. Several different crews were assembled and each group had a specific area to clean. Refuge staff served as support for the crews by collecting bags of trash and providing the volunteers with cold beverages and snacks. At noon, everyone met back at the Refuge Visitor Center for slow cooked pulled pork and hot dogs. After lunch, the refuge conducted an environmental education program entitled “Who Polluted the White River NWR?” Prizes were also awarded for those that found trash with a “winner” sticker attached to certain pieces of litter along their routes.

Friends member cooks lunch. Photo by Steve Reagan.

The funding for the festival and cleanup came from Entergy Power Company which provided the refuge with a stewardship grant. The additional grant money will be used to create a community awareness program in cooperation with Phillips Community College and the refuge. The program will consist of presentations at schools, community pride signs, and “Refuge Refuse Reduction Signs” at the refuge entrances. Through this grant and partnership we hope to continue to engage the public in cleaning up the rrefuge.. The partners have named this effort “S.A.C.C. IT” which stands for South Arkansas County Cleanup, and all participants were provided a S.A.C.C. It T-shirt with the new logo designed for this initiative.

Submitted by Matt Conner, White River National Wildlife Refuge, St. Charles, Arkansas

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Cyclone hits Warm Springs Regional Fish Center

Checking out the CycloBio Tower System. L – R: Brian Ellington, R4 Engineer; Dr. Barnaby Watten,

A cyclone hit the Warm Springs Regional Fish Center (WSRFC). Okay, maybe not a real cyclone but the power and technology of one. The WSRFC worked with our Engineering Division to conduct a pilot experiment using a CycloBio Tower to treat spring water for hatchery operations. The main water source for the hatchery has a moderately low pH and needs to be treated with agricultural lime using an older hopper system. But, with addition of fluidized bed technologies, such as the CycloBio Tower, this will change. The CycloBio Tower uses the low pH water supply to dissolve calcium carbonate sand, which increases the pH, hardness and alkalinity of the water. Such a system will reduce the cost for lime and energy, creating a less expensive way to treat the spring water. Besides being more efficient, the treatment system will be less hazardous -- no more need for harmful lime. Just one more way the

USFWS is trying to ensure safe operations and remain environmentally friendly.

Submitted by William Bouthillier, Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, Georgia

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Display of protected wildlife products. Photo by Sarah Steele.

Planet Earth Day at the Louisville Zoo

On April 22, 2007, the Service's Office of Law Enforcement in Louisville, Kentucky (Ray Born, Jeffrey Steele, and volunteers Jane Herndon, Larry Parker, and Sarah Steele) provided outreach and education to zoo staff and the general public during the Louisville Zoo's Party for the Planet: Earth Day 2007. A display of protected wildlife products were available for the public to examine. Evidence Custodian Jeff Steele prepared a handout listing various references of websites that the general public can access for additional information to increase compliance with federal wildlife laws and regulations. Steele also prepared two binders that listed regional and state invasive plant and animal species. The purpose of the listings is to promote public awareness and prevention of non-native species propagation. There were a total of 35 exhibits with more than 18,000 people in attendance at the event.which was so successful that the zoo remained open more than an hour beyonff its scheduled closing time.

Submitted by Jeffrey Steele, Office of Law Enforcement, Louisville, Kentucky

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Okefenokee and Earth Day - connecting people with nature

Mary Lee, manager of Big J Grocery store and Sallie Gentry of Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge present Taylor Holbrook with her framed grocery bag and t-shirt.decorated with her art. USFWS photo.

"Bicyclists and visitors braved reports of flames and smoke to attend the annual Earth Day Bicycle Ride at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Approximately 60 cyclists, some riding from the nearby city of Folkston, took advantage of favorable winds to enjoy a beautiful day in the great outdoors. Partners and volunteers staffed booths along Swamp Island Drive, sharing information and fun activities. Participants learned about law enforcement efforts to protect wildlife, red-cockaded woodpecker management, prescribed and wild fire, and cultural history in the swamp. Local boy scouts demonstrated Leave No Trace techniques. Visitors saw live snakes, birds, and butterflies native to the area. Soda bottle bird feeders and fish mobiles were made from recycled materials by many visitors. Volunteer coordinator Gracie Gooch led a dedicated team as part of a community-wide litter pickup. All participants in the Bicycle Ride received free t-shirts decorated with art selected from the Grocery Bag Art Project. Students decorated brown paper bags from local grocery stores with the environmental theme "Okefenokee and Earth Day - Connecting People With Nature". The bags were then given back to the grocery stores, where shoppers received their purchases in the bags during the Earth Day weekend. One bag was selected to represent the project and decorate the t-shirts. This year's selectee was Folkston Elementary School student Taylor Holbrook. Rachel Holbrook, Taylor's mom, was given an extra t-shirt to send to Taylor's dad, who is currently serving in Iraq. Mrs. Holbrook stated that Taylor got her drawing talent from her dad.

Submitted by Shawn Gillette, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Folkston, Georgia

Hats Off --

Retired State Farm employee, Charles Carmichael, is the yardman at Black Bayou Lake NWR. Carmichael works 40 hours a week without pay*. Photo courtesy of Terrance Armstard, The News Star.

Enjoying the great outdoors -- Charles Carmichael went from desk work to yard work by volunteering at Black Bayou Lake

Each weekday, Charles "Charlie" Carmichael beats the sun up for a good cause.

At the crack of dawn, you'll find him at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge working 40 hours a week, regardless of the weather. "I get here about sun up — 6:30 a.m.," said the 67-year-old Monroe resident. "If the sun comes earlier, I come earlier. I've been working since I was 11-years-old. This is not employment to me. The key is I'm doing this because I want to, not because I have to."

Carmichael puts in five days a week as a volunteer at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The man, who's turned his hobby as a yardman into a full-time job, mows about 20 miles of road frontage and 30 to 40 acres at Black Bayou — all free of charge. "Charlie is a volunteer and will do anything we ask him to do," said Kelby Ouchley, refuge manager at Black Bayou Lake. "We get people here from all over the world and one of the things they routinely comment on is how well kept the grounds are. That would not be possible if it were not for Charlie's volunteer efforts." Carmichael, who's been a Black Bayou volunteer for four years, said that he is the only volunteer who works outside 99 percent of the time. But he doesn't mind.

After spending close to four decades as an underwriting operations superintendent for State Farm Fire, Carmichael's gone from making decisions on insurance applications to cutting grass and killing fire ants. He welcomes the change. "For 38 years, I worked behind a desk in an office with about 55 people," he said. "I needed another function." Some of his yard duties include monitoring the wood duck nest boxes, cleaning aquariums, cutting wood around the arboretum and nature trail and spraying water hyacinths. "Our federal agency doesn't have a budget to hire people to do this type of work," Ouchley said. "And Charlie is critical to the success of our program because of his maintenance work."

Spending time at Black Bayou is rewarding to Carmichael because it allows him to give back to society, and it's a form of physical exercise that he enjoys doing. Carmichael, who played a role in having the Conservation Learning Center finished, said he's motivated by the children who come out to visit. "I get to see school children respond to what's being offered here," he said. "I am extremely pleased to be a member of the Black Bayou Friends group. "Carmichael said Friends of the Black Bayou was selected as No. 1 out of 250 different refuge Friends groups across the United States. "I feel like in northeast Louisiana we are blessed to have a place like this," he said. "So if I can contribute to making it better, then that's super. Maybe some others will enjoy it as much as I do."

Carmichael, who retired four years ago, began volunteering at Black Bayou because he grew bored of trying to find things to do around his home. One day he set out looking for something to occupy his time on the Internet when he ran across a Black Bayou advertisement. "I was looking for something meaningful where I didn't have a time table," he said. His schedule is still his schedule and flexible enough to allow for occasional "flipping." "Flipping" means he can sleep a little longer and arrive to work at 8 a.m. instead of 6 a.m. "I wake up at 5:30 a.m., and I haven't set an alarm clock in years," he said. Most importantly, his volunteer work has not interfered with he and his wife of 47 years traveling schedule. The two have visited 42 states and 11 countries.

But working at the peaceful refuge is similar to vacationing all year long.

Every once in a while, Carmichael will notice a deer run across the road, see a snake or a bald eagle. "People look at me like I'm crazy," he said. "But I've never felt so rested and at ease. I am out here because I'm doing something I love to do, and it's varied enough that I don't get bored." Working on the refuge brings Carmichael back to his childhood. He was raised off and on a farm in south Alabama. "When I started back out here, I got on a tractor for the first time since I was 15," he said. "It was like I was going back to a pleasant time in my life that I had missed. But I didn't realize I missed it."

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By Lunzeta Chretien, lchretien@thenewsstar.com

Greg Blanks wins Jimmy Clark Award

Refuge Law Enforcement Officer Greg Blanks, stationed at Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, was presented with the Jimmy Clark Award during this year's Southeast Region Law Enforcement Refresher Training in March.. Service Regional Director Sam D. Hamilton presented the award which was given to Officer Blanks for his drive and dedication to public safety in relation to his work over the past year combating illicit activities on both Pinckney Island and Wheeler National Wildlife Refuges.

Submitted by Amy Ochoa, Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, Savannah, Georgia

Greg Blanks. Photo by Russ Webb.

Photo Album --

Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery staff goes to Wisconsin to collect lake sturgeon eggs -- more photos

Carlos Echevarria takes sample counts of lake sturgeon eggs. Photo by Jaci Zelko.

Jaci Zelko and a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources employee are collecting milt from a lake sturgeon male. Photo by Carlos Echevarria.

Carlos Echevarria stirring one lot of lake sturgeon eggs to prevent clumping. Photo by Jaci Zelko.

Tom Sinclair, Atlanta Regional Office, maintains data records for all lof the lake sturgeon to collect gametes to make multiple crosses and family lots. Photo by Jaci Zelko.

Officers Eddie and Ajay to the rescue! -- more photos

Officers Eddie Brannon and Ajay with Melissa Mesnick. FWS Photo.

Officers Eddie Brannon and Ajay with Jeremy Mix and classmates. FWS Photo.

Three-way partnership benefits Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos

Admiring a completed restoration area. Photo by Byron Fortier.

Bags of smooth cordgrass are distributed around the site. Photo credit: Bryon Fortier.

Shelley Stiaes keeps up the effort. Photo credit: Bryon Fortier.

Tight quarters. Photo credit: Bryon Fortier.

Partners collaborate on upland habitat restoration project in South Carolina lowcountry -- more photos

After the site was bush-hogged, Partners Biologist Joe Cockrell tows a drags device to smooth out the field's rough surface. Photo by Jason Ayers.

The group empties bags of native grass and wildflower seed to form a mixture of six different species, all of which are Carolina ecotype. Photo credit: Joe Cockrell.

Using a tractor brought in from Francis Beidler Forest, Collis Boyd of Audubon South Carolina tows the cultipacker. Photo credit: Joe Cockrell.

With assistance from NRCS Biologist Sudie Daves (left), Partners Biologist Laura Fogo (right) performs calculations for calibration of the native grass drill. Photo credit: Joe Cockrell.

Fisheries Biologist Byron Hamilton tows native grass drill with tractor from Orangeburg National Fish Hatchery. Photo credit: Joe Cockrell.

After the seed was finally in the ground and everyone left, it was time to apply pre-emergent herbicide. Local contractor Doug Clayton generously came in with his equipment and specialized skills. Working with Doug, Matt Nespeca of TNC and Jonathan Smith of BASF (not shown) were instrumental in this portion of the project. Photo credit: Joe Cockrell.

Cyclone hits Warm Springs Regional Fish Center -- more photos

Fish Biologist Bill Bouthillier conducting a water quality test. FWS Photo.

Three happy souls, pleased with the new technology. L-R: Carlos Echavarria, Hatchery Manager; Vincent Mudrak, WSRFC Director; Brian Ellington, R4 Engineer. FWS Photo.

Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge opens new headquarters, nature center to the public in June -- more photos

Left to right:: Howard Holley, president of Champion Contractors; Margo Stahl, refuge manager; Jim Mixon, superintendent of Champion Contractors; Debbie Fritz Quincy, Hobe Sound Nature Center director; Jon Andrew, Southeast Refuges chief, and Mark Musaus, project leader, ARM Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Jackie Isaac.

Entrance sign. Photo by Margo Stahl.

More than 65 people attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Photo by Tracy Boothby.

Visitor Services --

Bayou Teche Bear Festival in Franklin, Louisiana

Coordination between Southeast Louisiana Refuges and the Lafayette, Louisiana Ecological Services Offices again resulted in a successful and entertaining “Bear-y Patch” education pavilion at the annual Bayou Teche Bear Festival on April 21. The “Bear-y Patch” featured large displays about Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge, as well as the “Bear Maze” in which kids learn about the various habitat needs and the hazards faced by Louisiana black bears. Eight other guest organizations also had engaging displays and hands-on activities. The Friends of Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuges organized special refuge boat tours for 65 enthused visitors as part of the Bear Festival.

Submitted by Byron Fortier, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, Lacombe, Louisiana

A young Bear Fest visitor posing with a mount in bear "habitat" Photo by Robert Greco.

Young "bears" try to cross a dangerous highway. Photo by Debbie Fuller.

Amanda Wilkinson assists young visitors with the waterfowl ID quiz. Photo by Bryon Fortier.

A visitor posing with the Blue Goose, underneath another Blue Goose! Photo by Bryon Fortier.

Bears explore their habitat for food in the Bear Maze. Photo by Debbie Fuller.

Park Ranger Diane Barth; Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries staffer Paul Provence; Biologist Barret Fortier, and Park Ranger Amanda Wilkinson were on hand to assist visitors.. Photo by Byron Fortier.

Wage Grade Profile --

Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge's "Lone Ranger"

David Gaskin. Photo by Andy Hofmann.

In 2007 Tennessee Refuge's team of three equipment operators became a team of one when two members of the team retired from federal service. David Gaskin remains, the refuge's only equipment operator, known to some as the Lone Ranger. Instead of Silver, the Lone Ranger's trusty horse, David spends his time maintaining refuge assets from the seat of a backhoe, road grader, dozer, truck-tractor, or farm tractor. A hard-working and dedicated employee, David is from Benton County, Tennessee. He and his wife Sheila have two teenagers, Evan and Ashley. When he's not at work repairing levees, replacing water control structures, and grading the roads, he kicks back with a fishing pole or spends time hunting with his son Evan.

Submitted by Andy Hofmann, Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge, Paris, Tennessee