



U.S. Fish &amp; Wildlife Service

# Southeast Region

## SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

FEBRUARY 2009 NEWSLETTER

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Marsh nourishment area. Mud flats have filled in between marsh grass clumps and in shallow water areas. Photo by Danny Breauk.

### Playing in the mud at Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

When you see the marshes of a refuge disappearing at an ever-accelerating rate, when the lake shoreline has been reduced to a thin ribbon of protection, and when the lake itself is breaching that shoreline and threatening to engulf several thousand acres of refuge wetlands, what's a biologist to do?

Well, sometimes you just have to go play in the mud. Most children like to play in the mud, and if you're a child at heart, you still like to play in the mud. At Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, a biologist gets to play in a much larger area and use much bigger 'toys'. Playtime in coastal Louisiana means the very real challenge of restoring and protecting thousands of acres of tidal emergent marsh.

Like most of coastal Louisiana, Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge is faced with the same forces of subsidence and erosion that cause the loss of emergent marsh and its conversion to open water. Even before it was a refuge, this area along the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain had already lost hundreds of acres of tidal emergent marsh to the forces of erosion and that loss continued after it became a refuge. Interior ponds got bigger and wave fetch and tidal scouring ate into the organic marsh soils at an ever increasing pace. Lake Pontchartrain itself worked on the shoreline, rolling it back in an ever narrowing band of protection for the marshlands beyond. It was obvious that something had to be done.

Working closely with the Lafayette, Louisiana, Ecological Services Office, refuge staff came up with a plan to dredge material from the bottom of Lake Pontchartrain and deposit it in marsh creation cells. These cells are areas of open water with a temporary earthen dike put around them to contain the pumped material. Refuge staff identified the areas most in need of protection, and a project proposal was developed. The plan was ambitious, as it needed to be, and called for the creation of nearly 500 acres of emergent marsh through this 'dedicated dredge disposal' process and for the nourishment and enhancement of over 100 acres of degraded marsh. Working through the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) program, refuge and Ecological Services staff secured approval and funding for the project in 2004.

Engineering work began, and the project was well on its way through the planning phase when in 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck. While Katrina temporarily delayed construction of the project, the overnight loss of another 2,000 acres of tidal marsh on the refuge

merely served to emphasize the need for action.

Construction finally began in 2008. Crews used airboats, marsh buggies, crew boats, tug boats, barges, and two suction dredges capable of moving up to 30,000 and 80,000 cubic yards of material a day. Dredging was completed in October of 2008, and the results have exceeded expectations.

The dredged material filled the marsh creation cells to capacity, laying the foundation for the establishment of nearly 500 acres of tidal emergent marsh. Marsh nourishment material, consisting of suspended sediments that flowed out of the marsh creation cells, produced over 400 acres of marsh nourishment and mud flats. Additional benefits not readily apparent include the improvement and protection now offered to the shoreline of Lake Pontchartrain and the fact that the new marsh platform is composed of less erodible mineral soils rather than the organic muck soils that had been washed away. This new marsh also will provide many decades worth of protection to the marshes beyond and provide habitat for the host of species that rely on coastal marshes.

As the dredge pipe was being removed and the marsh buggies were making the last improvements to the project, shorebirds, wading birds, seagulls, terns, waterfowl, and other species were already in evidence. Things can only get better as vegetation takes root and grows. As for me, I'm off to find more mud to play in. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

*Submitted by James Harris, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, Lacombe, Louisiana*

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## ***Behind the Scenes--***



### **Laura Brandt Wins National Championship!**

Laura Brandt, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wildlife biologist in south Florida, won her first National Racquetball Championship on January 18, 2009 (coincidentally her tenth anniversary of working for the Service). Laura traveled to Canoga Park, California, to compete against ladies from across the country in the 45+ age division and capture the gold. Laura has been playing racquetball competitively for 20 years and has won various local and regional events, but this is her first National Championship. She is sponsored by Ektelon and also promotes and teaches racquetball.

*Submitted by Laura Brandt, PhD, Team Leader for Joint Ecosystem Modeling, Davie, Florida*

Laura Brandt with her first place trophy after her tiebreaker win over Solanna Taragan of California. Photo by Randy Buffington.

## ***Bragging Rights --***



Amanda Patrick leads "Fiber to Fashion," encouraging students to think about the process involved in making many common goods. Photo by Jean Clement.

### **Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery supports Green and Healthy School Program in Kentucky**

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery is committed to helping visitors, especially kids, better connect to the outdoor world around them. The hatchery partners with Russell Springs Middle School as participants in the Kentucky Green and Healthy School Program. Russell Springs is one of 76 candidate schools in Kentucky in the program, and one of the only candidate middle schools.

The Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools (KGHS) Program is a new, voluntary effort to empower students and staff with the tools to take action and make their school operate at peak efficiency. KGHS incorporates a two-pronged approach. New or renovated schools may include a "green and healthy" design from the start. Existing schools participate as students

inventory current school operations and implement action plans to improve school health and sustainability. As a community partner, Wolf Creek works with Jean Clement, a teacher at the middle school, to help the students complete the surveys of the school. At the same time, the students also assist in the planning and implementation of different learning activities correlating to the survey topic at hand. Currently, the students are working to complete the Solid Waste Inventory, and Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery's Environmental Education and Outreach Specialist Amanda Patrick assisted in leading some activities in January as part of the program.



Students present drawings and details on the steps involved to produce one t-shirt. Photo by Jean Clement.

*Submitted by Amanda Patrick, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Jamestown, Kentucky*



Refuge personnel get familiar with the engineering equipment. FWS photo.

### **Refuge and Fisheries staff partner to conserve aquatic resources**

Personnel from the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center conducted a training session on fish passage and survey techniques for refuge personnel of the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Steve Miller, Eva Kristofik, and Greg Scull got hands-on experience in conducting fish passage surveys using the National Inventory and Assessment Procedure developed by the U.S. Forest Service. All staff took turns using equipment needed to conduct surveys; such as viewing through a transit level or holding a leveling rod. They also worked in the streams to get first hand knowledge of stream

morphology and ecology. This training will come in handy as the team starts surveying the Cahaba River NWR and adjacent waterways to identify barriers to fish passage.



Eva Kristofik, Greg Scull, and Bill Bouthillier assess the outlet of a culvert. FWS photo.

*Submitted by Bill Bouthillier, Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, Georgia*



A young Biologist-in-Training smiles as he enjoys a day of looking for aquatic critters in a stream. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

### **Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery and “Little BiT” are hits with Lake Cumberland Area Regional Health Department District**

Wolf Creek has partnered with the Lake Cumberland Area Health Department District (LCAHDD) and the Russell County Wellness Coalition to help get children outside. Led by LCAHDD Health Educator Shirley Roberson, the Coalition is comprised of nutritionists, environmental educators, teachers, and nurses, all whom have a vested interest in helping to increase wellness in the community. Because of the involvement of Wolf Creek and the interest in getting individuals outdoors, the Coalition decided to target getting children outside as their theme for the 2008-2009 school year. The Coalition’s most recent project was the distribution of 3,000 Biologist-in-Training (BiT) rack cards and BiT stickers to all of the pre-schools and Head Start programs in the Health Department’s 10-county region. The rack cards, which are two-sided, provide great information for parents on the health benefits of getting their children outdoors and providing fun, hands-on, sensory friendly activities specifically geared for younger kids. See (<http://www.fws.gov/southeast/fisheries/bit/BiTActivityCard.pdf>). Upon completion of the activities on the card, the children were given a sticker for their achievement.

*Submitted by Amanda Patrick, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Jamestown, Kentucky*

### **Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge hosts youth deer hunt**

Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge held its third youth gun deer hunt on December 13, 2008. Twelve youngsters were drawn for this one-day lottery hunt, and they hunted from ground blinds made by refuge staff. The youth enjoyed lunches, t-shirts, hats, and other items provided by refuge volunteer Phil Iacobacci. One deer was taken during the hunt; but, there were stories of “the one that got away.” Providing this type of hunt sparks young people’s interest in wildlife management, the great outdoors, and maintains the strong family tradition of hunting in Arkansas.



Daniel Fox shows off his buck. Photo by Carla Mitchell.

*Submitted by Carla Mitchell, Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge, Dardanelle, Arkansas*



Front row, left to right: Mandy McNamara, Taylor Campo, Shauna Lambert, Audrey Almand, Phallon Robin. Back row, left to right: Christain White, Arun Hewavitharana, Freddie Smith, Ali Thomason, Yun Jang, Alix Ladnriault, Nicholas Meade, Elijah Holland, and David Zolzer (teacher). Photo by Jan Dean.

### Students do spring cleaning at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery

Each year, students from the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts are required to come back one week before their winter classes start to participate in Special Projects Week. This year fourteen students chose to work with their teacher David Zolzer to provide public service assistance to organizations in the Natchitoches area. On Thursday, January 8, the group helped the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery do some spring cleaning around the aquarium. The students trimmed all the crepe myrtle trees lining the hatchery drive, re-mulched all the trees, and painted the hatchery entrance gates and flagpole. In addition to the once-a-year work service project, several other students work at the hatchery on a weekly basis cleaning and feeding in the aquarium, managing the webpage, developing public use presentations, and helping with alligator snapping turtles.

*Submitted by Karen Kilpatrick, Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery, Natchitoches, Louisiana*

### Trees planted to honor sacred ground for Caddo Indian Nation

Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery received 400 trees which were planted in November 2008, as part of continuing efforts to honor the hatchery site as sacred ground for the Caddo Indian Nation. The trees, mostly native varieties in five-gallon size containers, were part of a grant secured from the Apache Foundation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The trees were planted in a three-acre area to restore a small portion of the hatchery grounds as a reminder of what the land looked like when the Caddo Indians occupied the area. The trees were planted by hatchery staff from both the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery and the Booker Fowler State Fish Hatchery. The work was coordinated by Mike Renfrow, private lands biologist, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Tree-planters from the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery and the Booker Fowler State Fish Hatchery. Photo by Karen Kilpatrick.

*Submitted by Karen Kilpatrick, Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery, Natchitoches, Louisiana*



Jan Dean unloads the trees. Photo by Karen Kilpatrick.

### Service's Maintenance Action Team (MAT) to the rescue

What do you do when you have an expensive project and not much money? Call on a MAT for the solution. This is exactly what Welaka National Fish Hatchery did. A hatchery drain line had broken and needed to be replaced but there was not enough money to have a contractor do it. With the assistance of Stan Zazado, Project Leader Allan Brown was able to develop a scope of work, submit the cost estimates, line up some help, and get the project completed in a timely manner.



Credit: USFWS



Credit: USFWS

The Welaka National Fish Hatchery had 1,200 feet of old drain line that had collapsed and prevented the hatchery from utilizing five of its much needed production ponds. After making all the arrangements for equipment rental, and lining up help for a project that could be completed in a weeks' time, the project was begun. Hal Jones and Chris Allen from North Mississippi Refuge Complex and Chad Shirey from the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery in Georgia traveled to Welaka on November 16, 2008, to help.

This was a fairly complicated project due to the amount of additional water lines, electrical lines, the necessity of having a very precise grade, and those always hidden surprises you tend to find while digging. With the expert assistance of Hal, Chris, Chad, and the Welaka staff, the new drain line was installed, all the water lines were re-connected, everything was graded to perfection, and grass seed was planted, all within the allotted time frame. From an initial estimated cost of \$130,000, this project was completed by the MAT for less than \$30,000.

"I am certain that this was done with more pride of workmanship than any contractor," said Allan Brown, hatchery project leader. "After experiencing first hand how well this process works, I certainly hope to utilize the MAT concept for additional projects."

*Submitted by Allan Brown, Welaka National Fish Hatchery, Florida*

### Environmental education workshop for Vieques teachers

On January 16, 2009, Vieques National Wildlife Refuge staff from Puerto Rico and Dr. Daniel Sivek, professor at the University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point, provided an environmental education workshop for more than 70 elementary and secondary Vieques teachers. The workshop provided teachers with interdisciplinary environmental education activities that can work in different classes, from biology and mathematics to geography and social studies. Some of the activities were Turtle Hurdles and Wetland Metaphors, adapted from Project Wild. Activities also were provided activities that can be conducted indoors or outdoors. After the workshop, teachers were awarded a certificate of continuing education through the University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point. The workshop was a success, and these activities helped the teachers understand the diversity and importance of Vieques natural resources and



Teachers enjoy participating in Wetlands Metaphors workshop. FWS Photo.

that it can be applied in different subjects, indoor or outdoors.

*Submitted by Gisella Burgos, Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, Puerto Rico*



Participants in the Wildland Fire Chain Saws class. FWS Photo.

### Wildland fire training at Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge

For two weeks during the month of January, firefighter James Padilla from Cabo Rojo National Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge coordinated various fire trainings for community volunteers, Puerto Rican firefighters, Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources employees, and refuge employees. Retired wildland firefighter Dick Mangan from Missoula instructed Firefighter training, Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior, Portable Pumps and Water Use, Engine Boss, and Wildland Fire Chain Saws for more than 25 participants.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Puerto Rico has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Puerto Rico to assist the refuges in forest fires or natural emergencies. After two weeks, the participants were exhausted, but they all successfully passed the courses, and all are anxious to go on a wildland fire.

*Submitted by Gisella Burgos, Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Puerto Rico*

### Partnering for Mussel Conservation

Nicole Rankin, fish biologist at the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, visited the Service's Panama City Fisheries Resource Office and learned to section and age freshwater mussels on December 16 and 17, 2008. Karen Herrington and Laura Jenkins, fisheries biologists at Panama City Fisheries Resource Office, trained her to section mussel valves using an Isomet low speed saw and age mussels using thin sections. She learned to section and age three species of freshwater mussels from the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) river basin: *Elliptio crassidens* (Elephantear), *Amblema neislerii* (fat three-ridge), and *Elliptio sloatianus* (purple bankclimber). This year, the Fish Technology Center plans to estimate age and growth and evaluate annual deposition of growth rings for *E. crassidens* and *A. neislerii* collected from the ACF river basin. Nicole will be leading this mussel aging project and refining the aging technique for the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center.



Laura Jenkins sections a mussel valve using a low speed saw. FWS Photo.

*Submitted by Nicole Rankin, Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, Georgia*



Students visiting Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge from Cape Hatteras Secondary School learn about animal tracks from Abbey Reibel. Photo by Cindy Heffley.

### Cape Hatteras Secondary School students continue Pea Island Refuge exploration

Who Goes There? Cape Hatteras Secondary School students discovered the answer on a recent field trip to Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge.

These students made their second trip to the refuge to follow-up on research started a few months earlier. This trip had a double focus: study animal tracks and capture digital photos of some of the wildlife.

During an earlier refuge trip, a group of students had placed motion-activated digital cameras at various spots on the North Pond Trail to find out what types of mammals used the trail.

On this trip, before heading out on the trail to find out what, if anything, had been captured on the cameras, the group spent some time with Visitor Services Specialist Abbey Reibel learning about the various tracks wildlife leave behind. Students had the opportunity to help find tracks, identify them, and even make plaster casts of some.

One of the most exciting tracks discovered was that of a bald eagle. Apparently, the eagle had been shaking its prey prior to eating. There was quite a bit of disturbance on the soil near the bald eagle tracks.

After studying tracks, the students, accompanied by Reibel and Visitor Services Specialist Cindy Heffley, trekked out to the remote camera sites and recovered memory cards. The cameras were then strategically relocated for another round of pictures. After downloading the photos to a laptop, students learned that there are quite a number of white-tailed deer living on the refuge.

Some of the photos captured by the motion-activated cameras will be used to create a field guide about mammals of the refuge. Other students are working on guides about birds, reptiles, plants, aquatic life, and other things found on the refuge. This group of students will be returning to the refuge periodically throughout the school year to continue their study.



A six-point white-tailed deer on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Cape Hatteras Secondary School.

*Submitted by Cindy Heffley, Alligator River and Pea Island Refuges, Manteo, North Carolina*



The Manteo Middle School Science Club with teacher Hillary Szalkiewicz before the refuge digital scavenger hunt. Photo by Cindy Heffley.

### Manteo Middle School Science Club documents wildlife on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge

On January 26, 2009, as part of a digital nature photography workshop, the Manteo Middle School Science Club participated in a digital scavenger hunt on Creef Cut Wildlife Trail, one of two half-mile walking trails on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.

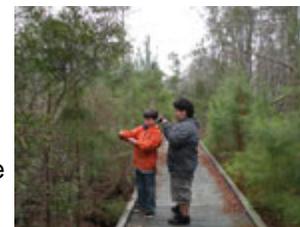
Since the beginning of the school year, refuge staff has been visiting Manteo Middle School each month to share educational programs on a variety of topics with the Science Club. Designed as a "Junior Refuge Friends" focus and co-sponsored by the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society, this partnership involving the school, the refuges, and the Society is one among four similar partnerships- the others in place at Columbia Middle School, First Flight Middle School, and Cape Hatteras Secondary School. Each school developed a way to make the partnership work- a club, a grade, or even the entire school is involved, depending on what worked best for the school.

In the Manteo Middle School Science Club, many students were familiar with digital cameras and the process of taking photos of their friends and families. However, some hadn't been to a refuge to take photos and didn't know the best methods for getting the best shots. A handout with many tips for better wildlife watching and photography was given to the students prior to their trip. They learned how important it is to know about the wildlife on the refuge and how to tell if certain animals are in the area. They were reminded that the refuge is home to many critters and care must be taken to avoid disturbing them. They also learned how to view and photograph wildlife safely.

Armed with all of this information and nine new Nikon Digital cameras, the students were ready to head out to the field to practice their newfound skills. Although they would receive a welcome break from the usual school day, the main objective of the trip was to help them understand the importance of documenting plants and animals. Decisions on managing wildlife must be based on good science. Good science must have thorough documentation. These students were wildlife biologists-in-training for the day. They also learned about biological communications careers, which include nature photography. The students seemed surprised to learn that before photography was invented, the documentation of plants and animals was accomplished through drawings and paintings.

An overview of the 35mm digital camera was given to ensure that the students could easily capture the various items on the scavenger hunt. After a guided hike to the end of the trail, each team was directed to go out and take pictures- one picture to represent each item required on the scavenger hunt. The students were successful at finding answers to all the questions on the scavenger hunt and even came up with some very creative answers. As a bonus, the group moved on to Sandy Ridge Wildlife Trail, off Buffalo City Road, where they continued taking photos and exploring the refuge.

When it was time to return to school, they quickly shared glimpses of all the photos they had taken. Each student will receive a CD with their team's photos. Although not all the photos they took would be considered biological evidence by professionals, none would argue that all the pictures taken would be considered evidence of a great field trip to Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge! The students were encouraged to bring their families and explore the refuge on their own.



Evan Murray and Jaime Santibanez, members of the Manteo Middle School Science Club, examine plant life on Sandy Ridge Wildlife Trail. Photo by Cindy Heffley.

*Submitted by Cindy Heffley, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Manteo, North Carolina*



Two of the alligator snapping turtles weighed more than 100 pounds.  
Photo by Sean Miller.

### British Broadcasting Corporation Returns to Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge

In 2007, a film crew from the British Broadcasting Corporation filmed a segment of "Nick Baker's Weird Creatures" at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Mr. Baker was featuring the American Alligator Snapping Turtle on a program which aired on Animal Planet. Thanks to Dr. John Carr, biology professor at University of Louisiana at Monroe, and his graduate student, the trip was very successful and the film crew fell in love with the refuge.

In November, 2008, the British Broadcasting Corporation returned to Black Bayou Lake again, hoping to film alligator snapping turtles. This time it was a feature with Steve Backshall, host of "Steve's Deadly 60." In spite of the cool temperature, Dr. Carr and his graduate student were again successful, netting three massive snappers in one net. Two of the turtles weighed more than 100 pounds.

The Alligator Snapping Turtle is a "species of concern" and is protected in varying degrees by state laws throughout their range in the Southeast. Under a special use permit, Dr. Carr and his students are documenting the snapper's nesting habitat, protecting nests from predators like raccoons, in some cases taking eggs to the university incubators. Tagged hatchlings are returned to the lake the following fall, some being released by children during the Black Bayou Lake annual fall celebration. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

*Submitted by Gay Brantley, Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Monroe, Louisiana*



Members of Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges prepare lunch for the staff. FWS Photo

### Friends Group --

#### No such thing as a free lunch?

In January, the Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges surprised the staff with a delicious spread for lunch. It was a great opportunity for the Board of Directors to meet new staff, and for everyone to get re-acquainted. President Jay Bushnell extended the Friends' appreciation for the work the staff performs for wildlife and visitors throughout the year. Smoked turkey and pork, venison lasagna, Greek salad, and divine desserts were included in the wonderful feast that made-the-day for the hardworking staff at the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge. The Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges has been an advocate for wildlife and the refuge system. Members write letters of support to Washington, they staff a booth at festivals, and they support Connecting People with Nature and Ranger programs.

*Submitted by Pam Darty, Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, Chiefland, Florida*

## Hats Off -



Kay was truly touched when Refuge Manager Lyne Askins presented a dedication plaque naming a new observation tower in her honor. FWS Photo.

### Kay McCutcheon named 2008 South Carolina Conservationist of the Year

Kay McCutcheon, retired park ranger at Santee National Wildlife Refuge, was named 2008 Conservationist of the Year by the South Carolina Wildlife Federation. The Federation honored Kay and other award recipients at an awards banquet on January 17, 2009, in Columbia, South Carolina. The Conservationist of the Year award recognizes outstanding achievements in the conservation of South Carolina's natural resources. The Federation selected Kay based on her contributions in the field of wildlife education and advocacy during her career at Santee and Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuges.

Kay retired on November 1, 2008, after more than 36 years of service. She served the last seven years at Santee National Wildlife Refuge improving the public use facilities and building a visitor services program. Kay spent the remainder of her career at Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge as a park ranger and office assistant.

Kay counts among her proudest accomplishments the new office and visitor contact station at Carolina Sandhills, working on the 2003 Refuge Centennial, and mentoring dozens of interns, trainees, co-op students, volunteers, and refuge managers. She also noted that she really appreciated the opportunity to get to know so many people on her many regional office and fire and hurricane details. The South Carolina Lowcountry Complex and the Carolina Sandhills-Pee Dee Complex each hosted farewell dinners to roast and toast Kay and usher her into her new career as a Service volunteer! More photos in [Photo Album](#).

*Submitted by Lyne Askins, Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge, McBee, South Carolina*



Kay bands wood ducks with her grandson Nicholas at Santee National Wildlife Refuge. FWS Photo.

## ***I Gave '8' --***



Logan, Jordan, and Phil McGrath enjoying the beautiful scenery on Bayou DeView, Arkansas. Photo by Joe Krystofik.

### **I gave 8: Canoeing down the Bayou De View Swamp**

October 25, 2008, was a beautiful fall morning with a clear sky, calm wind, and temperatures in the lower 50's as we pushed off in our canoes for our trip down Bayou De View Swamp. I, Joseph Krystofik, of the Conway, Arkansas, Ecological Services Field Office, led Phil McGrath and his two sons, Logan and Jordan, of Searcy, Arkansas, on an adventure. The trip was a reconnaissance for a future Boy Scout outing, wetland education experience, and a fishing trip. We started our trek on Sheffield Nelson Dagmar Wildlife Management Area and ended on the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge.

Bayou DeView and its associated wetlands are a unique and spectacular resource. Lined with 1,000-year-old baldcypress trees, the swamp is majestic and has a cathedral-like quality. Unique in that the stream bottom is primarily sand, the water in the bayou, though stained brown, was clear, and we could easily see bottom several feet down. Phil McGrath remarked that from the relaxing slow paddle of our canoes, we were able to see all the beauty the swamp provides; we could reach out and touch the Cypress-knees; and, as we passed through the low-hanging trees, we captured a deeper sense of the beauty of the bayou. Much of the bayou is distinct; however, the bayou is tricky in places as it weaves its way through the swamp in myriad channels, some winding around in a circle to where one entered and others leading to dead ends.

During the trip, we identified the various trees and discussed the wildlife that uses bottomland and swamp forests. We saw herons, egrets, many, many Wood Ducks, and heard Barred Owls, but the highlight of the trip was when we surprised a huge ten-point buck hiding in the swamp. We talked about how the hydrology determines why baldcypress and associated species are at some places and why Nuttall and overcup oak are found on other sites.

Oh, and about the fishing – it was slow, but Jordan and his dad managed to catch a few nice bass.

*Submitted by Joseph Krystofik, Conway, Arkansas, Ecological Services Field Office*

### **I Gave 8: Watching whooping cranes and manatees in Florida**

Mary Morris, the Service's natural resource planner, took five adults and three children to St. Marks, Florida, on January 17, 2009, to see the fly-over of the seven endangered whooping cranes led by an ultralight plane to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, where they hope to establish a wintering population. This was the culmination of an 80-day migration from Wisconsin. About 2,000 people gathered for the event at sun-up in 20-degree-fahrenheit weather to see the cranes pass overhead.



Whooping cranes fly over St. Marks NWR. Photo by Gabrielle.

The moon was still out, the sky was clear, and the weather was chilly, but the crowd was bundled-up and excited. There were information booths and an ultralight that could be inspected close up. Radio announcements relayed the antics of the seven young cranes separated that night from the others headed for Chassahowitzka

NWR. They weren't used to flying with fewer cranes and got distracted and flew off towards the river and between the two ultralights.

Forty-five minutes later, the seven cranes arrived about 1,000 feet overhead as the crowd of 2,000 "Craniacs" cheered the whoopers. There were souvenir t shirts; but, one 12-year-old boy in our group found a piece of driftwood that had the shape of a crane head and neck complete with beak and eye! As the whoopers and cranes passed overhead, the moon was still out and made a nice backdrop for photos. See also [http://www.operationmigration.org/Field\\_Journal.html](http://www.operationmigration.org/Field_Journal.html) or <http://www.bruceritchie.com/>

After the flyover, our group visited Wakulla Springs State Park where we watched manatees in the river and at the main spring boil of Wakulla Springs from a diving platform.



Manatees (mother and calf) nuzzle. Photo by Mary Morris.

This is the second year the manatees are overwintering in the springs the furthest northwest of the Florida manatee population which came up from Crystal River Florida. There are 12 to 5 manatees using the springs, and we watched 10 of them in crystal clear water. We also saw two mother-calf pairs and saw one calf nursing. The manatees ate, played, cavorted, nursed, rested, and traveled downriver. A friend with a great camera took 600 photos. I will use her photos to identify the four or five individuals with distinct scar patterns and mutilations for the manatee ID data base that the federal researchers at the Sirenia Project (USGS) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission use and share. I also offered to do further observations or assess the animals' health as needed. I was happy to see that all animals I observed were not showing any signs of cold stress and that they had plenty of submerged aquatic vegetation and an exotic nuisance weed (hydrilla) to eat.

One child in the group must be a budding biologist. When I told him the closest relatives to manatees are the elephant and hyrax, he knew what that small mammal is! I've never met anyone other than a manatee biologist who knew that. The group felt we had spent the day in a National Geographic moment, and it was wonderful to be people who appreciated nature.



Manatee on its back. Photo by Mary Morris.

*Submitted by Mary Morris, Natural Resource Planner, Tallahassee, Florida*



Boy Scout Troop 506 enjoy a boat tour at Okefenokee NWR Jan. 18, 2009. Photo by Tom MacKenzie USFWS

### **I gave 8: Boy Scout camping trip at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge**

Yes, I should know leading 63 Boy Scouts and leaders into the Okefenokee Swamp would be exciting. Anyone recall how fast boys run? The answer is, well, fast. Herding cats seems to come to mind... I know that, I for one, learned a lot about being a platoon leader again. Mainly, get a good platoon sergeant to keep track of your people!

We stayed at Traders Hill campsite on the Martin-Luther King three-day weekend 2009, along with three other troops and a lovely oak-studded campground, complete with a restroom and shower, and small convenience store, not that any one of us used the shower. The cool thing is what we found on the

canoe trip (for 18 qualified scouts and adults) and boat tour (for the other 45 of us). Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge has some of the best birding in the world! The scouts and adult leaders got to see groups of sandhill cranes up close and personal (less than 10 feet away), anhingas (which I had never seen), as well as a plethora of other wading birds like egrets, ibis, many ducks and scooters, and the ubiquitous great blue herons to name but a few. Now, since we went in January, the gators were, shall we say, non-existent. That was the down side of visiting the refuge when the hungry skeeters are NOT there... neither are the gators. We did spot one six-footer, thanks to the eagle eyes of some very helpful refuge visitors on the boardwalk to the observation tower. I even got a couple of photos to share with the scouts who were running by too fast to see him (the down side of hyperactivity). We all enjoyed the visitor center, and can't wait to return (hopefully in smaller groups) when the construction is complete. It sounds like the platform camping is the way to go for a true refuge experience. A bit difficult with 63 people though.

So the wildlife was great, the birding was excellent, and the police forgiving. What more can one ask for on a first leadership mission with Troop 506 of Snellville, Georgia? Well, there is always that platoon sergeant to help with accountability... Will have to put that on my wish list for next year.

I want to thank my boss Jeff Fleming, for giving me some extra time at work to help coordinate this trip. I found it took a lot more time than I originally thought to prepare for a visit of this size and complexity, but I learned a lot from our excellent on-line Boy Scout safety training courses, and Refuge Manager George Constantino and Jim Burkhart at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. I strongly encourage all of us at Fish and Wildlife to reach out to the local Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations in your local areas. They are hungry for action, and surely have more than enough energy! More photos in [Photo Album](#).

*Submitted by Tom MacKenzie, External Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia*

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## ***Photo Album --***

**Playing in the mud at Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos**



Dredge material at final elevation in marsh creation cell. Breach in containment dike allows for dewatering and tidal exchange. Photo by Danny Breaux.



Suction dredge and booster pump barge removing material from the lake bottom and pumping it onto the refuge. Photo by Danny Breaux.



Marsh creation cell along shore of Lake Pontchartrain with containment dikes and sediment plume. Created marsh will prevent breaching of shoreline, reduce wave fetch, and provide protection for existing marsh. Photo by Danny Breau.

**Kay McCutcheon named 2008 South Carolina Conservationist of the Year -- more photos**



When she retired, Kay received many gifts including this painting of McBee, a place she calls home and where she spent nearly 30 years of her FWS career. FWS Photo.



Although Regional Director Sam Hamilton was not able to attend her retirement celebration, his pleas for Kay to stay brought the house down during the "Baby, Come Back" skit (think Swiffer commercial). FWS Photo.

**I gave 8: Boy Scout camping trip at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos**



Boy Scout Troop 506 enjoy a boat tour at Okefenokee NWR Jan. 18, 2009. Photo by Tom MacKenzie USFWS



Sandhill cranes at Okefenokee NWR posing for Boy Scout Troop 506 Jan 18, 2009. Photo by Tom MacKenzie



Troop 506 conducts a police call of the campsite Jan 19, 2009. Photo by Tom MacKenzie.



Lone gator risks a photograph for Troop 506 Jan 18, 2009. Photo by Tom MacKenzie, Acting Scoutmaster, Troop 506.

**British Broadcasting Corporation Returns to Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos**



Steve Backshall lifts one of the massive snappers caught in Black Bayou Lake. Photo by Sean Miller.



You could lose a hand in that mouth! Photo by Sean Miller.



Testing the jaw power. Photo by Sean Miller.

## Ed EuDaly retires after 31 years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- more photos



Ed EuDaly receiving his Service plaque from Charleston Field Supervisor, Tim Hall. (L-R) Jane Griess (foreground), manager, Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, Ed EuDaly, and Tim Hall, Field supervisor, Charleston Field Office. Photo by Jennifer Koches.



Jane Griess gives Ed his Volunteer forms and uniforms for Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. (L-R) Jane Griess and Ed EuDaly. Photo by Jennifer Koches.

## Visitor Services --

### Reception marks opening of Southeast Louisiana Refuges' Visitor Center



The Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges served up refreshments to guests. Photo by Pon Dixon.

A wine and cheese reception was held on Saturday January 17, 2009, marking the opening of the Southeast Louisiana Refuges' Visitor Center. Guests toured Bayou Gardens to view the camellias in bloom and then enjoyed the new interpretive panels and wildlife dioramas in the Center.

A presentation by Project Leader Ken Litzenberger provided an overview of the complex, its recovery from Katrina, and the economic impact of refuges in the community. Supervisory Park Ranger Bryron Fortier outlined the visitor services program at the complex, and presented some ideas for further development of the Visitor Center which occupies the former chapel building

on the grounds of the Bayou Lacombe Center. The event was organized by the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, and group president Jim Schmidt presented information on opportunities for both facility development and volunteer involvement.



A selection of wildlife-related books are available in the new center's bookstore. Photo by Pon Dixon.

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

## Wage Grade Profile --

### Darryl Woodard of Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge



Darryl Woodard.  
Photo by Pat Metz.

If I were asked to characterize Darryl Woodard in one word, that word would be family. It's what matters most to the Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge Maintenance Worker, whether it be his own family or the one he's found within the Fish and Wildlife Service. Retiring as First Sergeant in the U.S. Army after 20 years of service, Darryl began his career in Refuges at Harris Neck and has remained there for the past eight years. During his tenure, he has proven to be one of the most hard-working, dedicated employees the refuge has seen.

His accomplishments are many, but Darryl will be quick to tell you that hardly anything gets done alone. He credits his fellow wage-grade workers at Savannah National Wildlife Refuge for always being willing to lend a hand (and vice versa) on big projects. One project really worth mentioning is the design and construction of the Harris Neck RV Campground for resident volunteers. After designing the four-pad facility by himself, help was received from the Savannah crew to assist with construction. The result is a great facility, the first of its kind for the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, enabling the refuge to host up to four volunteer couples year-round. Since the first volunteers signed on, Darryl has embraced the program and committed himself to giving these folks the attention they need to get some really meaningful work done on both Harris Neck and Blackbeard Island.

When the need arises for someone to take on some additional duties beyond their normal job description, Darryl is always quick to volunteer. He has been serving as one of the region's MOCC instructors for the past seven years, conducting two or three courses a year in various locations. When Hurricane Katrina struck, Darryl jumped on board to help out, delivering much-needed equipment to the New Orleans area.

Darryl's family is what he is most proud of in life. He and his wife Anita have two children, son Scott, 28 and daughter Kara, 23, and four grandchildren Mason, aged 3, Katley, aged 2, Tessa, aged 2, and Rylan, aged 1. Darryl spends the majority of his free time with his family. However, during hunting season, you'll find him in the woods as much as possible.

When asked what he enjoys most about working on a national wildlife refuge, Darryl's answer is simple: being around wildlife. Knowing that his hard work is ultimately contributing to the conservation of wildlife and habitat is all the motivation he needs to come in every day and do the best job he possibly can.



Darryl assists with aerial herbicide spraying operation at Harris Neck.  
Photo by Deb Barnard

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

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