



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

MARCH 2009 NEWSLETTER

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Matthews Brake. Credit USFWS

Not So Strategic Habitat Conservation -- A True Story About a Missed Opportunity

by David Viker

Ten years ago I was in my first week as manager of three rural Mississippi national wildlife refuges (Hillside, Morgan Brake and Matthews Brake).

The Project Leader and I were out kicking some dirt on one of the refuges when we began discussing plans for the coming year. He talked about many things that day, but I clearly remember hearing him say in his soft southern accent, "I like diversity. I like to manage for diversity. When I look across the landscape, I like to see diversity."

Now, at that time my "landscape" was only what my eyes could see from the top of that levee ... not what was needed on a larger, more important scale to meet the needs of wildlife that flew, lumbered, and swam beyond the reach of my eyes.

So my enthusiastic staff and I set out to create diversity on these refuges like had never been seen before. We planted trees in some places and created moist soil units in others. We allowed scrub-shrub to grow in areas while keeping open water in other spots. With each passing month, we continued to diversify our three big patches of ground.

Indeed, we attracted lots of wildlife through our "diversified" efforts, but in reality it was just more of the same species. Back then we did not realize how our efforts could contribute to a much larger landscape. We certainly helped keep common birds common, and we produced more deer, squirrel, and turkey than I'd ever thought we would.

However, we did little to meet the needs of priority forest interior nesting birds, which require larger wooded blocks; we did not take advantage of opportunities to create movement corridors for black bear; and, heck, we didn't even increase crop and moist soil production in the most beneficial places for ducks!

And I'm now embarrassed to admit we were less than an hour's drive from the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture office, where folks working on "conservation design" - a term probably not yet invented back then - could have shown us the latest GIS tools to

help us better understand how we fit into the larger landscape. Looking back I wish those folks would have come to the refuge, kicked the dirt with us that day, and let us know how they could help. Shame on me for not seeking out those who might help me answer the most basic management questions of “why” and “where.” Instead I was too focused on “what” and “how.”

If I had thought about the right conservation in the right places, I would not have planted a single tree at Matthews Brake unless the area could be flooded each winter for ducks. I would have continued to manage the many moist soil units at Morgan Brake, but with more of an eye towards meeting the needs of migratory shorebirds. And at Hillside, I would have planted every tree I could and worked with partners to build and connect corridors for forest interior nesting birds and black bear. If only I had known what I know now.

I can honestly say this was one of the most enjoyable jobs I've had with the Service, and we did lots of good things. But we didn't do the best things.

Although I wish I could get those two years back, there is a Chinese proverb, which says, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago ... the second best time is now.” I am grateful for the challenges and experiences over the last 15 years of my career, and I am excitedly awaiting the conservation opportunities the next 25 years will bring.

Behind the Scenes--



Holly and Mark Salvato stand near photograph of butterfly she took that was part of a recent exhibit at Everglades National Park. Photo Credit: Holly Salvato.

Husband, wife team contribute to butterfly exhibit

Mark and Holly Salvato spend a lot of their time chasing butterflies. They're hoping a butterfly photography exhibit they contributed to that was displayed in January at Everglades National Park (ENP) inspires others to share their passion for these winged insects.

Mark, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's South Florida Ecological Services Office in Vero Beach, is one of Florida's leading butterfly experts. Holly, works as a financial manager at the Homeless Family Center, also in Vero Beach. For this husband and wife team, both members of the North American Butterfly Association, their “butterfly chase” involves spending most of their weekends in the field gathering data about butterflies and photographing them. Data from their ongoing studies of butterflies within the Everglades was used to update the park's butterfly species list and to help develop the exhibit at the park's Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center.

With Mark acting as the primary researcher and Holly doing most of the photography, the two have been conducting a thorough survey of butterfly abundance, diversity, and distribution throughout the Everglades for several years. Mark says ENP is currently home to more than 90 species of butterflies.

“There's an astonishing diversity of butterflies in the Everglades. When most people talk about the Everglades they envision wading birds and alligators,” said Mark. “Hopefully, this display got people to start thinking about the spectacular assortment of other types

of plants and animals, such as butterflies, that inhabit the Everglades. The Everglades are an important environment for butterflies, too.”

Holly, who calls herself Mark’s official photographer, thinks the display is fabulous. Among the dozens of photographs shown in the exhibit were pictures she took of a Florida Leafwing and Southern Skipperling. She greatly appreciated the exhibit because she knows how hard it is to get a good picture of a butterfly.

“It takes a lot of patience and good timing. You have to get close. When they’re on a flower taking nectar or near water mineralizing...those are good times to move in on them,” said Holly.

The exhibit was stored away until it will be modified and shown again at Biscayne National Park from September through November, and possibly later at Big Cypress National Park. That’s great news to Holly.

“You usually see exhibits about birds and plants, but rarely about butterflies. I’m energized and excited about this,” she said.

“We were very pleased with how the exhibit looked at the Coe Visitor Center and look forward to it being shown at other venues in the future,” said Mark.

Submitted by Ken Warren, South Florida Ecological Services Field Office, Vero Beach, Florida

Bragging Rights --



Nicole Adimey, Keith Taniguchi, Melody Ray-Culp, and Debbie DeVore helped give partners an edge in coastal restoration funding. Photo by anonymous passer-by using Melody's camera.

Florida partners get the scoop on coastal conservation

Florida’s Coastal Program (CP) coordinators hosted a workshop at the University of Central Florida in January 2009, to spread the word about the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program. Nicole Adimey, Central Florida CP, and Debbie DeVore, South Florida CP, worked with the St. Johns River Water Management District and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to win Fiscal Year 2009 funding through this competitive program. The Coastal Program wanted to help give the rest of its partners an edge in developing successful proposals for acquisition, restoration, management, and enhancement of coastal wetlands. Keith Taniguchi, from Division of Federal Assistance in Atlanta, was the featured speaker. Despite travel budget cuts, more than 45 people came from local, state, and federal government agencies and non-profit organizations to get the scoop on this valuable funding opportunity

with relatively deep pockets.

Submitted by Melody Ray-Culp, Florida Panhandle Coastal Program, Panama City Field Office, Florida

Three youths make Junior Refuge Ranger status

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge's Junior Refuge Ranger program provides young people with conservation information, environmental education and recreational experiences. Students from 8 to 14 years of age may participate in the program. Activities are offered throughout the year and are open to anyone. To earn the title of Junior Refuge Ranger, each young person must collect a minimum of six stamps, for six different activities, within a 12-month period. When they complete this requirement, they are awarded a certificate and a reward. Our newest Junior Refuge Rangers are Elijah Maiers and Warren Smith, both eight-years-old from Starkville, and Kalakole Brown from Macon, Mississippi. Congratulations!

More photos in [Photo Album](#).



Kalakole Brown. Photo by Roger Smith.

Submitted by Andrea Dunstan, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Brooksville, Mississippi



Students from Murray State University help collect trash. Photo by Andy Eller.

Clean-up in the cold!

The cold weather didn't stop the annual litter day at Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday January 24, 2009. The high temperature reported for the day was 36° F. However, refuge staff, Friends members, students from Murray State University, and other volunteers from the community collected litter along roadways from 8:00 a.m., until mid-afternoon. During the day, more than 150 hours of volunteer time was donated, and enough trash was collected to fill four trailers.

As a thank-you, the refuge's Friends group collects donations from local businesses every year, so that a hot lunch is waiting for the volunteers once the work is done. In addition, this year, to show appreciation to the community for being so supportive of the volunteers' efforts, the refuge's staff focused the clean-up efforts in highly visible areas in the community.

Submitted by Stacey Campbell, Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge, Benton, Kentucky

Native grass symposium includes visits to Partners for Fish and Wildlife Projects



Symposium participants observe restoration of endangered plants on Partners project site. Photo by Joe Cockrell.

The sixth Eastern Native Grass Symposium was held in Columbia, South Carolina, in October 2008. One day of the conference was dedicated to tours of native grasslands in different parts of the state. Thirty-five people attended the Central Coastal Plain Tour which included field visits to two Partners for Fish and Wildlife projects. Participants, including natural resource professionals from as far away as Texas and Canada, visited the different project sites and discussed restoration techniques.



A Service biologist describes native grass restoration techniques to symposium participants on Partner project site. Photo by Sudie Daves, Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Joe Cockrell, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Coordinator, Charleston, South Carolina, ES Field Office



Red wolves at one of the captive facilities. Photo by Chad, McClure, Chattanooga Nature Center.

Keep track of red wolf recovery efforts

Have you visited the Red Wolf Recovery Program web site at www.fws.gov/redwolf lately? Many new additions are available to web site visitors:

- Recovering a Species video for your viewing pleasure
- A red wolf howling recording
- Updated statistics
- Updated reading list
- 2009 Howling Safari schedule

Watch for enhancements at the above sites as additional red wolf images are added. Also visit the News and Reports link to tag along with wildlife biologists field reports and learn what it is like to track, monitor and locate red wolves. It is a rare occasion to see a red wolf in its wild, northeastern North Carolina habitat. However, there are 40 Species Survival Plan captive facilities across the U.S. where red wolf viewing opportunities exist. Check these locations out at the web site Resources link.

Submitted by Diane Hendry, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Manteo, North Carolina

Scouts help net Gulf sturgeon



Boy Scouts with a Gulf sturgeon.
Photo by Jon Hemming.

This past summer, Boy Scouts from Pack 302 in Panama City, Florida, donned their life jackets and assisted fish biologists from the Panama City Fisheries Resources Office with sampling of Gulf sturgeons on the Choctawhatchee River. The boys rolled up their sleeves and helped Frank Parauka collect data on these ancient fish. Frank made the boys feel like part of the crew pulling the nets, measuring the sturgeon, reading the tags on the fish, and releasing them back into the wild. The day was successful, and several sturgeons were caught, one of which was over 100 pounds.



Examining a Gulf sturgeon. Photo
by Jon Hemming.

Submitted by Paul Lang, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery featured in We Can!newsletter

Each year Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery hosts fishing derbies, field trips, and educational programs about the outdoors. So, when the hatchery's staff learned about the We Can!™ Program, Wolf Creek registered as a community partner to utilize the program and help implement its information into the hatchery's Connecting kids with Nature activities. We Can! or "Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition" is a national program designed for families and communities to help children maintain a healthy weight. The program focuses on three important behaviors: improved food choices, increased physical activity, and reduced screen time. On the national level, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a national partner and supporting organization. Wolf Creek registered as an official We Can! community site in May, 2008.

Education/Outreach Specialist Amanda Patrick speaks with representatives at We Can! to request materials and brochures for various meetings and conferences. In doing so, she talks about the grassroots level work the hatchery is doing in Kentucky. Because of the hatchery's efforts, We Can! featured the hatchery in its most recent newsletter. A link to the article is as follows: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/news/news17.htm>

To learn more about We Can!, including how to register your office/site with the program, please visit the following: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/>

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

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery is a hit on Facebook!

Facebook helps Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery get the word out about the hatchery and the Service. Facebook is a free-access social networking website where users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school and/or region to connect and interact with other people. Individuals can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves.

From interns to outreach staff, several Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery team members are avid fans of Facebook as a networking tool. After seeing another federal site in Kentucky (Mammoth Cave National Park) had a group for site users to join, and after realizing the presence of avid trout fisherman across Kentucky on Facebook, a Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery group was created to allow supporters of the hatchery a place to join, talk, and share ideas concerning their support of Wolf Creek. Not all are fans of trout either. Some join in support of their community, because they are from Kentucky, to show their appreciation for the hatchery's outreach programs and/or to learn about upcoming events. The Facebook website was started in mid-January 2009, and it has grown to more than 140 members. Facebook members can visit the following link to show your support of the hatchery and to join: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=113325290276>

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



Navy SEABEES working to demolish damaged portions of the Tick Island cabin. Photo by Boyd Blihovde.

Navy SEABEES rebuild the Tick Island cabin

Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge's Engineering Equipment Operator, Wesley Allie organized a hugely successful drill weekend with his Navy SEABEES unit. The Navy SEABEES is an engineering and construction branch of the Navy which specializes in building roads, buildings, and just about anything else the Navy needs.

On December 6, 2008, Wesley Allie and other Lake Woodruff staff members transported nine Navy SEABEES and one Corpsman to the island. Once they arrived on the island, they quickly dismantled the old Tick Island cabin and put up new walls and a badly needed roof. The SEABEES showed their great level of construction experience by completing the mission in a day and a half. This was a win-win operation for the SEABEES and the Service. The SEABEES received a drill weekend in which they could hone their skills, and the Service got their labor at no direct cost. The work the SEABEES completed would have taken the limited refuge staff many days to accomplish. This project also was made possible by the donation of meals by the Friends of Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge.

Submitted by Boyd Blihovde, Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge, DeLeon Springs, Florida



The Navy SEABEES unit that conducted work on the Tick Island cabin (fifth from the left is FWS employee and SEABEE Wesley Allie.) Photo by Boyd Blihovde.



Workampers pose for a picture at a local event in which they represented Lake Woodruff. Pictured from left to right: Betty Dawson, Don DeMent, Marsha Bedford, and Jim Bedford. Photo by Jim Bedford.

New Workampers make a big impact at Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge

In October 2008, the Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge staff greeted two Workamper couples who moved into newly constructed campsites. The Friends group collected donations and did most of the construction to complete these camp sites. The Workampers covered four days out of each work week and completed many important tasks, both inside the Visitor Contact Center (VCC) and in the field. Examples of some of the tasks they completed include: scanning old pictures and slides, constructing new entryways in the office, painting the information kiosks, acting as guides to school groups and other visitors, working on updating the brochure inventory and redecorating the VCC. The Workampers also performed integral administrative activities such as answering the phone, checking the mail, greeting visitors, and simply keeping the office open. With the reduction in staff and funding, the refuge has had difficulty performing these basic duties and it has been a blessing having the Workampers at the refuge.

Submitted by Boyd Blihovde, Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge, DeLeon Springs, Florida

Dialog in the Dark

In February, Thirty-five regional office employees attended an exhibit entitled Dialog in the Dark at Atlantic Station in Atlanta, Georgia, s part of Budget and Administration's (B&A) annual diversity awareness training for employees. The training was so well received by the first group of B&A employees, that it was made available to all RO employees. The Dialog in the Dark exhibition uses blind guides who provided the employees with canes and led them in small groups through different settings in total darkness where they learned how to interact without sight by using their other senses. This is the second year B&A has offered a hands-on diversity awareness training experience in lieu of classroom or on-line instruction.



Dialog in the Dark participants: Back row: Joy Leach, Karmen Nicholson, Curtis Robinson [tour guide], Regina Abraham, Mary Creevy. Front row: Jennifer Gilchrist, Nelson Crawford, and Ruth Benson. Photo credit: Jennifer Gilchrist.

"After a five-minute intro, we were asked to step into the adjustment room, where the lights were gradually dimmed into total darkness. We then heard the sound of our tour guide's voice, who then led us through several different locations or venues," said Ruth Benson from Refuges/Realty, who attended the exhibit with her group on February 4. "Each location had different challenges for our four remaining senses. We could feel the grass beneath our feet, the sound of birds chirping, the running water and the increased volume of our own voices along with the collected scent of fear... fear of the unknown. Throughout the adventure our tour guide monitored our movement to make sure he ended up with the same individuals he started the tour with."

After venturing through a backyard, a park, a city street, a grocery store, and a boat, participants are asked to sit down in the café. This is where the dialogue begins. Guides answer questions about the exhibit or about their own experiences, living with blindness.

The goal of Dialog in the Dark is to offer an experience that may change mindsets on disability and diversity, and increase awareness, acceptance and understanding.

“It is amazing how your other senses kick in when you cannot see. We had heightened senses of smell and touch as we went through the exhibit. We came from the exhibit admiring those who deal with their impairment everyday instead of just the one hour that we experienced,” said Mary Creecy from B&A.

Submitted by Kary Allen, Diversity and Civil Rights, Atlanta, Georgia

Friends Group --

Gulf Sturgeon Preservation Society



Gulf Sturgeon Preservation Society. Photo by Mark Madamba.

A Gulf Sturgeon Friends Group, Gulf Sturgeon Preservation Society, was officially organized last year by Mark Madamba. Mark is retired from the U.S. Air Force and is employed in a civilian capacity at Eglin Air Force Base in Niceville, Florida. Mark's concern for maintaining a healthy environment and his keen interest in fish and wildlife prompted him to form a group of Eglin personnel who would be available to assist natural resource agencies in addressing important programs. The group assisted the Panama City, Florida, Fisheries Resource Office for several days in conducting a Gulf sturgeon census on the Choctawhatchee River last fall. In addition, Gulf sturgeon information signs and signs, warning boaters to reduce speeds and be aware that Gulf sturgeon leap out of the water and can cause serious injury resulting from a boating collision, were erected at several high use public boat ramps. The group's volunteer efforts are to be commended, and the Fisheries Resource Office looks forward to working with Mark and the members of the Gulf Sturgeon Preservation Society to address the various conservation issues encountered throughout the year.

encountered throughout the year.



Staff Sergeant Sean Thelen and Staff Sergeant Ben Phillips, Eglin Air Force Base, assist with Gulf sturgeon census on the Choctawhatchee River, Florida. Photo by Frank Parauka

Submitted by Frank Parauka, Panama City, Florida, Fisheries Resource Office

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 De View, 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 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

Photo Album --

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



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.



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



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

Three youths make Junior Refuge Ranger status -- more photos



Warren Smith. Photo by Roger Smith.



Elijah Maers. Photo by Andrea Dunstan.

Birds of a feather -- more photos



Puerto Rican parrot up close.
Photo by Carolyn Hust.



Puerto Rican parrot cages. Photo
by Carolyn Hust.



Puerto Rican parrots in "flying"
cage. Photo by Carolyn Hust.

Visitor Services --

Partners help stage successful deer hunts at Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge



Lunch at Wheelchair Bound hunt.
FWS photo.

Deer hunting at Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge has been known to be pretty good. This past year, refuge staff and volunteers built hunting blinds for youth and the physically challenged. These blinds came in handy during two Youth Lottery Gun Hunts in December 2008, and a Wheelchair Bound Lottery Gun Hunt in January 2009. Cooperation with partners, such as the National Wild Turkey Federation, the 2008 Ouachita High School varsity baseball team, Doug's IGA, the Tallulah, Louisiana, National Rifle Association, and Columbia Gulf all contributed to make these hunts a success.

A total of 20 blinds were designed and built by refuge staff, Tensas River Refuge Association members, and volunteers. These blinds are erected on a platform which can be lowered by forklift for the wheelchair bound hunts. Ramps also can be added. Each blind is 54 feet wide and 96 feet long, enclosed with womanized plywood complete with windows, and covered with a tin roof. The blinds have skids on the bottom that allows refuge staff to move them with an ATV to better locations if needed.

Each of the youth hunts in December had 20 participants, and 43 deer were harvested from the two hunts. Doug's IGA donated breakfast for both hunts. Subway provided lunch through a donation from the Northeast Chapter of the National Rifle Association.



Youth with 14-point, non-typical
buck. FWS photo.



Blind used in youth and Wheelchair Bound hunts. FWS photo.

The Wheelchair Bound hunt had 14 participants, ranging from 14 to 65 years of age. Seven deer were harvested. Lunch was provided by the Columbia Gulf and Tensas River Refuge Association.

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge would like to thank the volunteers, partners, refuge staff, parents, guides, and caring people who invested time, money, and compassion into these events to make them successful.

Submitted by Ron Hollis, Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge, Tallulah, Louisiana

Wage Grade Profile --

Eating the whale



Eddie Simmons and Bo Scroggins. Photo by Matthew Conner.

Imagine what it must have been like to chip the first piece of rock off the mountain that would later become Mount Rushmore or taking the first step as a hiker beginning the Appalachian Trail. The tasks must have seemed insurmountable in the beginning and the thought of completion must have been barely feasible during those first few moments. Perhaps this is what it feels like to be a wage grade employee for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at White River National Wildlife Refuge.

It is 6:00 a.m. on a Thursday fall morning and Eddie Simmons and Marvin (Bo) Scroggins, both equipment operators, arrive to work at the refuge headquarters in Saint Charles, Arkansas. Bo will spend the day working on a fleet of aging heavy equipment and Eddie needs to find a ride to the north section of the refuge to where his road grader was parked yesterday. Eddie is shuttled 40 miles to his grader so he can begin his day maintaining the refuge roads as he grades his way back towards headquarters. However, Eddie knows he will not finish the grading on the refuge today, or even in the new future. With over 120 miles of road to maintain and hundreds of assets on this 160,000 acre refuge, the two equipment operators are never "caught up."

A few hours go by and just as Bo and Eddie settle into a rhythm, their cell phones ring, and they are asked to assist with a more urgent need on the south end of the refuge.

Recently, a critical component of habitat was in need of immediate improvements to prevent the loss of hundreds of acres of critical wintering waterfowl sanctuary. The area of the refuge called Dry Lake has been used as waterfowl wintering feeding grounds since the 1960s by controlling the water levels with a large water control structure.

Around the time this structure was installed, there were as many as 23 employees at White River National Wildlife Refuge with 14 persons being field oriented. I wonder if the employees who installed the structure ever dreamed this area would provide habitat for waterfowl for the next 45 years!

Almost half a century later, the refuge has grown in size and complexity. The current work force is 15 employees with 7 being field oriented. Leading this group to save the waterfowl wintering grounds are Eddie and Bo. They run equipment to build a spillway to take pressure of the antiquated control structure and maintain ideal feeding depth for our fall migrants. With assistance from refuge foresters, refuge operation specialists, and biologists, the levee is strengthened and the sanctuary is saved.

It makes one ponder what contributions and assets employees will be working on at White River National Wildlife Refuge 50 years from now. What water control structures will have been installed, how many waterfowl will have used the refuge, and will the refuge roads still require grading and constant care?

When faced with a copious amount of work that seems never ending, one has to wonder how to proceed or even where to begin. The answer must be a lot like eating a whale. You can't eat the whole thing at once but you have to start somewhere. We have taken the first bite and will continue to chew regardless of the amount left to go. We can't finish all of it at once, but we can make sure that everything we do today is our best work knowing that those who follow will pick up where we left off. There is a lot of whale left to go; but, with our hard working employees, we plan to take more than our fair share of the whale!

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

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