



Michael Wilson

"The Eagle's Eye"

Edited by Mike Wilson, Lori Nicholson & Robin Will

SPRING 2011

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Visitors at St. Marks Lighthouse

St. Marks Lighthouse will be hosting several special events for visitors this April including some guests from out-of-town. First on April 6 at 6:30 p.m. is our annual Sunset Lantern Tour benefitting the annual "Wild About Wakulla" festival. The interior of the keeper's home will be illuminated by lantern light, just as it would have been in the days before electricity. The moon and stars provide outdoor lighting and allow you to imagine what it would have been like to live at the lighthouse in the days before telephones, television, and even radio. Then, on April 16 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. will be our annual Florida Lighthouse Day featuring tours, many fun and exciting activities for all ages, and history-related exhibitors.

The St. Augustine Lighthouse Museum Guild will stop by in April. And the U.S. Lighthouse Society will make their second trip to see St. Marks. Both are enthusiastic fans of lighthouses and lighthouse preservation.

We were happy to host Chief Jason Rule,

U.S. Coast Guard Aids to Navigation from Panama City, in February to view the lighthouse. A crew will return in March to help with some much needed repairs to the tower. We are hopeful that ownership of the lighthouse will be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service soon so that major repairs and renovations can begin.

Special guests are a tradition at St. Marks Lighthouse. Florida Governor John Martin used to anchor his yacht near the lighthouse and visit in the 1930. The Ringlings – of circus fame – also anchored their yacht off shore and visited with the Greshams. There was no road to the lighthouse until St. Marks Refuge was established and the Civilian Conservation Corps built one in the mid-1930s. Visitors were uncommon and always welcomed by the keeper.

So rare were guests that one story has it, one afternoon when the older Greshams were away, the children rolled the family piano down the porch stairs into the yard and nearby fishermen were invited to join an impromptu sing. - Andy Edel

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St. Marks NWR
P.O. Box 68 St. Marks, FL 32355
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<http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks>

Quota Hunts and Spring Fishing

David Moody

White-tailed deer quota hunts were well attended this year with over 650 permits sold and 116 deer harvested. Good weather conditions during the three day Wakulla Unit and Mobility Impaired Gun Hunt accounted for most of the harvest. I have noticed more participation from South Florida residents the last two years due to statewide advertisement from FWCC permit handling. Because of ongoing improvements to the program, I have similar expectations for the upcoming season. Feel free to contact the refuge office for questions or comments about the hunt program at St. Marks NWR.

Don't forget, March 15th is the opening for boats in the impoundments and gates in the Panacea Unit. Once again, all of the impoundments, ponds, ditches, and lakes around the refuge have water. Last spring offered some of

the best fishing in Otter Lake I have seen in ten years. The impoundments adjacent to Lighthouse Road have recovered from droughts and saltwater intrusion, offering panfish limits to many anglers. Refuge staff have restocked Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, and Redear Sunfish in major impoundments to supplement the quality and quantity of fish. Just remember, when the biting flies are thick, so are the feeding fish. According to the almanac and moon phases, the second full week of each spring month in 2011 should be top notch fishing. Here are some tips for "pitch fishing":

The Tools: 10-14 foot telescoping fiberglass fishing pole, 4-6 pound test line (the same length as the pole), a 1.5 inch cork colored float, a #8 black hook, the smallest split shot you can buy,

and finally a cricket box with a hundred or so crickets.

The Order: Remove all excess "tag line" from the eye of the hook, providing a great presentation. Place the split shot six inches above the hook, and the cork twenty inches above the hook. Impale the cricket from mid-belly, exiting the chin, exposing the point and barb.

The Placement: Methodically drop the live bait in every gap where vegetation stops and open water is available, working the shoreline by boat or walking. Make sure your shadow is not cast into your fishing zone and utilize early and late hours for prime time activity. How does that sink your cork!

Kid's Fishing Clinic

Lori Nicholson

The annual Kid's Fishing Clinic is happening again this year at Woolley Park in Panacea on April 9 from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Last year's was an overwhelming success with approximately 200 kids attending. The day will include games and instruction on different fishing techniques using different bait and lures for different fish. Saltwater versus freshwater fishing will be a topic as well as the importance of state rules and



regulations and how they help preserve and maintain the ecosystem so there will always be fish to catch. A hotdog lunch will be provided to all attendees and a free rod and reel will

be given to the first 200 children aged four to fifteen so come on out and see us April 9th at Woolley Park from nine in the morning until noon in Panacea and have some fun!



The Education building is moving along quickly now. The building should be dried in by this week. The next step is installing plumbing and electrical. Lori Nicolson is compiling a wish list for supplies and furniture needed for the building. If you would like to donate funds to help with those, SMRA is taking donations. She will have the wish list posted online or you can call or email her if you have any questions.

Refuge Enhancement and National Wildlife Refuge Association. In the past we have been able to avoid cuts to our budget, unfortunately; I don't think that will be the case this time. In these lean times, your support becomes more important. SMRA proceeds and memberships allow us to cover important needs such as education supplies, staff training, and staff travel. Thank you for being there for us.

ing funds. In addition, we are appraising 500 acres to the north of the refuge for acquisition using Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) dollars. Support for land acquisition is appreciated. Remember that the LWCF is not income tax payer dollars they are trust fund dollars. These funds come from royalty payments from economic uses.

Also, a welcome to Mary Owens, refuge intern serving as our Youth Ambassador, and Michael Wilson, a Student Conservation Association employee working with the education program. They both have articles in this issue so check them out. Mary is also keeping up a St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Facebook page. Be sure to friend us so you can be up to date on all of our activities.



Lori Nicholson (left) and Terry Peacock (right) discuss their future plans for the new environmental education building next to the visitors center.

If you have been listening to the budget news, then you know that it is not looking good for federal agencies. We have been here before and survived. We do appreciate all the support we have received from the Refuge Association and other groups like Cooperative Alliance for

These are exciting times in the land acquisition arena. We picked up two tracts last year with funds allotted for inholdings. These were only about 42 acres, but every acre counts. We have an appraisal coming in for 120 acres owned by The Nature Conservancy also purchased out of inhold-

REFUGE REGULATIONS

Please don't Litter Help keep your refuge clean!

Enclosed Cooking Fires are permitted in designated picnic areas only. Open fires are not permitted.

Pets must be on a leash and under control of owners at all times.

Collecting or taking of artifacts, natural features, animals or plants on government property is prohibited.

Fireworks are prohibited.

Spring is coming.... I can feel it every now and then in the short, transient warm afternoons. Coming up the ramp at the refuge yesterday, I heard a bunch of spring peepers calling each other in the hope of getting something going. They don't call for rain, as some people say, but frog activities are better when it is wet outside.

Robins are here as well; they are swarming everywhere. Remember that old song, "When the red, red robin comes bob, bob, bobbing....", well, it always reminds me of winter or something.

Another sign of spring is when we see that wise old bird Dr. Loren Anderson out wandering the refuge with his flock of loyal plant worshippers, identifying flora about which the average person does not have a clue. The refuge is lucky to have such a dedicated volunteer. Thank you sir, for your time and knowledge. **Dr. Anderson's next tour is scheduled for May 14 at 9 am** from the Visitor Center. Oh, and bring your camera as this is an opportunity to obtain some good natural history information and pictures about plants. The following is a note to Robin from Dr. Anderson:

"The little pond just into the woods across from the Visitor Center parking area is completely covered with a 'green carpet' of duckweeds. The sample I took

yesterday had FOUR species, i.e. *Landholtia punctata* (formerly *Spirodela*), *Lemna valdiviana*, *Wolffia columbiana*, and *Wolffiella gladiata*. *Wolffia* is recognized as the world's smallest flowering plant. A dissecting microscope was needed to identify the four."

Speaking of cameras, my photo class will resume the first Saturday each month at 9:00 a.m. so call the refuge and sign up at (850) 925-6121 to take this free digital nature photography class. Families are welcome and you don't have to be an expert in photography. In fact the course is designed to help the beginners take better digital photographs. I also throw in a little lesson or two on the natural history of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge because in my other life I was a biology teacher at Florida High School and I love the refuge. I usually finish up the photo class with an outdoor experience such as a walk through the woods or field and we try to do some hands on photography.



Visitor Information

Visitor Center - The Refuge Visitor Center and office is located on County Rd 59, 3 miles south of U. S. Hwy 98 at Newport. Visit the displays describing Refuge wildlife and habitats and the Refuge Association bookstore.

Entrance Fees - Federal entrance fee passes apply (America the Beautiful, Senior, Access) or daily car passes can be purchased for \$5. Annual passes include the St. Marks NWR Specific Pass and the current Federal Duck Stamp.

Hours - The Refuge is open daylight hours all year and the Visitor Center is open from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm Monday to Friday; and 10:00 am till 5:00 pm weekends. Closed on most Federal holidays.

Lighthouse Drive - For casual observation, the 7-mile Lighthouse Road provides many excellent stopping points between the Visitor Center and the St Marks Lighthouse on Apalachee Bay. Please observe the posted speed limit.

Restrooms - At the Refuge Visitor Center, Tower Pond/Mounds Trail and at Otter Lake in Panacea.

Picnic Facilities - Next to Tower Pond Trail and at Otter Lake in Panacea.

Hiking - Fall, winter and early spring are the best times. Foot- and bicycle-traffic are allowed on trails. Maps are available at the toll booth, visitor center and information kiosks.

Fishing - Freshwater and saltwater fishing are available in certain areas of the refuge year round. Contact the Refuge for restrictions. Boat launching is permitted during daylight hours at the Lighthouse saltwater launching ramp.

Hunting - Hunting is permitted for resident game species in designated areas fall - spring. Contact the Refuge after May 1 for upcoming year's applications and permit information, or visit www.fws.gov/saintmarks

It has been four weeks since I started my internship at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge and I am amazed at all I have seen. It is a pretty big deal when a college student is eager to wake up before the sun! This is because I finally realized that a conservation organization is exactly where I need to be.

I want to do whatever I can to help protect places like this refuge, so my kids in the future will be able to explore them. I grew up outside with my grandfather instilling ideas about the importance of nature in me. Some of my fondest memories growing up were our hikes through the sandy woods of Central Florida. They were such a great way to learn, explore, and even be creative.

Every time I explore the refuge, I find something new and interesting. Being the Youth Ambassador I have had a lot of opportunities to travel around with my camera. This is fulfilling the tiny part of me that still wishes I could work for National Geographic. I hope to be collecting some great shots to promote the abundance of wildlife at St. Marks as well as the landscape. I mean what is better than seeing four deer, a plethora of alligators and an otter all in one day. Not to mention, I finally saw a bobcat!

That was why I am here, but what exactly is the Youth Ambassador Program (Y.A.P.) and what do they do? It is a newly created program used to get young adults involved with promoting the Fish

and Wildlife Service. It is comprised of student ambassadors from different refuges in the Southeastern Region. We work together to create a blog updating people about what is going on at our refuges as well as any other conservation related news. We also brainstorm with people in the Atlanta regional office about ways the Fish and Wildlife Service can reach youth about the importance of healthy habitats for wildlife.

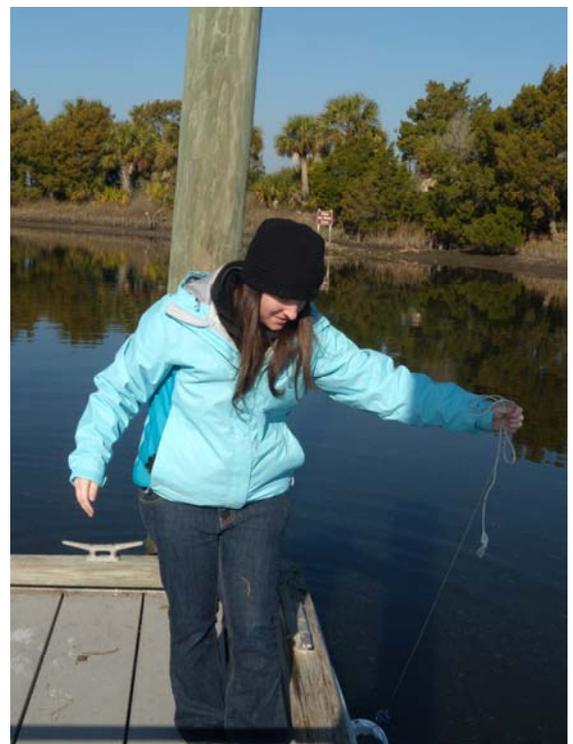
As the ambassador for St. Marks and St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, I get to build an online presence for the refuges. I hope to promote this to not only the loyal visitors, but also to an audience of young adults. A Facebook page is in the works. Once created it will be a platform for discussions and for information to be distributed regularly. I have found that environmental conservation jobs don't always make it to career fairs. I hope to connect young adults with information about working on a refuge by using the blog and Facebook. I have been fortunate enough to have some great experiences (like working a hunt and a festival just to name two). They are excellent adventures to share with an online community. After all, a spark of adventure is enticing to some students.

The Youth Ambassador Blog

has some great articles from my fellow ambassadors. It offers great insight into what the refuges of the Southeast are working on. Even more importantly it shows that young adults are concerned with conservation. Please check out our blog and become a member. We are the first region to adopt such a program and are working hard to make it nationwide. If you would like to be our Facebook friend find us by searching "St Marks and St. Vincent" on Facebook.

For information on the Y.A.P. go to <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/youthambassadors/>

To access the Y.A.P. Blog: <http://usfwsyouthambassadors.wordpress.com/>



Mary Owens collecting samples for the Phytoplankton Monitoring Network.

I am sure many of you have been wondering how the new education building is coming along. I can tell you that each day is an exciting adventure coming in to see what changes have been made and how quickly things are taking shape. We are all looking forward to it being completed and it looks like the timeline is still on schedule for it to be completed early this summer. Of course it will take some time to get everything moved in and have everything set up for all to see. We are planning an open house for everyone in early August and will certainly get that information out sometime later this spring.



Michael Wilson on a hike with a group of homeschooled children on Mounds Trail.

Stimulus funds paid for this building and therefore we plan on having many opportunities to engage the community, such as lecture series on topics relevant to our ecosystems, teacher workshops, meetings, festivals and refuge events. Soon we will be able to stand on the back deck or in the classroom and look out over Plum Orchard Pond at the spectacular view. A lot of peo-

ple have asked me questions about the builders and I can say the contractor is a Florida company and they are doing all they can do to make the deadline. We appreciate their hard work and dedication.

This spring has been busy with lots of education programs for the schools. Luckily the Visitor Services Staff at the regional office made it possible for us to get a SCA (Student Conservation Association) intern from February thru April. We received applications from all over the country and we chose an energetic young man named Mike Wilson. Mike has been a great help and has just jumped in and been a great addition to the team. I can tell he has a great love of nature and is great working with both kids and adults alike. I certainly appreciate all his hard work. You can learn more about Mike by reading his article on page 9.

It is only the first week in March and we are booked up pretty much for the entire spring. We even have programs scheduled next year. We currently have courses from the National Conservation Training Center scheduled for Nov. of 2011 and they are looking at other courses they may be able to offer here. We always knew we had great resources, now others are noticing it also. As the building completion draws closer I am looking at the monumental task of moving and stocking the new building with environmental education supplies. As the USFWS budget doesn't allow for a lot of purchases we will be accepting donations towards supplies and educational materials. A copy of the wish list is on page 16 of this news-

letter and will also be posted on the website under education. We will accept monetary donations through the SMRA. We will keep a list of donors (and the item donated) and display them in the newsletter and in the building. Keep in mind the list is ever changing. Updates on the website may take a few days once donations are made. If you would like to put a couple of choices down with your donation in case an item has already been purchased that would be great. Please include your name and contact information with donation so we can reach you if there are any questions.

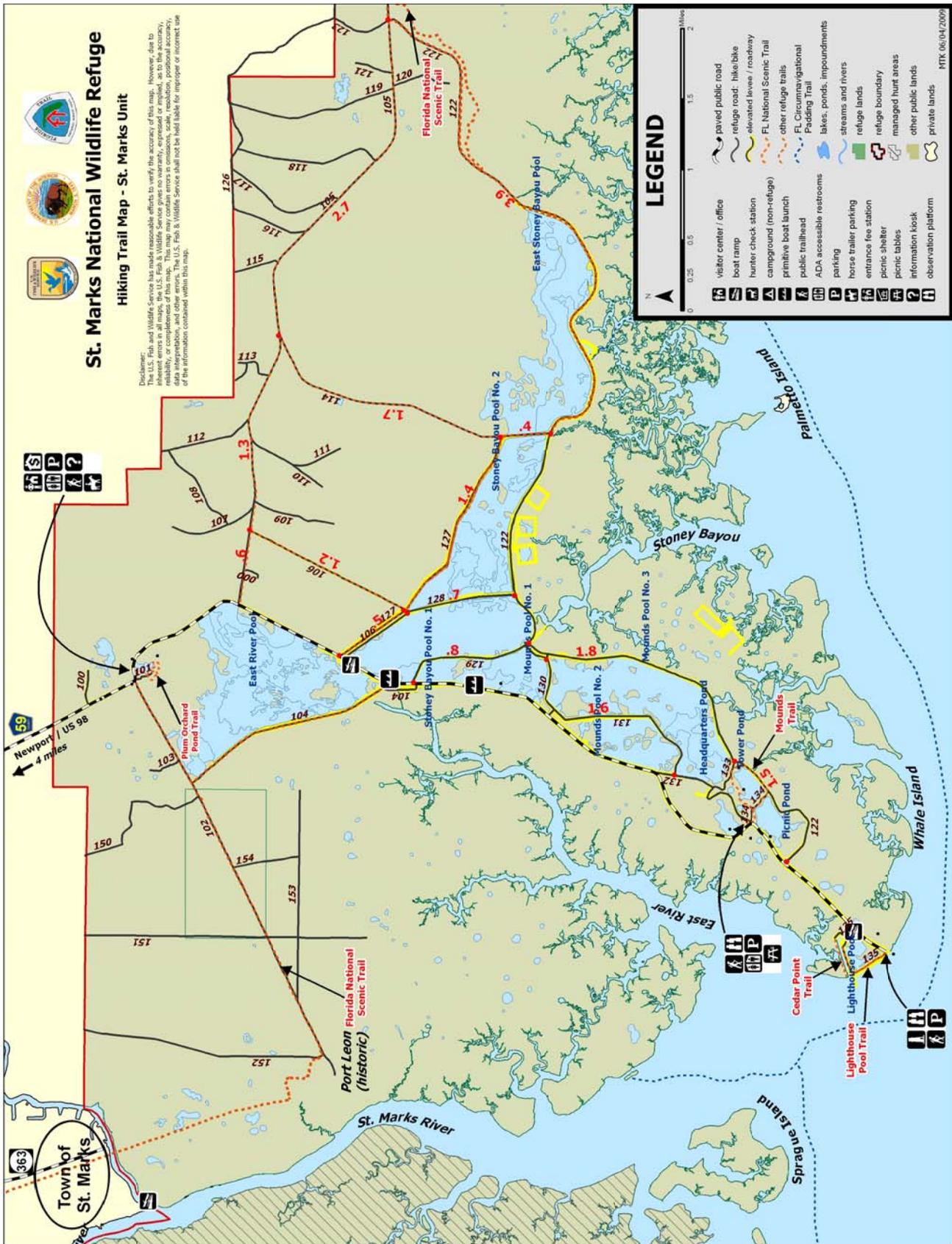
Coming soon! Keep your eyes open for the Jr. Ranger Activity Guide.

If you would like more information on the wish list, if you would like to volunteer as an environmental educator or if you would like to book a program send me an email at lori_nicholson@fws.gov or give me a call at 850-925-6121. I look forward to hearing from you!



Lori Nicholson guides a group of children seining in the bay for a Coastal Explorers program.

St. Marks Map with Trails



Calendar of Events – Spring 2011

Please call 850-925-6121 for Reservations & Updated Information

Sun. March 13 - Daylight Savings Begins! Gate times change. Open at 6 am and close at 9 pm.

Tue. March 15 - Pools open at St. Marks for hand-launched boats and gates open to the Panacea Unit until May 15.

Sat. March 19 - Photo Club meeting 9:00 am until finished. For more information email thomasd@talstar.com

Sat. March 26 - Families In Nature
Meet at the Picnic Pond area for Snacks, Drinks, and Games!
“Scatastic” 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Sat. April 2 - Wild about Wakulla
10:00 am - 4:00 pm Celebrate the Wakulla Spring Basin’s natural environment and rich heritage at Wakulla Springs State Park.

Sat. April 2 - Wildlife Photo Class. Meet at the Visitor Center at 9:00 am. *Registration required*

Wed. April 6 - Lighthouse Lantern Tour Come by at 6:30 to see what the lighthouse looked like before the age of electricity.

Saturday April 9 - Kid’s Fishing Clinic 9:00 am - 12 pm at Wooley Park in Panacea. Free Rod and reel to the first 200 kids ages 4-15. Free Hot Dog Lunch.

April 12 to 16 – Spring Gobbler Hunt at both Panacea and Wakulla Units.

Thurs. April 14 - TOTS on TRAILS Meet at 11:00 am inside the Visitor Center. Emphasis on introducing children to nature safety. *Registration required.*

Sat. April 16 – Florida Lighthouse Day Learn about St. Mark’s historic lighthouse.

Sun. April 17 - “Lets G.O.!” Event at the FSU Reservation. 2pm-5pm Fun outdoor events for families and friends. For more information please go to the “Get Outdoors Florida!” Website.

Sat. April 23 - Families In Nature
Meet at the Picnic Pond area for Snacks, Drinks, and Games!
“Earth Day” 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Sat. May 7 - Wildlife Photo Class. Meet at the Visitor Center at 9:00 am. *Registration required*

Sat. May 14 – Dr. Anderson’s Wildflower Tour Join Dr. Anderson on a trek through the grounds to visit the refuge’s spring wildflowers.

Sat. May 21 - Photo Club meeting 9:00 am until finished. For more information email thomasd@talstar.com

Mon. May 30– Memorial Day! Visitor Center OPEN.

Hints for Enjoying Your Visit

Take Your Binoculars

Binoculars, spotting scopes and cameras will help you get a close-up view of wildlife without disturbing them. Look for wildlife up in the trees and the sky as well as in the roadside pools.

Bring Your Field Guides

Guide books will assist you in identifying the more common north Florida native flora and fauna.

Start early and stay late

Mammals and birds are more active during the early morning and late afternoon hours.

Observe carefully

Be aware of potential dangers, snakes, poison ivy, etc. Observe common-sense rules with bears and alligators, don’t get too close. Remember feeding alligators as well as all wildlife is prohibited.

Dress appropriately

Bring insect repellent, sunscreen, proper hiking shoes and socks. Wear weather appropriate clothing.

Food

Other than chocolate bars, food is not for sale at the refuge, make sure to bring snacks or plan to visit nearby restaurants.

New SCA AmeriCorps Intern

Michael Wilson

Hi everybody! My name is Mike Wilson and I am the new SCA AmeriCorps intern at St. Marks. I have only been at the refuge a short time and am still settling into my new position but all the excellent people here at the refuge have been great at helping me get situated and promising that I will get a full experience of how a National Wildlife Refuge operates. This is my third internship with the Student Conservation Association and AmeriCorps in as many years and something I can confidently say is a wonderful experience for anyone interested in serving their community and gaining experiences and skills that will last a lifetime. (And look good on your resume.) For anyone struggling to figure out what to do after high school or college and looking for something unique and exciting these are two great organizations to begin your search with. My previous two stints with these remarkable organizations have been in the New

England area of the country. The first was in Massachusetts in 2009 building and maintaining trail structures in state parks and the second and most recent in 2010 was in the Hudson Valley teaching environmental education at a historic farm about an hour and a half north of New York City. This area of the country is not totally foreign to me, however, as I am a proud graduate of the University of South Carolina. While there I earned a degree in history with an emphasis on nineteenth century American history and minored in education.

While I'm here I'll be helping out mainly with the environmental education program but also a little bit of everything else. I'm hoping in the near future to find a position within the National Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Parks Service to share my passion for the outdoors and, in the words of Freeman Tilden, help "reveal meanings

and relationships of cultural and natural heritage to the public".



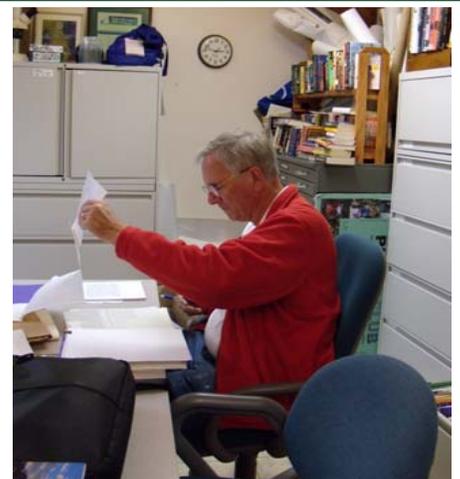
Michael Wilson explains a fishing game to one of the young attendants at the recent WHO Festival.

Volunteer Opportunities

The St. Marks staff is always looking for folks to come out and help with a little bit of everything at its festivals, educational visits, and other special events. If you or someone you know would be interested in lending a hand at some of our upcoming events please stop by the visitor center and ask about our volunteer opportunities. Someone would love to get your information and find out what you are interested in and would be available for.

St Marks loves its volunteers! Ask for David Moody to fill you in on upcoming volunteer opportunities!

850-925-6121



Volunteer Gordon Perkinson researches for the upcoming Florida Lighthouse Day.

On February 25, 2011 St. Marks hosted a group of nineteen managers of protected areas from the Russian Federation under the auspices of the Environmental Working Group of the U.S.-Russia Presidential Commission, created in July 2009 by Presidents Obama and Medvedev. They came to meet their counterparts in hopes that they might learn more about American success stories in managing ecotourism in protected areas and the infrastructure within those areas that makes them possible. A senior Russian Ministry official said, "Today we need to develop ecotourism and make the most beautiful places in our country accessible to people."

The Russian officials seemed most impressed by the array of diversity and number of animals seen during their morning travels through the refuge such as the alligators, eagles, and the multitude of shore birds. They appeared most inquisitive, however, when the topic of law enforcement came up and wanted to know what methods were employed to work with locals in preserving the habitat and its species from threats such as poaching and polluting. "One of the training management employees asked about very specific coursework requirements, physical techniques, fourth amendment and firearms trainings for their officers." said law enforcement ranger David Moody.



James Burnett explains the day's itinerary and some basic statistics about St. Marks to the Russian visitors before embarking on the morning refuge tour.

After the morning tour they were treated to a low-country boil of fresh Gulf shrimp, sausage and potatoes at the Giles Thompson House. The afternoon was spent touring the lighthouse grounds with perennial volunteer Gordon Perkinson and learning about the refuge's education programs from the Environmental Education Specialist Lori Nicholson.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge may have been the highlight but it was not the only stop in their travels. They visited Apalachicola National Forest before St. Marks and then went on to Wakulla Springs, the Everglades, Big Cypress and Bis-

cayne Bay before flying back to Moscow. To better manage and conserve wildlife populations and species shared by the United States and Russia, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service engages in a number of cooperative conservation activities with Russia. These activities include information sharing, joint scientific studies, training opportunities, and a small grants program to assist Russia's nature reserves and national parks. St. Marks was glad to be a part of this cross cultural exchange and even prouder to offer its example of how the mission of ecological protection can blend with and enhance the goals of public visitation, recreation, and education.

Wildland firefighting can be a very dangerous occupation. Often times, firefighters are exposed to situational and environmental elements that would otherwise never be experienced by the average member of the nation's workforce. Smoke inhalation, exposure to intense heat, low altitude flying in aircraft, and threats of falling snags and debris, to name a few, are enough to make even the most well-seasoned OSHA inspector cringe.

Not only is wildland firefighting dangerous, but it is also physically demanding. A firefighter will often find themselves working long hours in dirty conditions, covering vast distances of uneven, steep terrain on foot while carrying 45+ lbs. of gear, and being exposed to varying types of weather conditions. Being a firefighter in Florida poses its own physical demands. The heat and humidity of our area can take its toll on a weary body and the types of vegetation one must walk through can leave you literally stuck in a leg-hold trap. A firefighter must be physically fit enough to handle these situations over a prolonged period of time.

Being physically fit is not only important for the individual firefighter, but also for the crew. Physical fitness allows the firefighter to sustain mental fitness, which maintains the individual's situational awareness. The situational awareness of the individual keeps themselves and the crew safe from any hazards present on the fireline. If the individual firefighter is not physically fit,

they cannot do their job properly, putting the lives of their crew members in jeopardy.

Setting the Standard

Once a year, wildland firefighters are required to take the Work Capacity Test (aka "pack test") to satisfy their annual physical fitness standards. The test consists of walking 3 miles in under 45 minutes while carrying a 45 lb. pack or vest. While this test is beneficial at setting a baseline fitness requirement for firefighters, it is not enough to maintain a firefighter's physical well-being throughout the entire year and it doesn't necessarily reflect the true fitness of the firefighter.

Working out with the St. Marks NWR Fire Crew

The fire crew at St. Marks NWR goes the extra mile when it comes to physical fitness...literally. They go beyond the pack test, pushing themselves to become stronger and tougher through a broad range of exercises. Whether it's running, biking, weight lifting, or cross training, each member of the fire crew has a special workout routine catered to their personal preferences and needs. Most exercises tend to be endurance based, due to the nature of the type of work performed on a typical fire assignment. Physical training (P.T.) sessions are usually conducted first thing in the morning on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday of every week at the fire office and the nearby St. Marks

bike trail.

In the spirit of promoting physical fitness among all the fire crews in the southeast region, the St. Marks fire crew and the rest of district 4 will conduct a friendly, remote competition with the District 2 fire crews (South Carolina) in April. The competition will involve a 1.5 mile run, push-ups, sit-ups, and pull-ups. The best average scores among each district will determine the winner.



Fire Management Officer Greg Titus leads his crew by example as he demonstrates the proper way to climb a rope

Whooping cranes have been in the news a lot recently with the sad news of three shot in south Georgia and two cranes shot in Alabama. This is quite a blow to the reintroduction program especially since one of the Alabama cranes was trained by Operation Migration and had started to breed. Whooping cranes generally do not begin breeding until at least five years old.

Patience is the main ingredient for the recovery program – patience to raise and train the birds and patience to establish a breeding, migrating flock. The best news we’ve had lately is that some older birds have returned to the refuge and have been spotted several times on the refuge and the adjacent areas.

I went to visit friends in Gainesville one February weekend and we took a trip to Payne’s Prairie Preserve State Park. We saw hundreds of sandhill cranes, a large flock of white pelicans, many well fed and large alligators, and five whooping cranes in the far distance. It was a real treat to see those truly wild cranes.

I hope you attended the association’s annual meeting on March 5 at the Giles Thompson house. If you have not received your membership renewal information please contact Robin Will at 850-925-6121 or robin_will@fws.gov. When you renew your membership you might want to include a little extra for one of our other funds that support the outstanding work of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. We appreciate your support of the association and St. Marks NWR.

When Barney Parker started the St. Marks Photo Club a few years ago, I’m not sure he had an inkling of how popular it would become. Under Tom Darragh’s excellent leadership hundreds of people have been introduced to the fun of taking photographs not to mention St. Marks refuge. The field trips have allowed people to glimpse the far

reaches of the refuge as well as the beauty of the surrounding area. You’d do well to join them at the monthly meeting on the third Saturday each month– all ages and skill levels are welcome. Check this newsletter or the St. Marks Refuge Photo Club Facebook page for information.

The red bud tree outside my window started to flower a few days ago. It’s time to get outside and enjoy this perfect weather and there is no better place to go than St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Thank you to all staff, volunteers, and association members who make St. Marks NWR shine.



Paul Hamilton of the Refuge Association talking to the “Wild Bunch”, a group of North Carolina retirees on a tour of the St. Marks salt marshes.

St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc., is a non-profit all volunteer organization.

Profits support educational and biological programs of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

Association members receive a 10% discount on bookstore purchases.

Visit the refuge association’s website at <http://www.stmarksrefuge.org>

This summer will be a busy time for the refuge biologists. With a new monitoring project planned for the Gopher Tortoises and continued work with the groups of Red Cockaded Woodpeckers the hot months of June and July will hopefully yield continued success in reintroducing the Red Cockaded Woodpeckers in the refuge and coming closer to a true and reliable count of the populations of gopher tortoise.

Gopher Tortoise Survey:

The gopher tortoise is a keystone species in Florida which means that it is crucial or essential to the ecosystem's community structure and without it the species around it will be in danger. As such, St. Marks biologists need as much information about them as they can gather to adequately plan for the future conservation efforts needed to improve habitat and restore populations. One of the first things to begin with is setting a number of how many there actually are in an area which is what this summer's survey will begin to establish.

The gopher tortoise survey going on this summer will be unique in both its technique and its scope. The survey team will be walking just over eighty-two miles of transect lines within an area of approximately five-thousand and five-hundred acres over a period of approximately two months. As they are walking these lines they will be looking for gopher tortoise burrows but instead of simply counting gopher tortoise holes and assuming it is occupied they will be using a probe with a camera to visually inspect the inside of the cavity and see what exactly is or is not in the cavity. The



biologists planning this project have designed it to find at least sixty to eighty tortoises during the survey. Based on this sample, an accurate estimate of the entire population will be developed. After this process is complete and the data is entered into a database the findings should be available this summer so keep an eye out for more information in the next newsletter or find Mike Keys and ask him how its going.

Red Cockaded Woodpecker Work:

This spring Aubrey Sirman, a biology student-intern from Florida State University will be aiding Mike Keys in creating new nesting habitat for the Red Cockaded



Woodpecker and monitoring the sites for active breeding groups. The nesting habitat is created by inserting premade nest boxes into the trunks of longleaf pine trees or by drilling a starter hole into the tree that the woodpeckers can then finish. Both methods have their benefits and drawbacks.

The inserts are readily available for nesting birds and easy to move into. These nests, however, may not be occupied for as long as natural cavities with an average nesting duration of three to five years. The pre-drilled holes, on the other hand may take a woodpecker months or years to finish and roost in it. Once occupied though, they are usually utilized for much longer, sometimes for up to ten years. Because of these variables a mixture of the two are currently in use and the outcomes monitored over time. If you would like to try some monitoring yourself a good place with easy access to try is Buckhorn Creek Road off of Surf Road in Sopchoppy.

Spring is upon us, and it's an exciting time at the refuge for photographers as well as everyone else. Everywhere you look there is something to catch your eye. Check the calendars for the festivals and field trips going on. Now is the time to get out and enjoy the outdoors and take a few photos. If you need a little refresher on taking photos call the refuge to sign up for the first Saturday of the month photo class, or if you just want share the experience with other photographers come join the club at one of our outings or meetings. We still meet the third Saturday of the month at 9:00 a.m. check the Association web site for

where we will be meeting, or get on the email list by emailing Tom Darragh at thomasd@talstar.com

As always many members of the photo club are eager to volunteer at the refuge during festivals and working on special projects. We have also been asked to teach several photography work shops around town,; be on the lookout for us. And spring means new photo cards in the refuge Nature Store. Pick up a few to share with your friends and support the Refuge.

Now for something important... **Get outside and enjoy yourself!** Here are a few tips on macro photography, don't forget to look out

for those tiny flowers and bugs you might over look. Once up close you will be amazed how interesting and beautiful they really are.

Camera shake is more noticeable with close-ups. If possible, use a tripod or other support.

Image – stabilized lenses or camera bodies with a build in stabilizer can also be very effective in minimizing the effects of camera shake. You may also want to use a higher ISO to minimize camera shake and blurry images. Using a flash will help “freeze” movement. And set your lens to its smallest aperture (largest f-stop number) to maximize the depth of field.

St Marks Photo Club is an organization for all people interested in nature photography. Our membership includes enthusiastic people of all ages and levels from beginners wanting to learn to experienced adults willing to share. We offer field trips monthly meetings and more. No dues required! For more information please contact the Photo Club President Tom Darragh at Thomasd@talstar.com

Photo Contest Winners !



1st Place - Michael Robertson
Category: People



1st Place - Dave Gilbertson
Category: Adult Landscape



1st Place - Carole Robertson
Category: Altered

Contest Winners Cont.



Best in Show
Jing Ping Chen



1st Place - Karen Willes; Category: Adult Wildlife



1st Place - Diana Robertson; Category: Youth Landscape



1st Place - Dara Galloway; Category: Youth Wildlife



1st Place -
Joan Robertson
Category: Youth Small
Wonders

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 68
St. Marks, FL 32355
(850) 925-6121
<http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks>
www.stmarksrefuge.org

Education Building Wish List

Sign up for membership

ST. MARKS REFUGE ASSOCIATION

PLEASE CHECK MEMBERSHIP



◇	Individual/Family	\$ 25.00
◇	Organization	\$ 50.00
◇	Senior (over 62)	\$ 20.00
◇	Supporting	\$ 50.00
◇	Student (under 16)	\$ 5.00
◇	Class	\$ 10.00
◇	Life	\$250.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone (home): _____

Phone (office): _____

Email: _____

Gift membership Y / N: **Or Memorial Y / N**

In memory of: _____

Realistic wildlife puppets

Fawn.....\$8.00	Bobcat...\$15.00	Skunk...\$7.50
Raccoon...\$24.00	Flying squirrel...\$7.00	Eagle...\$15.00
Alligator...\$14.00	Turkey...\$22.00	Squirrel...\$14.00
Hermit Crab...\$12.00	Brown Bat...\$13.00	Mallard...\$10.00
Woodpecker...\$11.00	Mini turtle...\$7.00	
Tadpole/frog...\$16.00	Great Horned Owl...\$25.00	

-
- Hanging bird feeders... \$50.00 each
 - 10 Dell laptop computers-----approx. \$500.00 each
 - 10 Dip nets ... \$25.00-\$50.00 each
 - 10 Viewing buckets.....\$15.00 each
 - Children's books and Taxidermy specimens ...call for more info.
 - Wind meters----approx. \$25.00 each
 - First aid kits...\$50.00 each
 - Hand Held Magnifying lenses...\$10.00 each
 - Dissecting microscopes....\$300.00 each
 - Camera for microscopes... \$200.00 each
 - Tabletop tripod magnifier....\$35.00 each
 - Pocket microscopes...\$15.00 each
 - Field Thermometers (non-mercury)...\$20.00 each
 - Silva Starter Compasses....\$11.00 each
 - Kestrel weather stations...\$140.00 each
 - Sling psychrometers...\$85.00 each
 - Replacement thermometers...\$40.00 each
 - Chairs.....\$85.00 each Shoe scrapers...\$50.00 each
 - Display cabinets/shelves....\$200.00 each Craft supplies ..\$200.00

For more information see article on page 6.