



"The Eagle's Eye"

Newsletter of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Edited by Lori Nicholson & Robin Will and Gail Fishman

A Sea of Change

James Burnett

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

WINTER 2010 - 2011

A sea change occurred in the Florida business community in 1997. The St. Joe Paper Company, a regional forest products power that owned 1.5 million acres of Florida forest land, became the St. Joe Company. The decades-old company mantra of "we don't sell land, we buy land or trade for more land" was history. Virtually all of the vast holdings, including tens of thousands of acres adjacent to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge were slated for sale or development into upscale residential/recreational communities.

The landscape strategy for wildlife conservation on St. Marks NWR became far different than what had been imagined. We could no longer rely on managing the best possible wildlife habitat on refuge lands buffered by industrial forests. The land base of St. Marks NWR must be increased. Partnership efforts with other government and private land holders must be engaged if the refuge was to continue meeting our wildlife conservation objectives.

Formal expansion planning efforts began in 1999. The efforts were slowed, even stopped for extended periods, as administrations and land acquisition policies changed. The plan, vetted and endorsed by State, local, and federal government agencies, and overwhelmingly embraced by area citizens and neighbors, added 35,000+ acres to the authorized boundary of the refuge.

That was the easy part. Money must be appropriated from Congress, private, or non-profit sources to actually purchase the land. Our first priority is the Flint Rock Wildlife Management Area adjacent to the St. Marks unit and managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC). Just prior to the economic downturn, St. Joe began marketing Flint Rock. Conservation heroes – Mr. Sam Shine and The Nature Conservancy (TNC)– stepped forward. Each purchased about 10,000 acres with the intent to sell to the FWCC. Using some of their last available Florida Forever funds, FWC purchased about 2,500 acres from TNC. There are currently no state funds to complete this purchase. If another buyer steps up, the land could be lost to the refuge forever.

On the positive side, the public supports the expansion. Cont. on page 2.

On The Inside

- Pg. 2 A Sea of Change/Crane Pen
- Pg. 3 Every Refuge Matters
- Pg. 4 Focus on Nature
- Pg. 5 The desk of David Moody/Rec. fee
- Pg. 6 EE Update
- Pg. 7 St. Marks Unit Map
- Pg. 8 Calendar of Events
- Pg. 9 Assoc. Update
- Pg. 10 On Frank's Shoulders
- Pg. 11 Refuge Manager Update

- Pg. 12 New Faces of SMNWR
- Pg. 14 Toothache Grass
- Pg. 15. Photo Club Update
- Pg. 16. Happy Holidays

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

The proposed acquisitions are rated near the top of the national FWS list as measured by the Land Acquisition Priority System (LAPS). There are motivated, willing sellers. Two private owners with about three miles of St. Marks River frontage have expressed an interest in conservation easements. Dozens of other owners within the new acquisition boundary wish to sell to the Service at a reasonable price. The President's 2011 budget includes a \$1 million request from Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for St. Marks.

Congress appropriates money to purchase conservation land from the LWCF (fees derived from offshore oil and gas production), the Migratory Bird Fund (Duck Stamp sales), or other sources such as Gulf of Mexico environmental restoration funds associated with the deepwater horizon repair efforts.

Future demographic, economic, and climatological projections show increased pressure on wildlife and wild lands. The current economy and political climate

appear to be obstacles. Perhaps the very best thing our project has going is a fresh partnership between the St. Marks Refuge Association, the Florida Wildlife Federation, and the Tall Timbers Land Conservancy. These folks have banded together to promote these acquisitions to our Congressional Representatives and others. To learn how you can join the effort to enlarge St. Marks Refuge contact Lou Kellenberger at:

landacquisitions@hotmail.com

St. Marks NWR Crane Pen Workday

Betsy Kellenberger

Volunteers and staff of the St. Marks NWR recently held a workday to prepare the pen for the visiting whooping cranes which are expected to arrive, led by ultralight planes, sometime in late December. Terry Peacock, Refuge Manager, directed the group in various cleanup activities including clearing the trail, attaching electric fence wire, putting more oyster shells on the reef, making repairs to the blind, and putting up the camouflage screen. St. Marks Photo Club members, as well as other Refuge volunteers and staff mucked about in the water and mud to get ready for the important and well anticipated flock.

A group of students from the Wakulla High School Ad-

vanced Placement Science class joined in by stringing electric wire as their part of the project. Holly Peacock brought friends Danni Hutto, Autumn Porter, Kara Smith and Kristie Hodges to learn about this special effort to protect the cranes while they are wintering at the Refuge. "It was a

lot of hard work, but the effort was worth it to protect an endangered species," said Holly Peacock, after a day in the sun getting wet and dirty. All the students agreed it was fun and they'd like to do it again. The cranes are brought here by the Whooping Crane Eastern

Partnership (WCEP), the team dedicated to returning a sustainable population of whooping cranes to the Eastern Flyway. This will be the third year that half of the ultralight flock has spent the winter at St. Marks NWR. A flyover event, when the public can see the birds will be announced when the flock is ready to move into their newly refurbished pen.



Crane Pen work day participants ready the pen for the class of 2010. Photo taken by Lou Kellenberger.

National wildlife refuges protect plant and animal habitats. Sometimes it is easy to forget that public lands owned by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) also protect historical and cultural resources. Beautiful vistas are often a part of the package such the spectacular snowcapped peaks of Alaska and Benton Lake Wetland Management District. Benton Lake, in Montana, is the largest geographical area of any District in the United States.

Oregon's Willapa National Wildlife Refuge on Willapa Bay, is one of the most pristine estuaries in the United States. Chum, chinook, and coho salmon are found in this second largest estuary on the Pacific coast that includes more than 260 square miles of water surface.

Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge in Ohio was established in 1961 to preserve migrating bird habitat. Ottawa, together with Cedar Point and West Sister Island refuges, protect approximately 9,000 acres and some of the last remnants of the "Great Black Swamp" in the heart of the Lake Erie marshes. Because of the large numbers of migrating songbirds (and birders) that visit each spring, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network designated Ottawa as a site of regional significance.

Montana's Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge attracts big game hunters. This year, a bow hunter found the fossilized

bones of a rare prehistoric sea creature called a plesiosaur. Like modern day whales, plesiosaurs were air breathers and caught prey with their toothy jaws. Plesiosaurs thrived in the Cretaceous Seaway of North America which extended from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico 75 million years ago.

From a bit of Georgia land owned by the federal government since 1948, the FWS established the Millen National Fish Hatchery in 1950. It was renamed Bo Ginn National Fish Hatchery in 1988. From 1996 to late 2009 the state of Georgia operated the hatchery. Management has once again been turned over to the FWS. Located between Augusta and Savannah, Georgia, the 127-acre hatchery will serve as a refuge for threatened and endangered aquatic species, other rare species of concern, and will raise fish, such as striped bass, that occur in more than one state.

Recently Kevin Chapman, an archaeology graduate student at Georgia Southern University, was sent to find the footprint of Camp Lawton, a Civil War Prison that is partially within the hatchery's boundary. Camp Lawton was hastily constructed in mid-1864 to ease the overcrowding and health problems at Andersonville (Camp Sumter), Georgia. Like Andersonville, Camp Lawton was an open stockade with little shelter. The approach of Sherman's forces ended the camp's use barely six

weeks after the first prisoners had arrived.

Soon Chapman found nails, buttons, and an 1834 U.S. coin. A team was assembled to excavate the site which has been relatively undisturbed for 150 years. Camp Lawton is a unique piece of history. The FWS is protecting the site and the artifacts so that archaeologists can carefully extract, study, and preserve them for the American people.

In addition to habitat, birds, plants, animals, and fish, refuges and other lands owned by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service protect America's history.

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.

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

When I started the photo club a while back, I had no idea what the results would be. I had only hoped to avoid teaching a second level digital photography class and at the same time get a bunch of people interested in the refuge. Not only did it grow in numbers, enthusiasm and expertise, but it produced some side effects that an old, retired biology instructor can really appreciate.

First the number of participants grew into the hundreds thanks to the wonderful leadership of Tom and Teresa Darragh.

Then the members of the photo club began to volunteer at the refuge in large numbers to help the growing number of people who were taking part in activities at the refuge.

We are at the point where I don't believe we could provide the great outreach to the public which we offer now without them. They provide a great service to the refuge and enhance the friendliness and expertise for which the St. Marks refuge is known.

But, what really excites and satisfies me, as an old biology instructor is that I see them becoming amateur naturalists visiting the refuge from morning to evening for season after season. What the photo club members came to realize was that to get great pictures of wildlife, the plants, and beauty at the refuge, it was

necessary to learn things like what the animals eat, what eats them, where they live and their patterns of migration. Also to get great photos of flowers, it helps to know where they grow and when they bloom. Slowly the amateur naturalists began to learn and share their knowledge not only in photography, but the natural history of St. Marks. The other amazing thing is that they visit the refuge not by themselves, but they bring their families along with them and the whole family participates in the photography and learning about the natural history that surrounds them. We are so proud of them all.

When you see them scouring the refuge for encounters with wildlife, say hello and you'll be rewarded with thoughtful, caring information and advice about the wonders of the refuge.

Don't forget the free digital nature photography class that I teach at the refuge. See the calendar of events on page 8 for the dates. Families are welcome and, did I mention, that it is free?

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. Fees are payable in cash or checks.

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 the upcoming year's applications and permit information, or visit www.fws.gov/saintmarks 850-925-6121.

From the Desk of David Moody

It sure feels great to have winds from the north for a change. The migratory waterfowl, bald eagles, and other cold season visitors are calling the St. Marks Refuge home again. Many refuge visitors are now able to hike the trails without too much standing water and biting insects. Photographers and birders are stealthily maneuvering around the dikes and salt marsh for the next contest winning photo or life bird. The deer hunters have scouted their best ambush point to

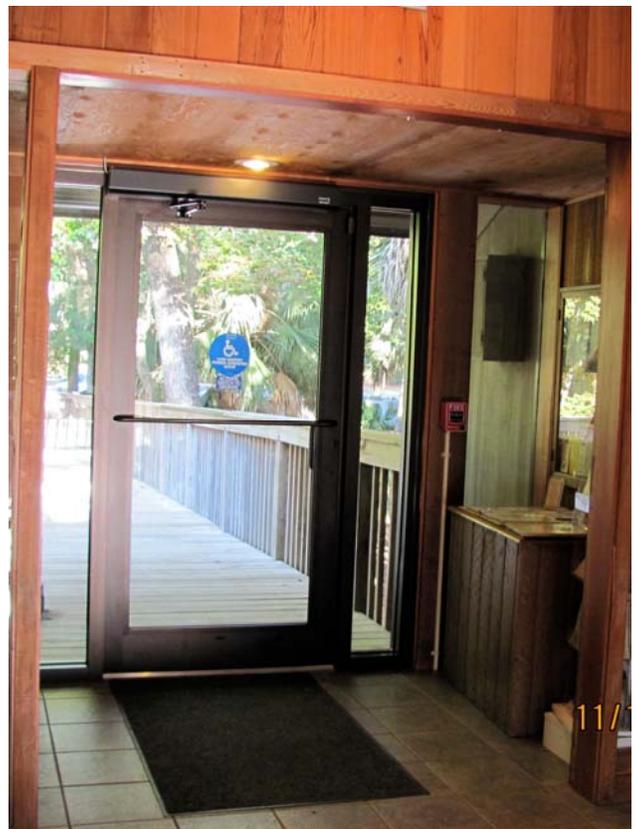
take that wall hanger buck on the Wakulla and Panacea units. People are watching the Goose Creek and Bottoms Seineyard for the annual “run”, where they can cast net or seine hundreds of pounds of mullet in a few minutes. What an exciting time of year! I want to encourage everyone, no matter your game, to spend a sunset at Otter Lake, listening to the sounds and observing the birds returning to roost.

Volunteers-

We couldn't offer the same level of service at the refuge without the help of dedicated volunteers, both local and RV. The RV volunteers give 3-4 days of service each week, and local volunteers give time as they can, supporting refuge biological programs, visitor services, and maintenance. For more information about volunteer programs at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, please contact David Moody at (850) 925-6121 or email at david_moody@fws.gov.

Recreational Fee Grant Improves Refuge

These accessible doors and modified alarm system were paid for with a \$9,000 grant from the Recreational Fee Program and fee monies from St. Marks NWR. Enjoy!



Wow! Work has begun on our new education building! It is so exciting to look over and see people busy working on our dream. It was with mixed emotions that we bid the cabin farewell, knowing that bigger and brighter things were in the near future.

The new building is scheduled to be completed early summer of 2011. We will all be busy moving things in and setting it up for the fall of 2011 classes.

We will have many needs once the building is completed. To help meet these needs we will create an "Education Building Wish List" that will be on our website and posted at the Visitor Center. Anyone who wishes to make donations to that wish list is certainly welcome. We have already received calls from a few people.

One recent donation to our education program is the new Madonna Cummings Transportation Scholarship for Leon County Schools. This continuing scholarship will allow teachers to receive up to \$500 to



Preliminary artists rendition of the new St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Education building.

help pay the costs of taking field trips to St. Marks NWR. It is made in memory of Madonna Cummings by her grandson, Jonathon, and his family, Rachel and Adeline. The scholarship is available for the spring of 2011. In addition, Mr. and Mrs. Cummings are donating a collection of environmental themed children's books for St. Marks' education programs in honor of their grandfather, Cliff Cummings. We certainly appreciate their support.

If you or anyone you know is interested in making a similar tax deductible donation please contact me at 850-925-6121 or email me at Lori_Nicholson@fws.gov

Our education staff and volunteers have certainly been busy this fall with education programs. We started the school year booked almost until December. We actually had teachers calling to book for the fall of 2011. I imagine it will only increase once the new building is up and going. We are so excited

about where environmental education is going at St. Marks NWR. It is certainly a wonderful example of how much our youth and their future mean to the staff and volunteers of St. Marks NWR and St. Marks Refuge Association. For a small place doing what comes naturally to them we have made quite a name for ourselves. We are setting precedents that are being noticed all over the southeast region and actually throughout the country. Someone mentioned to me that our programs and how they have grown have been noticed even at the national headquarters of the USFWS. Way to go team!

Calendar of Events - Winter 2010-2011

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

Sat. Dec. 18 - Photo Club meeting
9:00 am until finished. Contact
President Tom Darragh for more
information at thomasd@talstar.com

**Dec. 17-19 Panacea General Gun
Hunt.** Permits required.

Fri. Dec. 24 - Christmas Eve, Visitor
Center will be open 8 am - 4 pm.

Sat. Dec. 25 - Visitor Center will be
closed for Christmas.

Fri. Dec. 31 - Visitor Center will be
open 8 am - 4 pm.

Sat. Jan 1 - Visitor Center will be
open 10 am - 5 pm. No Wildlife Pho-
tography Class today.

Sat. Jan 8 - Winter Wildlife Tours led
by Don Morrow at 9:00 am and 1:00
pm. Meet outside the Visitor Center.
Bring cameras, binoculars, insect repel-
lent, water etc. Dress for the weather.
Registration required

**Sat. Jan. 8 - Star Study- limited
space.** Call for reservations and time.
Dress warmly.

Thurs. Jan. 13 - TOTS on TRAILS
Meet at 11:00 am inside the Visitor
Center. Emphasis on introducing chil-
dren to nature safety.
Registration required.

Sat. Jan. 15 - Photo Club meeting
9:00 am until finished. For more in-
formation email thomasd@talstar.com

**Mon. Jan. 17 - Martin Luther King
Holiday -** Visitor Center will be open
from 8 am - 4 pm.

Sat. Jan. 22 - Families In Nature -
"Welcome Whooping Cranes"
10:00 am - 3:00 pm. Check in at the
Visitor Center.

**Sat. Feb.5 - Wildlife Heritage & Out-
doors (WHO) Festival from 11 am -
4pm.** Come enjoy outdoor activities
and exhibits from the past and present.
Fun for the entire family!

**Sun. Feb. 6, Port Leon Historical
Tour with Andy Edel-** Meet at Visitor
Center at 2:00 pm.
Registration Required.

Thurs. Feb. 10 - TOTS on TRAILS
Meet at 11:00 am inside the Visitor
Center. **Registration required.**

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

Sat. Feb. 19 - Winter Wildlife Tours
led by Don Morrow at 9:00 am and 1:00
pm. See entry of Jan. 8.
Registration required

Sat. Feb. 26 - Families In Nature
"This is for the Birds" 10:00 am - 3:00
pm. Check in at Visitor Center.

Sat. March 5 - Wildlife Photo Class.
Meet at the Visitor Center at 9:00 am.
**Registration required --Historical
Tour for Magnolia Cemetary with
Andy Edel** meet at Visitor Center at
5:30. **Registration required.**

**Thurs. March 10 - TOTS on
TRAILS** Meet at 11:00 am inside the
Visitor Center. Emphasis on introduc-
ing children to nature safety.
Registration required.

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

Sat. March 26 - Families In Nature
"Scatastic" 10:00 am - 3:00 pm.

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.

It's been another busy year for the association. Hard to believe our second cohort of whooping cranes left only a few months ago. In mid-November members of the St. Marks Photo Club and other volunteers spent several hours getting the pen ready for our third cohort expected soon.

In October the monarch butterflies arrived in time for another festival and so did around 4,000 visitors. It was a beautiful day with lots of activities and fun for all ages.

Thanks to all the volunteers and members who work so hard for the refuge, especially the educators who are opening children's minds to nature. Perhaps a few will choose to become a biologist and come back to work at St. Marks.

We expect 2011 to be even busier for the association as we gain momentum for enlarging the refuge. We're building a partnership with Florida Wildlife Federation and Tall Timbers for a stronger voice advocating for increased federal funding. Although there is not enough money to purchase

every acre at once, by using grants and cash donations we hope to double the purchasing power of the federal allocation. We'll be asking for your continued support. For more information please email Lou Kellenberger at landacquisitions@hotmail.com

As we approach the end of the year, I want to thank the board of directors. Without them, the work of the association would not get done. Dede Wells as the treasurer keeps our bank account balanced and her watchful eye over our many funds – lighthouse, education, crane camera, historical sign grant just to name a few – is invaluable. Craig Kittendorf keeps our Web site up to date and he recently redesigned the page. Betsy Kellenberger keeps the membership table going at each event. Lou Kellenberger takes beautiful photos of the refuge almost every day (and so does Betsy) but moreover, Lou has been the driving force behind building the partnership for land acquisition. Tom Darragh keeps the St. Marks Photo Club involved in many events and is always willing

to share his expertise with other refuges. Photography is a perfect way to acquaint people from all walks of life to the refuge. Secretary Bruce Ballister documents every

meeting and is also a dedicated butterfly tagger. Janie Nelson keeps our bookstore stocked and decorated and makes sure the refuge receives lots of press coverage. Dale Allen, with his background with the Trust for Public Land, is a strong voice on the land acquisition committee. Shelley Yaun, a former board member and now our Special Events Liaison, is always ready and willing to help facilitate meetings and plans for the crane flyover. Robin Will, refuge liaison, has been our guiding light since the beginning. Her vision – and the need to buy dip nets and buckets for the education program – led to the formation of the St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc. I especially want to thank the entire staff of the refuge. Their commitment to managing this land as premier wildlife habitat as well as making it welcoming to visitors speaks volumes about their love for this special place.

Finally, thank you for supporting this organization and the refuge. Remember to shop in the bookstore. We've stocked ornaments for tree trimming, soothing holiday music, Florida Forever calendars, and the special edition Duck Stamp Cachet signed by David Moynahan. Members always receive a 10% discount on their purchases.



Crane pen volunteers work on the small inner enclosure.

You don't have to spend too much time around the refuge work center these days, around all that new-looking firefighting equipment and all those hard-bodied firefighters—all seemingly praying for a fire to challenge them—to realize that St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge possesses one of the most professional fire management teams and programs to be found within any federal or state agency.

In the face of all this excellence though, we oftentimes tend to lose sight of the fact the fire management program hasn't always been this way—far from it indeed. As is the case with most successful programs, we all stand on the shoulders of those who preceded us. Such is the case with the modern-day, fire management program on our refuge. To a large degree, those who eventually brought this program to its current level of proficiency stands on the shoulders of Forester/Fire Management Officer Frank Zontek, who retired in 1993.

Frank transferred to St. Marks as the Chief Forester/Fire Management Officer in 1965 after serving a tour in the same capacity on Kentucky Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge. With the aid of three junior foresters, he took charge of the even-age forest management program already in place and for the next quarter of a century successfully guided the refuge forest, woodlands badly abused by pre-refuge ownership, back to a measure of recovery before giving way to an updated, all

-age management program keyed to changing refuge and forest management objectives at about the time of his retirement in 1993.

The fire management program (wildfire suppression and prescribed burning) he inherited upon his arrival was rudimentary and presented Frank with his greatest career challenge, particularly prescribed burning.

That program had evolved little from its origins a quarter of a century earlier. Dedicated firefighting equipment was almost nonexistent. Such as it was, most consisted largely of homemade devices or surplus military property. Personal protective gear and fire retardant clothing were concepts yet to be conceived, and firefighting uniforms consisted only of everyday cotton uniforms. Hardhats, gloves, fire shelters, Nomex clothing—what's that? Formal firefighting training and physical conditioning standards were unheard of.

The prescribed burning crew Frank had to work with included the junior foresters, a refuge maintenance man, an equipment operator, a biologist, a biological technician, the assistant refuge manager, and refuge manager, all amateur firefighters who took the day off from their normal duties to string fire along the north side of miles and miles of plowed



Photo of Frank in the field, taken by refuge staff.

fire lines.

Prescribed burning equipment included one military surplus tractor plow unit, a couple of home-made drip torches, a couple of military surplus back pack pumps, shovels, and fire flaps. That was it.

When responding to wildfires, the same team of amateurs were available to assist the tractor-plow units of the Florida Division of Forestry, who were under contract for initial attack.

It took time, patience, and finally a Fish and Wildlife Service national commitment to the need for professionalism

cont. on pg. 11

Frank continued from pg. 10

in the fire management program before the St. Marks fire management program broke free of inertia and began a slow, but steady march away from decades of mediocrity. Under Frank's quiet leadership, this program began to transform a well-intended gathering of amateurs into a dedicated, highly trained team of professional wildlands firefighters.

By the time Frank turned his program over to his successor in 1993, the fire management programs, both wildfire suppression and prescribed burning, was on its way to present day proficiency and included such innovations as the use of ATVs, aerial ignition with contract helicopters and ping-pong balls, computerized fire weather programs, an engine

(pumper) unit, elimination of internal firelines and the use of head fires, helicopter water-drops, spotter planes, two new tractor-plog units, western fire details, fire retardant Nomex clothing and fire shelters, and qualification training and physical condition standards for all fire fighters. Good job Frank!

On August 12, 2010, Frank passed from this earth and ascended to the big refuge in the sky, where an abused, longleaf pine forest in need



Black and white photo of Frank taken from refuge narratives.

of even age management and cool, back-fire burns and a good golf course waits as his reward for a professional life well lived!

Refuge Managers Update

James and I are still spending time on the oil spill. James completed a detail in New Orleans as Refuge Liaison to the Unified Command in September and October. I am there in the same position from late November to December. James may need to return to New Orleans in January. We will support the spill response as long as we are needed and be thankful all the while that the St. Marks area was spared.

The education building is finally under construction. The underground piles have been

driven and they are beginning to build the pile caps.

The salt water boat ramp replacement is scheduled for December. They will pre-construct the ramps and install them as one piece to limit the amount of time that the ramp is closed. A portion of the boat ramp is currently closed. Boaters will still be able to use the ramp and the rest of the parking area until the ramp installation begins on Dec. 20. At which time it will be closed until further notice.

The whooping crane class of 2010 is on its way. We will be getting 5

Terry Peacock

of the birds here this year. I hope you can come out to the arrival event and enjoy seeing the birds come in. If you miss it, you will be able to watch the birds on our crane cam. It will be up and running on the St. Marks Refuge Association Web Site.

We have some new employees on the refuge. Make sure to read the articles on pages 12 and 13 to learn more about them.

St. Marks Gets a new Information Technology Specialist!



John Edwards in his office at St. Marks NWR.

John Edwards accepted the new Information Technology (I.T.) Specialist position at St. Marks in July 2010. His job is to troubleshoot and maintain the refuge's computer network, which he has had ample opportunity to do at Headquarters this fall as he successfully battled the computer gremlins! While his base is here at St. Marks, he also travels and serves as the I.T. Specialist for ten other Refuges in the Mississippi-Alabama-Florida area.

John's past experience has made him a perfect fit for this job. He came to St. Marks from the Financial Services Division for the State of Florida in Tallahassee where he was the Network Administrator. He also serves in the Naval Reserve where he sets up computer networks for combat situations. In addition, he's experienced

with mobile networks and satellite systems.

An Iraq War Veteran in the Army Airborne Infantry and a Crawfordville resident, John is married and has a seven-year-old son. When asked what he likes best about St. Marks, he replied, "The people!" He said everyone has been very welcoming and friendly, and he enjoys the quiet and stillness of the Refuge. He also likes traveling to the other Refuges, meeting and helping other people. Outside of work John enjoys watching football, riding four-wheelers, and spending time with his family.

John will be working with the team to get the Whooping Crane pen webcam operating in time for the Whoopers' arrival later in December. We are all so glad you are here, John! Welcome!

New Additions to the St. Marks NWR Fire Crew!

Brian Pippin and **Travis Pollard** are Engine Operators on the St. Marks Fire Crew. Before prescribed burns they help prepare areas around utility poles, electrical boxes, etc. They assist with prescribed burns by "holding" or containing the fire as needed. They also participate in fire suppression if the Refuge is threatened. And they are responsible for every aspect of maintaining their engines.

Brian came to St. Marks in August 2010 after having served on seasonal Federal fire crews in four other states, the most recent with the Jackson Mississippi Hot Shots. While completing degrees in Fire Science at Caspar College and Organizational Leadership at the University of Wyoming, Brian became interested in prescribed burns and gained experience at the Black Hills National Forest.

New Faces cont. from pg. 12



Brian Pippin

When asked what he liked best about St. Marks, he replied, “The qualified personnel and the good equipment.” He is enjoying learning the science of burning “Southern Rough,” a totally new experience for him compared to the forest environments at his previous posts. Brian lives in the village of St. Marks, and in his free time he plays golf, builds bicycles, and plays Rugby in the Deep Southern Union where his team competes with other southern cities.

Travis has been filling a temporary position at St. Marks for about two years, and in the summer of 2010 was assigned to a permanent position. Originally from North Carolina, he holds a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Science from North Carolina State. Towards the end of college Travis became interested in prescribed burning and decided to head to Florida to pursue his career. He was on the fire crew of the Florida Division of Forestry for Leon and Jefferson counties for four years.

Travis made it unanimous when asked what he liked best about St. Marks: he replied, “The people! They are great to work with.” He also added that he loves his job and takes it seriously, and that he likes to think he’s making a difference, making a contribution. Living just outside Tallahassee, Travis spends his free time doing “just about anything outdoors—hunting, fishing, boating, hiking.” He also plays drums in a local band—you can catch the group at the Tallahassee Moose Lodge once or twice a month. We appreciate the contribution that Brian and Travis are making to improve the wildlife habitat at St. Marks. Welcome to you both!

Travis Pollard



“Love conquers all except poverty and toothaches.”

Mae West

Luckily for Mae West, if she asked the St. Marks Refuge staff what to do about a toothache, we would have an answer.

Toothache grass. Yes, there is a grass that has the ability to relieve your tooth pain, at least for a short while.

Toothache grass (*Ctenium aromaticum*) is found in the southeast of the United States. It is a warm-season, perennial bunch grass, which means, it likes to grow in the heat of the summer, then turns brown and goes dormant in the winter. Also, it grows in clumps of grass leaves called bunches. Toothache grass can reach the height of 3 feet.



Area where toothache grass is growing because of prescribed fires during the growing season.

The flower or seed head looks like a small comb that can be straight or curled.

On St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge toothache grass is thriving in areas where the refuge has been igniting prescribed fires in the growing season. The growing season in North Florida spans the months of April to October. The growing season is also the best time in Florida to see lightning, the major cause of wildfires.

If you had a toothache and needed some relief on the way to the dentist, chewing or crushing the lower stem in your mouth may deaden the pain on your tongue and gums.



Close up of toothache grass.

The photo club is staying busy and having fun taking photos. We are looking forward to more field trips and a new meeting place in the Educational building, next year. Please come by for a visit, all ages and skill levels are welcome. Don't forget we meet the third Saturday of every month at 9:00 am. Check the web site for details and where to meet.

Craig Kittendorf and I were asked to give a photo class for BOW (Becoming an Outdoor Woman) given by FWC (Florida Wildlife Conservation) in October. We gave two classes over the weekend and had a good time.



Craig at BOW.

We also were invited to speak at Southeast Louisiana Complex National Wildlife Refuges in Slidell Louisiana in November. They held their first organizational meeting of their very own photo club. We took a power point presentation and gave them help and information and guidance.



Guest enjoying the viewing platform to paint a picture of the lighthouse.

I also want to thank Dallas Beckett for his work on the photo viewing platform by the lighthouse. As you know it was started by the Photo Club on our work day back in September.

Dallas, having seen what we were doing, took the initiative and did his magic, turning it into a wonderful vantage point not only for photographers and artists but for all St. Marks NWR visitors and guests.

We will have another photography show at the Leon County Senior Citizens Center, from Feb. 1 to March 18, 2011, it is entitled "Florida's Natural Beauty". Please drop by and see the wonderful photos; many will be of our own refuge. The Reception will be Friday, February 4, 6:00 to 8:30 pm.

The 2011 St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Photo Contest is under way. All entries must be **RECEIVED** via mail or delivery to the St. Marks Visitor Center by **January 16, 2011**. Judges will pick winners in the following categories:

***Wildlife** (all kinds, please take photo

from a safe distance.)

***People** (working or enjoying the refuge. **MUST HAVE A SIGNED MODEL RELEASE**)

***Landscape** (beautiful scenery and stunning vistas)

***Small Wonders** (wild flowers, insects, butterflies, spiders and other small plants and animals.)

***Altered photos**, (any photo that is noticeably altered will be judged in this category, judges will make the determination.)

Each photo submitted must have been taken on or of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in the past year by the person who enters it in the contest. There will be a \$10 entry fee for up to 3 photos (no entry fee for Young Nature Photographers 17 and under). Make checks payable to St Marks Refuge Association. Judges reserve the right to combine or subdivide categories, and judges will decide which category best suits each entry. Judges' decisions are final. Winners will be notified by mail or e-mail. For more information call 850-925-6121.

Winning photos of the 2011 Refuge photo contest will be displayed at the WHO Festival (Wildlife Heritage & Outdoors Festival) on February 5, 2011. Stop by and see the photos and come visit the Photo Club Booth for helpful tips.

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

**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: _____

The Blue
Goose Says
“HAPPY
HOLIDAYS!”



*The Blue Goose is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

