



"The Eagle's Eye"

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

Wildlife Heritage & Outdoors Festival

Attention outdoor enthusiasts! St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge will host the 4th annual Wildlife Heritage & Outdoors (WHO) Festival. Mark your calendars now for Sat. Feb. 6, 2010 from 11:00 am—4:00 pm. Regular admission to the refuge will apply.

Not only do we have many returning exhibitors from the first three years, we anticipate several new exhibitors this year. Over 49 non-profit organizations and clubs have been invited and confirmations have already been received by many. Exhibitors are selected to fit into the mission of this festival which is *to excite visitors to reconnect with nature and wildlife through a community celebration of nature's diversity and our local heritage.*

Not only will you have the opportunity to learn about and join local clubs and organizations, you will get to experience first hand outdoor activities too numerous to mention. There are scheduled tours and programs taking place that day. There will be plenty of fun for everyone. Kids can participate in hands on activities, Animal Olympics, and a youth turkey calling contest or duck calling contest.

Visitors can step back in time with living history exhibits, learn about hunting, fishing, hiking, kayaking, canoeing, photography and more. Make sure to mark your calendar now and plan to **come join the fun!**



On The Inside

Pg. 2 Refuge Managers Report
 Pg. 2 Environmental Ed. Update
 Pg. 3 Red-cockaded woodpeckers
 Pg. 4 Eye on Nature
 Pg. 5 Magnolia Cemetery
 Pg. 6 Calendar of Events
 Pg. 7 Map of St. Marks Unit
 Pg. 8 SMRA Banners / Volunteer Update
 Pg. 9 Fire Attention
 Pg. 9 Dormant Season Burns

Pg. 10 Levee Maintenance/Photo Club
 Pg. 11 On the Edge of the Refuge
 Pg. 12 Monarch Mania
 Pg. 13 Connecting Families to Nature
 Pg. 13 Book Nook
 Pg. 14 Association News and Update

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<http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks>

WINTER 2009 - 2010

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

I guess I should start with a Whooping Crane update. It looks like we should get 10 birds this year if all goes well on migration. I thank all of the volunteers that came out Saturday, November 14 to complete pen repairs. We had a good work day and are almost ready for the birds. Speaking of birds, last year's birds are beginning migration. Please call the refuge office if you see whooping cranes outside the refuge.

The refuge has entered an exciting phase. We have received permission to accept public comments on expanding our approved land acquisition boundary. This means that we are expanding the area approved for purchasing land. Unfortunately, this does not mean that we have additional funds to purchase the lands. We have to have an approved boundary expansion before we can request the funding so this

is the first step. We will be accepting comment on the expansion proposal until November 30. You can see the proposal on our web site or you can come by the refuge office to pick up a copy of the Environmental Assessment. Please send any comments to the refuge office.

I want to pass along to the St. Marks Refuge Association Members that I have nominated you for Friends Group of the year. However the selection process goes, I do appreciate the work you all do on the refuge and the advocacy you provide. I hope that you are recognized at the national level, but you are always winners in my opinion.

Come and visit your National Wildlife Refuge and watch the wonderful changes.

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 passes can be purchased for \$5 per car. 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 am to 4 pm Monday to Friday; and 10 am till 5 pm weekends. Closed on Federal holidays.

Lighthouse Drive- For casual observation, the Lighthouse Road provides many excellent stopping points along the 7-mile stretch of road from the Visitor Center to the St Marks Lighthouse on Apalachee Bay. Please observe the posted speed limit.

Restrooms - Located at the Refuge Visitor Center, Tower Pond/Mounds Trail and Otter Lake Recreation Area.

Picnic Facilities- Located next to Tower Pond Trail and Otter Lake.

Hiking- The fall, winter and early spring are the best times. Foot- and bicycle-traffic are allowed on trails. Guides 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 Visitor Center 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 June 1 for upcoming year's applications and permit information, or visit www.fws.gov/saintmarks

Environmental Education Update

Final numbers for the 2009 fiscal year were 9,509 participants reached in educational programs, a 15% increase from the previous year. Thanks to all those who helped make this possible.

This fall has certainly been busy with education programs and planning. This school year has started with transportation difficulties. Even with transportation scholarships, some schools have had to cancel field trips because of the exorbitant transportation costs. In some cases, we were able to go to the school when they couldn't come to us. This fall we were able to award 4 transportation scholarships to help aid schools in their travels to the refuge.

Teachers wishing to book a field trip for the spring will have until December 18th to turn in the scholarship application. If you know of someone who is interested please contact me via email

lori_nicholson@fws.gov or check the website for the application form.

Winning schools in the Coins for Cranes Contest were: Bucklake Elementary and Conley Elementary, with a total of \$786.00 raised.

Great Job!

Lori Nicholson
Environmental Education Specialist



Refuge adds to Red-cockaded woodpecker population

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge released five pairs of sub-adult red-cockaded woodpeckers into the refuge's longleaf pine forests between Sopchoppy and Panacea this October. This move was the latest in a series of similar projects to augment the refuge's existing population of this endangered species. Over the past eight years, 48 woodpeckers have been translocated to the refuge. The refuge's red-cockaded woodpeckers were nearly extirpated not long ago, reaching a low point of 3 single males in the 1980's. Today, there are over 60 adults in the population which has been growing at 10% yearly. Still one of the rarest birds on the continent, Red-cockaded woodpeckers have been brought back from the brink of extinction through intensive management such as these translocation events, creation of artificial cavities, planting and restoration of the longleaf ecosystem through frequent prescribed fire, thinning of dense forest stands, and hardwood removal.

The diminutive red-cockaded woodpecker (about the size of a bluebird) was once considered a common and noisy inhabitant intricately tied to the health of the great longleaf forest and savanna that blanketed the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains of the South. In fact, those fabled 90 million acres of longleaf pines that swallowed the first Conquistadores then built the post Civil War South was the land area equivalent to all of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina combined. Think of that the next time you drive I-75 or I-95 as the miles and hours tick by. Today's longleaf forest covers less than 3 million acres – an area roughly the size of the Orlando-Kissimmee metro area. Extending the

comparison to the comical, Orlando's most famous son, Mickey Mouse, oversees a kingdom of some 30,000 acres (of former longleaf pine forest) within the Disney entertainment complex, a figure that dwarfs (Dwarves?) the last remaining old growth longleaf forests in the world – all 12,000 acres of them.

Fortunately, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is located in the still beating heart of the remaining longleaf range and it is connected by agency partnership, proximity, and shared biological resources to the nation's largest remaining population of Red-cockaded woodpeckers anywhere – the Apalachicola National Forest. This national forest contains about 10% of all Red-cockaded woodpeckers range-wide and annually supplies upwards of 40 woodpeckers to smaller populations and reintroduction sites in Florida and surrounding states, which helps these populations overcome the effects of isolation and genetic bottlenecks.

To locate, capture and safely move dozens of individual Red-cockaded woodpeckers takes an enormous amount of coordination, sound knowledge of the species' habits, many miles of driving rough woods roads and sometimes a little luck. St. Marks was able to successfully conduct this year's translocation thanks to hundreds of hours of dedicated effort contributed to the project through the combined efforts of staff at the Apalachicola National Forest (US Forest Service), Panama City Field Office (US Fish and Wildlife Service), SERPPAS (Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability) and Disney Wilderness Preserve (The Nature Conservancy, TNC).



Jen Milikowsky with TNC & Disney Wilderness Preserve in preparation to release to two translocated red-cockaded woodpeckers.



Red-cockaded woodpecker banded and ready for translocation.

Did you ever eat “swamp cabbage”? It is made from the heart of the Sabal Palm tree, also known as the Cabbage Palm. When boiled and seasoned properly, it provides a healthy, tasty, cabbage-like meal. I am a fourth generation Florida “cracker” from Kissimmee and I feel right at home here on the refuge among the thousands of resident cabbage palms. My grandfather taught me to eat and enjoy swamp cabbage early in my life. He was a real Florida cowboy who rode his horse on the Kissimmee Prairie, rounding up cattle for a dollar a day in the early 1900’s. This was called “cow hunting” as there were no fences.

The cabbage palm grows to be over 50 feet tall. In its youth it is often confused with its cousin, the Saw Palmetto, which is also a tree. The Saw Palmetto tree trunk does not grow vertically into the air like the Sabal Palm, but lies flat and runs along the ground. It is easy to identify a palmetto from a young cabbage palm (see photos below). The heart of the Saw Palmetto is also edible.

My family’s recipe for swamp cabbage from the Sabal Palm follows:

UNCLE DEAN'S "CRACKER STYLE" SWAMP CABBAGE FIXINS

2 Swamp Cabbages (heart of Sabal Palm) (**NOT FROM REFUGE!**)

1 Large onion

4-5 Large potatoes

1 Chunk of fat-back (white bacon)

1 Gallon of water

Salt and pepper

Get you a pot big enough to hold one fair-sized she-coon. Cut up the cabbage but don't use the bitter end (taste it). Cut up the onion and potatoes and add the fat-back. Pour in the water, salt and pepper to taste. Boil 30-40 minutes. Goes good with Gramma Parker's cornbread.

By the way, the following photos show some differences between the Sabal Palm (swamp cabbage) and the Saw Palmetto.



Palmetto Leaflets branch like fingers.



Cabbage Palm Stem form a point at the end.



Saw Palmetto Stem (on the left) are barbed, and Sabal Palm Stems (on the right) are smooth.

What does this have to do with the digital photo classes that I teach the first Saturday of every month at 9:00 a.m. at the refuge? Well, it is one example of the natural history of plants on the refuge; a topic I like to teach along with the mechanics and techniques of digital nature photography. So, come on down to the refuge and we will take a walk behind the gates and take some pictures. The classes are free but reservations are required. Families are welcome. Call 925-6121 for reservations.

It is Halloween, a perfect time to visit a graveyard. A few miles from St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Ranger Andy Edel guides eighteen eager explorers through the woods. Remote, in this forest, long silent from the town that died young, stands the hand-wrought iron fence that marks the cemetery. Longleaf pines tower overhead, relics of the pine plantations of the past, valuable for both wood and turpentine. A tangle of vines and scrub tears at our arms and legs as we twist and turn our way along the path.

We stand at the site, and reflect on the history before us. Perhaps a dozen or so people lie at rest here. This is a territorial cemetery, a burial site for settlers prior to Florida statehood. The town was Magnolia, Florida, settled in 1827, by the four Hamlin brothers from Augusta, Maine, seeking a source of cotton for their cotton mill in the north. A few years later, the Ladds, nephews of the Hamlin brothers, came to the town. Florida and south Georgia cotton farmers took their cotton by wagon-loads to the river towns for export. The St. Marks River made transporting the crop by ship relatively easy, and Magnolia began to thrive. Several families also had a turpentine business in the area.



Old documents reveal interesting information. In its early days as a town, Magnolia had only two ordi-

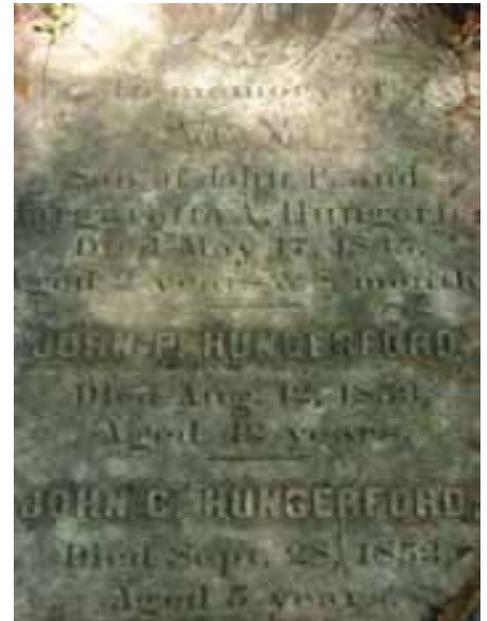
nances on the books: no cutting trees into the river south of town, and no dumping animal entrails into town streets. The town had several merchants: a general store, dry goods, drug store, bank, a newspaper, and a sawmill. A sulfur spring, still active and odiferous today, drew people for its supposed healing powers, and a hotel offered lodging close by. Seven schooners and one brig formed the town's transport fleet, owned by town residents. The settlers also established the town of Port Leon.

However, Magnolia's story was to be an abbreviated one. Yellow fever took its toll on the people in the town, and some grave markers indicate the death of young children. Competition from two other sister ports, St. Marks and Newport, together with the opening of the railroad and a Supreme Court decision involving the Spanish Land Grants, declaring the Magnolia families' land deeds to be invalid, led to the demise of the town by 1839.

Weld Hamlin (1805-1829) is reported to be the first person buried in Wakulla County commemorated by an existing grave marker.



One lighthouse keeper, Captain Hungerford, and his family are buried in the cemetery. Although the town itself was abandoned, burial of family members, other townspeople, and two Civil War veterans continued in the cemetery until the late 1869.



It is a haunting feeling to stand on this land, where the trees know the stories of who lived and died here, but we can only study what's before us, read spotty historical records, and imagine what it must have been like to live and work in this town. It is a fascinating journey through nearly two centuries, when our nation was young and about to meet its greatest challenge, the Civil War. The markers on the graves reveal the timeless values we all share on this human journey – grief at the loss of a child, a star 'too bright to be on this Earth'; people who lived good lives, worked hard, shared their love with others in their families; people who fought and died for their values and beliefs.

Calendar of Events Dec. 2009–March 2010

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

Sat. Dec. 12 - Early Winter Wildlife Tour with naturalist guide, Don Morrow to view the change of the seasons with birds, mammals, reptiles and plants. Please call to register for the 9 a.m. or 1 p.m. tour. Bring binoculars, bug repellent, water and field guides if you have them.

Sat. Dec. 19 - Photo Club - 9 a.m. until Contact President Tom Darragh for more information at thomasd@talstar.com

Sat. Dec. 26 - Families In Nature Self guided Family Discovery Scavenger Hunt, drop in anytime from 10a.m.—2 p.m. Come by the visitor center to pick up your form (traditional or GPS version).

Sat. Jan 2, 2010 - St. Marks NWR Photography Class - 9 a.m.-noon. For all levels of digital photographers! Reservations required. Class size limited.

Sat. Jan. 9 - Winter Wildlife Tour with naturalist guide, Don Morrow to view the change of the seasons with birds, mammals, reptiles and plants. Please call to register for the 9 a.m. or 1 p.m. tour. Bring binoculars, bug repellent, water and field guides if you have them.

Sat. Jan. 16 - Photo Club - 9 a.m. until Contact President Tom Darragh for more information at thomasd@talstar.com

Sat. Jan. 23 - Families In Nature Bring your family anytime between 10a.m.—2 p.m. to learn about Whooping Cranes.

Sat. Feb. 6 - 4th Annual Wildlife Heritage & Outdoors Festival (WHO) - 11 a.m.—4p.m. Bring the

entire family for fun and excitement. Lots of exhibits and displays for you to enjoy. Regular refuge admission applies.

Sat. Feb 6 - Winter Wildlife Tour with naturalist guide, Don Morrow. See Dec. 12 for more details.

Sat. Feb. 13 - St. Marks NWR Photography Class - 9 a.m.-noon. For all levels of digital photographers! Reservations required. Class size limited.

Sat. Feb. 20 - Photo Club - 9 a.m. until Contact President Tom Darragh for more information at thomasd@talstar.com

Sat. Feb. 27 - Families In Nature Bring your family anytime between 10a.m.—2 p.m. to learn about various birds.

Sat. March 6 - SMRA Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition with special field trips, starts at 9 with luncheon at 11:00 a.m.

Sat. March 13 - St. Marks NWR Photography Class - 9 a.m.-noon. For all levels of digital photographers! Reservations required. Class size limited.

Sat. March 13 - St. Vincent Open House. Call 850-653-8808 after Feb. 1 for more information.

Week of March 15– Wild About Wakulla Week. Call Refuge after March 1 for more details.

Sat. March 27 - Families in Nature Bring your family anytime between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to learn about Fantastic Flowers.

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 hours and late afternoon.

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.

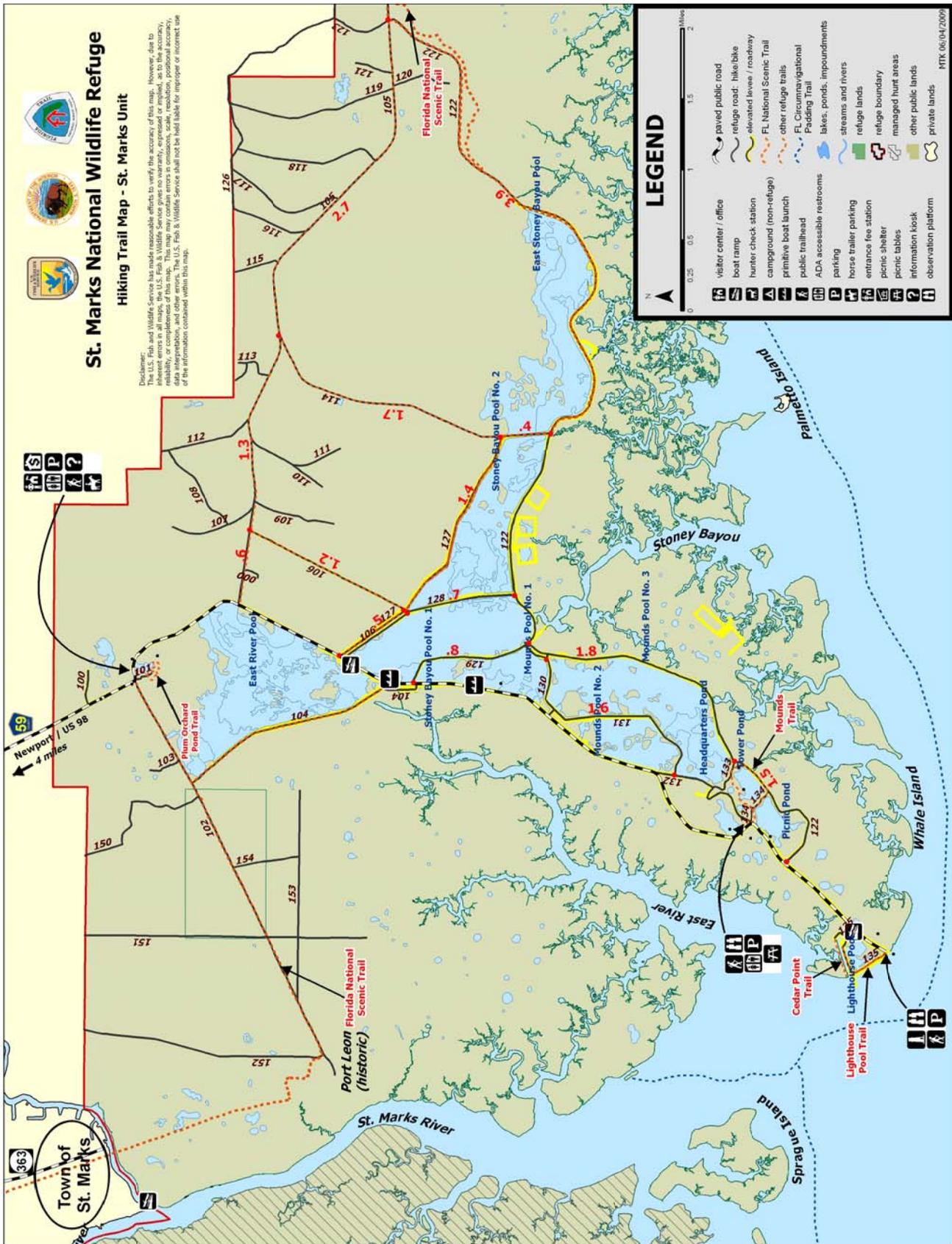
Dress appropriately

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.

St. Marks Map with Trail Numbers



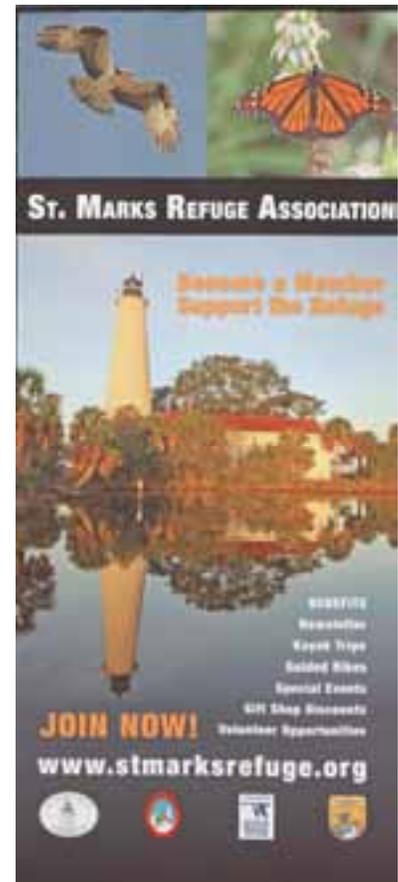
The St. Marks Refuge Association has partnered with two firms to produce new portable banners to display at special events at the refuge and to take to out-of-town conferences. Each banner is about six feet tall and three feet wide and retracts into a metal case when not in use. The case fits into a carrying bag for easy portability. The first banner produced is a membership banner encouraging viewers to join the Association to help support the refuge. It has photographs of the lighthouse, an osprey and a monarch butterfly, all icons of the SMNWR.

Tod Thomas of Thomas Duran and Associates designed the banner pro bono as his contribution to the refuge. Tod is a well-known graphics designer in Tallahassee. FastSigns in Tallahassee did the production work and consulted closely with volunteers to arrive at the right banner to attract new members to join the As-

sociation, the “friends group” for the refuge.

More banners are in the planning stages. One will feature the St. Marks Photo Club and will include more images of the beauty of the refuge. It will be used at meetings and conferences by photo club representatives. The third one will be a whooping crane banner for education specialist, Lori Nicholson, to use when teaching about the endangered whooping cranes that are now wintering at SMNWR.

Membership banner made its first debut at the Monarch Butterfly Festival held in October 2009.



Volunteer Update

We are finally getting some red and orange hues from the Sweet Gum and Maple trees. The St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge has had a fair amount of precipitation this growing season unlike many seasons before. Winds from the north are starting to descend our way, bringing cool fronts and drier air.

Birdwatchers are scouting the fringes; hikers and hunters are lacing up their boots; bicyclists are tuning their tire pressure; anglers are baiting their hooks; all coming out to enjoy their National Wildlife Refuge.

This hunting season, 2009-10, is the first for a new permitting partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. FWCC has

been issuing quota permits for many years and have new technologies at their fingertips. Over 1,400 individuals applied for almost 800 slots through this new system. Group applications were the only major change from previous year and we are trying to reprogram the system to once again allow groups to apply.

Volunteers are such a precious resource here at the refuge. We have several new additions in both local and RV ranks. Local volunteers that have been working during the week include Shadow Hibbard, Dede Wells, Janie Nelson, and many environmental education volunteers. We have one new RV volunteer couple and are welcoming back two couples that have been with us for years. Paul

David Moody

and Betty Hamilton are the new RV'ers, and the seasoned folks are Royce and Carol Phillips, Christine Barnes, and Gordon Perkinson. Pat and Ward New will be joining us again in the spring. We are excited to have everyone here this year.

Volunteer projects this winter :

- Manage hunt check stations
- Be a roving ranger during peak public use times
- Sign maintenance on primitive trails
- All visitor center operations
- Whooping Crane Pen Maintenance

Fire Gets Attention

The FWS Fire Program booth made an impression on professionals and college students attending the 2009 Society for American Foresters Convention in Orlando, Florida. Fire staff Greg Titus and Jennifer Hinckley from St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, and Jim Durrwatcher, Director of the Prescribed Fire Training Center, spent 3 days greeting hundreds of visitors and recruiting numerous students for potential employment.



FWS Fire Program Booth at the 2009 Society for American Foresters Convention in Orlando Florida.

“Our exhibit is by far a very good eye-catcher and has gotten a lot of good comments,” said Bob Eaton, Regional Fire Management Coordinator for the Southeast Region, who attended the convention. “Lots of folks here were not even aware we existed.”

The booth included a large full-colored background display, a table of informational materials, and a monitor showing a rotation of fire-related images in forested ecosystems on FWS lands and refuges. It was on display at the convention Sept 31 – Oct 2.

Jennifer Hinckley



Jennifer Hinckley greeting visitor at the 2009 Society for American Foresters Conference



Greg Titus and Jennifer Hinckley and their welcoming smiles.

Dormant Season Control Burning

It's that time again. The temperature is cooling off. The hardwood and cypress trees are losing their leaves. The fire management crew at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is preparing for dormant season control burning.

Much of Florida's natural landscape was shaped by fires caused by lightning and by Native Americans. As a result of these frequent natural fires,



the pinelands were open and relatively free of tall underbrush. Herbaceous plants eaten by wildlife were abundant. The wildlife in these areas is adapted to fire in the ecosystem. In fact, many of the plant and animal species are dependent on fire for their very existence. Careful use of prescribed fire techniques by the fire management staff helps to manage habitat. Wildlife will again be abundant and native wildflowers, grasses, butterflies and birds will flourish.

As a visitor or neighbor of the refuge, you will also derive several benefits from our prescribed fire program:

*The heavy build-up of fuel will be removed, thus reducing the threat of a destructive wildland fire that

Jennifer Hinckley



could damage your property or cause road closures and evacuations.

*Scenic vistas across the pinelands are being restored by removing much of the tall underbrush.

*Wildflowers, birds, fox squirrels, bobcats, butterflies, turkeys and other wildlife will be more readily visible.

Levees Maintenance and Importance

Jennifer Hinckley

When a visitor first encounters a section of the refuge where the St. Marks road maintenance or fire crews have been working, it is sometimes a shock. Grasses and trees may be burned or levees mowed clean, leaving this beautiful land looking changed and barren for a brief time. But these highly trained and experienced crew members manage the refuge roads and land as part of an extensive maintenance program.

One recent project helps to stabilize the impoundments, which are important for shorebirds and waterfowl in

migration. This autumn, the St. Marks Refuge road maintenance crew cleared and rehabilitated many of the levees south of the Visitor Center using heavy equipment. Originally these levees were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The crew removed large plants like cabbage palms, willows, and red cedars. These types of plants weaken the integrity of the dike through root growth and cause the grass cover to die out due to shading.

Once the large plants are removed, the crew then rehabilitated the levees by

grading, then planting rye grass to stabilize the soil. Soon the grasses on the dike will reestablish and the rough graded look will disappear. While the levees continue to function for years as an integral part of the refuge by being the Florida Trail, a road, a fireline and an impoundment for birds and other wildlife.

The next levee maintenance project will be the annual burning in early March to control the growth of woody plants and maintain the grass.

Photo Club Update

Thomas Darragh

The refuge photo contest is under way. Check out the rules and application on the Association website:

<http://www.stmarksrefuge.org/photocontest.cfm>

We will be running the adult and youth contest at the same time so get out and start taking photos. The entries will need to be turned in by January 17, 2010. We hope this will give our youth division some time to get out on their holiday break (maybe some will get new cameras this year!)

As always we want to encourage our youth to get outdoors and enjoy nature. The Photo classes and Club meetings are open to all ages and all levels of photography. We have fun and usually learn something without trying.

The photo club had a fun photo safari around Otter Lake in October; we took the tour wagon and about 30 people out on the trails. We also had a great time at the Monarch Festival; we had

cute little puppies try on our Monarch wings for photos.

Our Outdoors for the Holidays was a success with around 200 participants. Who enjoyed holiday treats, crafts and souvenir photos.

We have programs and safari's scheduled for the coming months so drop in and visit, the third Saturday of every month at 9am in the Education Cabin. December 19 we will be having an open house again starting at 9am, come by for a holiday treat and spend time out of on refuge.



We are starting to see ducks coming in, and several pairs of Bald Eagles. There is always something to photograph if you take your time to relax and enjoy your surroundings.

Keep checking the Association website for the posting of the Crane Cam, that will be on our own Class of 2009 Whooping Cranes. The camera is up and getting ready to go on line when the birds arrive. The Association website will post a link to the camera so you can watch our birds after they land.

The photo club would also like to wish our oldest member Hugh Horton a wonderful 95th Birthday! He resides in Panama City and is only able to attend a few meetings, but he is always a joy to have with us. Happy Birthday Hugh !!

Tom Darragh,
Photo Club President.
thomasd@talstar.com

Gloves or mittens? Mittens are supposed to be warmer, but my gloves were already in the pocket of my coat. Pulling up my collar and grabbing a knit hat, I hurried to catch up with my husband.....

January tides are always dramatic. And, today's low tide was spectacular. Where does all that water go? Every winter, Mother Nature seems to gather it up into her skirt and hide it, exposing the sandy bottom of Appalachee Bay. What is normally the private underwater realm of crab and scallop, suddenly calls out to we terrestrially bound beings, inviting us to venture away from the mundane. And, this was the perfect day to do just that. We started down the unpaved road, anxious to experience what had been hidden all summer.

Standing at the very end of the road, we could see every channel. They looked like long ribbons of wet hair resting on the newly exposed land. Here and there, tall barrettes of red and green held them firmly in place. My mind wandered to thoughts of summer; how we navigated those watery paths so carefully, fearing disaster if we strayed. Now it all seemed so simple, so orderly. And yet, if you looked closely, there were places where the water refused to be restrained, places where it had burst through and set out on a new direction. The storms of fall had encouraged them to venture out of bounds, hidden under the cover of the Bay. Next summer, their new avenues would confound those who had carefully hammered those markers into place last year. Yet, for any who would endure the cold, today a special winter preview lay completely exposed. We made a fast survey of the new water map, trying to quickly absorb each renegade nuance.....*disregard those markers, the new cut will be straight across now.....look how close to the shore the deeper channel really runs.....I'll bet we can take the boat around the other end of that oyster bar next summer.....* As we discussed our strategy, I noticed

a sandy path down into the newly surfaced Atlantis. It went right through the grass and led to a wide white band around our island. I climbed down the rocks to follow it. Would it be soft under my feet? Would it be slippery? I gingerly set my right foot down, like Dorothy as she began her journey on the yellow brick road. It was firm. I was free. I felt like a child who had climbed the fence and escaped from my yard. A brand new playground stretched in every direction before me. Which way should I go? A perfect scallop shell drew me to the right. Plucking it up from the surface, I turned it over and over in my hand. I was in the hidden realm. I breathed the cold air and joined the many wading birds who stood motionless, facing directly into the sunshine. Our shadows rested boldly behind us. My husband caught sight of us. He bounced through rocks and grass to join in. We walked right over to the edge of a major channel. Standing on the "cliff" of sand, I could see to the very bottom. Winter water is clean and clear. When Mother Nature pulls it in, she must sift out all the clutter from the summer months and slowly pour it back, pure and fresh. Energy renewed, it bounds forward.

Horseshoe crabs and detritus decorated the sand. Sea grasses lay neatly in piles, never needing mowing. I felt so small, walking easily under docks, gazing up at the houses high above me. This is what dolphins see as they make their fishing rounds on the changing tide. This is where the blue crabs hide, clutching at pieces of piling and grass. How funny we must appear to them, with our traps and nets, distorted alien life forms peering down through the salt water. Balancing on swaying wooden platforms atop tall wooden spindles. If our dry world suddenly flooded with water, would they choose to explore it? Would they feel the same joy I was experiencing, treading in their space? From under the docks, the barnacles were beautiful. I gently traced their smooth sides, careful not to slice a finger on their jagged

edges. Funny, but today they did not seem to be such a formidable menace. Somehow, it seemed "right" for them to rest upon the pilings, or cling to the bottoms of our boats. This was their home. Who were "we" to decide that they must be scraped and broken away from expensive possessions?

I turned to gaze across the new landscape. The exposed oyster bars stood as proud modern sculptures, adding impressionistic dimension to an otherwise flat domain. I could see the Lighthouse far across the Bay. It hovered, unattached to the land, like a mirage. Behind it, the trees that lined Lighthouse Road formed individual islands of vegetation, not unlike an ancient archipelago. Long before houses came to the edge of the refuge, Native peoples fished and foraged that land every summer. They harvested the oysters and netted the mullet. But, did they ever witness this winter miracle of the disappearing water? If they did, I wonder what they thought?

I still held the scallop shell in my hand. The tide was turning. Water slowly pulsed back into the Bay. Tiny fish forced themselves forward with it, anxious to reclaim their watery world. At times, they seemed to "wiggle" right across patches of slick mud to get to the shallow water. I glanced back at our footprints, still visible in the sand. We had not been the only creatures to experience the wonder that winter day. Raccoon tracks mirrored ours, step for step. Gulls, herons, and egrets had left their marks as well. We had all been part of the miracle. And, with the tide, any evidence of our presence would be gone. How fitting. I gently placed the shell down, exactly as I had found it. There it waits patiently for a new explorer to warm it on a spectacular winter tide.

Climbing up the rocks to the road, we stomped the sand from our shoes. I wonder what adventure awaits us tomorrow, on the edge of the refuge?

At St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, the fall is Monarch mania time. Driving along the refuge's Lighthouse Road, Monarch butterflies float and dance along the way. Sometimes they bob perilously close to the car – and then pop out the other side, unscathed. Monarchs in the butterfly, or adult stage of the life cycle, generally live only 4 weeks. However, the butterflies that emerge at this time of year are part of the “Methuselah” generation: they live for 8 months.

This extraordinary, specialized characteristic of the Monarch is not shared with other butterflies. Biologists believe it to be peculiar only to this species, and the longevity of the fall generation allows this butterfly to migrate for great distances, from the central and eastern provinces of Canada and the eastern and Midwestern United States, to the mountains of central Mexico. Where, at 10,000 feet on steep south-western slopes, millions of butterflies congregate in dense populations, awaiting spring, when they will make a return journey north and begin the complex cycle anew.

Over three thousand people visited the Monarch Festival to watch the Monarch feeding frenzy prior to the butterfly's long, migratory route across the Gulf of Mexico. Study of the Monarch's life cycle is relatively young, and many questions remain un-



answered. At the refuge and in other research and wildlife study sites, the Monarch Watch is

in process: researchers and volunteers carefully capture and tag Monarchs on their wings with tiny, numbered dots. Scientists track their behavior through the information on the tags.

The line of people at the lighthouse stretches for many yards, as families wait patiently. On this historic building's porch, one by one, trained volunteers and researchers tag a captive butterfly, then pass it carefully to a festival visitor to release with a wish on the wing.

On this spectacular blue and gold October morn, with orange butterflies bobbing all around the area, it may be that most of the festival visitors are unaware of the added significance of the day. It is October 24th, the International Day of Climate Action, also known as 350.org. In Tallahassee, with small, storm water control ponds and cute ducks paddling along in the background, five speakers deliver their message from different perspectives. A physician, a geologist, a city bureaucrat and others speak of the critical need to pay attention to the issue of climate change. A relatively small group of people, perhaps 100, more or less, young, old, every size and shape and color, listen intently, and collectively form a human 350 for photographers to send to the website and local papers.

Accompanied by a small band of guitars and other instruments, they sing together, “This little Earth's alive. We need to help it thrive.” Simple enough. No huge movement, just another very concerned group of people, hoping that their message will encourage more people and lawmakers to take this issue seriously. When scientists tell us that there is significant evidence documenting the effects of

REFUGE REGULATIONS

No Littering, 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.

Weapons, fireworks, or firearms are prohibited.

burning fossil fuels, that human-generated CO₂ is having a measurable impact on global warming, and that 350 is the most important number on Earth, the United Nations worldwide treaty on climate change should heed this call and respond in a responsible manner this December.

The Monarchs are flying over the Gulf this fall. So far. But the cool ecosystem in the mountains of central Mexico, so necessary for their survival, may be just another casualty of our continued choice to avoid responsibility for climate change. Is it so important to prove who is right, or who is wrong? Or is it important to do the right thing for this planet, and take personal and collective action to improve its climate?

Refuge active in Connecting Families To Nature

Attention families! Come to the refuge on the 4th Saturday of every month for a FREE family program. Each month focuses on a different subject with prize giveaways, scavenger hunts, crafts and other fun activities. Regular refuge admission applies.

- December— Family Discovery scavenger hunt
- January— Whooping Cranes
- February— Birds
- March— Fantastic Flowers
- April— Celebrate the Earth Day

Call the refuge for more information.



Ranger Bevis and guests at last year's Whooping Crane Families in Nature.

Also if you have toddlers in your family make sure and look for our new Tots on Trails to start in February. A great chance to bring your little ones out during the week and introduce them to the beauty of nature. Call the refuge in January for more details and to register.

Book Nook

The first week I worked at the bookstore, boxes of T-shirts arrived to be folded and priced. I think it was about all I did that day. I even dreamed about those shirts.

I brought the next shipment home and turned my dining-room table into a folding factory. I was slipping into a T-shirt coma.

Then an angel in the form of Lois Hostnick (seen below) came to my rescue.



Several women from the wonderful St. Marks Photo Club were at my place to plan our "Outdoors for the Holidays" event, and I mentioned what a chore it was to keep the T-shirts neatly stacked.

"I can help," Lois told me. It wasn't

an idle offer.

Lois has been coming down regularly, and it shows. The T-shirts are orderly, and I have more time to keep up with other things in the store. Before the Monarch Festival, she, along with and Jayne Parker, came to the rescue again, helping me get things ready for the throngs that showed up to shop and make it a very successful day for the store. Many, many thanks to them and others – Gail Fishman, Jane Storm, Carol Phillips, and, of course, master retailer Robin Will.

Get in the spirit

The store will be full of holiday cheer this year. We have some new Christmas CDs, -- "Celtic Christmas" and "Cozy Christmas," as well as some out-door-themed ornaments.

Keep the store in mind, when you're thinking about Christmas gifts. We have some new books – including "The Sibley Guide to Trees" that received a good review in Time magazine. If you're looking to put books under the tree, don't forget to add our own Andy Edel's "Historic Photos of Tallahassee" and Gail Fishman's "Journeys Through Paradise" to the list.

Janie Nelson

Beautiful nature photos, note cards and bookmarks from the St. Marks Photo Club would also make much-appreciated presents.

Other suggestions include field guides, children's activity books, T-shirts (We have some lovely new long-sleeved ones and a good selection in larger sizes.); mugs, jewelry, hats, totes and those ever-popular finger puppets and Audubon birds.

Bargain-hunters will be able to find special deals on out sale table. You can put together a very unique gift package for your friends, your children and their teachers without breaking the bank.

For those who have every thing, you also might consider giving a yearly pass or an association membership.

There are some extra special dividends that come with shopping at the association bookstore – you avoid the malls, and you get a chance to enjoy all that nature has to offer throughout the refuge.

Happy holidays!

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[Www.stmarksrefuge.org](http://www.stmarksrefuge.org)

Association News and Update

**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: _____

What a wonderful turnout for the Monarch Festival! The rainy summer brought forth abundant wildflowers and hundreds of butterflies arrived on time. It was the largest crowd we've ever had, about 3,500 visitors, and the weather was beautiful.

Last year we applied for two grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The first grant for \$5,000 was through the National Wildlife Refuge Friends Group Grant Program, to help us install a live video camera at the whooping crane pen. Volunteers and staff have worked many hours to ready the pen for the second class of cranes and the camera and all supporting equipment have been purchased and installed. We will have a live feed to our Web site and the camera will make it easier for the researchers to keep an eye on the cranes too.

The second grant, through the Preserve American Grant Program, was for \$15,000 to create and install a series of interpretive signs for some of the historical and cultural areas that are on refuge property. This project addresses a need from the refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan to inform the public aware of the long history of the land protected by St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. The signs and accompanying informational brochures will cover early Paleo-Indian occupation, the Civil War period, Goose Creek Seine Yard and other topics.

We wish to thank the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge Association, and National Audubon Society for awarding these grants to the association.

The 2009 class of young whooping cranes are on their way south and we are making plans to celebrate their arrival. That date is hard to predict but we'll do our best to inform everyone as the date draws closer. The association thanks everyone who has made a donation to the crane project and St. Marks Refuge Association, especially the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, Conley Elementary and Bucklake Elementary.

Gail Fishman
grtener@hotmail.com

Best Web site: <http://www.stmarksrefuge.org>