



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

JULY 2007 NEWSLETTER

▼ Home Page ▼ Behind the Scenes ▼ Bragging Rights ▼ Hats Off ▼ Photo Album ▼ Wage Grade ▼ Visitor Services



Debris from the hurricanes blown on to Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Brian Ellington.

After the storms: emergency recovery a team effort

When devastating storms struck the Southeast in 2005, Fish and Wildlife Service field stations took a major hit, particularly those along the Gulf Coast. Recognizing the extent of the damage, in 2006 Congress supplied more than \$132.4 million dollars in emergency supplemental appropriations for Southeast Region recovery. The task of ensuring that the recovery money is spent appropriately and within the specified timeframe has been delegated to an Emergency Recovery Team (ERT).

The full-time ERT is co-led by Jo Muratti of Contracting and Rick Huffines of Refuges and includes 14 other members from Engineering, Contracting, and Safety & Health. Upon formation in February 2006, the team was tasked with expediting the repair and re-construction of our affected field stations as quickly and safely as possible. The team committed to a goal of seeing that 90 percent of the funding for recovery construction contracts was obligated by June 30, 2007. The team reports to the Regional Director and Deputy RD through the Chief of Refuges and the ARD for Budget & Administration.



Clean-up underway at Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Brian Hardison.

“Our number one concern is seeing that the affected refuges and hatcheries are fully operational again,” says Jo. Rick agrees: “The field folks are doing all they can to get back to carrying out their mission. The role of the ERT is to help make the possible without sacrificing employee or public safety.”

Meeting the deadline for obligation of the funds is also extremely important. Jo explains, “Our credibility as a Region is at stake. If another natural disaster should occur before we’ve spent the money already appropriated, there’s a chance Congress will tell us to use what we have rather than giving us more. Really important projects could go unfunded in such a situation,” she says. This concern is underscored by the fact that another hurricane season is already underway in the Southeast Region.

By law, the emergency funds must be spent only to restore land, facilities, and equipment damaged or lost as a result of the storms. The funds may not be used to otherwise make improvements or upgrades unrelated to the storms. “The job of the ERT’s Project Validation Board is to ensure that our expenditures are proper and can meet the scrutiny of the Service, the Department, the Inspector General and Congress,” Rick says.

Jo attributes the successful operation of the team to the high degree of trust that exists among its members, allowing complex work to be accomplished in a short amount of time. Each team member has an important role to play. For example, since most of the

damage the Region incurred in hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma occurred on National Wildlife Refuges, Rick's role as a liaison to affected refuges has been essential. Similarly, Engineering/Contracting team members are providing the link to contractors that accomplish both designing and building of projects, an approach that saves time and money.

With the funds obligated, the work of the ERT centers on seeing projects through to completion. How would the ERT measure success? "By being put out of business, with every field station affected by the storms back on track, every penny of emergency funding spent, and every project completed," Jo and Rick agree.

ERT Team Members

Jo Muratti, Chief, ERT

Dale Bailey, Architect
Randy Brooks, Section Chief, Contracting & Finance
Billy Edwards, Civil Engineer
Dot Gibson, Administrative Assistant
Tyler Henderson, Construction Representative
Artela Jacobs, Contract Specialist

Rick Huffines, Chief ERT

Delano Jenkins, Construction Representative
Scotty McCollum, Construction Representative
Mac McCoy, Contract Specialist
Ron Parker, Construction Representative
Steve Sponaule, Contract Specialist
Lester Lewis, Contract Specialist

Submitted by Vicki McCoy, Special Assistant for Planning and Communications, Atlanta, GA

Recovery well underway at Sabine NWR, other refuges

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita did more than \$3 million in damage at Sabine NWR, irreparably damaging the office/visitor center and storage facilities; rolling up marsh like a carpet, leaving open water behind; and dumping a jumble of debris on the refuge that included hazardous materials, houses, boats, electronic goods and marsh grass.

The ERT has assisted the Refuge in making its comeback, obligating emergency funds for demolishing of condemned structures, replacement of water control structures, repairing of levees and canals, restoring marshes, cleaning up debris, rebuilding board walks and restroom facilities, and letting contracts for replacement of buildings.

In February, the ERT reported back to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans that, working with partners in the U.S. Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Service has cleaned up 36,000 acres of marsh at Sabine and two nearby refuges in just 3 months time. Elsewhere in Louisiana and in parts of Mississippi, 60 miles of canals have been restored and work is well-underway to repair more than 43,000 feet of levees, 22 water control structures, and nearly 200,000 feet of canals.

Submitted by Vicki McCoy, Special Assistant for Planning and Communications, Atlanta, GA

Behind the Scenes--



Sam, Becky, and Davis Hamilton.
Photo by Vince Mudrak.

Fishing, American tradition, next generation

Sam and Becky Hamilton, proud Grandparents of Davis Hamilton, participated in the “Kids Fishing for Fun Day” on June 9, at the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery in Georgia. Little Davis was introduced to the sport of fishing by his Grandfather, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Regional Director Sam Hamilton.

“Kids Fish for Fun Day” at Warm Springs is celebrated each year as part of the National Fishing and Boating Week Activities which are held throughout the nation. The 2007 event for was a huge success with over 300 children, ages 3 to 12, participating. The Friends of Warm Springs Hatchery, WenMarr Management, Wal-Mart All American Kids Fishing, Wal-Mart DC 6054, as well as many others, helped to make the event a fun experience. A live radio broadcast was made by Georgia Outdoor Radio Host Ken Hammock.

Children of all ages are encouraged to enjoy the many sights, sounds, and activities of the hatchery. Lazy alligators sunning, baby barn swallows hungry and waiting on momma to return, bumble bees buzzing, fuzzy baby geese waddling behind their parents, pretty goldfish ready to be fed, tanks with lots of fish, a nature trail, a carnivorous plant display, a pavilion, a boardwalk, purple martins dipping and darting to catch their next meal, a Great Blue Heron wadding on the pond bank ready to strike, these are just a few of the many facets of nature, visitors to the hatchery experience.



Fishing is fun for all ages. Photo
by Norm Heil.

“Opportunities such as National Fishing and Boating celebrations are vitally important to involving citizens in conserving our natural resources. In fact, a growing body of research shows a link between the attitudes and behaviors of adults toward nature and their direct interaction with nature as a child,” says Sam. “I’ll bet an overwhelming majority of us in the Service found our way into our careers in fish and wildlife conservation by way of our childhood experiences in the out-of-doors. Disconnecting children from all things electronic and getting them out into nature not only develops an awareness of the natural world that will last a lifetime, it also supports children’s physical development as healthy, active human beings.”

If you need a little time to “get back to nature” come on out to Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery.

Submitted by Rosla Plant, Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery, Georgia



Thom and Phil preparing the feast. Photo by Reg Gimás, Regina Aerocentre.

Service waterfowl survey crew give a shrimp feast in Canada.

Thom Lewis, St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge wildlife biologist, and Phil Thorpe, Division of Migratory Bird Management Central Flyway biologist, prepare a seafood feast for the Regina Aerocentre crew each year to say 'thanks' for making the Service feel at home in Canada. The Aerocentre is used as a base of operations while conducting Waterfowl Breeding Population Surveys each year. This year, Thom and Phil prepared fried shrimp, fried vegetables, shrimp dip and grouper dip. In the past, the feast has included a shrimp boil, Maryland crab cakes, and Thom's "Fur, Fins and Feather Gumbo." Everyone looks forward to this annual event.



Regina Aerocentre crew enjoying the shrimp feast. Photo by Reg Gimás, Regina Aerocentre.

Submitted by Thom Lewis, St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, Apalachicola, Florida

Bragging Rights --



The restoration area was along the hurricane protection levee at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Byron Fortier.

Students help restore marsh at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge

On May 30, 2007, approximately 30 students from Louise S. McGehee School in New Orleans spent the morning restoring a section of marsh at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. The marsh was damaged during the removal of a barge which floated in on Hurricane Katrina's storm surge. The marsh grass planting was one in a series of Community Service Days carried out by volunteers from the school. The students have logged over 2,500 hours of service in school projects including gutting flooded homes, hurricane restoration work at New Orleans' City Park, and joining with other area students to build a home through Habitat for Humanity. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Byron Fortier, Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, Lacombe, Louisiana



A local property owner tries his hand at dune planting. The Service provided plants and other supplies for the demonstration project. Photo by Dianne Ingram.

Daphne Ecological Services Office hosts dune restoration workshop

Friday at the beach? No, it wasn't an opportunity to sneak away from work...it was work. Really!

The Daphne, Alabama Ecological Services Field Office conducted a Dune Restoration Workshop on a sunny Friday in May to teach coastal landowners how to restore hurricane damaged dunes. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Daphne Field Office, the Baldwin County, Alabama Soil and Water Conservation District, and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service. Biologist Rob Tawes stressed the importance of restoring dunes, to both human and wildlife inhabitants of coastal areas. Participants were provided first-hand instruction in selecting and planting dune vegetation. Much of the information was drawn from lessons learned through previous projects conducted on public lands. This workshop focused on private landowners, and included information about a cost share program which can provide federal funding to aid in restoring dunes. Approximately 20 people attended.



Daphne Biologist Rob Tawes discusses the selection and planting of dune vegetation for restoration projects. With Tawes are Rhonda Bryars, Baldwin County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Larry Morris, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Submitted by Mike Groutt, Daphne, Alabama Ecological Services Office

Federal Financial System Refresher Training worthwhile

On April 24-26, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge staff welcomed 26 office personnel from across the Southeast Region, including representatives of Refuges, Fisheries, and Ecological Services offices. The successful refresher was given by Donna McElwee, Karmen Nicholson, and Buddy Jones of the Atlanta Regional Office. The Noxubee Refuge staff enjoyed having all the attendees visit and hopes they will return.



FFS Refresher Training attendees. FWS Photo.

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



Local, state and federal officials gather in the classroom at Wolf Creek NFH to meet with Congressman Ed Whitfield. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

Congressman Ed Whitfield visits Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

Congressman Ed Whitfield, serving Kentucky's First District, including Russell County, took time to visit with several local, state and federal officials during a visit to Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery on Tuesday, April 10. With the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Wolf Creek Dam Seepage Rehabilitation Project at the forefront, Mike Ensich, Chief of Operations for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District, and Tom Hale, Area Resource Manager, briefed the Congressman on the current status of the dam repair work. Whitfield also heard from several local government officials from Russell County, including Russell County Judge-Executive Mickey Garner; Russell Springs Mayor Hollis DeHart; Jamestown Mayor Brooks Bates; School Superintendent Scott Pierce; and

Russell County Tourist Commission President Jackie Burton. George Ward, Secretary of Commerce for the state of Kentucky, and Charles Bush, Head of Engineering for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, were also on hand to discuss their thoughts on the dam repair project with the Congressman and his staff.

During his visit, the Congressman also spoke with James Gray, Project Leader for Wolf Creek NFH along with Jerry Coleman, President of the Friends of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc., to hear their concerns and thoughts on how the dam repair work, most notably the lowering of the lake level, would affect hatchery operations. Whitfield also took time to tour the new Visitor/Environmental Education Center, and the Congressman's feedback on the new facility and the work Wolf Creek is doing were extremely positive.



Wolf Creek NFH Project Leader James Gray leads Congressman Whitfield on a guided tour of the new Visitor/Environmental Education Center. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

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



Kentucky Division of Forestry Rangers Kenny Pyles and Greg Parnell discuss planting needs for seedlings with visitors during the hatchery's Arbor Day/Earth Day Tree Giveaway. Photo by Reba Wagner.

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery hosts Arbor Day/Earth Day tree giveaway

With the arrival of spring, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery utilized the warm weather and the new Visitor/Environmental Education Center to make a winning combination for an event. Organized via a partnership endeavor between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Wolf Creek NFH, the Friends of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc. and the Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF), approximately 150 people enjoyed the first ever Arbor Day/Earth Day event at the hatchery. Participants were treated a wonderful mixture of trees, including pin oaks, red oaks, white oaks, bald cypress and pecan trees. Local KDF forest rangers Kenny Pyles and Greg Parnell provided invaluable planting information and guidance. Visitors also took time to explore the new Visitor/Environmental Education Center.

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

Savannah National Wildlife Refuge awarded conservation grant

Southern Company and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation recently awarded Savannah National Wildlife Refuge with a \$30,000 grant through their Power of Flight program. Refuge biologist Russ Webb wrote the grant proposal calling for the restoration of approximately 200 acres of degraded tidal freshwater wetlands within the refuge. The project involves cleaning the network of internal canals to improve water level and restore the ability to effectively manage and maintain the wetlands. The result will provide critical habitat for a variety of plants and animals, creating lasting benefits for wildlife and the public.



Refuge Biologist Russ Webb led a group of Southern Company employees on a tour of the Savannah NWR. They paused for a photo in front of a newly built rice field trunk with a few "residents" of the refuge. Photo by Patricia Metz.

Submitted by Amy Ochoa, Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, Georgia



Lots of fishing going on during the annual 21st Annual Catch a Rainbow Fishing Derby. Photo by Jeff Duffy.

Having fun and catching fish at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

After months of planning, there were nothing short of blue skies and jumping trout as Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery celebrated National Fishing and Boating Week with the 21st Annual Catch a Rainbow Kids Fishing Derby. The event, which began in 1986, has blossomed into one of the largest events of its kind in the entire country, and as in past years, volunteers and staff were excited for this annual day of food, fun, and fishing.

With plenty to see and do, the event is designed as a fun-filled way to get kids, aged from 1 to 15 years-old, outdoors and connected to fishing. Several booths and activities were provided for participants' enjoyment, including a boat simulator contributed by FLW Outdoors and shooting and archery sports through the local Ducks Unlimited chapter. Everyone enjoyed all the hotdogs, sodas, bottled water, cotton candy and popcorn they could eat, and each child was given a bag full of treats. Each participant five years of age and up had their choice of one of the following: a rod and reel, a tackle box, a sleeping bag, or a tent.

As in past years, the annual derby event was made possible through the generous support and contributions of many local, regional and national sponsors and businesses. For the 2007 event, 19 major sponsors donated at least \$1,000 in donations (either cash or items) while countless other organizations gave of their time and/or resources. The event also included the participation of over 130



The derby's younger participants enjoy their time at the kiddie pool area. Photo by Jeff Duffy.

volunteers as well, making it a true example of the positive benefits of partnering. Through such teamwork, an event with a value of \$35,953.87 occurred with little or cost to any one agency as donations for the event totaled at \$36,425.50.

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



Lighthouse Island, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Eric Shea.

Refuge visitors tour Cape Romain's Lighthouse Island

Refuge Volunteer Tommy Graham greeted the lighthouse tour participants as they arrived at the Sewee Center Sunday morning, April 22nd. Graham, who heads up the lighthouse restoration project, shared island history and showed old photographs of the lights and their keepers before the group boarded the refuge concessionaires Island Cat ferry to Lighthouse Island. After ferrying through the creeks and bays, sighting shorebirds and dolphins along the way, the group reached the island and walked up the narrow dirt path to the two historic lights. Accompanied by Graham, participants were able to enter the lighthouses and see the old brick and iron construction.

The 1827 conical lighthouse stands at 65 feet. Its light was visible for a distance of about 14 miles. In 1857, the 150-foot, octagonal lighthouse was built. Installed on the 150-foot tower was a lens that was visible for approximately 19 miles. The 1857 light was taken out of service in 1947 when coastal navigation techniques made it obsolete. Both lights are a significant maritime landmark and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The 1827 lighthouse is the oldest of its kind still standing in the United States.

Submitted by Patricia Lynch, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina



Participants enter the 1857 lighthouse. Photo by Ray Paterra.

Record catch for the sixth annual Banks Lake Youth Fishing Derby

On June 9, approximately 70 children caught over 1,200 hundred fish in the sixth annual Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge Youth Fishing Derby in Lakeland, Georgia. Heavy rains caused the event to be postponed a week, but that didn't dampen the children's spirits or their fishing aptitude, making this year's catch a record. Participants fished, participated in a casting competition, grunted worms, painted art on t-shirts, took the Fish ID Challenge, and ate lots of hot dogs. Bowen's Mill Fish Hatchery stocked the city-owned Flatlander Lake last fall, under the agreement that the city would take over feeding and care of the fingerlings and fry until the Fishing Derby. This popular event was made possible by the combined efforts of staff and volunteers from the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Okefenokee



The Valdosta Bass Federation volunteers weighed the fish while refuge staff and volunteers recorded the totals. Photo by Sallie Gentry.

Wildlife League, City of Lakeland, Valdosta Bass Federation, Lanier County/Lakeland Chamber of Commerce, Diamond Eagle Marine, and many others.

Submitted by Sallie Gentry, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Folkston, Georgia



Chyeanne Grooms proudly displays her catfish catch. Photo by Leslie Poston.

Sewee Center hosts Youth Fishing Rodeo

Zing!! Zing!! The small reels chimed as children excitedly threw their lines in the water in hopes of catching catfish and taking home not only their fish, but prizes as well. Saturday, June 9, was the annual Youth Fishing Rodeo at the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center in Awendaw, South Carolina, and 87 children were gathered around the Sewee pond. Under the Fish Art tent, Sewee staff and volunteers assisted children as they creatively designed and painted their "reel" fish print tee shirts, using their own catch or the black bass, spot, and croakers provided by the Center. At morning's end, prizes were awarded for the largest and most fish caught. For all age categories, Dakota Linderman, aged 6 years, caught the largest fish, a 4 1/2 lb. catfish. The prize for the most fish caught by families went to Kallie and Chase Conner; together they reeled in almost 7 lbs. of catfish. All total, the children caught a whopping 152 lbs. of fish and all were declared winners, taking home fish, tee shirts, and a bag filled with fishing paraphernalia. We would like to thank Georgetown's Sampit Bassmasters which served the children and their families a hot dog lunch, donated by the Cape Romain Refuge and Francis Marion Forest friends group, the SEWEE Association. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Patricia Lynch, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina

Out with the old, In with the new

No, we are not talking about a New Year Celebration. This is the long-awaited beginning of the construction of the ARM Loxahatchee Visitor Center and Administration Building. In order to start, it meant the end to the old buildings.

Demolition of the ARM Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge hurricane damaged headquarters and visitor center began with the rumble of treads and the slam of the backhoe's shovel into the side wall of the headquarters building on April 16, 2007. Within what seemed like seconds, huge sections of the building were no longer there. In hours, all that remained of the old administration building was a flat area on stilts. This is the area that will be converted into an overlook. It will overlook the Compartment C area that contains the Marsh Trail, a series of public trails that visitors can walk to view some of the extensive wildlife of the Everglades.

One week later, on April 23, the demolition continued with the shovel crashing through the Visitor Center. One day later, the old Visitor Center was almost gone. The day after that, it was completely gone. Its foundation will also be used as the base for an overlook in the Cypress Swamp.



New Visitor Center and Headquarters building. Artist rendering property of FWS.

With these two buildings eliminated, the real work building the new Visitor Center and Admin building has begun. The construction site was leveled and prepped for the new building. Next, the concrete base for an elevator and the foundation will be poured and the “real” construction will begin. We are all anticipating next year when we can move on in to a state of the art facility!

Submitted by Chuck Ryan, ARM Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida



Ralph Weatherly and Ken Cherry working in the Millennium Forest. Photo by Hilary Anderson.

Millennium Forest at Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

The Millennium Forest, a partnership project between Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Pocosin Arts, and Tyrrell County Schools in the Columbia, North Carolina area, was inspired by Feather Phillips, director of Pocosin Arts. In 2000, a remarkable number of school children and adults gathered to begin planting Atlantic white cedar seedlings in the forest. Since then, many of the cedars have grown significantly, demonstrating their ability to take hold on the site chosen for the Millennium Forest. The forest is beginning to assert its presence in its location one mile south of Columbia. Many of the trees have promising seeds. But, other species have also made a presence. Faster growing Loblolly Pines and Wax Myrtles spread quickly and threaten to shade out the Atlantic White Cedars. Recently, people in the community have helped remove much of the unwanted growth from the forest. Eleven volunteers and a Fish and Wildlife Service intern, Hilary Anderson, have contributed more than 100 hours to the forest project. The volunteers involved include: Wayne Wisner, Joey Edwards, Alex Simmons, and Josh Bonville of Columbia High School's Earth Science Class; Boy Scouts Chris Brickhouse and Zach Cuthrell, their leaders Arni Hopkins and Allen Lee; Ken Cherry and Ralph Weatherly of Columbia; and Andy Bartley of Edenton. . Recently, people in the community have helped remove much of the unwanted growth from the forest. As they cleared space around each Atlantic White Cedar, the forest display changed. Many junipers that were unable to be seen amongst the encroaching pines and shrubs, are now in clear view. Hopefully, with continued management and community support, the Millennium Forest will be a desired destination for people to visit a unique and valued ecosystem.

Atlantic white cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*) is a valuable resource that once flourished throughout this swampy landscape. The Nature Conservancy has designated the Atlantic white cedar ecosystem as globally threatened. Its massive decline is due to its high value as a wood product, being light in weight and insect- and rot-resistant. It's been used for building ships, shingles, fence posts, and many other products. The disappearance of most Atlantic White Cedar swamps has inspired much research and effort in the conservation and restoration of the forests that remain, and in planting new forests. People are working to bring back this tree as a valuable resource and a crucial link in the landscape. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Hilary Anderson, Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Columbia, North Carolina

Leadership group plants native shrubs and trees to restore Shell Mound Trail at J.N. 'Ding' Darling

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers -South Florida Water Management District leadership group of 22 people participated in a debris and exotic removal and native plant restoration project at Shell Mound Trail on June 21. The highly motivated group removed dead and downed debris remaining from Hurricane Charley and exotics such as arrowhead vine, Mother-In-Law's tongue and hundreds of royal poinciana seedlings and saplings. Two dump trailers of debris and exotics were removed. In addition, the group planted 40 native shrubs and trees in several locations where exotics had been removed by prior church, conservation, and volunteer groups. The project was coordinated by the Southeast Region's Invasive Species Strike Team Leader Bill Thomas, Jr., with assistance from 'Partners' Field Technician Toby Clark.



Exotic royal poinciana seedlings pulled from areas adjacent to the Shell Mound Trail parking lot. Photo by Toby Clark.



COE-SFWMD Leadership Group participants - Shell Mound Trail project. Photo by Toby Clark.

Submitted by William Thomas, J.N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel, Florida

Sturgeon "samaritans"



Perry Dent, Charlie Platt (in airboat), Jamie Riely, and Robert Paul herd sturgeon into the block net. Photo by Frank Parauka.

Last month, the Panama City, Florida Ecological Services and Fisheries Field Office responded to a call from the Alabama Department of Natural Resources reporting that boaters saw Gulf sturgeon stranded in a stretch of the Choctawhatchee River. Their possible plight stemmed from the very low water conditions caused by the ongoing drought. These "Sturgeon Samaritan" boaters, however, were not of the conventional breed! On June 15, we embarked on a sturgeon rescue mission using Airboats to jump logs, sandbars and navigate the shallow river. Seven sturgeons were located in a 100-yard stretch of river with upstream and downstream access restricted by shallow water. However, the fish were in no danger as river depth, flows, and dissolved oxygen were adequate to maintain the fish. With the help of the "Sturgeon Samaritans" herding the fish into block nets, we were able to collect and tag several sturgeons. The boaters vowed to shepherd the sturgeons and keep us updated on their activities.



L to R: Perry Dent, Frank Parauka (FWS), Charlie Platt (kneeling), Jamie Riley, Lowell Williams (Alabama Department of Natural Resources) and Robert Paul with 45-lb Gulf sturgeon. Fish was tagged and released. Photo by Terry McCall.

Submitted by Frank Parauka, Panama City, Florida Ecological Services and Fisheries Field Office

Smoothing the way for preservation of a rocky species



Lora Zimmerman, USFWS Biologist, Charleston Field Office (left foreground) with Rocky Shoals Spider Lily survey crew, Congaree River, Columbia, S.C. during a recent survey trip to locate, count and map the spider lily populations of the river. Credit: Andy Cabe, Director of Horticulture, Riverbanks Zoo & Garden.

During the months of May and June, some of South Carolina's rivers are aglow with a rare beauty that inhabits the rockiest of environments on the waterway – the Rocky Shoals Spider Lily. A dwindling species, the Rocky Shoals Spider Lily is currently a Federal Species of Concern and is listed as Endangered by the state of Georgia. Confined to the rocky shoals of only a few river systems, the majority of this plant's habitat in South Carolina has been lost or degraded by the alteration of river flow regimes brought on by dams and reservoirs. A unique group of individuals have joined forces to work together on the preservation of this species. Representatives from the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the University of Georgia, Riverbanks Zoo & Garden, the City of Columbia, and South Carolina Electric & Gas are working together to document existing populations of the lily and explore areas suitable for potential reintroduction. Efforts to address changes to river flow regimes are being handled through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing process and will seek to improve habitat conditions for the spider lily. A spectacle to behold, the Rocky Shoals Spider Lily adds a sense of grace and elegance to the few rocky

waterways fortunate enough to bear them!



Rocky Shoals Spider Lily, Congaree River, Columbia, S.C. Credit: Andy Cabe, Director of Horticulture, Riverbanks Zoo & Garden

Submitted by Jennifer Koches, Charleston, South Carolina Ecological Services Field Office



Service exhibit during World Ocean Day. Photo by Judy Toppins.

Regional Office employees participate in World Ocean Day at the Georgia Aquarium

The Georgia Aquarium packed a full house during its first World Ocean Day Celebration which took place on June 8. By 3: p.m., 8,400 guests had entered the aquarium and many made their way to the Ocean's Ballroom where the event was held. One of the themes of the event was invasive species and the Service's exhibit focused on the dangers of discharging unwanted plants and animals in the environment. Many parents indicated they did not realize pet fish, reptiles and aquatic plants can wreak havoc on our environment if not disposed of in the proper manner. The Habitattitude exhibit fit well within the invasives theme and both kids and adults were lined up for fish tattoos, floating fish key rings, and luggage tags depicting popular species, while they learned about the dangers of invasive species in the environment. This event was a good example of cross-program cooperation as volunteers Judy Toppins and Jay Troxel represented Fisheries, Shari Brewer represented Federal Assistance and Liz Chebib represented External Affairs. The Service is a key partner in the Habitattitude initiative. To learn more, visit: <http://www.habitattitude.net>

Submitted by Shari Brewer, Federal Assistance, Atlanta, Georgia



Male loggerhead sea turtle. Photo by Michelle Pate.

Cape Romain's turtle crew rescues male loggerhead

On May 16, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge volunteers and staff working with the Cape Island Turtle Project were heading back to the mainland when they noticed a disturbance in the water. A large Loggerhead sea turtle suddenly broke the water's surface, gasping for air and struggling with a rope wrapped around its flipper. Rope from an old crab pot was wound around the turtle's left front flipper, leaving a deep gash and entangling the turtle between a buoy on one end of the rope and the metal pot on the other. The turtle crew first tried to free the male loggerhead but, realizing the extent of its wound, they towed the 300- pound turtle to shore.

The loggerhead is now at the South Carolina Aquarium where it will be rehabilitated to be released back into the wild. Kelly Thorvalson, Sea Turtle Rescue Program coordinator, said the rope did not cut down to the bone, and the flipper can be saved. It is the first adult male sea turtle to come to the aquarium. Once born, male Loggerheads do not return to the shore, so seeing an adult male loggerhead is a rarity. In 2006, refuge staff rescued Lighthouse, a juvenile male loggerhead, on a sandbar off of Cape Romain's Lighthouse Island. Emaciated and covered with barnacles, the young turtle was taken to the aquarium's rehabilitation center where he was diagnosed with debilitated turtle syndrome, a condition believed to be caused by toxin overload and parasites. Fully recovered, Lighthouse returned to the sea this spring. Cape Romain's Cape Island is home to the largest nesting population of the northern subpopulation of Loggerhead sea turtles in the southeast. The northern subpopulation consists of Loggerheads which nest from North Carolina to around Cape Canaveral, Florida. With an average of 1,000 nests per year, Cape Island is the most significant Loggerhead nesting beach north of Cape Canaveral.

Submitted by Patricia Lynch, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge implements burnout to assist on Big Cypress Complex containment

On May 29, the fire crews at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and Big Cypress National Preserve worked together to help contain the Big Cypress Complex wildfire, a raging 63,599-acre fire. With critical strategic planning and collaboration, it was decided that the best method to help stop the western advance of the fire would be to burn out approximately 2,200 acres of pinelands on the refuge. It took two evenings of hand ignition to secure the western most line and then aerial ignition was used to complete the burn out on Thursday, May 31. This operation critically helped the Interagency Type 1 Interagency Incident Management Team (Whitney IMT) change focus to check the fire's northern boundary which was advancing toward private and Bureau of Indian Affairs properties. More photos in [Photo Album](#).



Florida Panther NWR employees Frank Connor(L) and Wes O'Connor(R) work on controlling a mow-line during the burnout. Photo by Josh O'Connor.

Submitted by Josh O'Connor, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Naples, Florida



Short-eared owl. FWS Photo.

Vieques National Wildlife Refuge celebrates International Migratory Bird Day

During the last week in May, the Puerto Rican Ornithological Society and the Puerto Rico Dept. of Natural and Environmental Resources teamed with the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge to teach the Vieques community and tourists about Vieques birds. We spent an evening learning about Vieques nocturnal birds. During an evening walk, we spotted one Short-eared owl hanging around Camp Garcia and heard a lot of Antillean Nighthawk activity at the former Navy airstrip. Early, the next morning, we hiked up Mt. Pirata, the highest peak on the island, and spotted various endemic birds such as the Puerto Rican woodpecker, Puerto Rican flycatcher and the Adelaide Warbler. We also heard or spotted the Zenaida and White-winged dove, Bananaquits, Mangrove Cuckoos and Smooth-billed Ani, and the Caribbean Elaenia. Later that evening, we had a presentation about global warming and concluded with Ice Age II for our younger audience. More than 100 people participated.

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

Vieques youth conserve natural resources

This year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employed 12 youngsters, aged 15-18, and a supervisor for the Youth Conservation Corps, (YCC). Since late May, these youngsters have carried out a series of maintenance activities and other duties at the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. In addition, they have participated in educational activities related to capturing and identifying bat species that are found on the refuge. They also have helped Officer Wolfrom remove illegal land crab traps in prohibited areas. Their most fascinating activity has been saving a leatherback sea turtle nest with Mr. Julián Garcia, director of the TICATOVE program, a Vieques Conservation non-profit group.



Xhaomi Torres with baby leatherback sea turtle. FWS Photo.

"I am very thankful for the opportunity given to me by the Service and the YCC program. It is of great satisfaction to be able to work for this program, while learning and conserving the environment," said Xhaomi Torres, a YCC participant. "With the money, I am going to buy everything for my newborn baby."

Submitted by Xhaomi Torres, YCC, Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, Puerto Rico

Hats Off --



Lewis Brown. Photo by Tom MacKenzie.

Lewis Brown, Jr.: Helping People

Lewis Brown, Jr. has a simple philosophy – help people and be happy.

He has focused on that goal throughout his federal career of 20 years in the U.S. Army and eight years with the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service. He served in multiple Human Resources management positions during his military years because he enjoys the fulfillment of helping people.

“I have always stressed that in order for people to be able to accomplish their missions successfully, we must complete their request in a proficient and timely manner, says Lewis.

Everybody who comes in contact with Lewis is also always greeted with a friendly hello and a smile.

As a staff member in Human Resources Labor and Employee Relations Branch, Lewis assists with financial disclosure reports, employee performance appraisal plans, the CC Program, and security background investigations. He also handles the transportation subsidy program and the fitness reimbursement program and coordinates special emphasis programs such as Black History Month.

Four years ago, Lewis increased the Service’s community involvement by starting our annual Thanksgiving food drive. Employee contributions are given to the Atlanta Food Bank. He also coordinates the Service’s Holiday Angel Tree program which now serves 150 to 160 children from homeless and battered women shelters each year.

Lewis is originally from Rolling Fork, Mississippi, a community close to Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge. He enlisted in the Army as a private after graduating from high school. He was stationed in diverse locations - - Alabama, Germany, Italy, Alaska, and Georgia. He served in Germany twice, and he says he enjoyed it the most.

“It was easy to adapt to the language and customs there, and a lot of people spoke English,” says Lewis. “I enjoyed the yeager-snitzel (a dish with pork, noodles, mushrooms and gravy).”

He also admitted he liked driving on the German autobon (expressway) because there were no speed limits.

Lewis retired from the Army in 1997. Instead of buying a retirement gift for himself, he took a year off from doing anything and just relaxed. Lewis came to work for the Service in 1999. He is currently a Junior at Saint Leo University, with a GPA of 3.67 pursuing his Degree in Human Resources.

He and his wife Rose have two grown sons - - Lewis D. Brown III and Prentiss D. Brown who both live in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Lewis and Rose are expecting their first grandchild in February - - perhaps Lewis Brown IV.

Submitted by Elsie Davis, External Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia

Photo Album --

Photo Album --

Students help restore marsh at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos



L to R: Louise S. McGehee students Allison Slatton, Mary Margaret Wilbert, Betsy Wagner, and Jeannie Reiss. Photo by Bryon Fortier.



A pleasant spring day for New Orleans - temps in the low 80's. Photo by Bryon Fortier.



Asst. Refuge Manager Shelley Stiles directed the planting activities. Photo by Bryon Fortier.

Sewee Center hosts Youth Fishing Rodeo -- more photos



Colorful fish art tees hang out to dry. Photo by Pat McCormick.



Kallie and Chase Conner with friend Dylan Skipper are intent on catching the big ones! Photo by Leslie Poston.



Ian, Quentin and Ebony McCormick are all smiles - Ian and Quentin received prizes for largest fish in their age category. Photo by Leslie Poston.



"Largest Fish" prizewinner Dakota Linderman with pup Bandit head home with a new rod-n-reel and huge sack full of fishin' stuff. Photo by Leslie Poston.



Sampit Bassmasters Volunteers serve a hot dog lunch. Photo by Pat McCormick.

Millennium Forest at Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos



Photo show Columbia High School students working in the forest.
Photo by Hilary Anderson.



Photo shows Columbia High School students working in the forest.
Photo by Hilary Anderson.

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge implements burnout to assist on Big Cypress Complex containment -- more photos



Aerial view of the burnout on the corner of I-75 and State Rd 29.
Photo by Jim Durrwachter.



Nighttime fire activity on the Florida Panther NWR burnout. Photo by Josh O'Connor.



Justin Mason (South Arkansas Refuges) carries the driptorch while Frank Connor and Wes O'Connor (Florida Panther NWR) patrol the edge of the burn. Photo by Josh O'Connor.



PJ Stevko (Florida Panther NWR) directs a helicopter drop on the burnout. Photo: by Josh O'Connor.

Visitor Services --

Waccamaw honors partners who contributed to Cox Ferry Recreation Area



Refuge Manager Craig Sasser and NWR Volunteer of the Year Marion Sansing. Photo by Karen Beshears.

The Cox Ferry Recreation Area at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge is expected to open to the public this September when construction of boardwalks and a parking area are complete. On May 8, refuge staff recognized their many community partners who helped make the project a reality.

The morning of the event began with a pair of swallow-tailed kites circling the volunteers as they set up for the event. The kites were followed by several large groups of wood storks and a pair of Canada geese, all signs that this would be a very special day. Marion Sansing, National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer of the Year, spoke about the importance of partnerships to National Wildlife Refuges. Refuge Manager Craig Sasser presented plaques to each of the partners in recognition of their efforts toward the Cox Ferry Recreation Center.

The possibility for the Cox Ferry Recreation Area began with the opening of a new Bass Pro Shops retail store in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 2005. Local refuges and the Charleston, South Carolina

Ecological Services Office in helped Bass Pro Shops with the grand opening, and Greg Martin, the store manager, designated Waccamaw as the recipient of their Conservation Award. Greg grew up on the Waccamaw River, and he asked that the donation go towards a public use facility on the refuge. The overall donation was \$35,000 and it was matched by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation bringing the total donation up to \$58,000! Additional monetary donations towards this project were made by Anheuser Busch and the City of Conway bringing the grand total up to \$87,500. The SEWEE Association, which serves as Waccamaw's Friends group, managed the finances throughout the life of this project.



Refuge partners during ribbon cutting. Photo by Karen Beshears.



New kiosk. Photo by Karen Beshears.

In 2006, Centex Homes became involved with the refuge through a land acquisition project being developed by The Conservation Fund. Later, Centrex Homes offered to help with the construction of the Cox Ferry Recreation Area. The company brought in several partners to help with developing a master plan, engineering, design services, and construction crews to help build the first two structures, a weather shelter and a kiosk. In addition to the project construction, Centex Homes had a Staff Volunteer Day, held on May 4, to help plant trees, install signs and assist with landscaping prior to the event on May 8.

Submitted by Marshall Craig Sasser, Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge, Georgetown, South Carolina

Wage Grade Profile --



Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery
Motor Vehicle Operator Wayne Rich. Photo by Sheila Kirk.

Wayne Rich: Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery

Wayne Rich has worked at the Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery in Tennessee for 20 of his 23 years of federal service. He has seen many changes, including a raceway expansion and working under three different hatchery managers. After all this time, Wayne says "I still enjoy my job."

Even though Wayne's official title is Motor Vehicle Operator, he wears many hats around the hatchery. Besides trout culture and fish distribution, Wayne is responsible for much of the maintenance duties at the hatchery, as well as SAMMS data entry. Wayne's years of dedication and hard work have recently been recognized. He is a 2007 recipient of the Regional



Wayne doing SAMMS data entry. Photo by Sheila Kirk.

Director's Honor Award

Wayne's personal interests include Civil War history, keeping up with his favorite sports teams, and harvesting the common snapping turtle for a rare southern fried treat. Wayne lives in Celina, Tennessee, with his wife Dolores. They have two grown sons, Marty and Joey, who also reside in Celina.

Submitted by Sheila Kirk, Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery, Celina, Tennessee