



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

APRIL 2009 NEWSLETTER

<input type="checkbox"/> Home Page	<input type="checkbox"/> Behind Scenes	<input type="checkbox"/> Bragging Rights	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends Group	<input type="checkbox"/> Hats Off	<input type="checkbox"/> I Gave '8'	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo Album	<input type="checkbox"/> Wage Grade	<input type="checkbox"/> Visitor Services
------------------------------------	--	--	--	-----------------------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-------------------------------------	---

Duke Energy will give \$1 million to help combat effects of climate change

Duke Energy will give \$1 million to help a fragile coastal North Carolina peninsula adapt to climate change, The Nature Conservancy announced in North Carolina on Mar. 3, 2009.

“This is valuable work that will help all of coastal North Carolina and the country adapt fragile coastal areas to rising sea levels,” said Duke Energy CEO Jim Rogers. “This is the kind of groundbreaking research that helps us learn more about climate change and will make a positive difference in our future.”

The refuge sits on the 2,100-square-mile Albemarle Peninsula, just inside the Outer Banks. The peninsula has very high vulnerability to sea-level rise, one of the hallmarks of climate change, the Environmental Protection Agency said in a January report.

“The Nature Conservancy and its conservation partners have a big investment in the Albemarle Peninsula, protecting more than half a million acres there in 30 years of work,” said Katherine Skinner, executive director of The Nature Conservancy’s North Carolina Field Office. “Duke Energy’s generous gift will help us protect that investment against rising sea levels.”

About two-thirds of the peninsula is less than five feet above sea level. Erosion is gnawing away up to 25 feet of shoreline a year.

Rising sea levels have already changed the area, which is valuable habitat for an array of wildlife, including black bears, red wolves and migratory songbirds. Peat soils are degrading, and plants and trees have died as saltwater has pushed into the area.

In less than 100 years, accelerated climate change and sea level rise is predicted to turn half of Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge’s 152,000 acres into open water.

“Man-made ditches dug years ago to drain the low-lying land are growing wider nearest Albemarle Sound,” said Mike Bryant, Project Leader, North Carolina Coastal Plain Refuges. “Forests are dying and changing to marsh as saltwater creeps farther



Ditch at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. This is the type of ditch that is leading salt water into the refuge. Photo by Debbie Crane, The Nature Conservancy.

inland.”

"All we want to do is make sure the rate of change isn't being accelerated by man-made features like the ditches," Bryant said. "Devices to manage the flow of water in the ditches will help restore the natural hydrology."

Adaptations will include planting marsh grasses and restoring wetlands as a buffer to rising sea levels and building oyster reefs to absorb wave activity. It will also include plugging canals and ditches to restore the region's natural hydrology and limit saltwater intrusion.

North Carolina's coast is considered particularly vulnerable to climate change because it is so long and flat. A 2008 study by the University of Maryland identified North Carolina's coast as one of the country's most vulnerable areas to climate change.

Submitted by Tom MacKenzie, External Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia, and David Eisenhauer, External Affairs, Washington, D.C.

Behind the Scenes--



L to R: Vince Mudrak, Warm Springs Regional Fish Center Director, with Wendell Ogden. Photo by Rosla Plant.

An old Service friend comes to town!

In March, Warm Springs enjoyed a visit from Wendell Ogden, a retired Service employee. Wendell started his career in 1962, as biologist for the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery. He lived on-site in the old Victorian style home that once graced the hatchery property. During his visit, Wendell told us about many interesting things that happened over the years. Wendell had worked throughout the south, moving from Warm Springs to Welaka National Fish Hatchery in Florida, and then to several other stations. Wendell finished his career fourteen years ago as Program Director for the original Fisheries Academy, in Leetown, West Virginia. He still enjoys meeting with friends at events sponsored by the Service's Retirees Association. He enjoys life as a whole, sharing time with family and with friends in the Shepherdstown community of West Virginia.

Submitted by Vince Mudrak, Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center, Georgia

Remembering LaWanda Dixon

Saying goodbye is never easy. On March 14, 2009, Georgia Ecological Services said a final goodbye to our co-worker and friend, administrative officer LaWanda Dixon. Those of us close to LaWanda, knew that she was an independent, spirited, and passionate woman who was always quick with a smile. With this same resolve and grace, LaWanda fought her two-year battle with cancer. Never losing spirit, even in the final days of her sickness, LaWanda fulfilled her lifelong dream of traveling to Africa as a missionary. Fittingly, LaWanda will remain there forever, when her daughter Jasmine and sister Chrystal travel back to Tanzania to scatter LaWanda's ashes, bringing LaWanda's dream to a close. LaWanda was our office "gatekeeper," a person that we felt compelled to share ourselves with. She believed in the Service's mission and continues in her way to teach us about what is important in life. At her service we heard LaWanda's close friend tell us that "tomorrow is not promised to us, to hold close to us those that we love." We never know the people our life's walk will bring to us, but those of us who had the privilege of knowing LaWanda are better for having her cross our path.



LaWanda Dixon. Photo by Janice Wilcox.

Submitted by Pete Pattavina, Georgia Ecological Services Field Office, Athens, Georgia

Bragging Rights --



Kentucky Ecological Services Supervisor Lee Andrews discusses the Ecological Services program and their ongoing work. Photo by Katrina Holt.

All Kentucky Field Offices meet at Wolf Creek

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery hosted the first meeting for all Kentucky field offices on Tuesday, March 3, 2009. Twenty-one participants attended. They included staff members from the Kentucky Ecological Services Office in Frankfort; Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge; the Louisville Port Office – Law Enforcement Special Agent; and Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery. Each office shared information about its program and current projects. Following the individual presentations and a wonderful catered lunch provided generously by the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc, a group discussion took place on a variety of topics, including climate change, Strategic Habitat Conservation, and outreach and environmental education. Everyone agreed the meeting was successful, and plans are underway to bring all programs together again to ensure the Service's one- family approach continues.



Meeting attendees pose for a group photo as the meeting comes to a close. Photo by Katrina Holt.

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



Kentucky Questing Workshop Facilitator, Steve Glazer, addresses an example of a Quest developed through his work with Vital Communities and Valley Questing in Vermont. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

Kentucky Questing Workshop a success at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery hosted a Kentucky Questing Workshop on February 24 and 25, 2009. The event, a first of its kind for Kentucky, featured nationally known Quest designer and author Steven Glazer. Questing is a place-based education model of creating and exchanging treasure hunts in order to collect and share a community's distinct natural and cultural heritage, special places, and stories. Quests are unique in that the information found in each can easily be correlated to core content used by teachers across the state and also can serve to be a key conduit for tourism and linking up various sites. Because of this versatility, the workshop drew support and interest from a myriad of organizations and agencies, which led to securing over \$5,000 in sponsorships, helping to keep costs low for the many participants. In fact, due to the overwhelming support, each registrant paid only \$20 for the two days of instruction, materials, and meals. Lodging stipends also were offered. More than 20 people, representing 18 different agencies, attended the event. For those in attendance, the workshop featured two full days of hands-on instruction on how to research, plan and design a site-based Questing adventure.

Sponsors for the 2009 Kentucky Questing Workshop included the Kentucky Environmental Education Council, the Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Lindsey Wilson College, Kentucky Division of State Parks, the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, and the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc.



Questing workshop participants stop to work on a section of the Quest by the outdoor raceway areas. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

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



Trumpeter swans released at Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Carla Mitchell.

Trumpeter swans released at Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge

Eleven young trumpeter swans from Iowa were released at Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge on February 17, 2009. Their arrival marked the second year in a three-year program to reintroduce trumpeter swans to Arkansas, which was historically winter habitat for these large birds.

These young swans are participants in an effort to restore the migrating instinct lost of most trumpeter swans restored to the upper Midwest. The process behind the release is called reverse migration imprinting. The idea is to bring south young birds that never migrated and let them use their instincts to return to Iowa.



Refuge Manager Durwin Carter holds a swan prior to the release. Photo by Carla Mitchell.

The effort is a joint venture between the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Trumpeter Swan Society and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

Submitted by Carla Mitchell, Holla Bend/Logan Cave National Wildlife Refuges, Dardanelle, Arkansas



Louisiana Governor's wife, Supriya Jindal, poses with a black bear cub at Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Mindy Gautreaux.

Central Louisiana Refuges Complex hosts First Family of Louisiana for black bear relocation

On March 15, 2009, the Central Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex hosted the Louisiana Governor's wife and their three children, allowing them to witness the relocation of the first of six female black bears. The six bears and their cubs will be moved to Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge this year. Lake Ophelia, along with several State Wildlife Management Areas located within east-central Louisiana, are participating in the Louisiana black bear Repatriation Project, a partnership effort between the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and the Service to establish a viable black bear population on approximately 155,000 acres of public and privately-owned lands in central Louisiana.

Governor Bobby Jindal was unable to attend, but his wife, Supriya Jindal, and their three children, along with the Governor's Chief of Staff, Timmy Teeple, and his family were all present. The children especially enjoyed holding a six-week-old bear cub while refuge and LDWF biologists processed the female bear. All participants enjoyed seeing the bears released back into their native habitat on the refuge.

Submitted by Mindy Gautreaux, Central Louisiana NWR Complex, Marksville, Louisiana



Refuge Biologist Bradley Bordelon (center) and LDWF biologists collect DNA samples and monitor the female black bear before moving her to the den site. Photo by Mindy Gautreaux.



New E-Learning Hands on the Land program introduced by Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges

Staff at Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges invite you to get onboard the electronic learning (e-learning) train. Taking an electronic field trip is possible for anyone with a computer. In addition, it doesn't matter if the weather is bad or you don't have anyone to take you to the refuge!

The first field trip to be offered will be "Marine Debris-It's time to talk about trash!"

Eventually there will be other field trips posted about wildlife and wild lands of North Carolina. Courses will offer slides, videos, worksheets, and basic text pages. Of course, what field trip would be complete without a quiz or exam? Fortunately, participants can complete as much or as little of each field trip as they want. The fun part about the e-learning site is that there will be an area for participants to "Ask an Expert" and even take part in a chat with the staff and other participants. This will be a great way for

individuals of all ages to learn about a variety of subjects in a safe, fun online environment. Anyone who visits the course areas can either participate as a guest or as a registered user.

The new e-learning tool is being made available through a partnership with Hands on the Land This project is a network of field classrooms designed to enhance kindergarten through high school student learning. In addition to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, five other federal agencies and a non-profit education foundation created the Partners in Resource Education. They started Hands on the Land in 1999. It has sometimes been called "America's largest classroom." In the process, school subjects are brought to life as students and teachers engage in hands-on activities in natural and cultural settings. Through the Hands on the Land website (www.handsontheland.org), students may learn about other sites and participate in environmental monitoring and other interactive projects. Although there are only a few online field trips at this time, we encourage everyone to check back frequently since many more will be added.

For more information, please contact Cindy Heffley, Visitor Services Specialist, at 252-987-1118 or cindy_heffley@fws.gov

Submitted by Cindy Heffley, Alligator River and Pea Island NWRs, Manteo, North Carolina

Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge invaded by youth

On Friday, March 6, any visitor at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge would have had a difficult time escaping the sound of excited schoolchildren. Four unique groups from Cape Hatteras Secondary School of Coastal Studies set out on missions as part of their year-round program at the refuge.

While one group went to the beach to gather and test samples of the seawater, another group conducted studies on the various plants on North Pond Trail. These two groups have visited the refuge numerous times to get hands-on experiences using scientific equipment and field guides.



Cape Hatteras Secondary School Junior Naturalists observing turtles at North Pond Trail. Photo by Cindy Heffley.

A third group set out to retrieve the memory cards from the motion-detecting cameras they had placed along the exterior of the North Pond Trail. This group was so anxious to get to the camera sites that they had to be reminded about the proper etiquette to use at the refuge. After quieting down and regrouping, they continued on their trek. It wasn't long before they reappeared with the memory cards in hand hoping to find shots of deer and other mammals. The photos are being used to assist them in their survey of mammals on the refuge.



Cape Hatteras Secondary School "Mammal" group. Photo by Cindy Heffley.

The fourth group was on their first-time visit to the refuge. These younger, Junior Naturalists embarked on a photo scavenger hunt looking for items such as animal tracks, various plants, and the infamous, animal scat. Each team of photographers had a chance to use the refuge-supplied cameras and explore North Pond Wildlife Trail.

Fortunately, all groups had a chance to interact with refuge staff and each other, which created a fantastic learning experience for everyone. The group and refuge staff look forward to the upcoming project of preparing waterfowl wings obtained from an annual U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wing Bee.

After the wings are ready for mounting, students at the school will be constructing a Wing Board for future use with other groups at the refuge.

Submitted by Cindy Heffley, Alligator River and Pea Island NWR, Manteo, North Carolina

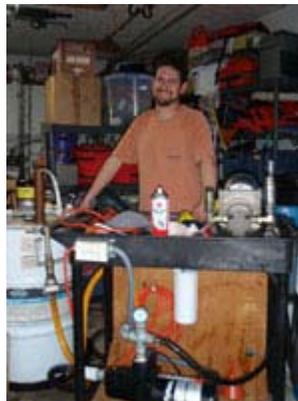
Fried chicken on wheels

Most dogs chase vehicles as an instinctive reaction. But they'd chase Tori Foster's and Mark Brecher's truck for another reason: it's primarily fueled by used vegetable oil, so sometimes it smells like fried chicken on wheels.

Tori is a fish and wildlife biologist with the South Florida Ecological Services Office in Vero Beach. Her significant other, Mark, is a certified auto mechanic who works as a fleet technician for the South Florida Water Management District in West Palm Beach. They converted their 2003 Dodge Ram into a truck that runs on diesel or vegetable oil for fuel.

Tori says they got the idea to convert the truck a couple of years ago when diesel fuel prices started to skyrocket. "We both commute a long way to work from Palm City and thought this might help cut costs," she said.

She started by searching on the computer for cheaper diesel and gas, and ultimately found a business that sold fuel additives to increase miles per gallon performance. "We tried it, but it didn't work well," Tori sighed. At that point, Mark went on a quest to find something better. He found several companies that sold kits to configure vehicles so they could use alternative fuels, such as used vegetable oil.



Mark Brecher stands near the "homemade oil refinery" in his garage. Photo by Tori Foster.

"After lots of research, I first set up the truck to run on used vegetable oil in November 2007," Mark recalled. "I actually built the first kit myself. There was lots of trial and error involved. It was kind of expensive and sort of like an adult science project for me and Tori. We were determined to make it work."

In addition to reconfiguring their truck, they set up a makeshift "oil refinery" in their garage where they transform the used cooking oil into fuel. "The toughest part now is collecting the used oil. At first, it was easier to get used oil free from restaurants. Now, most of them are charging because waste management companies know they can recycle it and sell it."

Fortunately for Mark and Tori, there's at least one restaurant that still gives them used cooking oil for free. "We're about at the break-even point now. And as long as we can keep getting free used oil, we plan to keep making fuel for our truck," Mark said. "Plus, rather than burning a tank of diesel a week, I only burn about a tank every five or six weeks. There's big savings there."



Tori Foster displays the vegetable oil fuel tank on the back of her truck. Photo by Ken Warren.

“In fact, I carpool with someone whose car I helped convert. We alternate driving between the two vehicles and also pick up two co-workers on the way. So, you have four people getting to work in one vehicle powered by vegetable oil, as opposed to four people driving to work everyday separately using fossil-fueled vehicles. Think about that carbon footprint reduction.”

Tori added: “Mark and I are both kind of ‘green nerds.’ This allows us to recycle a waste product and use it to produce fewer emissions than gas or diesel. We’re doing a good thing for the environment.”

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

A visit to Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Elizabeth (Beth) Stevens, assistant director External Affairs and Sam Hamilton, Southeast regional director, visited the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex during March 2 and 3, 2009.

During the first day of their visit Beth and Sam toured the Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge in Tampa Bay. They were able to enjoy the incredible natural and historical resources of the island, including one of the highest densities of gopher tortoises in the State and the remnants of the U.S. Army Fort Dade Military Reservation. While at Egmont Key they also saw some of the challenges that the island Refuge deals with in a daily basis, including the rapid lost of habitat due to erosion and the invasion by exotic plants and animals. The week prior to their visit, the USDA-Wildlife Service concluded a great effort to eradicate the black rat population from the island before the beginning of the birds’ nesting season. Nearly 40,000 pairs of nesting birds use the island every year. The rats were introduced to the island during a beach re-nourishment project and their numbers rapidly increase, creating great concern by the refuge staff and their partners who work to protect the birds that depend on the island’s habitat.



Beth and Sam snorkel at Three Sisters Springs near Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Keith Ramos.



Beth swims near a manatee at Three Sisters Springs. Photo by Keith Ramos.

On the following morning, Beth and Sam toured the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge and were able to enjoy one of the premier wintering sites for the West Indian manatee in Florida. The manatee population at the site can exceed 300 animals during the winter months. The Refuge manages seven manatee sanctuaries in Kings Bay, including the Three Sisters Springs sanctuary which provided protection to nearly one hundred manatees during the cold morning of their visit. Adjacent to this sanctuary is the Three Sisters Springs property which is currently considered the number one acquisition priority for the Southeast Region. The Service and various partners are working diligently to make this acquisition possible. By adding this property to the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge, the Service will protect a very valuable resource to the future of wintering manatees in the west coast of Florida.

Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge provided the last stop for Beth and Sam during their visit. They were able to take a glimpse at one of the most beautiful rivers in Florida, the Chassahowitzka River, while enjoying a visit to the whooping crane facilities located within the refuge. The crane facilities house the whooping cranes that make the journey from Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin every winter as part of the great effort to establish a migratory population in the Eastern United States. More photos at [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Keith Ramos, Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Crystal River, Florida

Cub Scout Pack 302 earns World Conservation award

The Cub Scout World Conservation Award provides an opportunity for scouts to “think globally” and “act locally” in order to better understand, preserve, and sustain the natural environment. This program is designed to make cub scouts aware of the how closely related all natural resources are and how the resources respond to the actions of people. The Wolf Cub Den (second graders) in Panama City, Florida, earned their World Conservation Award by completing the achievements of “Your Living World” that describe responsible energy consumption, resources use, and recycling. The scouts also completed electives on birding, fishing, and botany. In conclusion, the scouts participated in a beach cleanup as their den conservation project. Each cub scout received a patch for completing the program which lasted several months.



Submitted by Jon Hemming and Laura Jenkins, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office



Lights Out for Fisheries and the Southeast Regional Office!

Fisheries Program field stations across the region observed Earth Hour 2009 on March 27-28 by switching off all lights and non-essential electronics for one hour. The goals of this activity were to raise awareness of climate change, the impacts it will have to our fish and wildlife species, and how the Service is committed to address the challenges—as well as to collectively conserve energy.

During this hour, visitors to fish hatcheries were greeted with signs that read “Light out? We are observing Earth Hour 2009—Please come in and find out more!” All visitor facilities remained open during the hour. Staff members were available to greet visitors and discuss the unusual occurrence.

On March 27, Southeast Regional Office employees joined Fisheries in the Lights Out observance by switching off all lights and non-essential electronics between noon and 1:00 p.m. A film about Earth Hour was shown during that time.

Earth Hour began in Sydney, Australia, in 2007, when 2.2 million homes and businesses switched off their lights for one hour. In 2008, the message had grown into a global sustainability movement, with 50 million people switching off their lights. Global landmarks such as the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Rome’s Coliseum, the Sydney Opera House and the Coca Cola billboard in Times Square all stood in darkness. In 2009, Earth Hour had the goal of one billion people switching off their lights. More than 74 countries and territories pledged their support during Earth Hour 2009. The World Wildlife Fund sponsors the campaign. Visit www.earthhour.org for more information.

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia

High school students learn about shorebirds

In April, students from A.D. Harris High School in Panama City, Florida, learned about black skimmers and least terns. While learning about the birds' life history, they painted bird replicas to be used as decoys. The decoys will later be placed in optimal nesting habitats to attract birds to these safe nesting harbors. A volunteer cut out the wooden decoys that the students painted. The students primed the wooden replicas, stenciled the plumage outline of the birds, and then painted the decoys to realistically represent black skimmers and least terns.



Laura Jenkins presents an A.D. Harris student with a letter of appreciation as his teacher, Summer Zepher, looks on. Photo taken by an A.D. Harris High school student.

Submitted by Laura Jenkins, Panama City Field Office, Florida



MUSIC and climate change in south Florida

What Steve Traxler heard January 23, at a workshop at the Arthur R. Marshall-Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge was like MUSIC to his ears.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees were among the participants from various agencies who attended the recent MUSIC workshop. Photo by Todd Hopkins.

In this case "MUSIC" is an interagency venture between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)-U.S. Geological Survey Science Impact Collaborative (MUSIC), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop alternative futures that include the potential impacts of climate change on South Florida – more specifically as it relates to restoring the Everglades and how it could impact the Service's

wildlife refuges in the state.

"Great minds are working on this project. The MIT staff is building comprehensive data bases that will greatly help us," Steve said. "They're some of the best academic planners in America...if not the world." Steve, a senior fish and wildlife biologist with the South Florida Ecological Services Office, attended the MUSIC workshop with about 35 others. He sees MUSIC as a major stepping stone toward gathering information and ultimately developing some potential solutions.

At the first workshop, the MIT team validated some of their databases they have been developing. "We did some initial stakeholder mapping and calibrated spatially important refuge habitats and trust resources," Steve said. "This was one of the first steps in putting together some draft alternative futures regarding our refuges."

The MUSIC initiative will gather the best scientific information available on climate change and help prepare planners and policy makers for possible future climatic, hydrologic and land use conditions.

"There are impacts on our refuges and endangered species in south Florida; we have already seen nine inches of sea level rise over the last 70 years" Steve said. "For example: As the seas continue to rise, where will the threatened and endangered species, such as the Key deer, the Key Largo woodrat, and the cape sable seaside sparrow go? Will portions of our refuges will be

underwater and how will shifting development patterns affect trust resources? We need to give management some answers and some options.”

According to an abstract written about the MUSIC initiative, climate change is arguably the most significant and difficult issue to rise to prominence since the original formulation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) in 2000. Climate change will affect a wide variety of human and natural systems, and must be addressed within a context of considerable uncertainty in policy, human responses and indirect effects.

In addition, the day after the workshop, ARM-Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge project leader Sylvia Pelizza led an airboat tour for the MIT team. None of them had previously been on airboats. They had an enjoyable time and learned about the refuge’s issues and habitats.

Another MUSIC workshop will probably be held in the spring or summer to develop the alternative futures. “This group is focused and is making progress. There are lots of unknowns and uncertainties, but this is important work and I believe we’re headed down the right path,” Steve said.

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

Delivering Conservation on the Ground

More than 169 Service employees from across the Southeast and the Washington Office attended a wage grade employee conference, Delivering Conservation on the Ground, in late January 2009. The conference was held at the Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center in Alabama.



The MATT Team receives an award.
Photo by Hal Jones, USFWS

Dan Forster, the director of Georgia Department of Natural Resources’ Wildlife Resources Division delivered the keynote address, “The Maintenance Worker of the Future.” The conference updated wage grade employees on Service policy changes and discussed the Greening of the Service and how climate change may affect wage grade employees in the future. New action items were developed for the Wage Grade Advisory Committee.



The Resource Village. Photo by Hal Jones, USFWS.

“I hope that the wage grade workforce will continue to network with one another, that everyone knows how important their issues are, and that they are being represented,” said Wayne Smith, wage grade advisory committee co-chair and engineering equipment operator at Piedmont and Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuges.

Several awards were presented. The Maintenance Action Team (MATT) received an award for doing projects at Tennessee, Florida Panther, and Santee National Wildlife Refuges and at Welaka National Fish Hatchery. MATT saved the Service valuable dollars.

Bobby Baker, Lower Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge, received the first Regional Director’s Pioneer Award. Baker was honored for his hard work and dedication to the Southeast Region’s Heavy Equipment Safety Training Program. Bruce Mitchell of Southeast

Louisiana Refuges and Carl Campbell of Private John Allen National Fish Hatchery are the Wage Grade Employees of the Year.

Submitted by Elsie Davis, External Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia

Friends Group --

Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. attend Fisheries' Friends Conference in D.C.



Jerry and Betty Coleman and Amanda Patrick meet with Congressman Ed Whitfield. Photo by Cory Hicks, legislative director, Congressman Ed Whitfield.

Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. members Jerry and Betty Coleman, and Amanda Patrick, Wolf Creek's Environmental Education/Outreach Specialist, attended the Service's Fisheries Friends Group Conference held in Washington D.C., March 10-12, 2009. The national conference was an opportunity for Fisheries' Friends Groups from across the country to network and share ideas.

During their trip, the various Friends representatives began organizing and thinking from a national perspective and learned about the Fisheries Program budget, along with future program priorities, potential lobbying, and partnering organizations. They also discussed the formation of the newly established national association, including bylaws review, and spent two days on the Hill with the various

Senate and Congressional representatives to discuss important issues relating to the goals of the Fisheries Program and the overall mission of the Service. The Colemans also personally met with Congressmen Ed Whitfield and Brett Guthrie.

While on Capitol Hill, representatives from Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery met with staffers of Senators Jim Bunning and Mitch McConnell, along with those representing Congressmen John Yarmuth, Geoff Davis, Ben Chandler, and Hal Rogers.



Participants of the 2009 Fisheries Friends Conference stop for a group photo before heading to Capitol Hill. Photo by Richard Christian, FWS.

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



Natalie Hill, daughter of St Catherine Creek Maintenance Worker Nathan Hill, isn't so sure about touching alligators. Photo by

Wild Things!

March 7, 2009 was a wild day! The Friends of St Catherine Creek Refuge hosted Wild Things, an environmental education festival as their annual fund-raiser. The day-long event was free to the public and consisted of booths where kids and adults from the Natchez, Mississippi, and Vidalia, Louisiana, area enjoyed learning about and touching alligators, snakes, animal furs, and four species of raptors. They also played the role of a Louisiana black bear as they were taken through a year in the life of a black bear. They searched for food and cover, dodged traffic in urban areas, and tried out a den for winter. Participants who finished the course received a sticker and had their nose painted like a bear. The bear course was provided by Louisiana Ecological Services Field Office staff members Debbie

Fuller, Rob Smith, Jim Gruhaha, and Robert Greco.

Other activities included a youth long-bow archery tournament. Volunteer Bob Mills provided equipment and teaching skills to help the children shoot at balloons. Trophies were awarded to the top three places in each age category. Children also made butterflies out of pipe cleaners and colored paper snakes, all the while learning about refuges and refuge facilities. Kim Randall of Central Louisiana Refuge Complex provided a wonderful animal identification exhibit where children had a hands-on learning experience about the various animals inhabiting refuges in this area.

St Catherine Creek, Bayou Cocodrie and Cat Island Refuge Complex staff who participated in the event were Charman Cupit, Bob Strader, Deisha Norwood, Curt Freeman, Nathan Hill, and John Simpson. Other partners included Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, Jefferson Historic College, Wildlife Outreach Foundation, and Boy Scout Troop 21.

Approximately \$3,500 was raised through sponsors, food sales, a bake sale, and an auction. Proceeds will go towards the Friends Group's goal of building an educational center on St Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Charman Cupit, St Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Natchez, Mississippi

Hats Off -



North Louisiana Refuges Complex Volunteer of the Year is Bob Eisenstadt. Photo by Jim Heintz.

North Louisiana Refuges Complex honors volunteers at annual volunteer recognition dinner

How do you show appreciation for your wonderful and dedicated volunteers? Feed them, of course! The North Louisiana Refuges Complex held their eighth Annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner on March 5, 2009. The volunteers were treated to a delicious fried catfish, shrimp, and chicken dinner with all the fixings at a local restaurant. The dinner began with an ice-breaker activity to encourage interaction between volunteers and refuge staff and to share interesting information about each individual volunteer.

"This is a time that I can express to the volunteers how much I appreciate their help throughout the year and award them for a job well done!" says Gay Brantley, visitor services specialist for the complex and volunteer coordinator.

This year's recipient of the North Louisiana Refuges Complex Volunteer of the Year Award was Bob Eisenstadt. Bob is one of the founding members of Friends of Black Bayou, Inc, and is still very active and supportive of the refuge. Nell Odom, a volunteer who recently passed away, was added to the Volunteer Emeritus plaques for her support throughout the years. Hour pins and certificates were also presented to several volunteers.



Volunteers and staff enjoy a delicious meal and great company. Photo by Jim Heintz.

Gay always makes sure every volunteer walks away with something special; this year they were all given stainless steel water bottles that read, "National Wildlife Refuges Volunteer" and had the Blue Goose emblem on them. Everyone enjoyed the event, and looks forward to next year's ceremony.

Submitted by Sharon Fuller, North Louisiana Refuges Complex, Farmerville, Louisiana



Amanda Patrick receives her certificate of completion as part of the Class of 2008 in the Kentucky Non-formal Environmental Education Certification Program. Photo by Katrina Holt.

Amanda Patrick graduates from certification program for Non-formal Environmental Educators

After a year of hard work, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery's Environmental Education/Outreach Specialist Amanda Patrick graduated from the 2008 Certification Program for Kentucky Non-formal Environmental Educators. Patrick was awarded her credentials as a Certified Environmental Educator (CEE) on Wednesday, March 4, 2009, during a ceremony in Lexington, Kentucky.

Sponsored by the Kentucky Environmental Education Council (KEEC), the program is one of only three pilot endeavors of its kind in the United States. In Kentucky and elsewhere, the environmental education community is working toward more content driven professional development. This includes a voluntary certification program for non-formal environmental educators in Kentucky and also in a handful of other pilot program state programs. Program content is based on the Guidelines for the Initial Preparation and Professional Development of Environmental Educators, prepared by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). To date, there are roughly 150 graduates of such pilot programs in the U.S. – Kentucky's program accounts for approximately 115 of these certified professionals.

Patrick, along with her classmates, covered a myriad of topics and assignments during their one-year period of work, including passing an environmental literacy test, writing several essays involving a series of readings about the history and philosophy of environmental education, debating a contemporary Kentucky environmental issue, creating a detailed annotated unit of study tailored to their own individual program or situation and conducting an independent study. Kentucky had 98 graduates of its program by April 2007, and after graduating, all alumni must maintain their certification via CEU's.



The Class of 2008 pauses for a group photo and is all smiles with their work complete! Photo by Katrina Holt.

For more information on the non-formal certification program, check out the following link: <http://www.naaee.org/programs-and-initiatives/professional-certification-and-accreditation/the-pilot-states/>

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



John Kasbohm and Holly Gaboriault present the panel to TNC's Jeff Danter (far left). Photo by Ben West.

The Nature Conservancy honored for partnership

The Nature Conservancy, beginning in January 1979 with 4,077 acres in Dixie County, Florida, and most recently with 800 acres near the picturesque River Trail, has been instrumental in the creation of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

Spanning more than twenty years, the acquisitions of and contributions by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of nearly half the acreage of Lower Suwannee has enabled the Service to protect the last twenty miles of the historic Suwannee River and thirty miles of adjacent coastal estuary.

During the Friends of the Lower Suwannee NWR Annual Meeting and Refuge Open House, Refuge Manager John Kasbohm and Deputy Refuge Supervisor Holly Gaboriault dedicated a new interpretive panel to be placed in a kiosk at the River Trailhead, near refuge headquarters. The text honors the decades-long partnership of the Service and TNC. John presented a copy of the panel to Jeff Danter, the TNC Florida State Director of Florida who joined in the day's festivities.

Danter graciously addressed the crowd, speaking of the common goals in conservation shared by both the Service and TNC. He spoke of the global outreach of TNC including marine sites as well as land, but not without first praising the passionate efforts of our Refuge Friends Groups across the nation.

Once again, the strength of partnerships, whether with Friends Groups, or friends like TNC, enables us to protect and conserve lands vital for the wildlife of America.

Submitted by Pam Darty, Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, Chiefland, Florida

I Gave '8' --

Judges at the Palm Beach County Science and Engineering Fair

On December 10, 2008, Tiffany Trent and Serena Rinker from A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge were judges at the Palm Beach County Science and Engineering Fair. The fair was held at the South Florida Fairgrounds in West Palm Beach, Florida. This was the middle and high school division of the county science fair and there were a total of 27 first place high and middle school winners. There were 84 second place high and middle school winners, 119 third place high and middle school winners, and 139 fourth place high and middle school winners. There are 167 schools in Palm Beach County making it one of the larger school districts in the state. Tiffany was asked to judge zoology, environmental science, and earth and space science projects of 30 different students. This entailed talking to each student and finding out where they got their idea from, the general subject matter of their project, methods used in their experiment and did their data support their conclusion.

"I found it very inspiring to see so many students interested in the sciences, and I encouraged them to pursue careers like mine." Tiffany said.

Submitted by Serena Rinker, A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida



Refuge Manager Henry Sansing awards a Junior Ranger award. Photo by Andrea Dunstan.

Family Fun Day

Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge employees planned and participated in the refuge's National Wildlife Refuge Week Celebration. On October 4, 2008, Family Fun Day was held beside the Visitor Center on a beautiful day. More than 550 visitors of all ages enjoyed the event.

Each Noxubee employee donated at least eight hours to Family Fun Day.

Their duties included manning a table about bats, tomahawk throwing, archery, fishing casting, demonstrating a lift hunting blind, behind the scenes work, and instructing visitors how to canoe. The day was a success because of the efforts of the following employees: Henry Sansing, David Richardson,

Richard E. Smith, Dusty Dendy, Bobby Gentry, Gwen Cotton, Andrea Dunstan, Waymon C. Fondren, Joseph Harsh, Travis Prisock, Tom Jackson, Johnny Wayne Bradford, and Elvis Gillespie.

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



Officer Bobby Gentry instructs visitor how to throw a tomahawk. Photo by Andrea Dunstan.

Educating school children about wildlife

April Ostrom and Jeremy Conrad of A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge recently gave presentations at area schools to teach children about wildlife. On February 13, 2009, April gave a Powerpoint presentation to third and fifth graders at Treasure Coast Christian Academy in Port St. Lucie, Florida. She spoke on the differences between herbivores, omnivores, and carnivores and the importance of a stable habitat for each. On October 17, 2008, Jeremy spoke to about 60 primary grade students at Addison Mizner Elementary School in Boca Raton, Florida about sea turtles and the use of the scientific method to study a project. He described a project that he had completed as a graduate student working with nesting sea turtles and included a lot of "cool" turtle photos.

Submitted by Serena Rinker, A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida



Students help disperse gravel on the new nature trail. Photo by Karen Beshears.

New refuge trail gets started on National Make a Difference Day

On October 23, 2008, a beautiful fall day in South Carolina, served as part of the National Make Difference Day Program. A new nature trail was created to compliment the new Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center. On this special day, a group of high school students enrolled in the Georgetown County Service Over Self (SOS) Program, along with several parents, teamed up with Refuge Manager Craig Sasser after school to begin construction of a trail system. The trail leads from the remote parking area to the new environmental education center. It includes a new

boardwalk which crosses a wetland seep and will be used to access the center and for a nature walk.

The SOS students helped design the trail and worked with local retail stores to get donations of construction materials. During construction SOS students cleared brush, prepared the trail bed, installed wooden boarders and spread gravel. On December 23, during their Christmas holiday, the students met again to finish the trail and design interpretive trail signs. The trail signs are made of recycled corrugated plastic and cut in the shape of the plant or animal that the interpretive message represents. These signs are located throughout the trail, and they are designed for easy storage future use, as new signs are developed by SOS students in consecutive years.

"It's been an incredible experience watching these kids take charge on this project, and their enthusiasm and dedication has made it all worthwhile," said Refuge Manager Craig Sasser. "These kids will bring friends to show off their project, and they are excited to present their accomplishments during the grand opening."



Students sweep off the new boardwalk. Photo by Karen Beshears.

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

Photo Album --

A visit to Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex -- more photos



Sam swims near a manatee at Three Sisters Springs. Photo by Keith Ramos.



Sam snorkles at Three Sisters Springs. Photo by Keith Ramos.



Beth and Sam stand on a floating dock at Three Sisters Springs. Photo by Keith Ramos.



Beth and Sam look at resting manatees inside the Three Sisters Springs sanctuary. Photo by Keith Ramos.



Beth and Sam ride with Assistant Refuge Manager Richard Meyers on a airboat in the Chassahowitzka River. Photo by Keith Ramos.



Sam walks away from whooping crane facility at Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Keith Ramos.



Assistant Refuge Manager Richard Meyers talks to Beth and Sam about the erosion problems at Egmont. Photo by Keith Ramos.

Wild Things! -- more photos



Charman Cupit assists with the hawk demonstrations. Photo by Bert Freeman.



A young "bear" watches as her brother prepares to enter the den for winter. Photo by Charman Cupit.

Visitor Services --



People's Republic of China delegation while at Felsenthal: (left to right) Shenglong LIU, Changyou LI, Ricky Eastridge, Jun ZHAO, Xiyang SUI, Shoucal HU, Hongyan GUO, Elizabeth Day, Bobby Schat, Steve Kohl, Paula Navratil, Wanhai LI, James Harrington, Harold Smith (behind the sign, left to right), Dale Guthrie, Larry Threet, Weigang SHAO. Photo by Matt Corner.

Chinese delegation tours Arkansas refuges

During the week of February 9, 2009, a group of 10 delegates from the People's Republic of China toured Cache River, White River, Felsenthal, and Tensas National Wildlife Refuges. The visit was part of the Service's Division of International Conservation Program. Steve Kohl, chief of the Branch of Russia-East Asia Division of International Conservation, led the delegation's visits of the four refuges. Each refuge showcased their habitat management and maintained an active dialogue through the use of a translator.

The first visit was to Cache River where the group enthusiastically inquired about conservation of wetland areas, management of bottomland hardwood forests, and the effects of flooding and water level changes on those ecosystems. They also toured a waterfowl sanctuary where they encountered

thousands of wintering ducks and geese, resident wildlife, and numerous bald eagles.

For a little local flavor, the group was treated to a lunch of barbequed ribs and fried catfish at Gene's Barbeque in Brinkley, Arkansas. Each member of the delegation received an ivory-billed woodpecker coffee mug from the restaurant owner.

The next visit was to White River. The group saw several stages of forest succession as a result of the management on the refuge. Massive nuttall oaks, overcup oaks, and millennium old bald cypress trees fascinated the group as they learned how forest management on the refuge creates a variety of habitat for many types of wildlife.



Visitor enjoys venison jerky. Photo by Matt Corner.



Keith Weaver, project leader of Central Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex, accepts a thank you gift. Photo by Jonathan Windley.

Several of the group members inquired about how we could allow hunting and still manage for wildlife. The staff explained the positive effects hunting has on species management and the role of biological monitoring. Many in the group explained that hunting could not occur on their refuges due to low wildlife populations.

One of the delegates explained how hunting wild game would be nice for people in their country because they believe eating wild game makes a person spiritually and physically strong. Not missing a chance to demonstrate southern hospitality, the refuge staff soon supplied some homemade venison jerky, and everyone was eager to increase their strength!

Felsenthal was the next destination for the group. A hand-on demonstration of habitat management for the red Cockaded woodpecker was provided with great success. The delegation learned about black bears, fire management, and toured a green tree reservoir. After a long week, the group finished their tours at Tensas National Wildlife Refuge and learned about that refuge's management and habitat types as well.



Dennis Sharp, White River National Wildlife Refuge manager, prepares to take group to the refuge. Photo by Matt Conner.

When the various refuges compared experiences of the visit, some similarities were apparent. As much as the group enjoyed learning about the management at different refuges, they were equally impressed by the Service's fleets of four-wheel-drive vehicles, boats with outboard motors, and the refuge officers carrying sidearms.

The group had many questions translated about the use of the trucks and engine sizes, boat operation, and the use of firearms for law enforcement. Many posed for pictures in front of boats, trucks, heavy equipment, and a 6-foot, three-inch ranger wearing a size 14 boot! Several individuals wished they could take the equipment back with them to make their jobs easier on their refuges back in the People's Republic of China.



Jeff Denman, White River National Wildlife Refuge's forester, explains forest regeneration at the refuge. Photo by Matt Conner.

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

Wage Grade Profile --



Kenny Finch: Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge



Kenny Finch. Photo by Henry Sansing.

"I see things at work that other people may have to pay to see. I've seen a mother wood duck call its young out of a nest, a beaver build his dam, and an alligator catch a wild boar," says Kenny Finch, engineering equipment operator at Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge in Gilbertown, Alabama. "I've held 12-week-old bald eagles, watched them learn to fly and catch their first meal. I've trapped and banded wood ducks, mallards, and teal, and removed screech owls from wood duck nest boxes. I've paddled a canoe in a swamp at night in the company of alligators and watched river otters swim under a full moon."

Twenty years ago, Kenny started in a temporary position as a tractor operator at Choctaw. He has worked there ever since.

When asked what he likes best about his job, he says "I enjoy everything about my job, because I don't really have a set job. I may run heavy equipment to build a levy or road, clear trees after a storm, plant crops for wildlife, trap ducks for banding, clean and service wood duck nest boxes, or work a refuge hunt."

Kenny often has been assigned to details with special agents. He and others investigated and prosecuted a pesticide poison case where hawks and an eagle had been killed. He also worked with agents on endangered species cases involving turtles and on commercial migratory bird cases, including baited dove fields, where people bait doves illegally and charge \$100-\$150 per gun. Some of these operators received \$6,000 fines. In the last year, fines from illegal commercial dove fields that he worked totaled more than \$11,000.

He also has worked details at other refuges. Kenny remembers floating the Suwannee River at midnight trying to catch alligator poachers at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and working opening day deer hunts at Piedmont and Noxubee National Wildlife Refuges.

"I've been able to see kids experience the great outdoors and kill their first deer," he says. "I've also attended the Service's fabulous facility, the National Conservation Training Center, in West Virginia, and during the evening, I waded in the Potomac River to cast a lure."

He and his wife Mary Ann have four children: 12-year-old daughter Alex, and 9-year-old triplets - Quinn, Hight, and Abigail. He enjoys hunting, fishing, and spending time with his family.

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

[◆ Southeast Region's Home](#) [◆ Privacy](#) [◆ FOIA](#) [◆ Disclaimer](#) [◆ Contact Us](#) [◆ Search](#) [◆ Regions](#) [◆ Archived SE Currents](#) [◆](#)