



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

MAY 2009 NEWSLETTER

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Strategic Habitat Conservation in the Mobile River Basin



Alabama River at Dixie Landing.
Photo by Jeff Powell.

The stream drainages of Alabama and adjoining states comprise the most extraordinarily diverse aquatic ecosystem of North America. These drainages support a large and significant proportion of the native aquatic snail, mussel, crayfish, and fish biodiversity of North America, many of which are endemic to the region. Human development and modification during the past century has resulted in the extinction of 69 of these aquatic species, primarily aquatic snails and mussels, along with an equal number currently listed as threatened or endangered with extinction under the Endangered Species Act.

A host of additional aquatic species are considered candidates for listing or as species of concern. Habitats for these animals have been converted from free-flowing rivers and streams, to scattered isolated reaches that function as refuges of rare and endemic biodiversity. Maintaining the remnants of this unique legacy will require human stewardship and intervention into the foreseeable future. A Strategic Habitat Conservation Plan for Mollusks of the Mobile River Basin is under development with multiple partners to facilitate a long-term management commitment to preserve biodiversity in the Mobile River Basin.

Several partnerships exist between federal and state agencies and private industries. These partners help complete watershed assessments, identify recovery objectives, and exchange information at local, county, state, and federal levels. The following examples demonstrate the level of partnerships and valuable work completed to date.

- Federal and state biologists work cooperatively to conduct surveys and population assessments.
- Partners have recently completed a Reintroduction and Augmentation Plan for Imperiled Mollusks of the Mobile River Basin.
- The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) is nearing the completion of a state-of-the-art hatchery facility (Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center - AABC) dedicated to culturing and developing husbandry techniques for imperiled aquatic fauna.
- The Geological Survey of Alabama recently published a GIS-based spatial analysis that identifies the 26 highest priority restoration units (i.e., Strategic Habitat Units - SHUs) in the Mobile River Basin. Individual analyses are currently being conducted on each of the 26 SHU's.
- Through the FERC re-licensing process, the Alabama Power Company has committed more than \$7.5 million over the term of their hydro licenses on the Coosa River Dams. These funds will go directly towards instream habitat improvements and the AABC. They have committed to improving water quality conditions below dams by implementing either continuous minimum flows or other water quality improvements.
- The Corps of Engineers has begun utilizing navigation locks with the sole intent of moving fishes upstream and downstream at two dams on the Alabama River.

- The Alabama Clean Water Partnership and Alabama Department of Environmental Management work with local and county agencies to disseminate information and to develop basin water quality plans.
- The Mobile River Basin Coalition is another important partnership that has been formed between industry, local, state, county, and federal groups with an interest in preserving and protecting the Mobile River Basin. The Coalition holds periodic meetings to allow stakeholders an opportunity to present and discuss basin recovery priorities.
- Several organizations, including the Cahaba River Society, The Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Fund, and the Alabama Rivers Alliance have developed publications and used the local media to highlight biodiversity, challenges, and environmental management in their outreach. One of the highlights of this effort was the removal of an old dam on the Cahaba River a few years ago.

The guiding document for the Mobile SHC is the Reintroduction and Augmentation Plan. Within this document a three-tiered hierarchy of the most imperiled species has been developed. The plan also includes generalized population goals, as indicated in the recovery plan for the listed species, and the best locations to re-establish populations. There also are propagation procedures, reintroduction forms, research needs, and other means of accountability for researchers and stakeholders working to preserve these imperiled species.

Conservation design in the basin centers on the identification of 26 stream reaches within the basin which are critical habitat for a group of mussel species. These stream reaches support more than 90 percent of the endemic aquatic fauna of the basin, and have been identified as priority areas for program delivery for conservation of imperiled fauna.

Program delivery is focused on the successful management of the Basin's aquatic biodiversity. The first step is establishing baseline conditions in the priority areas (i.e., SHU's), and identifying, quantifying, and mapping land uses, water quality, diversity, and locations and condition of priority species populations. Once this information is available, a GIS system can be developed for tracking and disseminating watershed conditions for all of the priority watersheds. This system will allow the development of husbandry techniques for priority species including establishing captive populations for species imminently threatened with extinction. Areas can be identified that are historically occupied by the priority species where they may be successfully reintroduced.



Ocoosa River at Moccasin Gap.
Photo by Jeff Powell.

Monitoring priority watershed conditions will allow immediate responses to improving conditions as well as to threats through augmenting, reintroducing, or relocating priority species populations and establishing ARK populations to prevent extinction. Monitoring will also allow us to work effectively with state and other partners addressing threats through existing regulations. By developing strong working relationships with partners the Service looks forward to encouraging voluntary stewardship and conservation of these imperiled species.

The success of the Mobile River Basin SHC program depends solely on committed partnerships and a stable source of dedicated funding. The Service and its partners continue to build upon the successes of completed projects, ensuring the continued conservation of the ecosystem upon which these species depend. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Jeff Powell, Ecological Services, Daphne, Alabama, and Paul Hartfield, Ecological Services, Jackson, Mississippi

Behind the Scenes--



Larry helping identify what is in the touch tank at the Captain Planet Earth Day Kids Fest in Roswell. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS

The Youngs enjoy teaching youths about wildlife

Debbie Young and her husband Larry Young work daily to help the Service complete its mission. Debbie is the Region's web manager, and Larry works in Human Capital Management---both critical duties. This inspirational couple goes above and beyond to connect people, especially youths, to our agency's mission.

In the past year, Debbie and Larry have volunteered their time to work with youths through the Biologist in Training program. Last year, they helped host the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta at Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery. More recently, they spent an entire Saturday with mobs of fascinated children at the Captain Planet Earth Day Kids Fest in Roswell, Georgia. Giant bullfrog tadpoles and crafty caddisfly larvae worked closely with Debbie and Larry to attract the young festival-goers. Debbie and Larry create a terrific model for others, as they joyfully share their own sense of wonder for the living things we all work to protect.

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia

Bragging Rights --



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.



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

"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."

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



Firefighter with Chicamacomico Fire Department attacks flames in a roadside fire on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge on March 29, 2009. Photo by Lynn Belanich, National Park Service.

Three week-end wildfires strike Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge

With gusts reaching 33 mph and the wind at a steady 18 mph, Sunday, March 29, 2009, could have been a catastrophic day for a wildfire. In fact, an unknown vehicle with a faulty catalytic converter caused three small wildfires on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge.

The fires were reported shortly after noon by a passing motorist and were located between the visitor center and refuge headquarters area on the east side of highway NC 12. The Chicamacomico Volunteer Fire Department was the first to respond and had the blazes contained rather quickly. Other responders included the National Park Service, the North Carolina Forest Service, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"We're fortunate to have had the some rain recently, commented the Fish and Wildlife Service's Incident Commander Greg Suszek. "It's really good that the wind was out of the southwest and the fires started on the east side of the highway. It's not often we have a wildfire that runs to the Atlantic Ocean!"

The largest of the three fires, the Cadillac Fire, burned approximately a half-acre. The Lincoln burned about a tenth-acre. The Mini burned a spot only the size of a trash can lid before it burned out on its own. The fires were named after vehicles due to their cause.

"We're really thankful for the quick response of the Chicamacomico Volunteer Fire Department," said Suszek. "They pretty much had everything under control before we arrived on the scene."

These fires were the first to burn on Pea Island Refuge this year. Pea Island was not slated for prescribed burning during the 2008/2009 prescribed fire season. Due to past prescribed burns, a wildfire on the refuge has less potential to cause major damage. Pea Island is scheduled for additional prescribed burning in the 2009/2010 season.



Chicamacomico Volunteer Fire Department engine provides final watering to make certain the fires are out. Photo by Lynn Belanich, National Park Service.

Submitted by Bonnie Strawser, Alligator River and Pea Island NWRs, Manteo, North Carolina



Cindy Dohner nets Asian swamp eels. Photo by Allan Brown.

Cindy Dohner whacks invasive eels

Southeast Deputy Regional Director Cindy Dohner recently traveled to south Florida to assist Welaka National Fish Hatchery employees Allan Brown and Andy Jackson and South Florida Fisheries Resource Office Project Leader John Galvez with removal of invasive Asian swamp eels. Cindy assisted with the removal of more than 100 eels from the C-111 canal near Homestead.

Since their initial discovery in 2001, the Service has been monitoring the spread of Asian swamp eels in several of the South Florida Water Management District canals that border Everglades National Park. During the past three years, the Service has removed more than three-thousand eels, limiting their spread into the



Cindy Dohner with two of the eels she caught. Photo by Allan Brown.

Everglades ecosystem. Collected and formalin-preserved specimens are transferred to U.S. Geological Survey researchers for further studies. For the first time in 2008, two Asian swamp eels were found during a fish population assessment of Everglades National Park. It is unknown what the effects may be to native aquatic species if these eels spread into the Park in larger numbers.

Submitted by Allan Brown, Welaka National Fish Hatchery, Florida



A mother and daughter look for bugs and other aquatic critters during a macroinvertebrate stream survey at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery partners with local health coalition to encourage kids to go outside

The Russell County Physical Activity and Wellness/Diabetes Coalition, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, and the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. launched an initiative designed to encourage children and their families to get outdoors. "Let's Go Outside!" involved fourth graders in the Russell County School System. The activities started Monday, March 30, 2009, and concluded on Friday, April 24, 2009.

To participate in the event, each student was given a list of activities designed to promote physical activity in a nature setting. Each student completed the activities at home with their parents, and the parents signed an activity sheet to verify their participation. At the end of the four weeks, the school with the largest percentage of involved fourth graders was given a \$400 scholarship to use towards a school outing to any outdoor destination of their choice within Russell County. In addition to the field trip scholarship, each child who took part in the program also was entered into a drawing to win one of several fishing poles. The scholarship money and the fishing poles were donated by the Friends Group. All children who participated received a small accolade for their efforts.

Feedback on the program was immensely positive. All of the children and parents who participated were encouraged to participate in the hatchery's annual Earth Day Celebration on Saturday, April 25, 2009.

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

Chattahoochee Forest NFH takes part in Trout in the Classroom with Fannin County Middle School

On April 2, 2009, Chattahoochee Forest employees Deborah Burger, hatchery manager, and Crystal Thomas, program assistant, attended the Trout in the Classroom fish release held at Tammen Park on the Toccoa River in Blue Ridge, Georgia, by Fannin County Middle School seventh grade teachers and students. The students released approximately 300 fingerlings that had been reared in the classroom.

Throughout the school year, science students learn about aquatics, fish rearing, and conservation. Each day, students participate in feeding the fish, measuring oxygen levels, checking water quality, and cleaning tanks. The entire seventh grade curriculum focuses on Trout in the Classroom at some point. In music class, students write a song to be sung at the release. Essays are written about trout and the environment in English class. In math class, students figure out how many fish are in each tank.



ltoR: Deborah Burger and Crystal Thomas discuss fish barriers with a student as he attempts to putt his golf ball across the simulated fish ladder. Photo by Joe DiPietro, Blue Ridge Trout Unlimited.

Following the release, Burger and Thomas educated students with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fish Barrier Putt-Putt Golf Game. The golf game is educational, teaching students about fish barriers and was developed by the Service's own Tom Sinclair of Fisheries. Like a fish, the golf ball must navigate the river barriers of the golf course to reach its final destination. For the ball, the cup is the destination. For a fish, suitable spawning grounds are usually the goal of upstream movement. The course is difficult, as is a fish's journey, despite the presence of fish ladders and artificial rapids. The students had a blast!

Seventh graders also will participate in the Service's Biologist-in-Training Program (BiT). This is the second year BiT will be used by Fannin County Middle School seventh grade science teachers. The hatchery has offered to provide the school with trout eggs for the 2009-2010 school year.

Submitted by Crystal Thomas, Chattahoochee Forest National Fish Hatchery, Suches, Georgia



Refuge Intern Katharine Becker pauses along her hair collection route to collect a small clump of white, fluffy hair. Photo by Cindy Hefley.

Refuge intern learns about wildlife one hair at a time

Many Dare County residents and visitors to the area ask about the barbed wire recently added above the guardrails on the side of U.S. Highway 64 through Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. In fact, more than 11 miles of barbed wire are attached to the wooden supports of the guardrails. Many observers wonder if the refuge is trying to keep something or someone "in" or "out". The answer is that we are doing neither!

"The wire is one of the research tools used as part of the U.S. 64 Corridor Project being undertaken by Virginia Tech and the North Carolina Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the refuge," Refuge Intern Katharine Becker says. "The Department of Transportation proposes widening the federal highway through the refuge, expanding it to four lanes. This study is a way of monitoring wildlife crossing the highway to determine where to plan safe crossings."

The barbed wire will pull hair from individual bears, wolves, deer, or other species that may pass over the guardrail. DNA analysis of the hair will tell researchers how many different animals crossed and where.

Katharine and Virginia Tech Biologist Andrew Trent are collecting data for these wildlife studies. While traveling on U.S. 64, you might catch a glimpse of the two as they meticulously check the entire length of wire every 10 to 14 days for signs of hair and disturbances such as tracks and scat. Katharine and Andrew also conduct road kill surveys while checking the wire. A GPS unit is used to record the location of each road-kill occurrence. When possible, the species of the road-killed animal is also identified. Additional study components include trapping and outfitting bears and red wolves with radio collars. These new collars will replace existing collars on wolves. The collaring is expected to begin in early summer.

This study will give researchers more information as to which species are using particular sections as crossovers. It will be conducted over a two-year period before road construction to provide a scientific database for important decisions regarding locations for wildlife passage structures. Additional studies will be conducted during and after construction. It is important to understand that these studies are as much about human safety as they are about wildlife.

During the summer months, there may be a graduate student and/or a technician from Virginia Tech and several other refuge interns helping with the collection of data for this project.



The eleven-plus miles of barbed wire attached above guardrails on the side of U.S. Highway 64 through Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Cindy Hefley.

"I'm happy we're going to have more help," explained Katharine, "Working on a study like this sounds really exciting, but that's a really long line of barbed wire! It'll be nice to have a variety of people involved."

So the next time you travel U.S. Highway 64 through Alligator River Refuge or relax along the canal with a fishing pole, don't be afraid of being kept "in" or "out" by the barbed wire. If you are around when one of the researchers is collecting data, feel free to stop and ask about their work. Katharine and the others would probably appreciate the break and would enjoy explaining their latest findings. While you're at it, ask about how Katharine likes being a refuge intern. But, don't be surprised if she entices you to sign up as a volunteer for the refuge. She has a way of making a seemingly mundane chore appear to be exciting. After all, it's not often you can learn about wildlife one hair at a time.

Submitted by Bonnie Strawser, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Manteo, North Carolina

Lights out at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery in observance of Earth Hour 2009



Wolf Creek Biologist Bob Clark attaches temporary signage, alerting visitors about the hatchery's participation in Earth Hour, before turning off the lights and locking the doors to the tank room. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

On Saturday, March 28, 2009, some visitors to Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery found themselves in the dark, all to raise awareness of the importance of energy conservation and the potential impacts of climate change to our fish and wildlife species. As part of the global Earth Hour 2009 campaign, Wolf Creek participated in the event by turning off all non-essential lights for one hour. To help facilitate the educational value, signs were posted, and staff members were available with fact sheets in hand to talk with visitors on the significance and overall impact of the event.

Business, families, and schools also were encouraged to join Wolf Creek in Earth Hour 2009, as other agencies and organizations, including the Russell County Soil Conservation District and the Russell County Middle School participated.

National Fish Hatcheries and Fisheries Resource Offices across the Southeast participated in Earth Hour 2009 as well, with the goal of creating a unique and memorable opportunity to connect with visitors in order to raise awareness of climate change, the impacts it will have to our fish and wildlife species, and how the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is preparing to address the challenge—as well as to collectively conserve energy and reduce global greenhouse emissions.

Earth Hour began in Sydney 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 has the goal of 1 billion people switching off their lights. Over 74 countries and territories have pledged their support during Earth Hour 2009. The World Wildlife Fund sponsors the campaign.

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



Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery volunteers Bob and Pat Hoos are all smiles as they eagerly await the start of Earth Hour at the hatchery. Photo by Amanda Patrick.



Members of the apple snail crew take a break between sampling activities. They are from left: Dr. Phil Darby (University of West Florida), Daniel Mitchell (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), Kevin Palmer (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Melissa Juntunen (FWC), Marsha Ward (FWC) and Dave Mellow (UWF). The other member of the team, Jennifer Kettelin of the FWC is not pictured. Photo taken by automatic camera.

Interagency group searches for apple snails

I was among a group of biologists from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and University of West Florida who recently conducted Florida apple snail surveys in Water Conservation Area 3A, in Miami-Dade County.

The elusive apple snail is the only food source for the endangered Everglade snail kite and is also food for several other species such as limpkins, turtles and fish. The successful nesting of snail kites in 3A has declined in recent years prompting this interagency effort to determine if low apple snail densities are a culprit in this decline.

Snail densities are determined by capturing all snails in throw traps, which are deployed several times within a general area. On this occasion, the group threw the traps 80 times in four different locations, capturing 15 snails. This may not seem like many for the effort, but snail kites are much better at capturing snails than humans and it is generally thought that the snail population in WCA-3A is recovering, although slowly.

The group also looked for the tell-tale sign of abundant apple snail presence -- a large quantity of snail egg clusters. These are visible on emergent vegetation such as Eleocharis (club or spike-rush) and Cladium (saw-grass) stems just above the water line.

With the peak of snail breeding usually occurring in May one would expect a large amount of visible egg clusters. However, on this trip, few clusters were observed. The next sampling trip will take place in May, and it will be very interesting to see if more egg clusters are visible. A few adult snails were brought back for copper testing which will be conducted by Bob Frakes and his staff in the Contaminants Division of the South Florida Ecological Services Office.

Submitted by Kevin Palmer, South Florida Ecological Services Field Office, Vero Beach, Florida

The Nature Conservancy helps Make 2009 a record year in land acquisition for Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge

This year, Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge gained significant acreage through a strategic land acquisition partnership with The Nature Conservancy. Waccamaw grew from 18,620 acres to more than 22,500 acres. The Haulover Tract, a 1,292 acre parcel which is the largest acquisition this year, closed in December 2008.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) acquired the Haulover Tract in 2007 and has been holding it for the refuge until funding was available for the refuge to purchase it. Funding for the Haulover Tract will come from the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission which approved Waccamaw for funding in August 2008. Migratory Bird Conservation Funds are generated through the sale of federal Duck Stamps, and the purchase of the Haulover Tract is the first time these funds were used to acquire land at Waccamaw.



The Haulover Tract is located on the Great Pee Dee River and it consists primarily of old growth bottomland hardwood forests, including bald cypress, cypress tupelo, red maple and a diversity of oak species. This habitat supports abundant waterfowl and is important nesting habitat for the state-endangered Swallow-tailed Kite, which is considered the most threatened land bird in the Southeast without federal protection.

The tract is conveniently located adjacent to the Waccamaw Refuge's new environmental education center which is currently under construction overlooking the Great Pee Dee River and Yauhannah Lake.

The Haulover Tract is unique in that it has a good system of logging roads in place however the forest has been maintained relatively intact and in an older age class than most forests with vehicular access. The roads in place will be improved by USDA to provide better connectivity between the floodplain wetlands and the river during flood events, and eventually they will serve as nature trails for refuge visitors.

In addition to the Haulover Tract, The Nature Conservancy is currently holding an additional 259 acres for Waccamaw which will be transferred to the refuge this summer. The 259 acres is divided into four parcels and was purchased by TNC in 2008 by using mitigation funds from the Grissom Parkway Mitigation Bank.

Most recently the Nature Conservancy also was awarded a North American Wetland Conservation Act grant proposal in March 2009 for \$1,000,000 that will be used to acquire over 500 additional acres and protect over 3.6 miles of shoreline within the refuge's acquisition boundary. The proposal received the second highest score in the country

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



SMARxT Disposal™

Dr. Op Walker, CRMC, and Steve Alexander, Tennessee Field Office, demonstrate one of the proper disposal techniques for unused or expired pharmaceuticals. Photo by Cookeville Herald-Citizen/Ty Kernea.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), and the Pharmaceutical Research and manufacturers of America (PhRMA) share a vision of conserving fish, wildlife, and other resources by providing guidance about the proper disposal of unused or expired medications. The Service, APhA, and PhRMA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on March 17, 2008. This MOU allows and encourages the Service, APhA, and PhRMA to collaborate, design, and implement effective communications to the public about appropriate disposal of medication and the natural resource benefits of these actions. With this vision in mind, the SMARxT Disposal™ campaign was launched.

In March 2009, the Service entered into a cooperative relationship with Cookeville Regional Medical Center in Cookeville, Tennessee, to implement the SMARxT Disposal™ campaign in the community. The Service and CRMC implemented a public awareness campaign with an initial article in the local newspaper, the Cookeville Herald-Citizen. Informational materials will be displayed at the facility and included in each individual patient's discharge instructions. While various departments and units at CRMC have historically approached the disposal of unused or expired pharmaceuticals in different ways, the Service is also working with CRMC to develop consistent facility-specific guidelines for the appropriate disposal of these medications.

Submitted by Steven Alexander, Tennessee Ecological Services Field Office, Cookeville, Tennessee

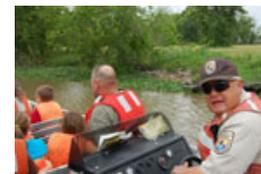
2009 Bear-y Patch in Louisiana



Blake Miller, age 4, makes tracks in the sand during the Bear-y Patch festival. Photo by Byron Fortier, FWS.

On April 18, 2009, staff from the Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex and the Lafayette, Louisiana, Ecological Services Office welcomed visitors to the Service's educational pavilion at the Bear-y Patch. The annual event entertained and informed visitors of all ages about endangered Louisiana black bears and coastal Louisiana refuges and habitat.

Other guest organizations also staffed exhibits at the Bear-y Patch. The Bayou Teche Refuge staff and the Friends of Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge offered free pontoon boat tours of the refuge. These tours were very popular. The festival also featured food and craft booths and live music, all in downtown Franklin, Louisiana. Though it never actually rained, threatening weather in the area helped keep visitor numbers down a bit from previous years.



Manager Paul Yakupzack heads out on a boat tour of Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Neil Lalonde, FWS.

Submitted by Byron Fortier, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, Lacombe, Louisiana

Friends Group --

Fish have Friends



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

With great excitement, the Fisheries Program announces the formation of the National Fisheries Friends Partnership. NFFP is a newly created national fisheries conservation organization. This organization was created with a vision of promoting and supporting a strong network of friends groups at the Service's Fisheries Program field stations nationwide. These friends groups provide independent citizen voices, thinking nationally and acting locally, to enhance the protection and conservation of aquatic resources.

Dozens of representatives from the 27 Fisheries friends groups, Fisheries Program staff, and the new NFFP Board of Directors gathered in Arlington, Virginia, in March to initiate NFFP's efforts. The group discussed goals and strategies, and were exposed to perspectives from guest speakers from a variety of partner groups. Rowan Gould, the Service's acting director, and other Washington Office staff members spoke to welcome and congratulate the group.

NFFP's first elected Chairman is Davy Wotton, who is the founding President of the Friends of Norfolk National Fish Hatchery in Arkansas. Norfolk's friends group is the largest in the Fisheries Program, with more than 230 individual members and has been in existence since 2006.

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia

Hats Off -



Patty Kelly receives 2009 Bird Conservation Award. FWS Photo.

Patty Kelly wins bird conservation award

On March 19, 2009, Patty Kelly, fish and wildlife biologist at the Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office, was presented the individual bird conservation award at the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Directors Reception. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative and The Association of Joint Venture Management Boards honored Patty for significantly broadening shorebird conservation partnerships in Florida, facilitating integrated shorebird management through communication, monitoring, research and habitat conservation through the regulatory process. Patty's persistent and significant efforts have changed the way land managers, biologists, and regulators view and consider coastal protection projects, as well as shorebird conservation, in a state that contains 1,180 miles of coastline, of which 746 are sandy beaches, providing primary shorebird habitat.

Submitted by Janet Mizzi, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Office

Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex celebrates volunteers' outstanding efforts

Southeast Louisiana Wildlife Refuges' volunteers contributed more than 10,500 hours during this fiscal year! To honor the volunteer's efforts, the refuges' staff held a Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon at Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge in March. The day began with boat tours of the Pearl River to explore hidden areas of the refuge and a pontoon boat ride of the Bogue Chitto Canal to see where much of the week-end visitation occurs. Then, everyone enjoyed a lunch of boiled crawfish, jambalaya, barbecued chicken, and more. After everyone ate till their pants were too tight, they settled in for an appreciation ceremony by Project Leader Ken Litzenberger.



Volunteers enjoy a pontoon boat ride. FWS photo



Lunch! FWS photo.

The large number of volunteer hours is made possible by strong support for the program from the Project Leader and staff. The complex is fortunate enough to attract a diverse group of local and resident RV volunteers to accomplish a variety of tasks from general maintenance, gardening of the headquarters property, a volunteer-staffed visitor center, and assistance on environmental education activities. In fact, the resident RV pads are so popular there is a waiting list of future volunteers. We're pretty proud of our volunteers and owe them all a big thank you!

Submitted by Jody DeMeyere, Southeast Louisiana Refuges, Lacombe, Louisiana

“Thursday Crew” honored by Kennedy Space Center

A group of Merritt Island Refuge volunteers, calling themselves the Thursday Crew, were honored recently by Kennedy Space Center with an Environmental Award for Natural Resources and Habitat Conservation. The Thursday Crew received the award for conducting two beach and dune clean-ups on the refuge and Kennedy Space Center beach.

The first clean-up prepared for a three-acre dune restoration project. During the second clean-up, the Thursday Crew served as team leaders for 30 Kennedy Space Center employees who removed more than 450 bags of trash and 150 bags of recyclable plastic and glass from a one-mile stretch of beach. The refuge and Kennedy Space Center beach and dunes are important habitats for southeastern beach mice and nesting sea turtles.



Merritt Island Refuge's Thursday Crew volunteers receive their Environmental Award from Kennedy Space Center officials. Photo by Ralph Lloyd.

The Thursday Crew is a seven-member group which has been meeting every Thursday for the past six years. The Thursday Crew works on refuge projects including trail maintenance, construction of visitor facilities, wildlife surveys, visitor center repair and maintenance, and wildlife garden maintenance.

As stated in the award, the Thursday Crew “are true stewards of the natural resources and habitat” at the refuge and Kennedy Space Center, and they are committed to sharing these resources and habitats with refuge visitors.

Submitted by Ralph Lloyd, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Titusville, Florida

I Gave '8' --



Hunter holds the jaguar pelt helping his dad, Daniel Barrand, with the Buyer Beware lesson. Photo by Pam Darty.

Daniel Barrand visits his son's class

In March, during Bring Your Dad to School Day, Hunter Barrand took his dad, Daniel Barrand, forester at the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge to his second grade class at Chiefland Elementary. Daniel (or Booney as most know him) introduced the refuge and the many fun things for kids and their families to do in the outdoors there.

Daniel thrilled the kids with skins of the exotic python and leopard, as well as walrus tusks used for Buyer Beware lessons. He took stickers, tattoos, posters, and Mark Trail's Fish, Wildlife, and People coloring book as a reminder of the two local National Wildlife Refuges (Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys) in their own backyard.

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

Warm Springs Fish Technology Center celebrates Earth Day 2009

Go Green! Earth Day Festival was celebrated by the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center in partnership with Georgia Department of Natural Resources at F.D. Roosevelt State Park on Saturday, April 18, 2009. This three-day event focused on promoting environmental awareness and conservation, eco-friendly alternatives, and ways to reduce your environmental footprint by reducing, reusing, and recycling. Allison Fritts-Penniman, Chester Figiel, and Nicole Rankin provided information and activities on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, aquatic species and habitat conservation, and fish and fishing techniques. A live touch tank with crayfish, salamanders, and tad poles; a dissecting microscope with live macroinvertebrates; and a juvenile American alligator were the major attractions for more than 40 children and adults. Several other organizations presented information and provided activities to engage and encourage participants to enjoy the outdoors.



Inquisitive girl holding a bullfrog tadpole. Photo by Nicole Rankin.



Excited kids looking for aquatic critters to touch. Photo by Allison Fritts-Penniman.

Submitted by Nicole Rankin, Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, Warm Springs, Georgia

Biologist-in-Training exhibited at Captain Planet Earth Day Kids Fest

Hundreds of fascinated faces flashed through the Biologist-in-Training (BiT) interactive display at the Captain Planet Earth Day Kids Fest, held in Roswell, Georgia, on Saturday, April 18.

The festival is a unique and exciting hands-on environmental education event where youngsters are encouraged to take the first steps in becoming environmental stewards. Through engaging activities and performances, kids are energized with empowering information, allowing them to lead the way in preserving and protecting our biological diversity and natural resources. At the Biologist-in-Training exhibit, participants got up close and personal with creatures like giant bullfrog tadpoles and crafty caddisfly larvae, leading them to discover the wonder filled environments of our ponds and streams. Southeast Regional Office staff from multiple programs (Fisheries, External Affairs, Budget and Administration, and Refuges) volunteered their time to help staff the exhibit. The BiT program is sponsored by the Southeast Region Fisheries Program (www.fws.gov/southeast/fisheries/BiT). More photos in [Photo Album](#).



Judy Toppins in front of the BiT display at the Captain Planet Earth Day Kids Fest in Roswell. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia

Photo Album --

Strategic Habitat Conservation in the Mobile River Basin -- more photos



Endangered Tulotoma snail. Photo by Jeff Powell.



Culturing tanks at the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center. Photo by Paul Johnson, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

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Claiborne Lock and Dam on the Alabama River. Photo by the Corps of Engineers.



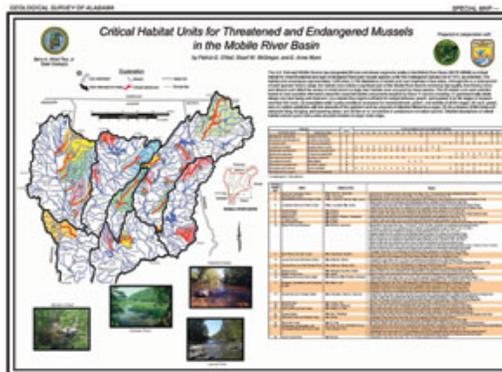
Millers Ferry Lock and Dam on the Alabama River. Photo by the Corps of Engineers.



Predemolition of the Marvel Slab Dam on the Cahaba River. Photo by Paul Freeman, The Nature Conservancy.



Demolition of the Marvel Slab Dam on the Cahaba River. Photo by Patric Harper, FWS.



Biologist-in-Training exhibited at Captain Planet Earth Day Kids Fest -- more photos



Judy with Captain Planet. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS



Hey what is in there. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS



Judy showing a future biologist a crafty caddisfly larvae. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS



What fun holding a tadpole and letting them wiggle in your hand. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS



Judy showing off the crafty caddisfly larvae. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS



Judy telling children the mystery of ponds. Photo by Debbie Young, USFWS

Visitor Services --

Trained Python Patrol at Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge



Angie De Brée uses a catch pole to catch a reticulated python. Photo by Bill Calvert.

On March 5, 2009, staff members of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in Boynton Beach, Florida, joined a trained group of professionals in South Florida skilled in handling large, non-native snakes. These include such dangerous snakes as reticulated and Burmese pythons, boa constrictors, and green anacondas. The Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Venom Response Unit taught various capture techniques, including the use of catch poles, Kevlar gloves, and towels for distraction. Another technique is using another person as "bait" to distract the animal. Local and national news crews filmed the action as staff members practiced the techniques to capture powerful snakes. The overall goal of the training is to have at least two trained responders at the location of a sighting within 20 minutes before a snake has the opportunity to move to another location.

Although there have been no confirmed sightings of pythons at the refuge, there are documented cases of these snakes migrating north from Everglades National Park where a breeding population is established. Due to suitable habitat at the refuge, the northernmost portion of the remaining Everglades marsh, it may be only a matter of time before these snakes are found within or near the refuge. The snakes chosen for the training were all captured in the south Florida wild.

Although not venomous, a bite from one of these powerful snakes animals is painful and incapacitating because the species' teeth point backward. Pythons are constrictors and hold their prey by biting it while simultaneously strangling and squeezing it to death before consumption. It is dangerous for even an experienced snake handler to catch a snake greater than 10 feet in length because these animals are very muscular and powerful. If a large snake were to bite and begin to constrict around the handler, it would be very difficult to remove it without help. Therefore, the policy of the Venom Response Unit is to always have back-up if the snake is over 10 feet long. Students received first hand training in the importance of that lesson as one massive snake started to constrict around Biologist, Tiffany Trent's arm. Although she was not bitten, it took three others to remove the snake: Senior Biologist Cindy Fury; Biologist Angie De Brée; and Public Use Specialist Serena Rinker.

Why are pythons in Florida? Python hatchlings are sold at swap meets and pet stores throughout the United States, costing from \$20 to \$85 each. They are usually only approximately 20 inches long when hatched. Within a year, they can grow to eight feet in length, require larger meals and enclosures, and create a great deal of waste. Irresponsible pet owners, who can no longer care for them because of their massive size, have been releasing the pythons into the Everglades and throughout South Florida. Some pythons also may have escaped from ill-equipped enclosures. Due to Florida's tropical climate, the snakes are able to thrive in the Everglades. Some researchers speculate that the snakes could conceivably survive in the lower third of the United States.

Stomach contents of captured pythons have included the federally endangered Key Largo woodrat, white-tailed deer, wading birds including the endangered wood stork, even alligators along with every mammal found in the Everglades with the exception of the Florida Panther. These invasive snakes are listed as Reptiles of Concern in Florida because they disrupt the natural ecosystem by eating many kinds of Florida's native animals and migratory birds. They also may out-compete many of Florida's native species for food sources and habitat.

Because these snakes grow to such large sizes, have such aggressive temperaments and are such prolific breeders, it is impossible to find sanctuaries and experienced handlers who are qualified and willing to take them. Because of this, once they are captured the snakes are humanely euthanized. After euthanasia, necropsies are performed on the snakes to gather information to determine the age, health and stomach contents, as well as to potentially provide information that may be helpful in capturing additional snakes in the future.



A reticulated python wraps around Tiffany Trent's arm. Cindy Fury is helping her remove it, and Serena Rinker is coming to help. Photo by Bill Calvert.

Submitted by Angela De Brée, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida

Wage Grade Profile --

Hubert Barcroft of Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge



Hubert Barcroft. Photo by Amy Colvin.

Hubert Barcroft started with Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge in Brownsville, Tennessee, in November 2002, as a Heavy Equipment Operator. Hubert's greatest assets are his versatility, his common sense, and his ability to fix just about anything. One day you may see him driving a tractor. On another day he might be grating a road, installing a water control structure, or building an observation deck. He is more than willing to do such tasks as pick up trash, help out at a fishing rodeo, make a show and tell visit at the local school, or band ducks.

Hubert loves his job and enjoys working with his co-workers and manager at Hatchie.

"I have an appreciation for all Fish and Wildlife employees; especially lately as they seem to be doing more with less," he says.

Hubert feels that he has a responsibility to help take care of "God's creation" and to maintain it for the public's enjoyment. During the six years that he has worked at the refuge, Hubert helped make many improvements. These improvements have helped bring more wildlife to the refuge and helped citizens enjoy the refuge more. He takes pride when citizens compliment the improvements he made.

Hubert and his wife Amy have two daughters, Marti, aged 28, and Emily, aged 6. He has a grandson, Hunter, who is six-years-old. Hubert is active in his church and the West Tennessee Emmaus Community. He loves duck and turkey hunting and to water ski. He also is a certified scuba diver.

Submitted by Amy Colvin, Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge, Brownsville, Tennessee

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