



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

Southeastern Currents

OCTOBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

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The US Fish and Wildlife Service's latest action to address Climate Change

Rising to the Challenge -- Strategic Plan for Responding to Accelerating Climate Change

ATLANTA, Ga. -- On coastal North Carolina's federal wildlife refuges, shorelines are receding and barrier islands are narrowing.

In the Florida Keys, the sooty tern, a sea bird, is showing up to breed four to six months earlier than usual.

Inland, invasive plants such as Alligator Weed are crowding out more desirable food for ducks and geese on refuges in Tennessee and northern Alabama.

These signs, and many others, are consistent with the science on global warming. And the climate models predict far worse, including the extinction of 20 to 30 percent of the world's species by the end of this century.

As part of the Interior Department's commitment to building a coordinated strategy to respond to the impacts of accelerating climate change on the nation's natural resources and safeguard the nation's fish and wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is today releasing a draft strategic plan that will guide its efforts to respond to the unprecedented threat posed by global warming. [Learn more . . .](#)

Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge: Serving as a 150,000-acre laboratory for evaluating impacts, testing adaptations, and recording observations relating to climate change

Currently, two research projects relating to climate change are underway on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. The first is a partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to evaluate the effects of several types of adaptive management on an area severely impacted by sea level rise. The second project is a research effort focusing on carbon and nitrogen cycling within swamp forest ecosystems.

The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Partners for Coastal Resilience -- an Adaptive Management Study



Alligator River ditch in the spring.
Photo by Debbie Crane, The Nature Conservancy.

Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge was established in early 1980s with aid from The Nature Conservancy. Today, the refuge encompasses more than 258,000 acres in Dare and Hyde Counties. However, accelerated sea level rise threatens the entire refuge. The Conservancy's climate change adaptation project will take several steps to make the fragile shoreline more resilient to encroaching seas. Adaptation strategies include: restoring the hydrologic regime and associated wetland systems, while limiting saltwater intrusion to maintain necessary soil moisture and promote carbon sequestration benefits of peat soils; planting salt-tolerant species in advance to sea level changes to ensure a resilient shoreline in the future; and building oyster reefs to buffer shorelines from waves and storms.

Part 1 - The refuge landscape has been dramatically altered by humans, making rising sea levels a more pressing problem. There is an extensive network of ditches that allow the wind-tide-driven systems to jet brackish water much further into the interior than is natural. This project will look at the surface water drainage patterns, how they have been altered and what can be done to restore them, while attempting to hold salty sea water at bay.



Point Peter. Photo by Debbie Crane, The Nature Conservancy.

Part 2 - While the refuge is threatened by saltwater intrusion, shoreline erosion also is accelerating. In an ideal world, the transition from forest to marsh should equal the rate of erosion of the marsh on the shoreline, but we don't live in an ideal world – even marsh vegetation is feeling and will continue to feel the pinch. This part of the project will plant salt-tolerant species such as bald cypress, black gum and green ash to buffer rising seas. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

[Learn more . . .](#)

Behind the Scenes--

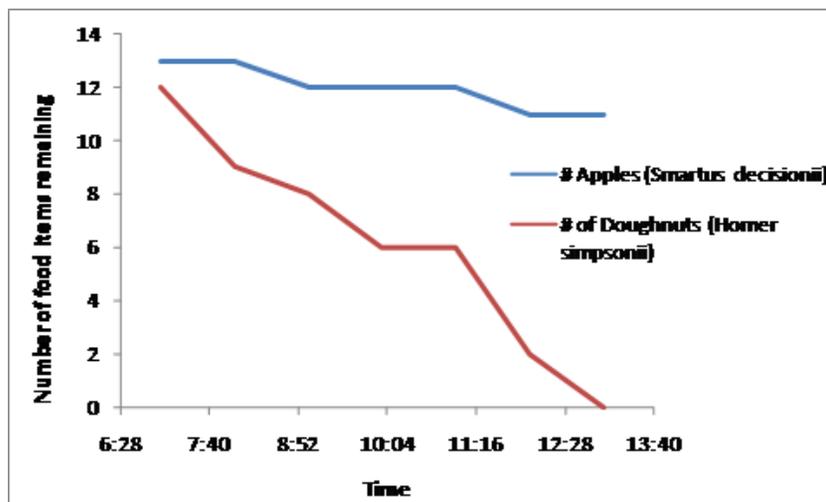
Forecasting the success of USFWS weight loss programs: Will we purchase a bicycle?

Submitted to Journal of Government Initiatives -- Accepted September 15, 2009

On September 14 2009, multiple USFWS Georgia Ecological Services employees (*Homo sapiens governmentus*) initiated a weight loss competition. Contestants agreed to contribute to an office fund if weight loss goals were not met and funds would be used to purchase an office bicycle. This competition is the fourth competition of such kind within the past five years. Because the competition is repeated on a near annual basis, we expect that past competitions have been largely unsuccessful. Thus, we hypothesized that the 2009 competition likely would result in the purchase of a bicycle. To test this hypothesis, we performed an experiment where we offered free unhealthy, weight-generating food and healthy food and tested the contestant's choice. Food items included 13 apples (*Smartus choicei*) and the weight-generating doughnuts (*Homer simpsonii*) as the healthy and unhealthy choices, respectively. We monitored the decay rate of each food item population until 100 percent depletion of one food item.

Summary: Weight loss contestants (*Homo sapiens governmentus*) showed a clear preference for the unhealthy, weight-generating doughnut (*Homer simpsonii*) over the apples (*Smartus choicei*; $T=2.54$, $p<0.0001$). All doughnuts were consumed by 1 p.m.

However, 11 apples remained at the end of the experiment (Figure 1). Anecdotally, an abnormally high amount of coffee was consumed (two pots) before noon, indicating a possible covariate with doughnut consumption. We interpret these results to mean that this competition will result in the purchase of an office bicycle and that the *Homo sapiens governmentus* subspecies will be under a sugar comatose by noon.



**The data presented above are actual data collected from a webcam hidden in the break room.

Submitted by Will Duncan and Donna Line, Georgia Ecological Services Field Office, Athens, Georgia

Bragging Rights --



Wildlife biologist Michael Morse speaks to workshop participants. FWS Photo.

Pocosin National Wildlife Refuge hosts successful educator workshop

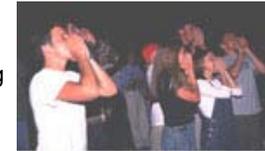
The Far Traveler teacher workshop was held on July 23, 2009, at Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Columbia, North Carolina. There were nine formal and non-formal educators from North Carolina and Virginia at the workshop. Ten educators is an ideal number, but we have hosted as many as 15 participants.

The Red Wolf Recovery Program and the Red Wolf Coalition (RWC) co-sponsor the workshop and RWC donates refreshments. Educators participate in activities from the Far Traveler curriculum authored by Cornelia Hutt, RWC chairperson. They also talk with a wildlife biologist from the Red Wolf Recovery Program and go home with the Recovering a Species DVD, a red wolf howling CD, a Far Traveler curriculum guide, posters, red wolf pens and literature. They become familiar with a Discovery Box and its use for red wolf education. This tool is sent to educators through a reservation system. Workshop evaluations help with future workshop development.

Submitted by Diane Hendry, Red Wolf Recovery Program, Manteo, North Carolina

October red wolf howling event celebrates 22 years of species recovery efforts

On Saturday evening, October 17, 2009, visitors to the Alligator National Wildlife Refuge will be standing where the first-ever canid restoration effort in North America took place 22 years ago. Cars will caravan to a site on the refuge where red wolf howls can be heard in the night. Participants also will hear a short presentation about this endangered species. Visitors are invited to have some howling fun and an opportunity to practice their own howling technique.



Visitors participate in a red wolf howling event. FWS Photo.

The event is scheduled from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in Manteo, North Carolina. For more information, please contact the Red Wolf Coalition at 252-796-5600, or register at www.redwolves.com. The web site provides a detailed description of the howlings, plus a map and other program information.

Submitted by Diane Hendry, Red Wolf Recovery Program, Manteo, North Carolina



The birthday bear himself, Smokey Bear, pauses to accept a hug from one very excited party attendee. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery celebrates Smokey Bear's birthday

Saturday, August 8, 2009, was a day of celebration and fun as the staff of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery celebrated a very famous icon's birthday – Smokey Bear! Although Smokey's actual birthday is Sunday, August 9, the hatchery decided to make a week-end event of the big day by partnering with the Kentucky Division of Forestry to host a week-end program. More than 100 people of all ages came to the hatchery to wish a very happy birthday to Smokey, who turns 65 this year. Birthday cake and lots of goodies were available for all guests along with plenty of helpful fire safety information. Everyone in attendance also got a chance to tour the new Visitor/Environmental Education Center.

Wolf Creek wishes to express its gratitude to the Kentucky Division of Forestry for its help in partnering to make the event a success!

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

Wood duck banding provides a way to connect children with nature

It was a banner year for wood duck banding at Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge. Biologist Clayton Ferrell coordinated banding efforts on the refuge that trapped a total of 2,417 wood ducks, with 1,129 being banded and 1,288 ducks recaptured. This large banding operation provided the perfect opportunity to connect kids and their families with nature while showcasing the beauty and importance of the refuge. Over the summer, the refuge held several banding events allowing adults and children to get up close and personal with nature. People seem to really enjoy holding a wild duck in their hands. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Joan Stevens, Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge, Paris, Tennessee



A boy hugs a wood duck. Photo by Joan Stevens.



Tom Head caught this 103-pound flathead catfish on August 18, 2009. This would have been a new state record if caught on rod and reel; current record is 83 lbs. Credit: GADNR Photo.

Warm Springs Fish Technology Center partners with Georgia DNR

The Fish Technology Center (FTC) is currently working with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR), Wildlife Resources Division, to estimate levels of genetic diversity, estimate age of fish using otoliths (fish ear bones), and check the presence of an oxytetracycline (OTC) mark on Gulf striped bass in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river system. Brent Hess and Paul Jones, biologists from GADNR, have been collecting striped bass samples from West Point Lake in Georgia. The samples include a fin clip and otoliths. Greg Moyer and Ashantye' Williams use the fin clip to determine the genetic diversity of broodstock repository lakes for striped bass. Brent and Paul are using the otoliths to determine fish age and to detect the presence of an OTC mark. Hatchery-raised striped bass are batch marked with OTC as phase one and/or phase two fish, and the otoliths retain the OTC mark. This OTC mark is used to determine if striped bass are hatchery raised or wild spawned. Nicole Rankin has been assisting Brent and Paul with thin sectioning striped bass otoliths for aging and OTC detection. All FTC staff assisted Brent and Paul by providing materials, equipment, and technical support for the Gulf striped bass project.

Joe Rydell, biologist from GADNR, recently requested the use of the FTC's low-speed saw to section a flathead catfish spine. This 103-pound catfish was captured on a trot line in the Ocmulgee River and was measured at more than 57 inches long and greater than 41 inches in girth. Nicole assisted Joe with thin sectioning and aging the catfish spine on August 25, 2009.

The flathead catfish was estimated to be 18 years old from the catfish spine. GADNR was also able to collect an otolith and estimate the catfish's age to be 18 years.

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

Successful Community Day at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge

On a beautiful summer day, August 22, 2009, Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge hosted a Community Day event. The staff and a host of volunteers opened the doors to the new 7,300 square foot state-of-the-art facility that has been eight years in the making.

Although the facility is not 100 percent complete, the event was designed to give folks an opportunity to see Waccamaw's new office and visitor center.

The facility is a monumental improvement to the 1,200 square foot, Georgetown-based, rental property the staff had been using since 2003. The Community Day event officially began at 10 a.m., but by 9:30 a.m. folks were already funneling in. People from the local community and all the refuge partners who made the facility possible got a chance to see first hand the great progress made on this facility during the past year.

School started a week before the event, and some people were still enjoying their summer vacations, so no one was sure how many people would attend. The first cool morning of the summer might have been considered a sign; however, no one ever imagined Community Day would be such a phenomenal event. More than 250 people toured the plantation-style facility equipped with a classroom, auditorium, exhibit hall and office wing. Between hourly guided walks, kid's activities, free food, a new bookstore, and a nearly complete exhibit hall, visitors had more than enough to do, see, eat and talk about.

The Grand Opening, complete with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, will be held on October 10. Now that Waccamaw's staff and volunteers have their first event under their belts, they will build upon what they have learned. - get a lot more hot dogs for the next event. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Ray Ray Paterra, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina



L to R: Park Ranger Ray Paterra; SEWEE Association Board Members: Grace Gasper, Robert Hopkins, Sarah Hartman, Tom Badgett, Karen Beshears, Eddie White; Refuge Manager Craig Sasser. April White is seated. Photo by Garry Tucker.



Biologist Sandy Abbott and intern Beth Bailey use a PIT tag reader to relocate translocated mussels in Sawhatchee Creek, Georgia. Photo by Karen Herrington.

Panama City Ecological Services Field Office leads study on effects of moving mussels during drought

During drought, freshwater mussels may become exposed when water levels decline. Moving listed mussels to deeper water or to downstream locations may provide a refuge during severe drought. However, potential effects to survival and long-term viability are uncertain. Therefore, the Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office is conducting studies to evaluate the effects of moving mussels in small and large streams. These studies also provide an opportunity to collect important demographic and genetic data about the life requirements of these rare species. Working with the Service's West Georgia Field Office and the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, the field office has currently tagged around 600 individuals from 17 sites in six rivers and obtained genetic material from more than 300 mussels. The study will continue for several more years.

Submitted by Karen Herrington, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office



Biologist Beau Dudley applies a PIT tag to mussels to facilitate relocation. Photo by Karen Herrington.

Friends Group --



Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. President Jerry Coleman awards 2008 Russell County High School graduate Cody Stephens with the 2009 Friends of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc. Scholarship. Also pictured are Cody's mother and Wolf Creek NFH Project Leader James Gray. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. award scholarship to local student

The Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. has awarded their annual \$1,000 scholarship to Cody Stephens. Cody will be majoring in Wildlife Management at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, Kentucky this fall. Cody was employed at the hatchery the last two summers through the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) Program. Cody is the son of Vince and Penny Stephens of Russell Springs.

The scholarship program is a competitive process in which prospective applicants must submit an application and essay. Preference is given to applicants who plan to pursue a degree in a natural resource related field. The scholarship is another avenue in which the Friends Group is able to benefit

and support the community.

For more information on the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery (NFH), Inc, please visit:

<http://www.friendsofwolfcreeknfh.com/site/page1.aspx>.

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

Hats Off -



Vern and Rae Nell Hasker standing on the beautifully repainted porch of the Black Bayou Lake Visitor Center. Photo by Gay Brantley.

The right volunteers at the right time

Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge has had many great resident volunteers, but Tom McCormick and Vern and Rae Nell Hasker top the list for being just what we needed this spring and summer. Tom, an experienced interpretive guide and naturalist, arrived right after Sharon Fuller left for the Regional Office and right at the height of our school group visits. At night and when he wasn't staffing the visitor center or giving programs, he designed eleven panels for our Wildlife Challenge Trail and created the files, eliminating art and design charges.

Vern and Rae Nell arrived shortly after Tom and began on visitor center landscaping and sprucing up right away. Rae Nell helped completely rearrange the gift shop and organize the shop storage closet. Vern was sweeping flaking paint off the porch several times a day. One day he said that they would like to sand and repaint the entire porch. And they did! It has never looked better. The two of them never slowed down.

I could not have hand-selected resident volunteers better equipped and more willing to meet the current needs at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge. I cannot say enough wonderful things about having these right folks at the right time. More photos in [Photo Album](#).



Tom McCormick with one of the 11 panels he designed for the Wildlife Challenge Trail at Black Bayou Lake. Photo by Gay Brantley.

Submitted by Gay Brantley, Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Monroe, Louisiana

I Gave '8' --



Satellite transmitter and overhead camera. Photo by David Underwood.

Everglades featured in live Japanese television broadcast

Last fall, October 7 to 11, 2008, the A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge was featured in a live satellite broadcast to Japan as part of a popular television show called Eco-Trip. Refuge Biologist Gayle Martin spent five days with the filming crew explaining the natural history and ecology of the northern Everglades. To prepare for the show multiple airboat trips were taken to select the best locations that would capture the uniqueness of the Everglades. During the broadcast, Gayle described just a few of the key aspects of the Everglades ecosystem including tree island formation, alligator behavior, and the importance of water. This was a unique opportunity to represent the refuge system and the Service's commitment to conservation for millions of viewers in Japan. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Serena Rinker, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida

Photo Album --

The right volunteers at the right time-- more photos



Tom McCormick prepares to install the trailhead panel. Photo by Gay Brantley.

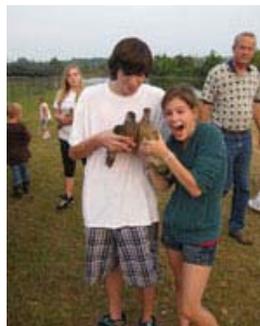


Tom McCormick is joined by local volunteers James Brantley and John Hughes during panel installation. Photo by Brittany Petersen.

Wood duck banding provides a way to connect children with nature -- more photos



A boy pets a wood duck. Photo by Joan Stevens.



Wood duck banding event photo by Joan Stevens.



Wood duck banding event photo by Joan Stevens.

Successful Community Day at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge -- more photos



A sister gives her brother a boost. Photo by Garry Tucker.



Kids use the spinners to learn about some animals that live around managed impoundments. Photo by Garry Tucker.

Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge: Serving as a 150,000-acre laboratory for evaluating impacts, testing adaptations, and recording observations relating to climate change -- more photos



Oyster reef. Photo by Aaron McCall, The Nature Conservancy.



Dr. John King talking to a group of international scientists visiting the tower site during a conference field trip dealing with forestry and climate change. Photo by Dennis Stewart, FWS



Dr. Asko Noormets climbing the monitoring tower to attach an array of instruments to it. Photo by Dennis Stewart, FWS.

Everglades featured in live Japanese television broadcast -- more photos



The host of the show explains the spatial reduction of the Everglades as a result of development. Photo by David Underwood.



Gayle and the show's host in the airboat to drive into the refuge during the live broadcast. Photo by David Underwood.

Visitor Services --

Everyone enjoys the Big Haynes Creek Wildlife Festival



Sharon Fuller educates festival goers on how to identify animals

The Visitor Services and Outreach staff from the Regional Office was almost as animated and excited as the 5,000 festival attendees who stopped by their booth at the Big Haynes Creek Wildlife Festival. The festival, held the last week-end in August at the International Horse Park in Conyers, Georgia, promoted an understanding and enjoyment of the outdoors while featuring animal exhibits, guest speakers, hands-on demonstrations, children's activities, stage performances, and arts and crafts.

Garry Tucker, Sharon Fuller, Deborah Jerome, and Stacy Armitage developed a hands-on tracking activity that connected festival goers with nature they could find in the own backyard. Participants were

encouraged to get wild and create animal tracks in a sand box, identify scat, animal pelts and skulls, all while learning about the National Wildlife Refuge System and the opportunities to connect with nature in the Southeast Region.

By Stacy Armitage, Visitor Services and Outreach, Atlanta, Georgia



An eager family learns how to make animal tracks as Stacy Armitage offers guidance. Photo by Garry Tucker.

Wage Grade Profile --

Fisheries and Refuges work together to complete pond project at Warm Springs



Chad Shirey, Richard Johnson, Wayne Smith, and Carlos Echevarria take a break from pushing dirt. Photo by Warm Springs NFH, FWS.

In late August, Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery needed some assistance and two refuges answered the call! A pond rehabilitation project was underway, and the staff at Warm Springs quickly realized they needed heavy equipment and additional manpower. Richard Johnson, engineering equipment operator at Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge, and Wayne Smith, engineering equipment operator at Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, lent a week's time and their skills to help the hatchery.

Two adjacent ponds at the hatchery were being combined into one large pond. The project meant that tons of dirt would need to be moved and graded to enlarge the pond, as well as to expand and reinforce the banks. The pond will become the main water supply for the holding house. Previous to this rehab, the two single ponds both supplied the holding house. However, leaking pipes and minimal water pressure and volume had the hatchery looking for a solution. The water for the holding house is used to culture alligator gar and is also extensively used during harvesting and marking of Phase I and II striped bass.



Wayne Smith and Richard Johnson move tons of dirt to level out the bottom of the pond. Photo by Warm Springs NFH, FWS.

The hatchery needed several pieces of heavy equipment to complete the job. Although Electrician Chad Shirey is qualified to run all of that equipment, the hatchery does not own the right equipment for this project. The hatchery borrowed two dozers, one excavator, and a dump truck from Piedmont and Eufaula National Wildlife Refuges.



Wayne Smith builds up the expanded bank of the new, larger pond. Photo by Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery, FWS.

Along with the equipment, the refuges also sent two highly-qualified and skilled employees who provided invaluable help and insight to bring the project to completion. Warm Springs is extremely happy with the outcome.

Submitted by Jaci Zelko, Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery, Warm Springs, Georgia



The guys are using the dozer and excavator on the backside of the pond bank. Photo by Warm Springs NFH, FWS.



Richard Johnson used the excavator to shore up the north edge of the pond. Photo by Warm Springs NFH, FWS.

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