



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

January 2010 Newsletter

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Island 63: Improving recreational fishing by a notch

It didn't happen overnight. It wasn't the result of a natural phenomenon. But it happened. Slowly but surely, aquatic habitat changed to terrestrial habitat. It's referred to as "accretion of bedload materials." What it means is this: fish and other creatures that formerly used the habitat were choked out by gradually accumulating sediment. The place where this change occurred is known by the decidedly unromantic name of "Island 63." It lies at Mississippi River Mile 637 in Coahoma County, Mississippi - about two thirds of the way from the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to where it empties into the Gulf some 954 river miles later. This leveed floodplain ecosystem supports the nation's largest freshwater fishery and several trust species, including the pallid sturgeon, the least tern, and the fat pocketbook mussel.



Island 63 notch. FWS Photo.

To understand how the Island 63 secondary channel got blocked off in the first place, it helps to remember that a river has a natural inclination to meander on its way to wherever it is going. According to Dr. Ron Nassar, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Coordinator for the Lower Mississippi River, it all has to do with the civil works projects and water control structures that were put in place many years ago to restrict the river's floodplain and remove many of its bends - - in order to enhance flood control and improve navigation.

"The well-intentioned actions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers inadvertently contributed to the loss of aquatic habitat," explains Nassar, "and now the Corps is one of our most active partners in the effort to restore that habitat."



Opening the secondary channel at Island 63 near Coahoma County, Mississippi improved recreational fishing soon after. FWS Photo.

The project to which he refers was selected in 2006 as the first in a planned series of aquatic habitat restoration projects, to be tackled by an ambitious partnership coordinated by the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee and composed of representatives from the Service, the Memphis District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, and a host of non-governmental organizations. With assistance from the Service's National Fish Passage Program, the partnership created a 300-foot-wide notch in a rock dike located within the secondary channel. This solution allowed water to flow through in a controlled fashion—thus restoring aquatic habitat, improving slack-water habitat for trust species such as the pallid sturgeon, and enhancing the reproductive potential of sandbar nesting species such as the least tern.

Initial monitoring results are promising: both adult and young-of-year pallid sturgeon have been documented in the newly opened portion of the channel. But, another kind of metric is also reflecting improvement: creel counts.

"Recreational fishing has really increased," says Nassar, "particularly among users of the Quapaw Landing public boat ramp. This

project has really made a positive difference in that regard.”

Nassar can discuss the Lower Mississippi River Island 63 project authoritatively. He can talk about the \$66,000 in funding contributed to the project by the National Fish Passage Program, and how the restoration has been both “cost-effective” and “resource effective.” He is perhaps most eloquent when he sums up the gains made through the partnership’s efforts in very simple terms: “That habitat is now good.” More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia

Behind the Scenes--



Photos of Terri Nallet's yard. Photo by Terri Nallet, FWS.

Climate change – carbon footprints – Certified Wildlife Habitat

Plant a tree - cut down a tree! Oh my, I had twenty trees cut down to claim user friendly space for my backyard! That is “human” user friendly space. In an age where phrases like climate change and carbon footprints are terms of great concern, I felt very guilty. But, I also had a plan.

I specifically wanted to replace habitat that I had removed by planting additional trees, shrubbery, and flowers to attract butterflies and birds to our yard. I referenced information available from various sources such as local nurseries, garden shops, gardening books and magazines, the Fish and Wildlife Service at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/ea/funfacts.html> and the National Wildlife Federation at

<http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife>.

First of all, I will admit the extent of my actions. We have a small yard, about a quarter of an acre, which required cutting down a dense section of trees, brush, and other vegetation to make it user friendly for the human inhabitants. We also had to haul out about 30 dump truck loads of dirt to level it off before installing a concrete retaining wall to hold the subsequent banks in place.

Since then, Leyland Cypress were planted on the top side of the concrete wall and Rose-of-Sharon, Roses, Holly, Hydrangea, Camelia, and Butterfly Bushes encompass the bottom sides of the wall. One corner contains a raised garden and pond with a waterfall. Birdbaths and a wide variety of flowers, bushes, and trees are located throughout remaining areas.

My goal was accomplished recently when the yard qualified as a NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat.

I can't help but wonder how many other Fish and Wildlife Service employees have already had their backyards certified as wildlife habitats. I also wonder how much we would improve our footprints, if 25 to 50 percent of the Fish and Wildlife Service employees committed to providing the additional components necessary to qualify their yards for NWF wildlife habitat certification. Although I might have gotten a little carried away, all you need to do is to provide elements from each of the following areas:

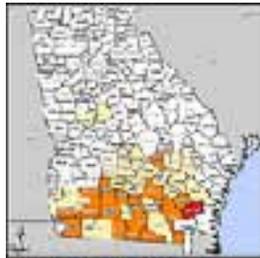
- **Food Sources** - For example: Native plants, seeds, fruits, nuts, berries, nectar
- **Water Sources** - For example: Birdbath, pond, water garden, stream
- **Places for Cover** - For example: Thicket, rockpile, birdhouse
- **Places to Raise Young** - For example: Dense shrubs, vegetation, nesting box, pond

- **Sustainable Gardening** - For example: Mulch, compost, rain garden, chemical-free fertilizer

Submitted by Teri Nallett, Safety Office, Atlanta, Georgia



Bragging Rights --



FEMA map shows Georgia disaster areas.

April Showers brought floods and flowers

When strong storms rolled through the Southeast last spring, numerous stream crossings in four states were damaged or completely washed out by the flood waters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) declared disasters in Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. Many of the stream crossings occur in areas that support federally listed or candidate mussel and fish species.

To streamline the many requests for assistance to repair these crossings, FEMA's Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation program and five Ecological Services offices prepared guidelines for the repair or replacement of the bridges and culverts, avoiding the need to consult on each project individually. The guidance outlines construction techniques and alternatives that avoid and minimize the adverse effects of FEMA-funded projects on threatened and endangered species and critical habitat. The guidance applies specifically to the seven declared disasters, but it is intended to be an initial step toward a more permanent document. A version 2.0 was developed when flooding hit Georgia again in September, and the Georgia Ecological Services office updated and improved upon the original to quickly provide guidance for another declared disaster.

Submitted by Sandy Pursifull, Panama City Ecological Services Field Office, Florida.

Steve Traxler loves to spread the word

Steve Traxler, a biologist with the South Florida Ecological Services Office, believes getting out into the community to spread the word about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and conservation issues is great way to “give back” and educate the public.



Steve Traxler talks to an audience of about 100 people at the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute. Video capture by Mike Claus, St. Lucie County Television.

Steve recently spent part of an evening telling about 100 people at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (HBOI) in Ft. Pierce, Fla. about Everglades restoration and climate change. “It was a great mix of people...students, teachers, scientists and more,” he said. “They asked lots of great questions. This is important stuff and they seemed to get that.”

Steve’s lecture was part of an ongoing series about ocean science sponsored by the Institute. “Steve’s talk was received very well. Climate change is something people need to have on their radar screens,” said Dennis Hanisak, the Institute’s Director of Education. “Steve did a tremendous job and deserves a big ‘thumbs up’ for a very stimulating presentation. I got a lot of positive comments.”

This was Steve’s fifth or sixth public speaking engagement over the past year. He spoke to about 300 students at Gifford Middle School for Earth Day. “I think part of our job is to help the public better understand the issues we deal with,” he said. “I especially like working with young people and kids. They soak up information. Our future is in their hands.”

Steve added that meeting new people is one of the benefits of doing these engagements. He said, “In fact, I met someone at Harbor Branch who invited me to speak at his civic club. I see it as another opportunity to tell people about whom we are and what we do. I enjoy it.”

Steve’s presentation was videotaped by St. Lucie County and was shown on the county’s cable TV access channel throughout the month of October.

“We’re fortunate to have someone of Steve’s caliber on our staff who is so willing and is such an excellent ambassador for us in the community,” said Pam Repp, Assistant Field Supervisor for Everglades Restoration.

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



Looking around the 1827 lighthouse. Photo by Tricia Lynch, FWS.

Fall tour to Cape Romain’s Lighthouse Island

Lighthouse enthusiasts awoke on October 25, 2009, to blue skies and a cool light breeze – a perfect autumn day to visit Lighthouse Island and see the two historic lighthouses. Fifty folks gathered at the Sewee Visitor Center to meet lighthouse tour guide Tommy Graham and learn from Tommy the history of the 1827 and 1857 lights.

Tommy, who also heads the lighthouse restoration project, had an interesting display of old maps, diagrams and photos, and gave his audience a fascinating slide presentation. The slide show included hand-drawn diagrams of the 1857 lighthouse foundation construction and many old photos - oil lamps and the more modern Fresnell lens; aerial views of the island that showed the lights and light keepers’ houses; and photos of the light keepers’ family members and friends. Tommy also showed slides of

restoration efforts undertaken in the past to preserve the lights. Following Tommy's presentation, visitors headed to McClellanville boat landing to board the refuge concessionaire's ferry to Lighthouse Island.

Tommy continued his presentation on the island, taking visitors inside the 1857 light to view its construction. Some of the other visitors went explored the island, particularly the 1827 lighthouse which, today, consists of only the outer wall. A cistern, located close by the old light but barely visible among the rambling vines and shrubs, drew everyone's attention. The moss-covered reservoir, once holding rain for the keeper's drinking water, now serves as a freshwater source for the island's wildlife. Throughout the afternoon, folks ambled over the narrow paths and amid the sprawling vines looking at the cultural artifacts that defined a maritime era for coastal communities.

Cape Romain's Lighthouse Tours are offered twice annually, in the spring and fall. Visit the refuge website at www.fws.gov/caperomain or contact the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center at 843.928.3368 to obtain more information about the tours. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Tricia Lynch, Park Ranger, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina

A holiday at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery staff members and their families spread a little holiday spirit by participating in the 2009 Russell Springs Christmas Parade on Saturday, November 28, 2009.

Wolf Creek Project Leader James Gray, Biologist Bob Clark, Biotech Chris Murphy, Office Assistant Teresa Devore and Friends' of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc. Administrative Assistant Johanna Spencer were among the staff members who participated in the annual holiday event. The crew utilized one of the distribution trucks for their float, and the parade entry also included a special guest star, Goldie the Fish. Adding to the trout-tastic holiday theme, crowd participants were treated to candy fish as the truck passed by.



Wolf Creek's crew distributes candy fish. Photo by Johanna Spencer, Friends of Wolf Creek, Inc.

The crew's participation in the annual parade is becoming a tradition. Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery team members eagerly look forward to a great new year ahead!

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



A red-cockaded woodpecker is banded. Photo by Chris Carrell, FWS.

More red-cockaded woodpeckers coming to Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

It's almost dusk but the day is just starting for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biologist Neil Lalonde, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Red-cockaded Woodpecker Biologist Eric Baka and some of their colleagues from the Department of Defense and U.S. Forest Service. Armed with climbing equipment, spotting scopes and nets they carefully and quietly make their way into the pine forest of the Kisatchie National Forest near Fort Polk, Louisiana. They are hunting four juvenile red-cockaded woodpeckers to relocate them to a new home in Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge on the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain.

Setting up their equipment under the roost sites only takes a short time but then the waiting starts. They look through the scopes

and some time before dark, in a flurry of peeps and chatters, they'll see the birds come in for the night. It is up to the biologists to identify the birds using their colored legs bands before they enter the roost. When they are sure they have the right birds, Lalonde and Baka place a net over the roost cavity hole, bang on the tree to wake up the drowsy inhabitant and brace for the bird to hit the net. Then, they carefully place the bird in a box to transport it to its new home.

Although the USFWS and LDWF have a long history of working together, this is the first year of intensive collaborative monitoring and banding of the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) population on Big Branch Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is already home to 15 family groups of RCWs for a total of approximately 60 birds. In addition to the two agencies, other state, federal and private landowners, including the Department of Defense and U.S. Forest Service, formed the Western Zone Red-cockaded woodpecker Translocation Cooperative to share information and research. The Cooperative also surpluses birds to inhibit inbreeding and enhance the genetics of existing populations. Baka has been instrumental in sharing his expertise on artificial cavity installation, juvenile RCW banding and now translocation. With his help Lalonde has banded 21 juvenile birds on the refuge and hopes to band the rest of the population in the near future. These colored bands are placed in a specific color combination to help biologists identify individual birds.

After a long night of capturing and containing the birds, Lalonde, Baka and their colleagues still have to make the four-hour drive to Big Branch Marsh Refuge where they will climb pine trees and put the birds into new artificial cavity inserts before covering the hole for the night. They'll release the birds in the morning and from then on it is hands off management till the spring when the next roost count determines if the birds stayed in the area.

About the size of the common cardinal, an RCW is approximately seven inches long with a black cap and nape that encircle large white cheek patches. RCWs were once considered common throughout the longleaf pine ecosystem, which covered approximately 90 million acres of the Southeast before European settlement. Unfortunately, much of the longleaf pine ecosystem disappeared from its original range due to widespread commercial timber harvesting, commercial tree farming and agriculture. Refuge managers, foresters, biologists and fire fighters are doing their part to recreate the bird's preferred habitat through prescribed fire, thinning, long leaf pine plantings and constructing artificial nest cavities.

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

Trout production is a 365-day operation for Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

You might know about Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery's outreach efforts or that Wolf Creek is a part of the Southeast Region's Fisheries Program. However, the hatchery also raises more than one million rainbow and brown trout per year, and someone is on the station 365 days per year to make this happen.

With 100,000 visitors annually, a busy outreach program, an active volunteer program, and a Visitor and Environmental Education Center, it might be easy to overlook the real reason the hatchery is in place, which is coldwater fisheries production. Whether cleaning raceways, feeding, dealing with maintenance issues, or loading trucks, someone from the fish production team is always onsite, 365 days per year. Ice, sleet, sun, snow and/or rain – you name it, the fish production team at Wolf Creek enjoys a variable outdoor office year-round.

If you're looking to learn more about Wolf Creek and its myriad of activity, take time to visit the hatchery and serve as a part of the crew for a day, week or longer. The Wolf Creek website also offers a glimpse into our fish production program:

<http://www.fws.gov/wolfcreek>. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

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



Fish production team members work in the cold of winter to load fish on to a distributor truck. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.



Project Leader James Gray explains the process of trout production. (Photo by Katrina Kerr, FWS volunteer.)

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery helps to expand trout in the classroom program in Kentucky

The staff members of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery raise over 1,000,000 rainbow and brown trout annually, providing an amazing up close and personal field trip opportunity for students from around Kentucky looking to learn more about life cycles in action. Yet, what about the many children who can't make the trip? What happens when the hatchery can't be brought to the classroom?

Now, thanks to a partnership between the hatchery and members of the Bluegrass Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the hatchery experience can be shared in the classroom. On Friday, November 13, 2009, Trout Unlimited members traveled to the hatchery to take delivery of 3,600 eyed rainbow trout eggs for the twelve schools across the state involved in Trout in the Classroom (TIC) program.

Trout in the Classroom is an environmental education program in which students in Kindergarten through high school raise trout from eggs to fry; monitor tank water quality; engage in stream habitat study; learn to appreciate water resources, begin to foster a conservation ethic, and grow to understand ecosystems. Most programs end the year by releasing their trout in a state-approved stream near the school or within a nearby watershed. Additionally, teachers can adapt the program to meet curriculum needs and utilize the project as a lesson plan for both indoor and outdoor teaching.

In Kentucky, the program is relatively new, but it is gaining momentum thanks to the Bluegrass Chapter of Trout Unlimited. In fact, due to immense popularity during the inaugural year in 2008, in which Trout Unlimited members began working with schools to start the program, interest in the Trout in the Classroom project has grown and expanded immensely, and members were eager to collect the eggs to take back to the students and teachers during their November visit to the hatchery. Many teachers in the Lexington, Kentucky, area also are seeking funding opportunities to bring their students to Wolf Creek, even opting for special extended day field trips, due to the incredible learning opportunities and excitement about the Trout in the Classroom program.

For more information on Trout in the Classroom, please visit: <http://www.troutintheclassroom.org/>

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



Wolf Creek NFWF staff and Trout Unlimited members count out the 3,600 eggs the TIJ team will take back to kick off their Trout in the Classroom program. (Photo by Katrina Kerr, FWS volunteer.)



Makin' paper. (Photo by Tricia Lynch, FWS)

Wood Magic at the Sewee Visitor Center

The tenth annual Wood Magic Forest Fair was held Nov. 17-20, 2009, at the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center, a facility which showcases both the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and the Francis Marion National Forest. A total of 561 fourth graders plus teachers, parents, and volunteers from six schools learned just how magical the forests are. Five stations - - sawmill, paper, gifts, fire and magic - - intrigued the students throughout each day. And of course, no fair would be complete without popcorn and pizza!

At the sawmill, students learned what processes are involved from the time a harvested tree leaves the forest to becoming a 2" x 6" board, plywood or wood chips. Many students recalled the introductory film about Freddie, an eager pine seedling more than ready to reach maturity and become a house.

At the paper station, students learned what sources are used in making paper and that 50 percent of the content in landfills are paper products. The students themselves were actively involved at the pulp mill. Paper shredding, creating pulp, screening, and removing excess water made the students squeal and squirm in their seats. Before leaving the station, students learned a recycling song:

*Paper here and paper there,
Stacks of paper everywhere!
Put them in the recycling bin.
Use that paper over again!
Advice! Be nice! Use it Twice!!*

The students discovered that trees magically filter the air, protect soil and water, create various stages of wildlife habitat and, provide places for people to enjoy. Students found that forests provide many jobs for people who want careers in forestry, biology, education, and the wood industry.

Donning bright yellow fire jackets, students gathered around a burning pile of leaf litter, as a forester showed fire tools and demonstrated how fire, when controlled can be “good” to promote a healthy forest or “bad” as in the case of uncontrolled wildfire. Students learned the “recipe” of fire - - fuel, oxygen and heat - - and were quick to point out both good and bad fire scenarios.

Students learned that tree parts are turned into soap, drink, toothpaste and medicine and, through proper natural resource management, forest land provides us with innumerable renewable resources. The fair participants learned that all this magic is only made possible with cooperators working together, although they share differing backgrounds and opinions.



How healthy is this tree? Photo by Tricia Lynch, FWS Photo.

Wood Magic is made possible through volunteers and partners from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Forest Service, South Carolina Forestry Commission, Wood Industry, and the Baruch Marine Institute at Hobcaw Barony, Georgetown .

Submitted by Michelle Wrenn, Francis Marion National Forest, Awendaw, South Carolina



STEP Student Glen Supp treats a substantial cogon grass infestation at Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Ben Hornsby, FWS.

Waging war on invasive exotics

Fire personnel at Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge get the opportunity to wear many hats because they join refuge biologists in an ongoing battle against invasive exotic species. Invasive exotic species pose a major threat to the Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge because they displace native plants. Loss of habitat is the most critical threat to priority species, such as the Florida Scrub Jay. Invasive exotic species such as guinea grass and cogon grass have the ability to invade the scrub oak habitat where they live. Merritt Island forestry technicians spend a lot of time on the ground throughout the refuge, allowing for identification and documentation of new infestations that can then be treated with herbicide.

Exotic plant species on the refuge are fought in three ways: through exotic species removal contract crews, refuge personnel, and volunteers. While contract crews are beneficial for large landscape general removal projects, the use of refuge personnel and volunteers allows for a more specific mode of attack. The cooperation between fire program personnel and the biology staff has created a strong force dedicated to attacking these exotic plants. While the war against invasive exotic plant species is far from a victory, current efforts are making great progress on keeping these species in check.

Submitted by Ben Hornsby, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Titusville, Florida

Holla Bend NWR serves as bird-banding site for local school



Students watch Dr. Kellner as he untangles a bird from the mist net. Photo by Amber Mascuilli, Russellville High School.

Recently, Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge was a place of learning and delight as 18 students from an environmental science class from Russellville High School in Arkansas participated in a bird-banding of migratory songbirds. With the help of Chris Kellner, a professor from Arkansas Tech University, and their teacher, Amber Mascuilli, the students trapped 30 birds in the seven nets that were placed in a hardwood reforestation area on the refuge. Included in the birds captured were indigo buntings, willow flycatchers, cardinals, Carolina wrens, and white-eyed vireos. Each bird was identified, weighed, measured, and banded with a USFWS band, by the students. Russellville High School, Dr. Kellner, and the Holla Bend NWR would like to initiate a yearly bird-banding project on the refuge.



Students watch after untangling the first bird to be banded from the net. Photo by Amber Mascuilli, Russellville High School.

Submitted by Sarah Chronister, Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge, Dardanelle, Arkansas

Go on a virtual tour through Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

The Florida Everglades are perhaps one of the most unique ecosystems in the southern region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this area is home to 56 endangered or threatened species. To protect these species there are two key components that we must manage that helped to form the Everglades. Water is the first and not just any water, water that is exceptionally low in nutrients such as phosphorus. The second component is wildland fire, which is directly tied to water levels.



Virtual airboat tour. Photo by Jon Wallace, FWS.

The new visitor's center at the A.R.M. Loxahatchee NWR focuses on both of these key components along with several others, and the effects these components have on the plants and animals that reside on the refuge. Through exhibits such as a virtual airboat ride which takes visitors on a ride through the refuge and adjacent to a prescribed burn in progress, to the night sounds exhibit narrated by a Gladesman who explains to his young grandson the importance of fire in the Everglades as lightning flashes around the visitor and the sounds of fire erupt. Alligators bellow and birds can be heard flying out of the path of the fire. The visitor then moves onto an interactive Managers Game in which they are quizzed about how they would manage issues such as exotic species control, prescribed fire, wildland fire, and water quality.



Virtual Managers Game. Photo by Jon Wallace, FWS.

The finale of the new exhibits is the refuge movie which looks at the history of the refuge and then showcases refuge staff discussing the work they perform on the refuge in a collaborative effort to ensure the future of the Everglades.

As you may be able to surmise the exhibits are largely influenced by the fire program at the refuge. This is because refuge managers feel as though fire is one of the best ways to restore the ecology of the Everglades, and because of the urban setting of the refuge many people have questions when they see smoke billowing up from the refuge interior on a prescribed fire day. The exhibits focus on the necessity of fire in managing the Everglades.

The majority of Loxahatchee is also considered to be wildland urban interface and the fire program works actively to manage fuel loads in areas in close proximity to urban areas to reduce the possible impacts of wildfire to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Submitted by Jon Wallace, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida

Friends Group --



Miss Farnil, a representative of the Kappa Alpha Order at Mississippi State University, gives a check to Dr. Larry Bon, President of Friends of Noxubee Refuge. Photo by Kimberly Sikes, FWS.

Kappa Alpha Fraternity a new Friend and volunteer

On October 17, twenty-six members of Kappa Alpha Order at Mississippi State University, Starkville, Mississippi, volunteered their services on a variety of Noxubee Refuge projects. These details included picking up litter along eight miles of road, weeding native plant and bird gardens, installing two 16-foot-long foot bridges on the Craig Pond Trail and clearing 1.25 miles of trail. The KA Order became a Friends of Noxubee Refuge Corporate Sponsor and hopes to make this an annual service project. We really appreciate all the help and look forward to working with them in the future.

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



Bridge under construction on Craig Pond Trail. Photo by Henry Sarasing, FWS.



Finished Bridge on Craig Pond Trail. Photo by Henry Sarasing, FWS.

Hats Off -

Southeast Region's volunteers give back in a BIG way



Volunteer Ricardo Colon helped the Service to monitor the introduction of the listed *Leptocereus grantianus*. Photo by Silmarie Padron, FWS.

In the Southeast Region 8,943 volunteers gave 359,441 hours of service during fiscal year 2009; that is equivalent to 172 full-time employees!

Volunteers play a vital role in helping the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fulfill its mission of conserving, protecting, and enhancing America's fish, wildlife, and habitats. They are individuals who want to give back to their communities, parents who want to be good stewards of the land and set examples for their children, retired people willing to share their wealth of knowledge, concerned citizens of all ages who want to learn more about conservation, and passionate people who enjoy the outdoors and want to spread the word about America's greatest natural treasures. Volunteers are folks who value our

national treasures and want to see them passed on to future generations.

Volunteers helped the refuges in the Southeast with almost every aspect of their work this fiscal year. They led nature and environmental education programs, guided tours, and provided interpretive information to public groups. They also staffed Visitor Centers or operated bookstores, assisted with historical and cultural artifact collections, monitored natural resources and assisted with habitat restoration efforts. Many helped with maintenance and construction projects.

Some examples:

- Thanks to the time and effort provided by volunteers at the Caribbean Field Office, they were able to restore habitat for wildlife and plants in private and public lands, including establishing sustainable populations of listed plants. In addition, they helped implement recovery actions to listed species such as the Puerto Rican parrot, the Puerto Rican crested toad, *Peperomia wheeleri*, and *Leptocereus grantianus* by assisting with surveys, monitoring and by planting listed species to improve their conservation status.
- The Mammoth Springs National Fish hatchery in Arkansas had help from volunteers too. Volunteers created displays and educational handouts for the hatchery's visitor center and environmental education program. Informational displays highlighted aquatic resource conservation and provided information on trout habitat and recreational fishing.
- At the Memphis Migratory Bird Field Office, a volunteer banded a total of 25 mourning doves and submitted results to Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

By joining the Southeast Region's dynamic team of volunteers they were able assist in preserving and conserving wildlife and its habitat for future generations of Americans. To learn how volunteers can help you, please contact the Regional Volunteer Coordinator, Stacy Armitage at 404/679-7178.

Submitted by Stacy Armitage, Visitor Services, Atlanta, Georgia

I Gave '8' --

Outreach efforts along Florida's central Gulf Coast

Todd Mecklenborg recently participated in two educational events that reached several hundred people.

The first was at U.S. Geological Survey's Understanding Climate Open House. The two-day event hosted approximately 1,000 fourth graders the first day and several hundred general public visitors the second. Todd spoke to visitors about the various species artifacts on display, and he even had a live crocodile and alligator.

The second event was the Great American Teach-in at the Broward Elementary School in Tampa, Florida. Todd presented a short slide show on wildlife and spoke to 125 school children (42 fifth graders and 83 kindergartners) about the various species artifacts he brought along, as well as a live alligator for the students get up close and personal with.

Todd is based out of the North Florida Ecological Services Office and focuses his conservation efforts along Florida's central Gulf coast.

Submitted by Chuck Underwood, North Florida Ecological Services Field Office, Jacksonville, Florida

Photo Album --

Russell County fourth graders experience Outdoor Eco Adventure at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery -- more photos



Sue Duncan, Park Ranger, NPS Big South Fork National Recreation Area, talks with students. Photo by Amanda Patrick.



Outdoor Eco Adventure Day participants learning about the lessons of fuel mileage in relation to conserving our resources. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.

Local students sweep Bulls Island Beach -- more photos



Molly Garrison and Alysa Bowman, Pinckney Elementary Ecology Club members, display a collection of rubbish. Photo by Mike Oline, Pinckney Elementary School.



Wando High School students pick debris off the beach. Photo by Diane Girardero, Wando High School.

Kids enjoy fishing clinic -- more photos



A successful catch! Photo by Takako Sato, FWS.



Layne Hamilton helps explain to the kids how fishing license fees help pay for programs like these. Photo by Takako Sato, FWS.

Vieques NWR still going batty -- more photos



Bat field work. FWS Photo.



A little girl shows her decorated bats. FWS Photo.



Jesus Rios, an Ecological Services employee, shows the audience a bat. FWS Photo.

Visitor Services --

Junior naturalists at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge experience nature journaling



Junior naturalists from Cape Hatteras Secondary School, with coordinator Linda Austin, display nature journals. Photo by Cindy Heffley, FWS.

Can you remember a time before computers, digital cameras or digital voice recorders - - a time when paper and pencil and film cameras were the tools used to share memories?

Many of us can remember, but for most middle school students, 'electronic' is all they know. Recently, seven students from Cape Hatteras Secondary School in Buxton, North Carolina, experienced the age-old practice of journaling on paper. They felt the satisfaction of documenting their observations on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge.

For centuries, naturalists have been using journals to record a wide variety of experiences to share with others. Long before cameras were invented, line drawings and colored pencils were used to document wildlife and wild lands in our country. With modern technology came digital cameras and voice recorders to be used to keep track of a variety of things in the field. Computers with tiny memory cards took the place of hundreds and thousands of pages with handwritten notes and drawings.

With plain black and white composition books and volumes of arts and crafts supplies, these seven students ventured out to connect with nature. Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Services Specialist Cindy Heffley gave the junior naturalists an opportunity to create their own custom nature journals. Some from the group spread out on the table and benches at the Visitor Center. It wasn't long before they were cutting and drawing and taping- creating individualized covers for their books.

Heffley told stories about past naturalists such as William Healey Dall who accompanied the Western Union Telegraph Expedition of 1865-67 and anthropologist William Duncan Strong's expedition to Honduras in 1933, as well as more recent naturalists. The students were interrupted by a call from other students near the North Pond Trail. Four river otters were making their way around the pond. One of the students asked if they could go observe the otters. Heffley explained that the best thing about being at the refuge is that the day's activities can be determined by the wildlife more than an instructor. "We have to take advantage of the opportunity when it presents itself," Heffley reminded the students.

The students were given refuge's digital cameras to record their observations, and off they went. Eventually, they returned to the porch and to their projects and posed for pictures which will be included in their journals. The students also will receive CDs with the digital pictures they took so they can have a record of their day. As they learned during a previous field trip, naturalists and other researchers rely on a variety of tools to provide proof of their journey and experiences. A big part of the process is the documentation. The photographs they take and their new nature journals will be used at their school and on other field trips throughout the school year. Not only will the students have a record of the wildlife and wild lands they see this year, they will also have something tangible to share with others for years to come.

Submitted by Cindy Heffley, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Manteo, North Carolina

Wage Grade Profile --

Mike Gallagher and Steve Nelms, Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges



Mike Gallagher and Steve Nelms preparing for a test firing of the trap. Photo by Tom Wilmers, FWS.

Mentioning that Mike Gallagher and Steve Nelms are incredibly versatile individuals able to accomplish a wide array of tasks is like saying that Julia Child can make corn dogs.

Recently, Mike and Steve completed a task that even for them was a bit daunting and out of the ordinary: constructing a trap to capture Reddish Egrets to enable attachment of satellite transmitters. Movement and dispersal patterns of Reddish Egrets, a species of Regional and Continental Management Concern, are poorly understood.

If building such a trap sounds easy, consider the designers' caveats: "Because of the technical aspects involved in the construction of the modified flip trap, we recommend consulting with a professional machinist to ensure proper construction of the trap and execution of the firing mechanism."

The complex design called for a radio-triggered, spring-powered apparatus that would fire a 30-foot-wide net able to travel rapidly and far enough to allow safe capture. Mike and Steve examined the intricate diagrams and, despite lacking a machine shop, believed they could construct the trap. They laboriously fabricated and welded the myriad parts; bit-by-bit the trap took shape. Upon completion, they made repeated test firings to synchronize the triggers for the twin throw arms and adjust fulcrum tension for the four garage-door springs.

On October 15, their hard work bore fruit when a white-phase Reddish Egret was captured and fitted with a satellite transmitter. Upon release, the bird flew majestically to a remote part of an island. To date two adult and two juvenile birds - - a perfect complement for tracking - - have been fitted with transmitters. With a transmitter life of three years, for the first time, detailed information on intra- and inter-seasonal movements across years will become available on this species.



A white-phase Reddish Egret fitted with a satellite transmitter. Photo by Tom Wilmers, FWS.

Submitted by Tom Wilmers, Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges, Big Pine Key, Florida