U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Southeast Region

Southeastern Currents

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Burmese python. Credit: Public domain/Wikimedia commons.

Burmese Pythons: An invasive threat in the Everglades

Invasive species are one of the historical “big three” threats to natural resources in south Florida, right alongside habitat loss and the limitations of existing water infrastructure. Climate change is also the transformational conservation challenge of our time and our future, both because of the challenges that it poses in its own right and also because of the way it could exacerbate the historical big three.

Invasive plants like melaleuca and Brazilian pepper have been a clear focus of attention for years, and lygodium has emerged as a major threat to Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and other sensitive habitats. Invasive animals have arguably received less attention in the past, but this is quickly changing. Perhaps 10 years ago the Burmese python achieved a foothold in the Everglades, and today a large population is breeding in south Florida. This snake, which is originally from Southeast Asia, can grow to over 20 feet in length and has a ravenous appetite with no natural predators in Florida. Some estimates put the population size in the tens of thousands; furthermore, some recent science suggests that the range of pythons in the United States could expand notably, perhaps exacerbated by climate change.

The python threat has struck very close to home. Pythons are most commonly found in Everglades National Park, our important partner in conservation. In addition, pythons were recently implicated in the death of several endangered wood rats within Crocodile Lakes National Wildlife Refuge on North Key Largo. The wood rat is one of the most endangered species in south Florida, with about 200 individuals remaining in the wild within one small geographic area. Simply stated, every single wood rat is important, and the possibility of pythons establishing a home range in the Keys is extremely concerning. A number of other highly endangered species such as the Cape Sable seaside sparrow, Florida panther, wood stork, and Key Largo cotton mouse also occur in places where pythons have been found.

The greatest conservation challenges require a unique mix of relationship building and a common vision, scientific understanding, and a diligent and persistent effort to achieve success. The threat posed by invasive species and the python in particular is no exception. We have only begun to address this threat and much more work is needed to make headway. Over the past couple of years, we have organized multi-stakeholder workshops to identify priorities and take action. A few priorities have consistently risen to the top. We need effective control methods to slow and hopefully stop the spread of pythons, and we need to build a firewall that keeps them out of the Keys. We need to develop new science that will help us understand the full extent of the threat and develop effective management strategies. We also need to reach out to the public and pet industry to let them know how to help.

So far, we have made some strategic investments to accomplish these needs. We are working closely with our Fisheries and Refuge colleagues, the U.S. Geological Survey, Everglades National Park, and the University of Florida to develop effective traps and deploy them in the Keys. This is no simple task. Developing a trap that catches a 15-foot snake but doesn’t catch native species requires commitment, trial, error, and trial again. Fortunately, prototype traps are showing some promise. We have also

invested in science, partnering with Everglades National Park to understand the risk posed by pythons in detail. This science also a foundational part of the proposed rule to determine whether pythons and other large constrictors should be listed as injurious under the Lacey Act, which would prohibit importation and interstate transport of the species. We have also worked very closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Fisheries Program to promote “amnesty days.” This program helps pet owners find new homes for animals like pythons that have become difficult to maintain, thereby helping avoid intentional pet releases into the wild. In addition, we are working hand in hand with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on a variety of other related fronts, ensuring our regulatory and law enforcement strategies are fully complementary.

Our work has only begun to address the python and other invasive species. Nile monitor lizards and other invasive animals are emerging threats. The plants that have been a major focus of attention will continue to be. A climate change world also may allow new invasive species to gain a foothold. Our conservation work is never done, and we must continue to build the relationships, create the vision, advance the science, and accomplish the work on the ground that is needed to meet this challenge. Our cross-program partnership within the Service between Fisheries, Law Enforcement, Refuges, and Ecological Services will help lead the way.

Submitted by Paul Souza, Field Supervisor, South Florida Ecological Services Office, Vero Beach, Florida This article was reprinted from Eddies--Reflections on Fisheries Conservation, Spring 2010

Behind the Scenes--

Hatchery workers carry fish in old milk cans. Historical Forest Service/FWS Photo

Fifth generation at Chattahoochee Forest National Fish Hatchery

Rebekah Pickelsimer recently visited the Chattahoochee Forest National Fish Hatchery in Suches, Georgia. She is the granddaughter of Facilities Operations Specialist Mitchell Pickelsimer. Mitch has worked at the hatchery for almost 20 years and administers the fish production and stocking program. Mitch is very dedicated to his job and loves doing it. Mitch literally grew up on the hatchery since his father, Sylvan Pickelsimer, worked for 38 years at the hatchery as a Maintenance Worker. Mitch loved coming to work with his dad as a youngster, and that is one of the reasons he wanted to work at the fish hatchery.

In the early 1940’s, Hubert Pickelsimer, father of Sylvan and grandfather of Mitch, worked for the U.S. Forest Service. Chattahoochee Forest hatchery was then owned and operated by the Forest Service. Mr. Pickelsimer helped with raising and distributing fish during this time. The fish were hand-carried in old milk cans and stocked throughout North Georgia.

Mitchell Pickelsimer with his granddaughter Rebekah. Photo by Crystal Thomas, FWS.

Rebekah picks up a loose fish. Photo by Crystal Thomas, FWS.

As you can see, this truly is a family affair that has lasted throughout five generations. Bekah already has shown true ability in picking up “loose” fish. The hatchery crew has a hard time catching that one fish that escapes out of the net, but not Bekah. She just scoops it right up and loves every minute. She may very well grow up and work on a National Fish Hatchery somewhere!

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

Bragging Rights --

Jerry Coleman, president, Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc., talks with Hill Week at Home attendees. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery hosts Hill Week at Home

On May 6, 2010, representatives of Senator Mitch McConnell, Congressman Ed Whitfield and Congressman Harold "Hal" Rogers were on hand at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery for guided tours and presentations as part of the 2010 Hill Week at Home event.

Jane Eller, executive director, of Kentucky Environmental Education Council (KEEC) and Jenny Howard, president of KAEE, speak to attendees. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.

During the event, the hatchery staff showcased the hatchery's accomplishments and discussed pressing issues. The event also allowed the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery Inc. and other supporters, such as members of Trout Unlimited (TU) and the Kentucky Association for Environmental Education (KAEE), to talk about why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wolf Creek is of importance to their respective organization and how the agency's mission ties-in with their work. Ten attendees enjoyed a tour, informative presentations, a catered luncheon provided by the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc., and a guided fly fishing excursion provided by members of Trout Unlimited.

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

Airmen Don Linn and Aric Jones measuring water quality in the Brothers River. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

Air Force volunteers assist with Gulf sturgeon spawning study

During April and May, 2010, Air Force personnel from Tyndall Air Force Base, Panama City, Florida, assisted Panama City, Florida, Field Office biologists with a study to document Gulf sturgeon spawning in the Brothers River with the collection of eggs. Egg collection pads were deployed in suspected sturgeon spawning areas, and these pads were inspected every two or three days for a period of five weeks. Water quality, depth, and the global position were recorded for each pad. Although Gulf sturgeon eggs were not collected during the period, spawning cannot be ruled out, and further investigations are proposed for next year. In addition, staff from Tyndall Air Force and a Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) biologist helped field office biologists gather lake or river bottom substrate and organisms in several Gulf sturgeon overwintering sites located in the Gulf of Mexico between Gulf Shores, Alabama, and Pensacola, Florida. More photos in Photo Album.

Submitted by Frank Parauka, Panama City Field Office, Florida

Successful Kids Fishing Clinic

Kids fish during the clinic at the Panama City Marina. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

The Panama City, Florida, Field Office assisted the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in the 14th Annual Kids Fishing Clinic held at the Panama City Mariana on June 5. Since 1996, more than 44,000 children and 32,000 accompanying adults have participated in the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's statewide saltwater Kids Fishing Clinics. This year, the event attracted more than 250 eager, youthful anglers who were indoctrinated at different stations about fish habitat, fishing ethics, knot-tying, fishing regulations, casting, and water safety. After completing the learning stations, each child received a free fishing rod and reel, a tackle box and bait, and tested their newly required angling skills in the bay waters. Great weather, a cooperative fish or two, free drinks, hot dogs, and ice cream added up to a fun day!

Children attend the learning stations at the Kids Fishing Clinic. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

Submitted by Frank Parauka, Panama City Field Office, Florida

Children listen to a Law Enforcement program presentation. Photo by Gisella Burgos, FWS.

Celebrating Earth Day in Puerto Rico

Refuge staff coordinated and organized two Earth Day Events in April at two elementary schools located in Vieques and Culebra Islands, More than 500 kids attended these events. The University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant Program showed the students the different types of sands found on the islands. The students also had an opportunity to listen, see, and touch the different types of coquíes (tree frogs) found in Puerto Rico. Fish and Wildlife Service staff also provided other workshops and talks about management programs such as Law Enforcement, Fire, Parrot and Sea Turtle programs. The Coast Guard, Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust and 4H were among other agencies participating in this activity. These kids were amazed and delighted by all the activities honoring our Mother Earth. More photos in Photo Album.

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

How will Everglades restoration projects affect the eastern indigo snake?

Valerie Sparling of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and John Wrublik of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service document an eastern indigo snake found under one of the artificial covers being used at the project site. Photo courtesy of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Steve Mortellaro of the South Florida Ecological Services Office is the lead biologist for an interagency team looking into the impacts of Everglades restoration construction projects on the threatened eastern indigo snake.

Shortly after the team was formed in June 2008, the highest priority needs were identified. Among the highest priorities were deriving population and density estimates in a variety of habitats and determining responses to construction and flooding activities. Due to the high cost of capturing them, finding a way to cut costs was sought.

"The C-44 area is a former citrus grove and fits the profile. And of course, eastern indigo snakes had been seen in the area," Steve said.

Per the draft Statement of Work, the project's objective is as follows: "Radio tracking data shall be used to better determine extent of take or more specifically, the survivability of eastern indigo snakes on project lands during and immediately after construction."

The question: How to catch the snakes in order to implant them with telemetry gear? "Searching for snakes can be time consuming and expensive," Steve said. "We worked with a snake hunter to find a way to bring the snakes to us."

Eleven artificial habitats designed to attract the snakes were built around the 12,000-acre C-44 Reservoir and Storm Treatment Area in Martin County, Florida. Three types of materials were used as artificial cover: housing carpet, plywood and corrugated tin.

"They were stacked and spaced in such a way that the snakes can go in and out easily. The idea was that they'd go under the covers and perhaps stay there to get out of the elements," said Steve.

He and other members of the team try to check the artificial habitats twice weekly. So far, they've only found one Eastern Indigo Snake using the artificial cover, which was located under the bottom stack of plywood placed near a canal.

"Keep in mind this is a pilot study. We're learning as we go and there's nothing to say there haven't been snakes using these covers during the times we are not inspecting. The covers are used as an attractant, since they are not traps the snakes can come and go at will. We expect to find more snakes as outdoor temperatures rise," Steve said.

Steve Mortellaro raises the plywood cover in search of eastern indigo snakes. Photo courtesy of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

"We hope the data we're collecting leads to a cost-effective method for surveying and capturing indigo snakes," Steve added.

In addition to visiting the project site with team members from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Steve has taken staff members from the South Florida Ecological Services Office to the site.

"It's interesting to go on these snake surveys to see if we've got anything. The next phase will involve capturing and radio-tagging snakes and then tracking their movements," he said. "I'm hopeful this pilot study will help us get there."

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

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Fun-filled day for participants of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge's Crabbing and Fishing Rodeo

Misty Hilliard, along with her two sons, Tyler (left) and T.J. (right), show off one of their keepers." Photo by Cindy Heffley, FWS.

Beautiful weather welcomed the participants of the 17th annual Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge Crabbing and Fishing Rodeo on Saturday, June 12. Although the number of crabs caught has been diminishing each year, families continue to enjoy a morning of relaxation and fun.

"There were new faces seen around the North Pond this year, but the majority of the folks have been coming since the start of the event in 1993," said Cindy Heffley, Visitor Services specialist at the refuge.

Some participants said that they used to come as children and are now bringing their own children. The rodeo, held on the second Saturday in June each year, has truly become a family tradition.

Most everyone caught at least one crab, but a few families caught enough to take home for their lunch.
Both the young and the young-at-heart tried their hands at crabbing with collapsible traps and hand lines. Fish heads and chicken necks were the most-seen bait of choice. Manteo resident Misty Hilliard enjoyed the day with her two sons, Tyler and T.J. In addition to catching crabs, the boys enjoyed being outside with their mom.

Once again, area businesses donated prizes which were awarded at a random drawing to children age 12 and under and the close of the rodeo. Prizes were donated by ACE, Awful Arthurs, Bear Factory, BeachExpress/Subway, Ben Franklin, Bird Store, Cottage Shop, Farmers Daughter, Forbes Homemade Candies, Grits Grill, Jockey's Ridge, Jurassic Putt, Kill Devil Hills Frozen Custard, Kitty Hawk Kites/Rodanthe, Mutiny Bay Golf, Nags Head Bowling Center, Oregon Inlet Fishing Center, Outer Banks Boarding Co., Puzzles, Pranks and Games, Scoops Ice Cream Parlor, TW's Bait and Tackle, Wave Riding Vehicles, West Marine, and Wings. .Each child received a prize.

“It amazes me how generous and supportive the local businesses continue to be,” said Heffley. “Like magic, we have enough prizes for each child every year. This year we even had some extra coupons to give out to the children.”

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

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Adrienne, Mam, and Tyler take measurements. Photo by Yvonne Duvall, FWS.

Observation of willow flycatchers and Bell’s vireos at Holla Bend

While there are several species of birds using the refuge at Holla Bend NWR the willow flycatcher and the Bell’s vireos are two that are being observed. These two species have been declining in number over the years.

Dr. Chris Kellner, professor of Fish and Wildlife Science at Arkansas Tech University, has a group of students observing these birds. Three of the students are Mathew Young, Tyler Williams, and Adrienne Doyle. The title of their project is Population size of and habitat selection by Willow Flycatchers and Bell’s Vireos in carbon sequestration plots.
Information with this study will be used to aide in developing a habitat that can sustain a viable population on the refuge, which is this group’s goal.

Submitted by Yvonne Duvall, Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge, Dardanelle, Arkansas

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Local children visit Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge without leaving their neighborhood

Friends of Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge member and Refuge Volunteer Ron Johnson Sr., explains the purpose of the airboat for refuge management. Photo by Cindy Heffley, FWS.

Vacation Bible School participants at Oak Grove Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, recently took a road trip to learn about various natural resources in their area. Since Mackay Island and Currituck National Wildlife Refuges were nearby, they were chosen to be destinations for the children. Many of the children have visited Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge, and some even live right next door.

Visitor Services Specialist Cindy Heffley and Volunteer Bob Glennon traveled from Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges to lend a hand to the Friends of Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge. Friends members and Mackay Island Volunteers Ron and Danny Johnson were on hand to help provide a fun learning time for the 145 travelers. From pre-schoolers to sixth graders, all of the children had a chance to learn about the importance of refuges and the plants and animals that live there. They

even had an opportunity to climb aboard an airboat to get an idea of how biologists perform many of their surveys at the refuge. Although the heat was hovering at 98 degrees, none of the children complained about leaving the air conditioned building to discover what is up the road from their church.

Live samples of wetland plants, along with flowers, mature seed, or green fruit, helped the children see first-hand some of the plants that are so important for the refuge critters.

Visitor Services Specialist Cindy Heffley introduces the children to wildlife found on Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge and explains why the refuge is so important. Photo by Bob Glennon, FWS

Volunteer Bob Glennon enjoyed sharing with the children as they climbed on the picnic table seats right next to him. He noted, "The students were really interested in looking at the flowers especially the swamp rose mallow with the yellow pollen spores dotting the inside of the pink blossoms." Quite a few thought the dissected green fruit of swamp iris looked like okra or a pepper.

A mounted osprey, cattle egret and pintail duck provided the children with close-up views of bird adaptations. Along with the mounts, numerous photos of refuge wildlife gave the children a glimpse of what they might see when visiting the refuge. Although the younger children were more interested in petting the bird mounts, many of the older ones recounted stories of spotting various critters in their yards or at the refuge. Still others told of hunting and fishing on the refuge.

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

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2010 Bogue Chitto Youth Fishing event a success

Event winner Kristen Melton looks her fish in the eye. Photo by Daniel Breaux, FWS

The weather was great, and the fish were biting at the 2010 Bogue Chitto Youth Fishing Event. More than 170 kids aged 4 through 12 participated in the event, held in observance of National Fishing Week. The event started at 7:30 a.m., and the fish were awake and biting. Numerous large catfish and bream were pulled out of the pond, making for an exciting day of fishing.

Four-year-old Kristen Melton won the event with a catfish just over 20 inches!! Hunter Larose won the 4 - 6 year-old category with an 18-inch catfish. Ethan Duckworth had the longest fish in the 7-9 year-old category at just over 18 inches. Dillon Burrell pulled in a 19- inch catfish to win the 10 -12 year-old category.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges Inc. hosted the event at the Pearl River Turnaround, part of Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge. Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge is part of the Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, headquartered in Lacombe, Louisiana.

Sponsors included Lafarge, Textron, Sams, Wal-Mart. and Shell. Volunteers from Lafarge assisted with pole and bait distribution, the Backyard Bass casting game and the overwhelming task of pole repair. Their support helped make the event a success.

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

Students excavate the remains of an 18th century structure. Photo by Jason Hunnicutt, FWS

Excavation at Waccamaw yields 18th century structures and artifacts

Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge hosted the Coastal Carolina University Archaeological field school in June. Cheryl Ward, Ph.D. and seven students performed an excavation of what appears to be the remains of several 18th century structures. The area was used by American Indians until the mid-1600's and also as a ferry crossing in the early 1700's. Speculations as to the purpose of the structures include slave cabins from the once Yourhaney Plantation and a trading post. The artifacts found include ceramics, beads, nails, tools, and medicine bottles.

Submitted by Jason Hunnicutt, Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge, Georgetown, South Carolina

Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative partnership meeting

Dan Ashe and Dave Hankla talking to LCC partners. Photo by Chuck Underwood, FWS

The Peninsular Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative (PFLCC) hosted its kick-off partnership meeting June 16, 2010, at Austin Cary Memorial Forest in Gainesville, Florida. A number of excellent presentations were given, including a great overview by Dan Ashe, deputy director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, about how LCCs will work nationally. The kick-off meeting had 40 diverse partners in attendance representing large private landowners, conservation groups, and federal and state agencies. The meeting was coordinated by the core team for the PFLCC, which consists of Dawn Jennings, Todd Hopkins, Steve Traxler, and Bill Miller from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Thomas Eason from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Ann Birch from The Nature Conservancy. This core team is guided by a team of federal and state agency leaders, with representation from a number of programs in the Service. The meeting was facilitated by University of Florida Professor Perran Ross.

The Peninsular Florida LCC Coordination Team. L to R: Anne Birch, Bill Miller, Steve Traxler, Dawn Jennings, Todd Hopkins, Thomas Eason. Photo by Chuck Underwood, FWS

The consensus among attendees was that the meeting was a success and some have already asked to serve on a steering committee, which is under development. In addition to establishing a steering committee, the next steps include developing a second south Florida workshop, developing a charter and operations plan and hiring a coordinator. The goal of the PFLCC is to be running in FY 2011 and having conservation design and implementation by FY 2012.

Information about the PFLCC can be found at:
http://www.fws.gov/southeast/LCC/PeninsularFlorida/FlordiaLCCFactSheet.pdf

Submitted by Steve Traxler, South Florida Ecological Services Field Office, Vero Beach Florida

Invasive species awareness workshop

Biologist Chuck Hayes gives invasive species presentation. Photo by Monica Harris, FWS

Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex and its Friends Group hosted an invasive species awareness workshop on June 30, 2010. The program attracted 50 private citizens, as well as non-governmental, local, state, and federal agencies that were eager to learn about invasive species. The workshop was designed to provide the public an understanding of invasive species and discuss the need for early detection and rapid response. The participants also had the opportunity to look at examples of invasive plants that have been found in the local area. As a continuing learning opportunity, interested individuals from the workshop will work with the refuge biologists to educate the community of the local invasive issues as well as develop a plan to document and treat new invasive species on the refuge.

Monica Harris, Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, Hardeeville, South Carolina

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Wood Storks at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Monica Harris, FWS

Harris Neck starts wood stork banding

Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge, in cooperation with University of Georgia, has started banding Wood Storks for the season. The refuge with the help of partners has been banding Wood Stork nestlings since 1995. Over the years a total of 691 hatching year storks have been banded at Harris Neck with a numbered aluminum band on one leg and a numbered plastic band on the other leg. Other cooperators from the University of Florida and the Jacksonville Zoo have been equipping a few hatching year birds as well as adults with satellite transmitters. You can view results and follow some of these birds by going to www.seaturtle.org. By banding a bird of known age, factors such as age of first breeding and longevity may be determined. The oldest bird is more than15 years old. By having a marked group of birds especially those with satellite transmitters, other information like distribution patterns, site use and habitat preferences and site and mate fidelity can be determined.

Submitted by Monica Harris, Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, Hardeeville, South Carolina

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International Migratory Bird Day at Felsenthal

Students hopped their way through the Mississippi Flyway avoiding lost wetlands along the way. Photo by Amanda Wilkinson, FWS

In May, Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge hosted its first ever celebration for International Migratory Bird Day. The guest list included over 70 students, teachers, and parents from a nearby elementary school. The excitement level was high as students migrated through various activities at the refuge's Visitor Center learning about birds, habitats, and migration flyways. The highlight of the day was a physical exercise that demonstrated the importance of wetlands to migratory birds as they journey along the flyways. The students became the birds and hop-scotched through the Mississippi Flyway trying to avoid obstacles of lost or destroyed wetlands along the way. The exercise gave the students an enlightening perspective of how crucial these habitats are and how working together and doing our part can help.

Submitted by Amanda Wilkinson, South Arkansas Refuge Complex, Crossett, Arkansas

Friends Group --

Participants of the 2010 Fisheries Friends Conference pose for a group photo. Included is Friends of Wolf Creek NFH, Inc. member Barry Begley (second row, fourth from left). Photo by Karla Bartelt, FWS.

Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. attend Fisheries Friends Conference

Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc. member Barry Begley, along with Wolf Creek Deputy Project Leader Sheila Kirk, attended the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fisheries Friends Group Conference held in Washington D.C., April 20 - 22, 2010. The national conference was an opportunity for Fisheries Friends Groups from across the country to network and share ideas.

In D.C., the group continued the momentum created last year by providing a national forum to support and expand the number of Fisheries Friends Groups; promoting the conservation of aquatic resources; providing educational opportunities for the public; and to advocating the Service's mission. Attendees also learned more about the Fisheries Program budget, along with both current and future program priorities, potential lobbying/partnering organizations, the formation of the established national association, including bylaws review, and spent time on the Hill with the various Senate and Congressional representatives to discuss important issues relating to the goals of the Fisheries Program and the overall mission of the Service.

While on Capitol Hill, representatives from Wolf Creek Hatchery also met with staffers of U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell from Kentucky, along with those representing U.S. Congressmen from Kentucky, Ed Whitfield and Hal Rogers.

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

Hats Off -

Luizetta reading volunteer information. FWS photo

Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge's youngest volunteer places second in science competition

Luizetta Vadimovna Navrazhnykh, 16, a Florida Atlantic University student, and a volunteer at Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge placed second in the world in the Plant Sciences category in Intel's' International Science and Engineering Fair held in May in San Jose, California. Luizetta earned a second place award of $1,500 and the right to compete internationally by winning the top prizes at the local, regional, state and national science fairs.

Luizetta prepares to look at lichens on the Cypress Boardwalk. Photo by David Underwood, FWS

Luizetta's project explained Growth Form in Intertidal Lichen Zonation. This means to the rest of us that in areas where lichen grows, the more advanced foliose lichen has the ecological advantage. However, at a certain point in the rocky intertidal habitat, it is out competed by the simpler crustose lichen. Her project explained this pattern of Zonation by calculating the ability of the lichens to withstand wave forces. She determined that the crustose lichen is better suited for this environment because of its extensive attachment structures.

The Intel International Science and Engineering Fair has been administered by the Society for Science and the Public (SSP) since its inception in 1950. SSP is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the public engagement in scientific research and education.

When Luizetta is not starring in local plays, studying for class, or winning international science competitions, she is volunteering four hours a week at the refuge. Her Saturday mornings are spent meeting and greeting visitors in the Visitor Center. Ironically, Luizetta volunteers with our oldest volunteer Frank who is 90 years old. Luizetta has started a research project at the refuge. She will be studying refuge lichens and how the noise and other pollutants from the construction of a new Cypress Boardwalk will affect them.

Submitted by David Underwood, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida

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I Gave '8' --

A BOW participant tends to dutch ovens while baking pineapple upside down cake and pork loan in marmalade during a Primitive Chef class. Photo by Melody Ray-Culp, FWS.

Becoming an Outdoor Woman workshops in Florida

Don't let the funky name and potential for pink camo put you off! This is a terrific program that gets women, city and country gals alike, out on the land and into the water. Becoming an Outdoor Woman (BOW) workshops offer a relaxed and supportive outdoor classroom for gentle immersion, allowing women to get comfortable outside and ready to connect with family and friends who love to hike, camp, hunt, fish, canoe, watch birds, and otherwise enjoy Florida's natural resources. Participants arrive for lunch on a Friday afternoon and depart after lunch on Sunday, having taken four classes from a menu of 25 that includes everything from pan, bass, and fly fishing; to archery, handguns, long-guns, and muzzleloaders; to backpacking, wilderness survival, knot tying, and orienteering; to canoeing/kayaking and motor-boating; to the most popular Primitive Chef, which really should be called Primitive Gourmet! There's also plenty to do in the evening with campfires, story-telling, star-gazing, and night hiking. Participants also can obtain Hunter Safety Certification, good for a lifetime and accepted in every state.

BOW participants in a Map and Compass class learn to navigate under an oak tree. Photo by Melody Ray-Culp, FWS.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission offers three BOW workshops each year around the state. The cost is $175 for the "deluxe package" (bed in a rustic, air-conditioned bunkhouse), with a discount to "tenters." The likes of Bass Pro Shops and Cabelas are generous sponsors of BOW, with each graduating class adding more shoppers to their aisles. Where else can you pick up a camo teddy along with a turkey whistle, cross-bow, and ammo? Of the 101 ladies at last year's spring workshop in Ocala National Forest, about 75 percent were first-timers, though some gals return many times to enjoy the camaraderie and practice their skills. After three workshops as a participant, "I Gave 8" and extended the fun by volunteering as an assistant instructor.

Submitted by Melody Ray-Culp, Florida Panhandle Coastal Program, Panama City, FL Ecological Services Field Office

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Photo Album --

Air Force volunteers assist with Gulf sturgeon spawning study -- more photos

Armen Joshua Tobin and Cory Mauer pull up egg collection pad to check for Gulf sturgeon eggs. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

Arman Aron Moore checking egg pad for Gulf sturgeon eggs in the Brothers River. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

Armen James Irwin and Bill Cyphers and SAIC biologist Rick Combs inspect a substrate sample for organisms taken in the Gulf of Mexico, off Gulf Shores, Alabama. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

Celebrating Earth Day in Puerto Rico -- more photos

Students participate in a Sea Grant Sand Workshop. Photo by Gisella Burgos, FWS.

A coqui (tree frog). Photo by Gisella Burgos, FWS.

Visitor Services --

This year's event drew a large crowd. Photo by Andrew Currie, FWS.

Thirteenth annual Kids' Fishing Rodeo a tremendous success

On the morning of Saturday, June 12, 2010, a total of 2,000 nine-inch rainbow trout and six large display fish were released in the creek below the Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery for the thirteenth annual Kids' Fishing Rodeo. Rainbow trout also were stocked into the adjacent Obey River, giving those people not taking part in the rodeo the opportunity to share this important resource on Tennessee's Free Fishing Day. Held in celebration of National Fishing and Boating Week, the rodeo is open to kids aged 15 and under. This event is co-sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the citizens of Clay County, Tennessee, and presents a unique opportunity for families to spend quality time together and to connect children with nature.

The event is covered in local newspapers and on Tennessee Sportsman, an outdoor television show which airs on WCTE-TV, the local Public Broadcasting Station. A volunteer staffing a face painting station was kept quite busy all morning. Local businesses and individuals donated prizes, tackle, bait, drinks, advertising, and effort to this year's event, helping to make it a tremendous success. This year's event drew a large crowd. The overall attendance was 260 children and approximately 280 adults. People from as far away as Indiana and Ohio traveled to Celina to get the chance to catch a rainbow trout.

Submitted by Andrew Currie, Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery, Celina, Tennessee

This boy tangled with one of the large Rainbow trout stocked for the event . . . and won! Photo by Andrew Currie, FWS.

There was a long line at the face painting table all morning long. Photo by Andrew Currie, FWS.

A sandwich after a morning of fishing hits the spot. Photo by Andrew Currie, FWS.

Wage Grade Profile --

Dirty George

L to R: George Pelt with Dirty Jobs' Mike Rowe. FWS Photo.

George Pelt, equipment operator from Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge was asked to assist on a special project at Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. As he walked out the door, I could hear him say, “dirty jobs.” Grabbing the door and nearly shrieking, I asked “Dirty Jobs? You get to work with Mike? Mike Rowe!!!”

George just shrugged his shoulders and said, “yeah,” without any of the excitement I would have imagined.

Upon his return from the dirty work I quizzed him for details and photos I’d asked him to have taken for E-Grits. George explained the Loxahatchee crew and he had cut and burned exotics – “nothing real dirty.” He let me download the photo; all the while I was turning green with envy. I created a captioned photo and posted it on our bulletin board for all to see; George seemed perplexed.

Never have we had so many comments from the visiting public on any previous postings, photos, posters, or banners as “Dirty George” with Dirty Job’s Mike Rowe. Over the years, Rowe has done-his-dirt on several refuges, so Americans are getting exposed to our wild places, our National Wildlife Refuge in some pretty unorthodox ways.

The Dirty Jobs show featuring George Pelt and the Loxahatchee crew is currently scheduled to air sometime this fall.

Submitted by Pam Darty, Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges, Chiefland, Florida