



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

Southeastern Currents

MARCH 2010 NEWSLETTER

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Picayune Strand ground-breaking



Kim Dryden stands amid tall native grasses on solid ground at Picayune Strand on what was once the site of a flowing canal. Photo by Ken Warren, FWS.

When you give 13 years of your life to something, it becomes a big part of you. That's why Kim Dryden gets so emotional about the Picayune Strand Restoration Project (PSRP).

For Kim, her rush of emotions reached a peak January 7, when ground was broken on the first federally funded component of the PSRP – the Merritt Canal Pump Station, which in effect ushered a new era of hope for the entire Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).

The ground-breaking ceremony was held at the future site of the pump station at Picayune Strand and was attended by over 200 guests, including several VIPs from Washington, D.C. such as Florida U.S. Senator Bill Nelson. He called the Everglades a tremendous ecological jewel, adding that Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Assistant Secretary Tom Strickland "have a personal interest in the Everglades."

Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, followed Senator Nelson on the program. She thanked everyone involved for their work in getting the PSRP to this point. She also offered hope of continued federal support by saying, "The Obama Administration is committed to jump-starting projects in this critically important ecosystem."

Tom Strickland spoke next. "How improbable is it that once having screwed this place up that we'd not only stop screwing it up, but try to get it right and undo what had happened before. Well, that improbable moment has arrived. It's here. It's now," he said to thunderous applause.

As someone who has worked for 13 years to help undo what happened at Picayune Strand, those were magical words to Kim. "Just having folks at that level here says a lot. Then to hear them say things like that...I can't tell you how happy it makes me. There were times when I thought this project wasn't going to happen," she said dabbing tears from her eyes.

The PSRP is an effort to reclaim these 55,000 acres from the ravages of a failed housing subdivision from decades ago. This project will restore water flow across the landscape, rehydrate drained wetlands, improve estuarine waters and return habitat to threatened wildlife communities. Imperiled species that should benefit include Florida panthers and wood storks.

Kim relishes the momentum. "I expect the Corps to move forward aggressively. They have a great contractor. My job got a lot easier once they started moving dirt. Pretty much all I have to do now is watch and smile!" she said with her tongue firmly in cheek,

with a sense of relief, pride and triumph.

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

Behind the Scenes--



Photos of Teri Nallett's yard. Photo by Teri Nallett, 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 --



Workcampers enjoy a moment of camaraderie. Photo courtesy of Katrina Kerr, FWS volunteer.

Wonderful Workcamping at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

What do the States of Arizona, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, New York, and Florida have in common? Wolf Creek is currently serving host to volunteers from all of these states. Known as Workcampers, these volunteers travel the country and live full-time or part-time in their personal fifth wheel or RV on a free campsite provided by the hatchery. In exchange for the site and other amenities, the volunteers give of their time and talents by helping to fulfill the hatchery mission. Whether it's a day spent helping to clean raceways and grade fish or serving at the Visitor and Environmental Education Center front desk, Wolf Creek would not be able to function as well as it does without the help of these dedicated volunteers!

Currently at the hatchery are Dick and Maxine Cordrey of Arizona and Ohio; Jerry Balfourt of Michigan; Ralph and Karen Parrish of Texas; Bob and Cindy Biggs of New York; and Josh and Latisha Lindsey of Florida. Popularity and interest in Wolf Creek's volunteer program is rapidly growing, and it is with much gratitude that the hatchery looks forward to working with these volunteers and others to follow! Last year the hatchery's volunteer hours had a value of \$272,605.50.

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

Section 7 Interagency Cooperation class builds bridges

Marilyn Stoll's job title is fish and wildlife biologist, but over the past 11 or 12 years of leading the Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7: Interagency Cooperation course, she's also served as a teacher, ambassador and bridge builder.

"The first time I did this class in Florida was in 1998 or 1999," said Marilyn, who recently marked her 30th year of federal service. "It was held here in Vero Beach and was only two hours long."



Marilyn teaching. Photo by Ken Warren, FWS.

The course is now spread over three days, held at various locations around the state, and includes guest lecturers. "The participants come from various government agencies—state, federal and local. After 15 years working for the U. S. Forest Service, I understand the participants' perspective of the ESA process. People are more aware and interested, and we're doing more consultations," said Marilyn.

The class is generally offered twice annually, at a federal agency's request. The latest offering was January 5-7, 2010, in Ft. Myers. Students were primarily environmental specialists from agencies including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Everglades National Park, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Lee and Collier Counties. The curriculum included sections on biological assessments, biological opinions, and habitat conservation planning (HCP).

Guest lecturers during the most recent class were Kalani Cairns, Connie Cassler, Barry Wood and Tori Foster of the South Florida Ecological Services Office, as well as Luis Gonzalez of the FWC.

"They were definite highlights, giving presentations on manatees, the HCP process, geographic information systems, Florida panthers and wood storks, and the FWC online Conservation Guide, respectively," said Marilyn.

Bill DeFrance, of the Corps regulatory office in Ft. Myers, was in the class. He attended because he wanted a better understanding of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's side of the consultation process. "I also enjoyed spending some time and getting to know co-workers from across the county and state," he added.

Marilyn says students like Bill inspire her. "It's a two-way street. I learn a lot from the participants. We're helping them do their jobs and also extending our reach by giving them the tools to help us conserve south Florida's imperiled species and their habitats," she said. "It's important because they're on the front lines of designing projects, or reviewing permits and working with applicants."

Tunis McElwain, chief of the Corps office in Ft. Myers, is among those on the front lines. He said, "The class will pay dividends down the road as we continue to educate our staff and build relationships between our agencies."

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



Airboating through Loxahatchee's open water slough. Photo by Matthew Harwell, FWS.

Loxahatchee hosts Everglades restoration group

In 2000, Congress authorized the National Academy of Science to provide an overarching review of Everglades restoration progress. The National Academy's committee (called CISRERP or Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress) produced reports documenting the status of restoration efforts and offering guidance on how to move restoration forward. Committee members represent a broad spectrum of scientific expertise from across the country and they utilize this expertise to prepare a report every two years.

In September 2009, the staff of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park hosted an all-day field trip for CISRERP while the members were doing background research for their next report, due this year. The committee first received a briefing on the Loxahatchee Refuge and its current efforts to manage hydrology and water quality while protecting the refuge's ecosystem. After a virtual tour by computer, the committee climbed aboard airboats to check out the interior of the Loxahatchee Refuge. Weather conditions were great, and the committee got to see the ecosystem diversity within the Loxahatchee Refuge first hand, including spotting several whitetail bucks traveling between tree islands).

The afternoon tour focused on work being done by refuge partners with the Loxahatchee Impoundment Landscape Assessment (LILA) project. These are a series of impoundments – located where the public can walk along the outside levees – designed to mimic tree island and ridge and slough habitats in the interior of the Everglades. The CISRERP members learned how scientists are manipulating water levels in these impoundments to study these mini-ecosystems in a controlled manner. Finally, the committee took a road trip up the Loxahatchee Refuge’s perimeter levee to visit the two constructed wetlands built just outside of the refuge’s boundary to treat stormwater runoff to minimize water quality pollution of the refuge and the rest of the Everglades.



CISRERP members, citizens, and scientists show off work done at the LILA project. Photo by Matthew Harwell, FWS.

Kudos go to Loxahatchee Refuge and Everglades National Park staff for hosting a successful field trip on a Sunday and receiving focused attention from the National Academy of Science.

Submitted by Matthew Harwell, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Boynton Beach, Florida



Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge used a helicopter to ignite a controlled burn near Pungo Lake. Plastic spheres, similar to ping pong balls dropped from the helicopter light individual spot-fires within the burn unit. Photo by Vince Carver, FWS.

Successful prescribed burns at Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge successfully burned more than 1,200 acres last month near Pungo Lake in Hyde County. The controlled or prescribed fires burned off much of the grass, ferns, and small shrubs which will improve wildlife habitat and reduce the build-up of dead plant material that leads to large wildfires.

Prescribed fire is an important wildlife habitat management tool for national wildlife refuges in eastern North Carolina and other land managers across the State. In fact, North Carolina Governor Beverly Perdue declared February 7-13 Prescribed Fire Awareness Week, the first statewide recognition of prescribed fire and its importance in North Carolina.

Prescribed burning derived its name from the medical field. Typically, a doctor gives a patient a prescription which spells out exactly what medicine is needed, how much is needed, and how often to take the medicine to treat a particular illness.

A land manager writes a burn plan, also called a prescription that spells out what weather conditions are needed for the burn, what time of year the burn should be ignited, and what type of fire behavior is needed to meet particular objectives for that burn unit.

According to Pocosin Lakes Fire Management Officer Vince Carver, the conditions for last month’s prescribed burns were just what the doctor ordered. “All the rain we had gave us ample soil moisture so we were able to burn the surface fuels without getting much ground fire,” said Vince. “Since the organic soils on the refuge are made of plant material, called peat, that will burn, finding the right conditions for controlled burns can be a challenge.”

Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is partnering with several researchers to study the science of prescribed burning. Researchers are investigating conditions that contribute to ground fire (burning of organic soil), as well as the chemical make-up of the smoke and its impacts on human health. Learning more about fire will improve the use of this important land management tool.



Smoke from a prescribed fire at Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge follows the wind and travels away from communities and other areas of concern, just as fire managers had planned. Photo by Vince Carver, FWS.

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



Bird-watching at Summerhouse Ponds. Photo courtesy of Billie Snyder, FWS volunteer.

Volunteer Day at Cape Romain's Bulls Island

On Saturday, January 23, the Cape Romain Refuge staff sponsored a pot luck luncheon at Bulls Island for Volunteers in recognition of their contributions to the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center and the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge in 2009.

Chris Crolley of Coastal Expeditions captained an early morning ferry boat ride the Intracoastal Waterway over to Bulls Island. The volunteers then met refuge staff members who took them to the Dominick House where they were briefed on the plans for the day's tour and events.

The first stop on the tour was the rice trunk at Summerhouse Pond where the volunteers learned why and how the fresh water level of the pond was controlled, resulting in positive impacts to the wildlife and plants on the Island. The next stop was at the Old Fort where a brief history lesson was provided on the first English settlers to South Carolina in 1670, who were met by the native Sewee Indians. The Old Fort saw activity during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, as well as battles with pirates. The last portion of the tour was along the levees that help maintain the fresh water and brackish water impoundments, and then on to Boneyard Beach where the bleached white skeletal remains of trees still stand on the ocean beach despite the daily tidal activities. At Boneyard Beach, the group learned about the effects of the ocean currents and winds on Bulls Island.

The group then returned to the Dominick House for the buffet lunch. After lunch, Ranger Tricia Lynch presented the volunteers with appreciation awards, and Refuge Biologist Sarah Dawsey thanked the volunteers who assisted with the successful Loggerhead sea turtle nest program in 2009. Refuge Manager Kevin Godsea announced that 143 volunteers logged in 12,210 hours of service in 2009, equating to six full-time employees. Raye Nilius, project leader of the South Carolina Lowcountry Refuges, added her appreciation of their efforts.

Special recognition was given to Jim Hawkins who accumulated a total of 881 hours of volunteer service, Neil White with 583 hours, and Mary Catherine Martin with 567 hours. The afternoon was free for folks to wander, relax, and enjoy the surroundings. As the day began to fade, the group made their way back to the boat landing with a greater appreciation of the natural world and the feeling that they had all made a contribution in helping to preserve it. More photos on [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Tom Kearney, volunteer, Cape Romain NWR, Awendaw, South Carolina

Winter time means squirrel time

As much of western North Carolina was digging out from under snow, a team of biologists from the Fish and Wildlife Service, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians laced their winter boots and headed into the highest parts of the Great Balsam Mountains in Haywood County, searching for the endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel. The Carolina northern flying squirrel, not to be confused with its far more common cousin, the southern flying squirrel, is an endangered species, usually found where the birch and maple trees of the northern hardwood forest give way to the spruce and fir trees found on the tops of our highest mountains.



Measuring a northern flying squirrel. FWS Photo.

The team is checking a handful of squirrel nesting boxes put out across western North Carolina. The squirrels fill the boxes with insulating tree bark and find refuge in them during the winter. Biologists count the number of squirrel in each box, then weigh them, measure foot length, and tag their ear. During the course of the winter, this scene will be played out again and again.

Monitoring of wildlife populations, such as that done by these biologists, is a fundamental part of the way the Service evaluates the success of its actions. The information collected on these trips helps give biologist an idea of the health of northern flying squirrel populations and can help guide management efforts to increase their numbers.

Submitted by Gary Peeples, Asheville, North Carolina, Ecological Services Field Office



Jackie Isaacs and Dianne Ingram return the sea turtle to the Gulf. Photo by Denise Rowell, FWS.

Kemp's Ridley rescued during cold snap along Alabama's Gulf Coast

On Dauphin Island, the sun was just bright enough to soften the chill of the wind. It was the perfect day to release a Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, one that was rescued in Alabama after a piercing cold snap. The temperatures along the Gulf Coast had been unseasonably colder than usual. Earlier in the month, the Florida panhandle seemed to be a hot spot for cold-stunned turtles. Hundreds of them washed up along the sunshine state's coastal beaches. But this time, it was coastal Alabama where a turtle was forced out of the water due to below average temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico. Luckily, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, along with biologists and veterinarians from the Institute of Marine Mammals Studies, were there to help.

Jackie Isaacs, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist stationed at Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, serves as the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Coordinator for the state of Alabama.

"On January 13, a live Kemp's Ridley sea turtle stranded on Dauphin Island was reported by the Alabama Department of Marine Resources. Faye and Kent McIntosh, volunteers with the Alabama Sea Turtle and Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN), were then immediately contacted to initiate primary care for the cold-stunned sea turtle," explained Isaacs. "They put the female in a container with dry towels in a room kept at 70 degrees Fahrenheit to warm the turtle slowly. I was delighted to hear from Faye later that night that the turtle was becoming more active"

The sea turtle was stunningly beautiful. The Kemp's Ridley is the rarest of all sea turtles, yet, is beginning to be a regular nester in Alabama, although in low numbers.

After the initial rescue, the sea turtle underwent a week of rehabilitation by biologists and veterinarians at the Institute of Marine Mammal Studies. Then, the rare, endangered Kemp's Ridley was released back into the coastal waters of Dauphin Island. Biologists gathered on a small peninsula off the island to release the juvenile female back into her natural home.

"We consider Kemp's Ridley our sea turtle. It is strictly found only in the Gulf of Mexico waters and in the western Atlantic Ocean along the U.S. east coast. They are ours to protect and enjoy," said Dianne Ingram, biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Alabama Ecological Services Field Office.

Wearing waders, both Isaacs and Ingram held the sea turtle as they slowly walked into the Gulf. As soon as her little fins touched the water, the female knew she was about to resume the life she once knew. As soon as biologists released her, she disappeared into the blue-green water.

“What a great experience to directly assist this animal back to her home. It’s a thrill and an accomplishment for all,” said Ingram.

“My colleagues and I were ecstatic that the Alabama STSSN was activated promptly and successfully to provide care to the cold-stunned Kemp’s Ridley sea turtle. Without immediate care, this rare sea turtle would have most likely perished,” explained Isaacs. “If you are ever walking the Alabama beaches and find a live or dead sea turtle, call 1-866-SEA-TURTLE to activate the Alabama STSSN as soon as possible. The earlier we know about injured sea turtles, the sooner we can provide proper initial care. Our ultimate goal with the Alabama STSSN is to release rehabilitated sea turtles back into their natural habitat as soon as possible,” said Isaacs.

Submitted by Denise Rowell, Daphne, Alabama, Ecological Services Field Office

Western North Carolina dam removal clears way for imperiled species

As a handful of people watched, heavy machinery obliterated the powerhouse for North Carolina’s Dillsboro Dam, the most visible sign yet of the impending removal of the 12-foot high dam itself, scheduled to begin in early February.



Dillsboro Dam removal. FWS Photo.

Dillsboro Dam, built in 1927, is one of a series of Duke Energy hydropower facilities on western North Carolina’s Tuckasegee River. Federal law requires operators of private hydropower dams to address impacts to fish and wildlife. Duke Energy’s decision to remove the dam is seen as a major part of that effort on the Tuckasegee River and will aid the recovery of a pair of imperiled species – the federally endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel and the sicklefin redhorse fish.

Dillsboro Dam prevents most fish, crayfish, and other stream animals from moving up and downstream, splitting some aquatic wildlife populations while preventing others from accessing otherwise quality habitat. The Appalachian elktoe mussel is found both above and below the dam, and removal will help reconnect the bisected population. Fish surveys have documented greater diversity below the dam than above, including 10 species not found above the dam at all. Dam removal will provide access to upstream habitat not only to these fish, but also the sicklefin redhorse. This migratory fish is found in the lower reaches of the Tuckasegee River and is the focus of efforts to boost its numbers, including creating a population that will swim further up the river, into habitat made available by dam removal.

For the past century, nearly a mile of the river has sat impounded behind Dillsboro Dam. In this reach, sediment has settled on the stream bottom, covering the natural sand and rock bottom that supports native life. Water at the bottom of the reservoir is also lower in oxygen and colder than free-flowing river water. The biological impact of the reservoir can be seen in the fact the Appalachian elktoe is found above and below, but not in the reservoir, and biologists found 11 species of fish in the reservoir, while the river immediately below the dam had 38 species and the river stretch above had 24. Restoring the reservoir to a free-flowing river will make this reach usable to a suite of native fish and other aquatic animals.

For photos and additional information, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/asheville/htmls/projectreview/DillsboroDam.html>

Submitted by Gary Peeples, Asheville, North Carolina, Ecological Services Field Office



Resident Harris hawk at the Carolina Raptor Center. FWS Photo.

Two Harris' hawks seized in North Carolina returned home to Texas

A pair of Harris' hawks, unlawfully captured in Texas and brought to North Carolina, were treated to a plane ride back to their south Texas home recently, the culmination of nearly two months of effort that included law enforcement officers, raptor biologists, and Delta Air Lines.

In October, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department received a tip about the birds through their Operation Game Thief wildlife crime stoppers program. State game wardens began investigating the case, and by mid-November the tip led U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement Special Agents to a North Carolina suspect in possession of the hawks.

The birds were taken to the Carolina Raptor Center, in Huntersville, North Carolina, for treatment, rehabilitation, and evaluation for release. Delta Air Lines provided transportation from Charlotte, North Carolina, to San Antonio, Texas, for the birds and their caretaker.

Amber Rosintoski, director of bird programming for the raptor center, accompanied the birds. In San Antonio, she met staff members from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department who escorted her to an area near where they were taken from the wild outside of Laredo, Texas. Operation Game Thief Committee Member Gene Walker has offered to allow the release of the hawks on his family ranch in Webb County.

Sometimes referred to as the "wolves of the sky," Harris' hawks are one of the few raptors to live in groups. Cooperative hunting allows these raptors to kill larger prey than a lone hawk and they can take down mammals the size of a jackrabbit. Their wingspan is three-and-a-half to four feet and they can weigh as much as four pounds each.

Submitted by Gary Peeples, Asheville, North Carolina, Ecological Services Field Office

Scientist with Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program shares technical expertise with Chile to help save a species

A couple of years ago, Thomas White of the Service's Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico was contacted by Dr. Jaime Jimenez Ph.D., a colleague with the Universidad de Los Lagos in southern Chile. Dr. Jimenez requested assistance in initiating a research project with the slender-billed parakeet, an endemic parrot found only in southern Chile. At that time, no scientific study of this species had ever been conducted, and because Dr. Jimenez knew of the work the Service has done for years with the Puerto Rican Parrot, he sought technical assistance to help him start a new project. After obtaining the Service's approval, Thomas went to Chile a couple of times to provide technical assistance and advice on parrot research, including parrot capture and attachment of radio-transmitters. During these visits, he also conducted workshops on radio-telemetry for students from several local Chilean and Argentinean universities. At the same time, Dr. Jimenez recruited a graduate student to do the field work.



Thomas White's wife, Arelis Jhonson (with the FWS cap), and Gemma French (a volunteer from England) with a wild adult parakeet right after a transmitter was attached. Photo by Thomas White, FWS.

That graduate student, Ana Bertoldi Carneiro, has now finished her studies based on nest site habitat



Thomas White with a nestling parrot to which a radio-transmitter was attached. Photo by Arelis Jhonson, FWS

analyses and radiotelemetry of fledgling slender-billed parakeets, and is currently submitting manuscripts for publication based on the joint research project. Such papers will be the first ever scientific research published for the species. Thomas just returned from a two-week trip back to Chile in late January, during which they successfully captured the first-ever wild nesting adult parakeets and attached radio-transmitters for monitoring movements, habitat use and nest site fidelity by the birds over the coming year. However, the technological exchange was definitely bilateral, as Thomas also learned new techniques for accessing nest cavities from his Chilean counterparts, and together they devised a new method for capturing nesting parrots that Thomas had never used before.

Because of the nationally endangered status of the parakeets, rapid loss of nesting habitat to agricultural clearing, nest robbing for the local pet trade, and the complete lack of needed scientific data for formulation of any effective species management plan, the new research project could not have begun at a more critical and important time for the survival of the species. Hopefully, by sharing the experience and expertise that we in the Service gained through years of intensive management of a critically endangered parrot in Puerto Rico, we may in some small way also help our colleagues in other countries who are working diligently - and with much less resources - to prevent extinction of some of their own endemic parrots.

Submitted by Thomas White, Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico

J. N. "Ding" Darling mourns loss of crocodile

For over 30 years, one female American crocodile visited the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge and Sanibel Island. She was once removed from the refuge to the Everglades 70 miles away in 1986 and made her way back six months later. Basking along Wildlife Drive, her presence, along with refuge interpreters, educated the public about the importance of this endangered species. She was an example of how people can co-exist with wildlife on this Sanctuary Island.



2005 photo of refuge crocodile.
Photo by Toni Westland, FWS.

"She was an island icon and vital to us in our mission to educate visitors about endangered species," said Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik "She will be missed by all current and former refuge staff, volunteers, and partners."

Her hide and tissue are being sent to the Service's Forensics Lab to analyze her body chemistry and DNA. Her legacy will continue at the refuge as her skeleton will be articulated on display in the "Ding" Darling Education Center. Next January 26, it will be unveiled on the anniversary of her death to celebrate her life.

Submitted by Toni Westland, J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel, Florida



Key Largo woodrat. Photo courtesy of the Lowry Park Zoo.

Key Largo woodrats, bred in captivity, reintroduced to native habitat

For the first time, Key Largo woodrats born in captivity were released into their native habitat at Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in February. This species was listed as endangered in 1984 under the Endangered Species Act.

The 14 woodrats, bred as part of a joint effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo and Disney's Animal Kingdom, were taken to Crocodile Lake NWR by biologist Sandra Sneckenberger of the South Florida Ecological Services Office as part of a pilot program to see if they can survive and breed in the wild.

Sandra delivered the first seven woodrats to the refuge February 1 and 2. She delivered the second group of seven Feb. 22.

Upon arrival at Crocodile Lake NWR, the woodrats were placed in individual enclosures with nest structures designed and built by refuge volunteers. Each animal was/will be fed for about seven days until the enclosures were/are removed.

"We're excited about reintroducing Key Largo woodrats here. This species is benefiting from a partnership of passionate people," said Steve Klett, Refuge Manager at Crocodile Lake NWR.

Unfortunately, four of the first seven fell to predation after their enclosures were removed. "We're working to identify the predators," said Sandra. "The other three from that group appear to be doing well. The second group will remain in protective structures until around March 2."

The Key Largo woodrat historically inhabited tropical hardwood hammock forests throughout Key Largo south to Tavernier. This small mammal was listed as federally endangered in 1984 due to habitat modification and development pressure. Since then, additional threats have emerged, including increased predation pressure from non-native animals such as free-roaming cats and Burmese pythons. After a severe population decline was detected by researchers -- estimating less than 90 individuals remained -- the Service initiated a captive breeding program in 2002 at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo and in 2005 at Disney's Animal Kingdom near Orlando.

"As a primary center for Florida wildlife conservation, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo was pleased to respond to the call from the Service in 2002 to receive the first group of wild woodrats in support of a captive breeding initiative for these endangered native animals," said Dr. David Murphy, zoo veterinarian.

Breeding Key Largo woodrats was a challenge since little was known about the social structure, reproductive biology or ecology of this elusive nocturnal species. Key Largo woodrats are atypical for rodents. They are asocial and females appear to tolerate the presence of males only for breeding. When breeding is successful, females typically produce only two litters per year of one to three pups per litter.

Through diligent research, we've built a successful captive breeding program in a short period of time and have learned significantly more about Key Largo woodrat reproductive behavior, maternal care and pup development. As a researcher, it's very rewarding to be able to contribute to the recovery of an endangered species," said Christy Alligood, Ph.D., research specialist at Disney's Animal Kingdom.

This collaboration to augment the existing wild population, now found only in Key Largo, may prove even more important in the future as this species will be among the first to exhibit impacts from sea level rise.

"Thanks to Disney's Animal Kingdom and Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo, we have the capability to breed Key Largo woodrats in a captive setting," said Paul Souza, Field Supervisor of the South Florida Ecological Services Office. "We've taken the next step of placing some of these woodrats back into their native habitat. We're hopeful these efforts will help improve the condition of this highly endangered species."

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

Cedar Keys Light Station draws crowd

For nearly ten years, the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges have celebrated National Wildlife Refuge Week by holding an open house at the Cedar Keys Light Station on Seahorse Key. Partners, David and Alice D'Amicol, Florida Lighthouse Association volunteers don period uniforms and provide tours of the lighthouse and the historic cemetery.

This year, the lighthouse enthusiasts held their annual meeting adjacent to the refuge in the quaint fishing village of Cedar Key. Refuge Manager John Kasbohm welcomed the group, explained our mission and invited all to enjoy both refuges while in the area.



Pictured is Catharine Hobday as portrayed by Toni Collins. Photo by Pam Darty, FWS.

Levy County historian and former Lower Suwannee Friends President, Toni Collins, dressed as Assistant Light Keeper Catharine Hobday, performed her reading of the detailed history of the lighthouse. She also told of the many duties she would have performed as an assistant to her son, Light Keeper Andrew Hobday.

After the meeting, 130 members wearing a variety of lighthouse shirts, earrings, hats, jackets, and pins visited the lighthouse for the event finale. Boatloads ventured out into the Gulf three miles to walk the 52-foot-high Pleistocene dune upon which sits the 156-year-old light. As they awaited their return voyage, Refuge Ranger Pam Darty explained the symbiotic relationship between the "white" guano-covered moccasins that thrive on regurgitated yak that often falls beneath the rookery nests.

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



Logo courtesy of REI.

REI outreach staff participates in Regional Office brown bag lunch event

On Wednesday January 27, 2010, the Regional Office staff had the opportunity to learn more about one of the leading outdoor equipment and gear companies – REI. Surprising to a lot of our employees, they learned there is so much more about REI that relates to what we do on a daily basis. Each year, REI donates millions of dollars to support conservation efforts nationwide, and sends scores of volunteers to build trails, clean up beaches, and teach outdoor ethics to kids. Through responsible business practices, they strive to reduce their environmental footprint. Outreach staff from the Atlanta stores spoke about some of their local outdoor programs, trainings and events they offer for individuals, families and groups. The 21 participants that attended were able to sign up for events, take home educational packets and there was even a hiking back-pack given away as a door prize! The Regional Office Visitor Services team will be collaborating with REI in the future on volunteer opportunities and outreach related events. This could be the start of a great partnership all in the name of conservation!

Submitted by Sharon Fuller, Visitor Services, Atlanta, Georgia

Friends Group --



Friends group board member Bill Jewell takes a group on tour. Photo courtesy of Susie Andres, Friends group.

Friends group sponsors Bayou Gardens Open House

The Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges coordinated an open house January 23, 2010, to coincide with the camellia blooming season in the Bayou Gardens at Southeast Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges' headquarters. About 250 visitors enjoyed garden tours, free refreshments provided by the Friends group, and displays of camellia-waxing techniques. In the visitor center, guests from local camellia clubs displayed blooms from their collections and gave tips on camellia cultivation.

Bayou Gardens was started in the late 1940's by prior owners of the 110-acre headquarters site. Later the site was operated as a commercial garden attraction. After the Service acquired the property in 1998, the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges eventually took on the project, including repairing tremendous damage from Hurricane Katrina. Today, large sections of the 25-acre gardens have been restored by the Friends group, along with new trails. The open house illustrated the power of non-traditional-type events to draw potential refuge supporters and reach new audiences. Ten new members joined the Friends group during the event. As camellia enthusiasts studied refuge exhibits in the visitor center, many commented "I didn't know any of this was here!" More photos in [Photo Album](#).

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

Hats Off -



Service representatives on the three Southeast Incident Management Teams. Our involvement in these teams has increased dramatically in recent years with the 2010 teams having 29 participating members. FWS Photo

Fish and Wildlife presence grows on Southeast Incident Management Teams

The recent announcement of members for the 2010 Types 1 and 2 Incident Management Teams for the Southeast showed quite an increase in Fish and Wildlife Service employees, indicating the growing levels of both interest in and support for the Incident Management System by our agency. The Type 1 Blue Team has two members who are Service employees. However, a tremendous Service presence can be seen on the Type 1 Red and Type 2 teams whose combined rosters boast a whopping 27 Service employees. Tony Wilder, a Service employee from the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, is the Incident Commander for the Type 2 team.

Wilder is appreciative of the change in attitude this increase indicates. "I remember when Ray Farinetti and I were the only Fire Management Officers in the country with qualifications higher than basic firefighter," he said. "The Fish and Wildlife Service is really stepping up to the plate and taking on a leadership role in both fire and all-risk management. Other agencies are recognizing that we can hold our own in the Incident Management System. And, that's a good thing!"

On an Incident Management Team, the core positions are called Command and General Staff. General Staff members supervise individual sections, specifically Operations, Logistics, Finance, and Plans. Each section has unit leaders who get the job done on each incident. The Command Staff is comprised of Liaison Officer, Information Officer, Safety Officer and Deputy Incident Commander. These positions provide advice and counsel to the Incident Commander and interact with outside agencies, and media and provide safety oversight of the incident. Every position on the team has one or more "primaries", one or more "alternates", and varying numbers of trainees and apprentices. The trainees and apprentices are basically gaining on-the-job training when they are assigned to an incident with the team.

Type 2 Team

Command and General Staff

Incident Commander - Tony Wilder;

Information Officer, primary - Catherine Hibbard (Region 5);

Information Officer, alternate - Bonnie Strawser, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex;

Safety Officer, trainee - Tom Crews, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex;

Operations Section Chief, primary - Pete Kubiak, Refuges, Southeast Regional Office;

Operations Section Chief, primary - Glen Stratton, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge;

Planning Section Chief, alternate - Phil Weston, Southeast Regional fire planner.

Other Wilder Team members include:

Operations - Division Supervisor, alternate - Matthew Johnson, Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge; trainee - Jay Mickey, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge;

Helibase Manager, trainee - Cory Waters, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex;

Logistics - Facilities Unit Leader, alternate - James McCray (Region 2) (retired but still serving);

Security Manager, primary - Greg Blanks, Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge; alternate - Jason Vehrs, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge;

Finance - Time Unit Leader, apprentice - Holly Cyprian (Region 2).

Type 1 Red Team

Command and General Staff

Safety Officer, trainee - Bob Eaton, Southeast Regional Office fire chief;

Operations Section Chief - Jim Durrwachter (retired but still serving);

Operations - Division Supervisor, trainees - James Lankford (Region 3); Greg Titus, St Marks National Wildlife Refuge; Thaddeus Hertzberger (Region 2), Ryan Vice (Region 2); Larry Smith, Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge; and Josh O'Connor;

Southeast Regional Fire Office; apprentice - Michael Ward, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge;

Finance - Cost Unit Leader, primary - Beverly Derouin; Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge; trainee - Helen Czernik; Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex;

Plans - Resource Unit Leader, apprentice - Sue Wilder, Southeast Louisiana Refuges;

Plans - Situation Unit Leader, trainee - Jennifer Hinckley, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge;

Plans - Long Term Analyst, primary - Kim Ernstrom, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

Type 1 Blue Team

Operations - Division Supervisor, primary - Jon Wallace, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge;

Finance - Orders Manager, trainee - Michael Good, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Bob Eaton, Southeast Regional Chief of the Division of Fire Management, also commented on the Service growth in the Southeast Teams. "We have grown from fewer than six to almost 30 representatives in a little more than 10 years. This can be attributed to more support from Line Officers, as well as heavy and aggressive recruitment to build capacity. I am extremely proud of the commitment we have from our Regional Directorate down to individual commitment from each Line Officer on the ground. It is also great to see a Service Incident Commander, Tony Wilder, and the Command and General Staff participation from our folks," he said.

Wilder summarized the change in attitude and the benefits of being on a team. "Our Service leadership and field personnel alike are looking at the big picture and realizing the importance of getting the necessary training and experience. Yes, serving on a team takes us away from our 'day jobs', but the benefits to the resources of our country are worth the sacrifice. The more we do this, the safer we are, the better we get, the better job we can do for our refuges back home. We learn something new and become better qualified with every assignment."

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

I Gave '8' --



Diane Beeman shows the class a beaver skin. Photo by Susan Vaughan, FWS.

Peachtree Academy students learn about endangered species

Diane Beeman, Susan Vaughan, and Elaine Bishop of the Service's Regional Office recently spent a day with the children at Peachtree Academy in Conyers, Georgia. Both of Susan's children attend Peachtree Academy, and we originally intended to give the presentation to their classes only. Ultimately we talked to children in pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade about endangered species.

The children were especially fascinated with the elephant hair bracelets that are part of the endangered species display. We talked about the hair being from the tail and ultimately decided that the hair looked much better on the elephant than on our wrists. The boys in particular liked the snake skins which was a perfect opportunity to discuss the issues that exotic invasive snakes have caused in the Everglades.

Because of the recent removal of the brown pelican from the endangered species list, we also had a discussion about how some pesticides; DDT in particular, had caused egg shells to thin in certain birds causing their numbers to decline dramatically. When the pesticide was banned the birds started to have stronger egg shells and their numbers bounced back. All three of us were pleased at what the children already knew and how excited they were to learn more. It was a fun day and we were asked to come again next year.

Diane is the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Coordinator in Ecological Services. Elaine is the Chief of Ecological Services' Budget and Administration, and Susan is an Administrative Specialist in Budget Planning and Financial Services.

Submitted by Diane Beeman, Ecological Services, Atlanta, Georgia

Photo Album --

Volunteer Day at Cape Romain's Bulls Island -- more photos



Potluck feast. Photo courtesy of Tom Kearney, FWS volunteer.



Volunteers travel to Bulls Island. Photo courtesy of Bob Raynor, FWS volunteer.



Captain Chris Crolley explains the use of rice trunks in water levels management. Photo courtesy of Billie Snyder, FWS volunteer.



Volunteer Dennis Hyatt recognized for contributions. Photo courtesy of Tom Kearney, FWS volunteer.

Friends group sponsors Bayou Gardens Open House -- more photos



Camellia club members displayed blooms from their collections. Photo courtesy of Kathleen Guinnane, Friends group.



Friends member Bonnie Schmidt demonstrates a technique for waxing camellia blooms. Photo courtesy of Kathleen Guinnane, Friends group.

Visitor Services --



Charcoal gray shingles are added to the roof. Photo by Jaci Zelko, FWS.

New partnership forged by Outdoor Learning Station at Warm Springs Hatchery

On a cold, wet, and muddy weekend in January, more than 20 volunteers from the Benning Bass Club worked with the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery's staff to build an Outdoor Learning Station gazebo. All prep work including constructing the concrete and block foundation was finished by hatchery staff members Chad Shirey, electrician, and James Muzik, construction representative, before the group arrived on Saturday. The Bass Club built the entire gazebo in eight hours with instruction and assistance by hatchery staff.

The volunteers assembled the pre-fabricated 14' X 20' oval gazebo despite the rough weather conditions. They needed very little supervision. This new partnership between the hatchery and the Benning Bass Club formed from a Biologist-In-Training (B-i-T) program in December. The Bass club had scheduled a B-i-T program and a group tour for its youth club to expose the junior members to fish conservation and environmental education. The Bass Club was so impressed by the exemplary work done at the hatchery, the members wanted to get involved in any way they could!



Volunteers add the finishing touch to the gazebo, the cupola!! Photo by Jaci Zelko, FWS.

The Benning Bass Club is based out of Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, and is a member of the Bass Federation. Established in 1972, Bass Club membership is open to all military, retirees, honorably discharged service members, Department of Defense civilians, and family members. The club sponsors a monthly tournament, numerous charities, a junior bass club, and environmental and conservation initiatives. The construction of the Learning Station fulfills the group's requirements of participating in one environmental and conservation project a year. Hatchery biologist Jaci Zelko is developing additional conservation projects that can be accomplished with this new partnership.

The funding for this project was received in 2009, as part of the Visitor Facility Enhancements projects in the Southeast Region. This station will be used in conjunction with the Biologist-in-Training (B-i-T) program as well as the annual Open House in September, Kids Fishing Day in June, teacher trainings, and outdoor science seminars.

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



The finished Outdoor Learning Station at Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery. Photo by Jaci Zelko, FWS.



Hatchery staff and Benning Bass Club Members are proud of their achievement. Photo by Jaci Zelko, FWS.



The eight floor panels are fitted into place. Photo by Jaci Zelko, FWS.



The railings and posts are added once the floor is bolted down. Photo by Jaci Zelko, FWS.

Wage Grade Profile --

Nathan Hill strives for excellence at St. Catherine Creek



Nathan Hill. Photo by Chris Swanson, FWS.

There are many superior and passionate folks working to achieve a common goal within the National Wildlife Refuge System. Each individual plays an integral role within this system to ensure that the Service's mission is upheld to the highest standards. Nathan Hill, a maintenance worker at St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Sibley, Mississippi, is one of the Service's most dedicated employees

"At St. Catherine Creek, I am lucky enough to supervise Nathan who contributes to the success of the refuge in a dynamic number of ways," says Chris Swanson, assistant refuge manager. "He possesses a work ethic that is unrivaled, and his efforts are greatly appreciated by staff members and visitors to the refuge."

Nathan has been with the Service since 1993, and he has worked at Savannah and Harris Neck refuges, both located in Georgia, in addition to St. Catherine Creek.

"Regardless of whether he is mowing a road, performing law enforcement duties, or maintaining refuge property and equipment, I can always count on him to go the extra distance to get the job done," says Chris.

Recently, Nathan was assigned the task of organizing all records of heavy equipment and personal property to streamline the fleet of equipment on the refuge. As the property officer, he contributed by removing excess equipment, creating an updated property management archive, and by getting rid of bone-yard equipment. This was no small task given the long list of property records and equipment that needed revitalization. Nonetheless, Nathan demonstrated his ability to excel for the good of the resource.

“Nathan is one example of the type of employee who makes a difference each and every day. I’ve heard many people say that ‘people are our most valuable asset’ within the Service,” says Chris. “I have no doubt extraordinary contributions like Nathan’s are what make the Service a leader in conservation.”

In his free time, Nathan enjoys spending time outdoors, and he has a five-year-old daughter Natalie with whom he loves to spend time.

Submitted by Chris Swanson, St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Sibley, Mississippi

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