



Chief Editor: Elsie Davis

January-February 2015



RD's Corner

As Southeast Region employees, we know that we are fortunate to be able to apply our knowledge and

talents to work that is our life's calling. For most of us, there is simply nothing we would rather commit our energy to than ensuring healthy, thriving, outdoor environments in which our families and all Americans can live, work, and play. As your Regional Director, I'm honored to be part of this work with you; and I look forward with great expectations to what we will achieve in 2015.

As we ring in a new year together, we do so with great momentum. We have hit the ground running as a direct result of the outstanding achievements of all programs in 2014. We are building on our successes, fueled by a shared passion for the outdoors and its fish and wildlife resources.

On our travels throughout the region over the last year as a Regional Directorate Team, we have seen first hand the unwavering commitment employees give to our mission. Whatever challenges you face, you rise to them. Whatever limitations you confront, you push through them. There is a will to succeed that is associated with what we do to conserve fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. It is a will borne of a deep conviction that our mission is not just important--it is essential. We are in the business of helping to sustain that which sustains us.

continued on page 2

A familiar face for females in science

By Jennifer Strickland, External Affairs



photo, Jean Richter's personal collection

What image pops into your mind when you hear the word, "scientist?" We, as Fish and Wildlife Service employees might envision a biologist in her brown uniform walking through a longleaf pine forest in search of woodpecker roosts. However, many Americans see a very different image, a stereotype we're all familiar with: a man in a white lab coat and gloves holding a beaker or peering into a microscope.

Jean Richter is a scientist who has been wearing brown rather than white for 18 years. As a wildlife biologist stationed at Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina, a day spent stomping solo through the swamp is just another day on the job. But this past May, one particular day at work led Jean to a unique experience.

A woman named Clare Fieseler e-mailed Jean introducing herself as a doctoral candidate and marine ecologist at the University of North Carolina. Fieseler explained that she was seeking women who were advancing science within the State, and through her research she kept coming across Jean's name.

"I guess I've been here long enough that I've gotten myself into some trouble," Jean jokes.

A former filmmaker, Fieseler stated that she was interested in creating a permanent photographic archive of female scientists at work. The project, *Outnumbered*, attempts to dissolve the stereotype of the man in a lab coat and replace it with a more realistic image that features women in a variety of scientific careers. In her project proposal, Fieseler asks, "What do women of science look like? What are their questions, dreams, and struggles?"

Jean agreed to help Fieseler, so they identified a day in July for Fieseler's crew to come to the refuge. "I didn't do anything different than I normally do; I needed to get stuff done!" Jean says.

That experience resulted in a series of compelling images featuring Jean knee-deep in swamp water and set against a beautiful green backdrop of cypress and tupelo trees. Jean explains, "In those pictures we are totally drenched, and it wasn't all sweat!"

continued on page 2

RD's Corner continued...

To keep our momentum, I believe we must celebrate what we have already achieved. While it is important to anticipate and plan for what lies ahead, we also must look back and take heart from just how far we have come. Each year, I ask all Southeast Region programs to provide a few key highlights of what they achieved in the previous year just for that purpose—to acknowledge our people and their accomplishments.

You will find many “firsts” and “bests” in the Southeast Region’s track record for the past year. As proud as I am of those accomplishments, I am even prouder of how we got there. The subtext in everything you will read is partnership. What we did, we did with and through people. We have extended our biological understanding of the interconnectedness of the natural world to a realization that its conservation requires interconnectedness at the social level. As a result we are accomplishing more and more for our fish and wildlife resources working together with all of our partners across the landscape.

We set the bar high for ourselves in carrying out our mission for fish, wildlife, plants, and people. We owe it to ourselves to take a good look at all that we have done in 2014 to fulfill a mission that we feel such passion for and celebrate our successes. ❖

— *Cindy*

Southeast Region’s 2014 Accomplishments continued on page 6

females in science continued...

The need for a project like Outnumbered begs another question: Is the Fish and Wildlife Service doing a good job of inspiring, recruiting, and retaining female scientists?

Jean thinks so.

“In FWS we have a good culture. I see so many females in this agency that I never thought about not being well represented,” she says.

Then when she considered the conservation community at-large, “I realized that with our state and non-profit partners, women really aren’t that well represented. I feel like through this

project I’ve become a symbol for the females here in Fish and Wildlife,” Jean says.

Jean is someone we can all be proud to have represent us as an agency. She’s committed to inspiring the next generation of conservationists, be they male or female, and that’s one of the reasons why she agreed to take time to participate in Fieseler’s project.

“We have a generation behind us that has got to walk in our footprints,” she explains. “[The experience] wasn’t an inconvenience for me because I just did what I normally do. Clare didn’t interfere, even with the cameras. For the very little time it takes, there’s a potential for a big return, and I think that’s part of our responsibility: to make sure that the people we have coming in behind us are really dedicated. We want them to appreciate the resource and be willing to go to bat for it.”

A website supporting Outnumbered will launch later this year. You can learn more about the project and watch a promotional video at <http://college.unc.edu/2014/11/12/outnumbered/> and <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/11/141107-gender-studies-women-scientific-research-feminist/>. ❖

Employee Spotlight

Employee of the Month: Torre’ Anderson

By Elsie Davis, External Affairs



photo contributed by Torre’ Anderson

In his job as a Fisheries biologist with Federal Aid, Torre’ Anderson reviews state projects for Sport Fish grants. In his spare time, Torre’ serves the community through his varied activities with his social fraternity,

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., Beta Lambda Lambda Chapter, in Gwinnett County.

Torre’ joined Omega Psi Phi during his college years at Henderson State University, and was very active and involved at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. He continues his involvement here through the Gwinnett County Chapter. In fact, his chapter recently honored him as their Omega Man of the Year.

In December 2013, in partnership with Overcomers House, Inc., and the Atlanta Food Bank, he sponsored more than 400 turkeys, to be distributed to families during the Christmas holidays. The turkey giveaway aided over 250 families. Located in Snellville, the non-profit Overcomer’s House is a social service education resource center helping people conquer their struggles.

Torre’s fraternity members mentor 15 to 20 students at Lanier High School. They teach them how to do resumes, tie ties, and complete successful job interviews. The fraternity also gave seven Gwinnett County high school students a combined total of about \$11,000 in college scholarships in 2014.

Torre’ also participates in the fraternity’s annual high school talent hunt. Students have an opportunity to share their poetry, dance moves, or music. The winner receives as much as a \$1,500 college scholarship, with opportunities to compete at the state, district, and national levels. If they win at each of the levels, a student may ultimately earn as much as \$10,000 for scholarship purposes. Perhaps Torre’ contributes so much to youth education because he has a daughter and a son who are still in school. His son is a freshman at Bethune Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Florida, and his daughter is in Little Rock, Arkansas, completing her Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

Torre’ is an accomplished pianist who currently plays the piano at a local Gwinnett County Baptist Church. He also is an avid fisherman.

What's Trending

By Katherine Taylor, External Affairs



Apps: This is for when you feel like getting a little wild. Instant Wild is a free app that delivers live photographs of animals from motion sensitive cameras across the globe. In fact, by identifying photographed animals you can play a direct role in helping conservation scientists.

#MostShared Story:

In January the regional Facebook and Twitter accounts shared the story of a bald eagle that was shot (luckily he survived) and asked our followers to help us find those responsible. The story has reached over 3 million Facebook users and was retweeted 583 times!



photo: University of Tennessee Veterinary Hospital

Social Media: We have a new national social media platform that will launch very soon! So the question is, "Are you Pinterested?" We'll be bringing y'all more details, but Pinterest is about to get a little wilder.

Culture: When we want to reach the future generation of conservationists (tween-teen age group) Instagram may be the way to go. Feedback from these age groups has shown that Instagram is the predominant way they're consuming social media. ❖

Bragging Rights

West Georgia Field Office receives 2015 Partner-in-Education of the Year Award

By David Caldwell, West Georgia Field Office

On January 31, The West Georgia Ecological Field Office received the 2015 Partner-in-Education of the Year Award from the Phenix City Education Foundation. For eight years, the West Georgia Field Office has partnered



West Georgia Ecological Field Office Staff L to R: Sandi Spivey, David Caldwell, and John Doresky

with Ridgecrest Elementary School in Phenix City, Alabama, to accomplish many challenging environmental education projects. These tasks included the construction and development of an outdoor classroom, an Animal Olympics Trail, vegetable gardens, student recycling programs, and outreach events. Each of these accomplishments helped students and faculty from Phenix City schools learn about native wildlife and gain a better understanding of how human interactions can directly affect the land and wildlife.

This is the second Partner-in-Education of the Year Award for the office. They won their first one in 2013! These awards demonstrate what a successful partnership can accomplish with dedicated individuals holding the reigns. ❖

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery aids Monarch butterfly populations

By Moria Painter, Wolf Creek NFH

In January, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery volunteers and staff members



Wolf Creek's Environmental Education Intern Bobby Joe Pennington and Volunteer Linda Jarrells prepare to spread seeds, photo: Moria Painter, USFWS

began efforts to help sustain Monarch butterfly populations by providing milkweed habitat for summer breeding

grounds. Milkweed habitats have suffered significant losses in recent years due to increased herbicide use.

Three plots will be planted covering about one acre. The plots will be planted with a mixture of native seeds consisting of Butterfly Milkweed, Common Milkweed, Purple Coneflower, False Sunflower, Black-eyed Susan, Blazing Star, Lemon Mint, Royal Catchfly, Smooth Aster, New England Aster, Bergamot, Cardinal Flower, Blue False Indigo, Goat's Rue, and White Wingstem.

Wolf Creek also will start a scout badge workshop for local Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Cub Scouts. The workshop will educate and empower youths to help conserve natural areas to ensure the health of the Monarch butterfly populations. Scouts will help cultivate the ground and plant one of the milkweed plots. They also will learn about the benefits of pollinators through hands-on learning activities. Upon completion of this workshop each scout will receive a PRIDE Environmental Action Patch for community service.

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery supports the Kentucky Trout in the Classroom program

By Moria Painter, Wolf Creek



Alan Kimbler and Todd McGowan count rainbow trout for the Trout in the Classroom program at Powell County High School. photo: Moria Painter

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery supports the Trout in the Classroom program in 19 Kentucky schools this year, by providing rainbow trout eggs and fry, food and technical advice. In a cooperative effort with the Bluegrass Chapter of Trout Unlimited from Lexington, Kentucky, the program continues to thrive in its seventh year.

Trout in the Classroom is a national campaign supported by Trout Unlimited that offers school age kids an opportunity for hands-

on environmental education in their classrooms. Students in kindergarten through high school raise the trout from eggs to fry by monitoring tank water quality, feeding the fish, and cleaning the tanks. Students also engage in stream habitat studies. By completing this program students begin to foster a conservation ethic and begin to make connections to their lives with the natural world around them. Most programs end the year by releasing their trout in a state-approved stream near the school or within a nearby watershed. Teachers can adapt the program to meet curriculum needs and utilize the project as a lesson plan for both indoor and outdoor teaching. Some of the schools have even made field trips to the hatchery, covering a trip time of two hours or more, to further their studies. ❖

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

Intern from France works at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

By Gail Fishman, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

Gabriel “Gaby” Moutte from Provence, in southeastern France, arrived in America for the first time on October 11. A friend recommended St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge as a good place to do an internship on aquatic environments for his forestry degree.

Gaby experienced many firsts in the two months he was at St. Mark’s. He helped our educator, Lori Nicholson, with children’s environmental education programs, spent several days on St. Vincent Island learning about their hunts, observed the fire crew at work, and helped prepare the whooping crane pen for the cranes from the ultralight migration. He also tagged butterflies at the Monarch Festival and went to Tarpon Springs for a Project Learning Tree conference for educators and facilitators.



Gaby is all smiles after catching this redfish, photo: Lori Nicholson, USFWS

For fun, Gaby attended many football games at a middle school, Wakulla High School, and three Florida State University games. He enjoyed his first football tailgate party, hunting, fishing, and crabbing. He celebrated his first Thanksgiving at two Thanksgiving feasts; visited the Tallahassee Museum and the Museum of Florida History; loved the Jungle Cruise at Wakulla Springs, and saw his first manatees.

His best experiences were the rousing football games, learning about Wakulla Springs, hunting with David Nicholson, and running dogs for deer hunting with Bart Rye.

We all enjoyed getting to know Gaby. He’ll use the knowledge gained from his internship as he works toward his forestry degree in France. ❖

Friends and Volunteers

Wildfest 2014 a huge success!

By Cindy Hefley, North Carolina Coastal Plain National Wildlife Refuges



Puddles and a sea turtle posed with the children, photo: USFWS

Sponsored by the North Carolina Coastal Plain National Wildlife Refuges Complex and Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society (CWRS), Wildfest is an annual event held during the school day for second grade students. Partners from the area bring educational programs to the event to help students learn about the wildlife and wild lands around them. Since many North

continued on page 5

Wildfest 2014 continued...

Carolina schools have limited funds for field trips, CWRS provides transportation grants to the schools. Students from Elizabeth City finally were able to attend the event after three years of trying. Students from Columbia also attended the event. Although these students live near Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, they rarely travel outside of the Columbia area.

Needless to say, more than 430 children were thrilled with the trip and time spent at the event. Partners from the Coastal Environmental Education Network enjoyed sharing a variety of topics with the children. Smokey Bear was there as well as Puddles the blue goose, a red wolf, and an alligator. Refuge interns and RV volunteers helped make the day a success. Due to inclement weather, the event was held inside the gymnasium at the College of the Albemarle campus in Manteo. Responses from teachers and chaperones ranged from, "Fantastic!" to "We love being able to participate in this event since it correlates to our curriculum, and the students have fun while learning." ❖

Friends Group obtains five acres of land for Kentucky refuge

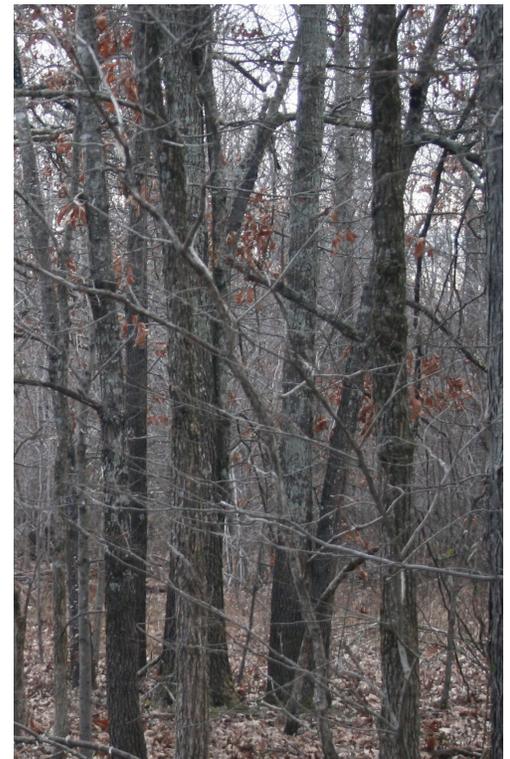
By Stacey Hayden, Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge

In December of 2014, the Friends of Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge donated a five-acre tract of land that will be donated to the refuge sometime in 2015. This was the group's first purchase as part of their new land acquisition campaign effort. The Friends' intent is the purchasing of small in-holdings that can then be transferred to the refuge.

The land is located in a flood-prone area of the Clarks River floodplain and contained a residential property until the flood of 2011, when the residents lost their home. The owner was reluctant to sell the property as residential, knowing future residents would be affected by flood waters at some point, and instead, wanted to sell to the refuge. However, no federal land acquisition funding was available.

This purchase provides: (1) protection of forested wetlands that can provide habitat for the endangered Indiana bat and proposed endangered Northern long-eared bat; (2) enhancement of public access for wildlife-dependent recreation; and (3) improvement of management opportunities for the refuge by reducing the acreage of this type of small in-holding.

This acquisition was funded by a grant from the Indiana Bat Conservation Fund and made possible through a partnership with the Friends of Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge, The Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, and the Service's Kentucky Ecological Services Field Office. ❖



Coming and Going

Anthony Velasco works with DOI

By Jennifer Garland, Kentucky Ecological Services Office

Anthony Velasco, former Contaminants Ecologist at the Kentucky Ecological Services Field Office in Frankfort, left the Service in November 2014, after more than 20 years. Tony now works as an Environmental Protection Specialist with the Department of the Interior's Office of Restoration and Damage Assessment in Washington, D.C. He is greatly missed by his co-workers in Kentucky! ❖



Anthony Velasco, photo: USFWS

What You Didn't Know About Sara Aicher

Sara's gingerbread creation: The Quiltmaker's Gift

By Mindy Gautreaux, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

For the past two years Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge's Wildlife Biologist Sara Aicher participated in the Jacksonville Gingerbread Extravaganza, which is an annual fundraiser event for the Jacksonville Historical Society in Jacksonville, Florida. Both her 2013

continued on page 6

Gingerbread Creation continued...



photo courtesy: Sara's award-winning gingerbread creation

and 2014 gingerbread creations won the distinction of Best in Show.

This year's creation was based on the children's book The Quiltmaker's Gift by Jeff Brumbeau and Gail deMarcken. Each entry has to be at least 80 percent edible. Sara estimates that it took her about 50 hours to make this year's entry. The biggest challenge is dealing with the high humidity in the South which softens the gingerbread. Sara's entry featured the quiltmaker and a quilt that spreads over the flower covered hills, and her log cabin. A bear with caraway claws sleeps comfortably on a pillow made from the quiltmaker's shawl. You can see the assembly sequence of The Quiltmaker's Gift at http://bit.ly/1vM2eTd. ❖

Southeast Region's 2014 Accomplishments (Continued from RD's Column, Page 1)

Budget and Administration

For Budget and Administration, 2014 was all about protecting our workforce, providing essential services in a fair and cost-effective manner, and working "lean, clean and green."

Putting safety first, our Office of Safety worked closely with all programs to help the Region achieve a 25 percent reduction in work-related accidents.

We were also fiscally responsible as a Region, ending FY14 with one of the lowest charge card delinquency rates in the Service, at 0.28 percent.

The Service and the Department recognized our efforts to practice what we preach regarding environmental responsibility: Refuges and Engineering received both a FWS Environmental Leadership Award and a DOI Environmental Achievement Award in the Lean, Clean & Green category for the Camp Garcia Renewable Energy Project on the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. This renewable energy system was constructed



Camp Garcia Renewable Energy Project on the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, photo: Aireko

using a combination of battery and solar power. The results: Fewer power outages during storm events and lower costs associated with old high voltage lines.

In partnership with Refuges and Engineering, Contracting and General Services (CGS) knocked it out of the park with small business procurement, substantially exceeding the Secretary's goals for awards to small, disadvantaged businesses (20 percent with a goal of 5 percent) and women-owned businesses (21percent with a goal of 5 percent).

Our internal partnering through expanded shared service efforts with the Southwest and Northeast Regions will save the Service more than \$500,000 annually, while still providing high quality services to employees. Currently, the Southeast Region supports both the Southeast and Southwest Regions with Worker's Compensation and Diversity and Civil Rights services; and the Northeast Region with Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Recovery (NRDAR), Hurricane Sandy contracting, and grants/agreements. The Southwest Region provides the Southeast Region with Human Resources support for Staffing/Recruitment and Employee Relations.

Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA)

The Southeast Region's Deepwater Horizon NRDA Team led the nine-member Deepwater Horizon NRDA Trustee Council's efforts to complete the massive \$627 million dollar, 44-project Phase III Early Restoration Plan. The Phase III Plan includes three projects from the Department of the Interior--one Fish and Wildlife Service project and two National Park Service projects. The team also led completion of the Early Restoration Programmatic Restoration Plan and associated Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), and the development of the Record of Decision. Additionally, the team managed the extensive Gulf-wide public engagement activities related to the Phase III Plan and PEIS, which reached out to many stakeholders with a great variety of interests and issues. Nine public meetings engaged approximately 500 people, and a lengthy comment period generated more than 2,400 comments.

Leadership Quote:

Be absolutely determined to enjoy what you do.

- Gerry Sikorski



Public meeting, photos: USFWS



In support of the Presidential Executive Order on Environmental Justice, the Southeast Region's Deepwater Horizon NRDA Team worked diligently to expand opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged communities to have meaningful input into the Deepwater Horizon NRDA Early Restoration process. Environmental Justice outreach efforts included 12 meetings (in addition to the nine formal public meetings). These meetings were held for the purpose of preparing minority audiences, particularly those with language and socio-economic challenges, to meaningfully engage in the subsequent public meetings and to comment on the draft plan. About 300 residents of the Gulf region took advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them through these additional meetings.

Ecological Services

Leading in conservation of at-risk species: Working with states through the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, we led new approaches to conserve species that are candidates or petitioned for listing so that listing was not necessary. Our innovative At-Risk Species Strategy involves use of all existing conservation tools, including our Partners for Fish and Wildlife program landowner agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements, Conference Reports and targeted status surveys for species. Our efforts yielded results: The Georgia aster was determined to be not warranted for listing through implementation of a

Candidate Conservation Agreement with multiple partners, and listing petitions were withdrawn for five crayfish species based on new surveys showing these species to be secure.

We encouraged and supported development of new conservation approaches. For example, a Partners for Fish and Wildlife pilot program in Georgia and Alabama included an ESA Section 7 biological/conference opinion that provided landowners with some regulatory predictability for listed and candidate species in the longleaf pine ecosystem. We also collaborated with the Department of Defense (DoD) on an innovative effort to develop pre-listing mitigation conservation projects to provide assurances to DoD facilities that invest in pre-listing conservation for the gopher tortoise and Louisiana pine snake. The Service's leadership on this effort convinced the Secretary of Defense to provide funding for policy analysis to support development and expansion of the pilot projects.



Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service director Dan Ashe recognize Eddie Belk, Director of Programs, Mississippi Valley Division U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commanding general Lt. Gen. Thomas P. Bostick for an innovative landscape-level conservation approach, photo: Tami Heileman, DOI

The Service completed a formal Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) Channel Improvement Program for the Lower Mississippi River (LMR). This consultation considered the Corps' conservation work for the endangered interior least tern, pallid sturgeon, and fat pocketbook mussel in the LMR developed under Section 7(a)(1) of the Act. This conservation work transformed the



least tern, photo: USFWS

channel improvement effort from a threat to these three species to the primary mechanism to recover them in the lower Mississippi. It was a key factor in the Service's recommendation to delist the interior least tern because it is recovered. Our use of this flexibility within the ESA was recognized by Secretary Jewell, Director Ashe, and the Department of the Army. USACE recognized the potential and cost-effectiveness of Section 7(a)(1) conservation programs, and is actively working with the Service's Directorate to expand the use of this flexibility across the country to reduce interagency conflict and get better conservation results.

We met all legal deadlines under the Multi-district Litigation Settlement with Wild Earth Guardians and the Center for Biological Diversity. This included publishing one "not warranted" finding (Georgia aster), two "proposed" listing determinations (Florida bristle fern and black pine snake), final listing and critical habitat designations for 12 species (Kentucky gladdess, Bartram's hairstreak butterfly, Florida leafwing butterfly, Short's bladderpod, fleshy fruit gladdess, whorled sunflower, Carter's small-flowered flax, Florida brickell bush, Agave eggersiana, Gonocalyx concolor, Varronia rupicola, Georgia rockcress), and two final "critical habitat" designations (loggerhead sea turtle and Cape Sable

thoroughwort). We also provided substantial assistance to our Midwest and Northeast regions with large and controversial listing determinations (red knot and northern long-eared bat) to help them meet their deadlines.

The Southeast Region has more than 60 percent of the national post-MDL listing workload, so we began planning for this during 2014. Our plan involves close coordination with states, other programs and regions, our Washington Office headquarters, and our field offices, with a careful analysis of staffing, field office and Regional Office workloads, and our conservation priorities.

We also have been proactive through careful management of Ecological Services' listing budget: We began to fund FY 15 listing projects in FY 14, getting a jump start on this year's large workload.

External Affairs



An otter takes on an alligator, photo: Geoff Walsh

We took on an aggressive effort to re-examine the way we communicate on a range of ESA actions. Our communications experts put in place a set of tools and some new messaging that will help us talk about the decisions we make, what they mean and how they will affect landowners and other interested people. We put an emphasis on connecting with stakeholders much earlier in the decision making process and telling compelling stories about our work. To read more about our efforts, visit Inside FWS at <https://inside.fws.gov/index.cfm/go/post/r4-esa-toolkit>.

E-Grits has a new look. We re-designed our regional newsletter and made it bi-monthly to make it more interactive and to reduce workload. It's more reader friendly now, and its presentation takes advantage of some new technology that makes it fun to read. The result: According to

analytical data, we have quadrupled views of the revamped newsletter compared with the previous version and design.

We are leading redesign of the ever-popular hunting brochures for use with the iPhone, iPad, and similar devices for more than two dozen national wildlife refuges. We saved the Refuges program nearly \$45,000 by changing the way we bid out printing projects and taking on more work internally.

Use of social media to inform, educate and entertain continues to flourish and grow in the Southeast Region. Our biggest success occurred in March when we featured a series of images of an otter preying on alligator. The photos went viral, landing on the front page of Yahoo.com, BuzzFeed.com, National Geographic and Time online, as well as numerous international online newspapers. We nearly doubled our rate of growth in social media from last year, gaining 59,100 new Facebook fans and generating 125 million impressions through Facebook and Twitter!

In November 2013, the Director asked members of the Directorate to ramp up their presence on the Hill. In the Southeast, we were already moving in this direction and in a nutshell, here are the numbers: in 2014 members of our Regional Directorate Team led by Cindy participated in more than 40 meetings with Members and staff for in-person briefs, conference calls, and meetings addressing a range of issues mostly on a proactive basis. The result: greater trust and awareness, and, we believe, openness and leeway. Areas of emphasis included at-risk species, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, land conservation, land acquisition, and endangered species listings and critical habitat designations. Intensive work to connect with Congressional offices about our work and how we are of seeking creative solutions and taking advantage of existing flexibilities in our mandates has positioned us well for an even stronger effort in 2015.

Fisheries

For the Fisheries program, 2014 was all about the science. By promoting the application of new techniques in satellite imagery and interpretation, we can now provide biologists with a landscape summary of two of the most important environmental factors regulating habitat suitability for floodplain-dependent aquatic species: how frequently floodplains are

flooded and water temperatures that predict spawning success.

We have initially combined these two new data sources with land-cover data to provide a unique landscape assessment that outlines the distribution of suitable habitat for alligator gar spawning in the Lower Mississippi River. By combining our expertise and resources with partnerships such as the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative and the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership, the Fisheries program is now able to provide tools to our partners to develop management strategies and habitat conservation projects that consider landscape-scale features.

In 2014, the Conservation Genetics Lab (CGL) explored the utility of environmental DNA (eDNA) for the detection of endangered aquatic organisms and aquatic nuisance species, and the inventory and monitoring of aquatic fauna. Specifically, the lab is working with Asheville and Cookeville Ecological Services field offices to develop eDNA markers for the chucky madtom – a species that has not been seen for more than 10 years. The CGL is also developing a low-cost inventory and monitoring tool using eDNA to obtain presence/absence data for aquatic organisms in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park simply by taking water samples from a stream.



Happy Trails and Group that worked on Happy Trails, photo: USFWS

Using money from the Fish Passage Program and the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, a cross-programmatic team of Service employees and partners worked to restore aquatic habitats, remove aquatic species barriers, and rehabilitate and repair stream banks in areas that are home to hundreds of “at-risk” and federally protected species. Our successes include the Happy Trails Culvert replacement on Gills Creek in South Carolina benefiting the federally-protected Carolina heelsplitter mussel; the Lassiter Mills Dam removal on the Little River in North Carolina to benefit American shad, American eel and other species; two barrier removals on Swan Creek in Alabama to benefit the federally protected slackwater darter; and the Goodwin’s Mill dam removal and stream bank restoration on Big Canoe Creek in Alabama to benefit numerous threatened, endangered, and at-risk species.

Gulf Restoration Program



Brown pelican, photo: USFWS

The Gulf Restoration Program (GRP) was established in 2014, building on the Service’s existing cross-regional/cross-program effort to actively engage the expertise of all Service programs and more than half the Service’s regions in accomplishing conservation and restoration goals across the Gulf’s 31-state watershed. GRP is a unique model of integration and collaboration, where dollars are allocated directly to existing Service programs with centralized performance and accountability expectations attached. In addition to leveraging existing, dedicated capacity, the GRP is re-directing and adding new capacity in Gulf field offices to address the increasing workload in environmental compliance and restoration coordination. In 2014, three new positions were created: a Gulf Science Coordinator, responsible for directing Gulf science priorities for the Service working across

the four Gulf LCCs, multiple regions and programs; a Gulf Congressional/ External Affairs Coordinator, responsible for communications and Congressional relations as it relates to the Service’s interests in Gulf restoration; and a Gulf Migratory Bird Coordinator, responsible for working across multiple regions and Joint Ventures to coordinate Gulf bird conservation in one of the most important flyways on the continent. The GRP also works closely with other Federal agencies and the five Gulf states to ensure that Gulf restoration efforts are integrated across the multiple Deepwater Horizon funding streams (NRDA, NFWF, Restore, NAWCA).

The GRP Science Coordinator is working with the four Gulf LCCs, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and other partners to establish numerical population objectives for species identified in the Service’s Gulf Vision document. Leveraging an initial \$197,000 grant from the Office of the Science Advisor through the National LCC Network, this project attracted additional funds from the Southeast Region Science Applications program, the Gulf Restoration Program, the Gulf Coast Prairie LCC, and the USGS National Wetlands Research Center, to bring the total budget to just over \$490,000. In September 2014, explicit biological planning units were defined, priority species were identified, and a common course was charted across all programs and partnerships. Once the population objectives for species are established this summer, the next phase of the project will build species-habitat models that will establish habitat objectives explicitly linked to species’ needs and our population objectives. This will allow the priority areas in our landscape conservation design for the Gulf to be tied to defensible numerical objectives, guiding our conservation investments and increasing the accountability and transparency of our Gulf priorities through science. Outreach to program and partnership staffs has begun in earnest, to make them aware of this project and to provide them an opportunity to shape it through targeted feedback. We anticipate the Gulf biological habitat objectives will be completed by early 2016.

Migratory Birds



Reddish egret, photo: Emily Clark, Texas State University

Partnering for success: The Southeast Region’s Migratory Bird program led an effort with partners from the United States and Mexico to develop and implement a focal species action plan for reddish egrets. They are the rarest and least known of the egrets and herons in North America, with an estimated global population of only 7,000 to 9,000 individuals. The Reddish Egret Conservation Action Plan is available at <http://www.reddishegret.org/about.php>.

The East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture (EGCPJV) released a comprehensive communications strategy, A Burning Issue: Prescribed Fire and Fire-adapted Habitats of the East Gulf Coastal Plain, which promotes the critical role of fire in restoring and maintaining longleaf pine and other community types vital to many high priority bird and wildlife species. The strategy describes the EGCPJV’s “niche” in advancing the application of fire as an essential conservation tool in the East Gulf region. Additional information can be found at <http://egcpjv.org/projects.html>.

More than one million acres of habitat were conserved within the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV) through Farm Bill conservation programs, most of that permanently protected in 2014. Early cooperation among LMVJV partners, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), resulted in focused placement of Wetland Reserve (WRP) projects that protect and restore habitats for priority birds. Recently, the LMVJV partnership has ramped up cooperation through the Tri-state Conservation Coordination Committee in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The committee was established to explore and address opportunities to bolster support for NRCS conservation

programs that intersect with habitat conservation priorities of the LMVJV. Importantly, representatives from the LMVJV Conservation Delivery Networks in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi are playing key roles. They are aligning WRP ranking criteria across the three states and are developing a tri-state "Regional Conservation Partnership Program." LMVJV partners are working to complete recommendations regarding forest management practices that support desired habitat conditions for priority wildlife on WRP sites.

National Wildlife Refuge System



photo: Prescribed fire at a refuge, photo: USFWS

Setting records, buying land, and hosting visitors: In the Southeast, the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) exceeded its prescribed burn/hazardous fuels target of 51,392 acres by nearly 44,000 acres, achieving a total of 95,313 acres. Southeast personnel responded to 175 wildfires that burned 27,375 acres of Service lands, with no lives or structures lost.



Kids play at a refuge, photo: USFWS

In the Southeast, we were allocated nearly twice the funding requested in our MCBF Plan because other regions were not able

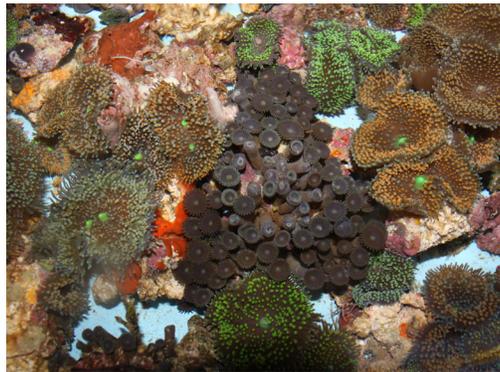
In FY14, we acquired 26 tracts for the region at a cost of nearly \$12 million, adding 8,357 acres to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Unlike previous years, in 2014 the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) grew significantly. In

to complete planned acquisitions and we had signed options on hand to spend those allocated funds.

We lead the largest regional visitor services program in the nation by several measures, welcoming 13 million visitors, assisted by 6,586 volunteers (contributing more than 357,000 hours), and supported by 46 Friends groups. Visitor participation numbers for 2014 included 791,000 hunt visits, more than 3,000,000 fishing visits, 197,000 students in environmental education programs, and 7,782,000 visitors coming to observe wildlife.

We developed a first-in-the-nation comprehensive regional workforce plan for the National Wildlife Refuge System after a series of four working meetings with all NWRS project leaders. Our proactive workforce alignment efforts helped manage budget reductions exceeding 10% (FY11-13) without having to implement a hiring freeze; and enabled the filling of key positions while also achieving a 25 percent operating margin.

Office of Law Enforcement



Coral, photo: USFWS

Upholding wildlife law: Operation Rock Bottom, a multi-year, undercover operation involving the illegal harvest and sale of various forms of marine life from National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, National Marine Sanctuaries and other protected areas in or surrounding the Florida Keys, South Florida and Puerto Rico, yielded some significant results in 2014. Aptly named for the manner in which commercial marine life divers illegally chiseled corals from the ocean bottom with large pieces of live rock attached, Operation Rock Bottom demanded the focused attention of the entire Special Agent and Wildlife Inspector staff in our Miami, Florida, Office of Law Enforcement. Information gained during the investigation has thus far led to the

execution of 11 search warrants and 21 subjects and businesses arrested and/or criminally convicted. Numerous other subjects and businesses are in various stages of criminal prosecution.

The operation also has confirmed that the targets of this investigation knowingly and illegally harvested CITES-regulated and State of Florida-protected species of marine life invertebrates, corals, rays, tropical fish and sharks from areas owned or administered by the Department of the Interior and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; exported them using false documents; and unlawfully sold them in interstate commerce in violation of international and federal law (Lacey Act and Endangered Species Act). Globally, targets have ranged the entire span of the marine life industry to include initial harvesters, wholesalers, retailers, smugglers and public aquariums. Convictions of subjects and businesses have resulted from felony conspiracy, violations of the Lacey Act, and obstruction of justice. To date, criminal sentences have totaled approximately 5 1/2 years of incarceration, about 18 years of probation, criminal fines totaling \$111,000 and forfeitures of two boats and two vehicles.

Science Applications

Science Applications provided regional leadership in supporting the states and federal agencies in the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) in developing the Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy (SECAS)--an unparalleled effort to proactively define the desired conservation landscape of the future. SEAFWA has captured the significance and implications of SECAS and is exploring options for coordinating and integrating its work with landscape planning efforts that are underway in various locations across the nation. One example of this is the development of the Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT) through the Western Governors Association. To learn more, click here: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/lcc/pdf/SECAS-brief-Fall-2014.pdf>.

Science Applications continues to foster an organizational environment that values a science-based approach to collaboration. As a tangible example of this commitment, our staff, working



Jack's Branch Natchez Trace, Tennessee, photo: Joe Meiman, National Park Service



Louisiana pine snake, photo: USFWS

through the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives in the Region, hosted a Structured Decision Making (SDM) training at Auburn University and a SDM workshop at Mississippi State University in 2014. The training was attended by Service staff from Ecological Services, Migratory Birds, Fisheries, Refuges, and Science Applications, along with partners from multiple other state, federal, and private agencies and organizations. The workshop also included multiple stakeholders and focused on four specific issues, each concluding with a workable prototype solution: First, conservation of the Louisiana pine snake; second, Endangered Species Act Sec.10(a) (1)(A) permitting; third, relocation of the flatwoods salamander; and finally, endangered species management in the context of cultural resources along the Natchez Trace Parkway.

Within LCC geographies, Science Applications has provided coordination for an effort to better engage Service project leaders and states in the implementation of SHC; specifically, in the use of surrogate species as natural resource indicators and how they provide insight into habitat conditions. For the South Atlantic LCC, for example, three ARDs and a 10-person team were commissioned to form a FWS South Atlantic Leadership Team. The team was empowered to work with all project leaders in SALCC geography to:

- Link Service trust resource work to LCC natural resource indicators in the SALCC geography and articulate the Service role in contributing/linking our work to the indicators;
- Develop a 3-year work plan that lays out our strategies for conserving our priorities within the context of the LCC priorities and the LCC geography;
- Develop a summary report to share with others in the region;
- Solicit and carefully consider input with all Service project leaders in the geography; and
- Provide support to the states and Service decision support framework effort.

Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration



A helicopter deploys materials for an oyster reef restoration project in Georgia. This project is funded through our Sport Fish Restoration Program, photo: USFWS

Working with state partners: The Region's Wildlife Restoration and State Wildlife Grant programs provided more than \$18.8 million in federal funding to purchase and/or protect 17,872 acres of quality wildlife habitat to be maintained and managed in perpetuity for the conservation of game and non-game species.

Funds provided to Southeast states by the Wildlife Restoration's Hunter Education program introduced more than 154,000 students to the world of hunting and natural resource conservation.



Students being trained in basic archery skills at the Archery Park in Athens, Alabama, photo: USFWS

By training them to be safe, ethical and responsible while in the woods, we are helping to create the conservation stakeholders of the future.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) program fully implemented the new Wildlife Tracking and Reporting Actions for the Conservation of Species (TRACS) system used to capture conservation and related actions funded by WSFR grant programs. The success of the system is dependent upon state and tribal grantees' entry of project statements and performance report data. WSFR staff succeeded in communicating with and engaging grant partners on the purpose, efficiencies and processes of TRACS. We provided support and hands-on training on the new TRACS system to federal and state coordinators through 11 workshops and presentations in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina and at the Atlanta Regional Office. As a result, WSFR Regional Office staff and state project leaders have successfully submitted more than 250 projects in TRACS.

An important measure of success for WSFR is ensuring that apportionments to states do not revert through deficiencies in use and become "stale" or "non-reusable." WSFR closed out FY '14 with a mere 0.36 percent of reversions from apportionments to states of \$235,052,207. This was accomplished through close partnership, i.e., by notifying states throughout the year of the possible loss of funds and by the states, in turn, working hard to reduce or eliminate any such losses.