



Chief Editor: Elsie Davis

July - August 2015



RD's Corner

Here in the Southeast Region, we have always put a premium on relationships with stakeholders.

The human dimension of fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation is something we purposefully weave into our actions and decisions. We know, and often say, that conservation won't happen unless people are engaged, have an opportunity to express themselves, and feel they are part of the decision making process. We live by the adage, "To buy in, they have to weigh in."

Nowhere is that more true than with our most valued stakeholders—our own employees. The Southeast Region's mission is accomplished through its people. They are where "the rubber meets the road." Because this is so, the entire Regional Directorate Team takes it seriously when we get employee feedback about areas in which improvements to our ways of doing business may be warranted. The regional pulse check survey identified some of those areas, and our response regionally is to step up our game. To connect better. To listen to what our employees have to say. To walk a mile in their shoes. To make course corrections as they are needed.

We have a Southeast Region Intranet site that is dedicated to engaging all employees in the effort to keep our region going strong. When you visit <https://inside.fws.gov/go/post/r4-pulse/> on a networked computer, you can get information on the pulse check,

Peachtree Creek restoration's recipe for success: partnership, teamwork, and Girl Scout cookies



Four volunteers from Boys & Girls Club Atlanta join Sally Sears, on trail clearing on MLK Day 2015, photo: Bill Head, South Fork Conservancy

By Katherine Taylor, External Affairs

You know a project is destined for success when the Girl Scouts are involved and donating part of their cookie money.

Atlanta's South Fork Conservancy and its partners working to restore Peachtree Creek got a big boost from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and other partners, who committed more than \$100,000 to this coalition's work in Southwest Atlanta. This proves that teamwork does make the dream work.

That teamwork includes the help of dedicated volunteers. Recently around 40 volunteers from the Lindridge Martin Manor Neighborhood Association, located in Northeast Atlanta, cleared honeysuckle vines and kudzu from the area around Peachtree Creek. They also planted milkweed and educated neighbors about the monarch's dependency on milkweed as a food source. In addition, The Georgia Conservancy is forming groups of volunteers to hold regularly- scheduled Monday morning workdays to keep the milkweed plants from being re-eaten by honeysuckle or kudzu.

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RD's Corner continued...

view the schedules of ARDs who may be headed your way, and submit ideas for jobs that you would like to invite members of the Regional Directorate Team to share. For example, Service Conservation Law Enforcement Officer Walter Duran hosted ARD for Budget and Administration Jackie Parrish on a job-share protecting West Indian manatees in the well-travelled Intracoastal Waterways in Martin County, Florida, over the Fourth of July weekend. Jackie participated in a ride-along with Office of Law Enforcement officers patrolling slow speed minimum wake manatee zones and running radar along the 25mph marked manatee zones. In her words, "This was an amazing experience and I want to thank the officers for the opportunity to see firsthand the work they do."

Jackie said she came away from the experience with tremendous pride in the professionalism of the Office of Law Enforcement folks she worked with, as well as a reinvigorated sense of mission about doing her own job to support all of our Regional Office and field employees.

Now, that's connecting! Next up is ARD for Fisheries Allan Brown, who will take part in an aquatic vegetation Survey at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina the first week of August. We just received a dozen more job-share ideas, so stay tuned for more information on these. Remember, if you have an idea for a job share, let us know. Our region is made better and stronger when we have opportunities to appreciate one another and understand what we bring to the Service mission.

In late August, we also are re-energizing our Listening Sessions, begun many years ago by our late Regional Director/Director Sam D. Hamilton. The first session will be held at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Alabama and will include a cross-section of employees from stations in close proximity to the refuge in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Based on employee feedback, we are creating topical areas for discussion, including communication, priorities, career development and training, diversity and inclusion, and dealing with limited resources, each of which will be facilitated by an ARD. We are working on questions to get the conversation

going and will distribute those to participants for review and a call well in advance of the meeting. Participants will be asked to come to the Listening Session prepared to speak candidly and to represent themselves and their colleagues. A second session is scheduled for mid-October. We know that great ideas, including our E4 (Employees Empowering Employees for Excellence) mentoring program, have come from our employees' recommendations during Listening Sessions.

In addition to these formal opportunities to provide your RDT with feedback, keep an eye out for team members who may be travelling your way. We also have also stepped up our efforts to stay a while and chat with employees when we have scheduled business at a station or nearby. This is another great way to showcase your accomplishments and share ideas with your leadership team.

Speaking of accomplishments—we have a whopper to celebrate this month! The Department of Justice has reached an Agreement in Principle with BP to settle civil claims for the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. If approved by the federal court, the total settlement will top \$18.7 billion—the largest settlement with a single entity in American history. The funds will be used to help repair the damage done to the Gulf fisheries, wetlands, wildlife and economy. I am very proud of all the Service employees who helped contribute to this positive outcome. I want to particularly thank our region's entire Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Case Management Team for extraordinary efforts that helped bring this to pass. The only thing better than this outcome would have been for the spill never to have happened. But it did; and our job now is to look forward rather than back, to use the expertise, creativity, and hard work of our people and the funding that will restore all the Gulf's wildlife treasures.

- *Cindy*

Peachtree Creek continued...

The milkweed plants are thriving," says Sally Sears. "We saw our first monarchs return in mid-July."

Partnerships, like this new one with the South Fork Conservancy, are all part of the Service's Urban Wildlife Conservation Program. The Foundation, the Service and a host of partners announced a series of grants for new and existing partnerships around the country. The grants were made possible by the 2015 Five Star grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Nationally, these Five-Star grants generated \$2.35 million in direct contributions and matching funds from local partners.

This is the first year an Atlanta project is receiving funds under the Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships program involving urban, natural habitat restoration efforts led by community organizations that utilize volunteers. This year the South Fork Conservancy received 29,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and \$75,000 in matching funds from other organizations to work on initiatives such as creating an urban meadow along Peachtree Creek.

In January, around 80 volunteers spent their Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday clearing Meadow Loop Trail of saplings, which had begun to grow in the opening.

"We spent hours working with the neighbors on the restoration plan for the urban meadow," says Sally Sears of the South Fork Conservancy. "We were aware that we were removing trees some people wanted to keep; but, the consensus vote of the neighbors and all of the scientists with whom we worked was to restore the meadow and not let it succeed into a mixed forest. The neighbors decided to use the perimeter around the meadow as the looping nature trail we call Meadow Loop Trail."

Bluebirds and mockingbirds (not to be confused with the fictional mockingjay in Hunger Games) are at home in the meadow. Otters, beavers, blue herons and crawfish are all in Peachtree Creek.

"The collaborative nature of the South Fork Conservancy's natural restoration work is just the type of effort the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation are seeking to support through the Urban Wildlife Refuge

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Peachtree Creek continued...

Partnerships program,” says Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “The South Fork Conservancy includes everyone in its work - - Atlanta Public Schools, Girl Scouts, National Audubon Society, neighborhood groups. Everyone has a voice, and they are all lending a hand.”

The community’s work continues in and around Peachtree Creek. The Atlanta Botanical Garden and the Blue Heron Nature Preserve helped choose the wildflowers in the meadow. The National Audubon Society conducts bird identification tours. Eco-Addendum, a non-profit group in Atlanta that conducts naturalist walks, held a wildflower tour in mid-July. Students grew American Chestnut hybrids to plant along a creek bank downstream of the meadow, as Atlanta Public Schools and The American Chestnut Foundation created an orchard of blight resistant chestnut trees. ❖

Employee Spotlight

Nanciann Regalado, NRDA



Nanciann with her dog Sophie, photo courtesy of Nanciann Regalado

By Elsie Davis, External Affairs

Nanciann is the Department of Interior’s Outreach and Media Coordinator for the Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration team formed after the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. She’s always on the go, and her communications position seems like a natural fit. She even describes herself as a news junkie. Yet, surprisingly, Nanciann started her career as a biologist, with a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in biology from Florida Atlantic University.

Nanciann’s first job was with the City of Boca Raton and involved both regulatory and environmental planning work. When she realized she needed to work more effectively with city planners, she returned to Florida Atlantic and obtained a Fellowship for Environmental Policy and Planning at the master’s level. Communications was an important part of her studies and her fellowship duties at the Center for Environmental and Urban Problems, and she learned a lot about how to reach out and involve the public in environmental planning.

Later, she worked for the Audubon Society’s Everglades Campaign for four years and then for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Everglades Restoration Program for 10 years before joining NRDA four years ago. She works with Public Affairs Specialists and representatives with the five Gulf states, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to communicate DOI’s restoration efforts and collaborate with the other partners.

Nanciann has an interesting hobby as a foster parent for dogs. She goes to animal shelters and rescues dogs that have stayed there the longest and/or are the sickest. She takes them home, nurses them back to health, and finds owners for them. Sometimes, people will bring sick dogs to her for help.

Nanciann also enjoys spending time outdoors. She has a beautiful garden, and is clearing the lot next to her Southeast Atlanta home of exotics like Chinese Privet and English Ivy so she can re-establish native plants and provide better habitat for wildlife. ❖

What’s Trending

By Katherine Taylor, External Affairs

Apps: Ducks Unlimited has a new app and it’s a must for waterfowl lovers. This free app features a waterfowl ID, DU events, sunrise/sunset calculator, DU news, hunting tips, and more!



Sixteen bears gather at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, photo: Jackie Orsulak, USFWS

#MostSharedStory: A photo of 16 black bears hanging out at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge was shared 172 times on Facebook and reached 33,000 Facebook users!

Social Media: The Southeast Region was the first region to use Periscope to live broadcast an event through Twitter. We filmed a rescued bald eagle being released.

Bragging Rights

Choctawhatchee Estuary Family Festival

By Jeffrey Van Vrancken, Panama City Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

The Choctawhatchee Estuary Family Festival is an annual event hosted by the Mattie Kelly Cultural and Environmental Institute in Niceville Florida. The festival celebrates the natural beauty of the bay and its watersheds, raises public awareness, and connects children and adults to local natural areas. Adjacent to the Choctawhatchee Bay in the Florida panhandle, Eglin Air Force Base has more than 1,500 miles of spring fed

and seepage slope streams that provide habitat for numerous aquatic wildlife and one federally threatened fish, the Okaloosa darter.



Jeffrey Van Vrancken shows Samuel Knight some aquatic insects, photo courtesy Kelly Knight

About half of the stream miles located on the base, including all of the watersheds inhabited by the Okaloosa darter, drain into the Choctawhatchee Bay. The Service has a long-standing partnership with Eglin Air Force Base which houses the Niceville suboffice of the Panama City Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office. This year, Jeff Van Vrancken, a Service aquatic ecologist, represented Eglin's aquatic management program with an interactive display featuring the use of aquatic insects as stream health indicators. Aquatic insects are a commonly used tool for assessing water quality for the federally threatened Okaloosa darter.

Children and adults were allowed to pick through dip net samples collected from an Eglin stream and discover stream insects. These insects were separated into several pans labeled by the orders Ephemeroptera (Mayflies), Trichoptera (Caddisflies), Plecoptera (Stoneflies), Odonata (Dragonflies/Damselflies), or others. Children determined the stream was healthy based on the critters that had been collected. They learned how essential clean water, stream habitat heterogeneity, and biological diversity are to the health of their local receiving bays and estuaries. They also discovered partnerships between organizations can result in military mission success and natural habitat preservation. ❖

Bottomland hardwood forests improving in Mississippi Alluvial Valley

By Steven McKnight, Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture



Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge reforestation, photo: USFWS

Conservation partners of the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture are focusing on effective bottomland hardwood restoration within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. Thanks to the application of cutting-edge GIS technology by the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture Science Staff and Ducks Unlimited's Southern Regional Office, the benefits of reforestation, particularly for forest interior nesting birds, are being quantified. A forest assessment using recent satellite imagery reveals about eight million acres of hardwood forest within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley - a net gain of one million acres since 1992! Much of that additional forest is placed in such a way as to build forest core - the basic building block of priority bird habitat. For example, the Wetlands Reserve Program is responsible for reforestation of more than 700,000 acres within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, and just over 500,000 acres of forest core, increasing available habitat for priority bird species by 10 percent. Many other partners also are important to successful conservation - from non-profits protecting valuable habitats through fee title and conservation easements, to state wildlife agencies and the Service restoring and managing quality bottomland forests. Read about all this at www.lmvjv.org and click on the "Gaining Ground" button to learn more. ❖

Annual Wilderness Day Camp at Dale Hollow



Brave girl holds King snake, photo: Andrew Currie, USFWS

By Andrew Currie, Dale Hollow NFH

The Friends of Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery hosted the Third Annual Wilderness Day Camp on July 9, 2015. The event was co-sponsored by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. All activities took place at the nearby Corps picnic pavilion located at the Dale Hollow Dam Recreation Area. Activity stations included BB-gun and archery target shooting, water safety, a live red tailed hawk and king snake, and fly rod casting. David Pelren and Ken McDonald of the Tennessee

Ecological Services Field Office, Cookeville, gave presentations on aquatic insects and song birds. A presentation on water safety was given by Corps' Ranger Bobby Bartlett and his wife Geneva. Numerous agency personnel and volunteers helped to make the event a success. About 35 children and 10 adults attended.

Junior Refuge Ranger summer camps at Okefenokee NWR

By Sarah Wyatt, Okefenokee NWR

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge held the 2015 Junior Refuge Ranger summer camps during late June. Kids ages 5 to 7 and 8 to 12 years old participated in three days of fun activities and educational programs during two separate weeks of camp. Thirty-three campers enjoyed a variety of activities such as boat tours, an historic tour at the Chesser Island Homestead, fishing, archery, and nature journaling. At the conclusion of camp, each participant was awarded a junior refuge ranger badge along with a camp shirt and giveaways during a special celebration ceremony. The 2015 Junior Refuge Rangers and their family members then joined Izzie Lizzie Alligator and Puddles the Blue Goose for cake and punch. The 2015 Junior Refuge Ranger camps were made possible by the support and collaboration of the Okefenokee Wildlife League and the refuge's staff, volunteers, and interns who lent a helping hand. ❖



Archery was the most popular activity. Photo, Andrew Currie, FWS

Students gain valuable experience at Okefenokee NWR

By Sarah Wyatt, Okefenokee NWR

This summer, area students were hard at work on Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) students and interns dedicated their time and efforts to the mission of conservation at the refuge. High school and college students gained valuable work experience and earned summer money and stipends. They worked on such projects as presenting environmental education programs at local libraries and clearing trails along the Chesser Island Boardwalk.

Denise Diaz, an intern through the Student Conservation Association and in a Fish and Wildlife Service program known as the Career Discovery Internship Program, was instrumental in creating programming and managing refuge summer camps held in June. Sierra Hoisington, an intern through the



Students who worked this summer, photo: Sarah Wyatt, USFWS.

National Wildlife Refuge Association, experienced all aspects of managing a refuge while participating in public use, forestry, and biology programs. The

YCC students focused on maintaining the refuge through facility and vehicle maintenance, as well as trail maintenance in both the swamp and uplands.

Friends and Volunteers

Okefenokee Swamp Friends Theater

By Sarah Wyatt, Okefenokee NWR

Reaching out to communities has always been a mission of Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. During a three-month time span, more than 900 people within the local communities were introduced to the Okefenokee Swamp through a whimsical traveling puppet show. Refuge staff and volunteers showcased the Oke Swamp Friends Theater to libraries throughout southeastern Georgia. The puppet theater, designed and constructed by a refuge volunteer, is only half of the treat. Members of the audience get the chance to watch and listen to "Swamp Tales" told in part by Okefenokee Swamp critters Izzie Lizzie Alligator and Wide-mouthed Frog. To enhance the experience, educational programs with props and activities were presented to children and adults. The puppet shows have provided a way to actively engage audiences of all ages. Due to popular demand, shows will continue into the fall. ❖



Interns and a volunteer show the beautiful puppet show theater, along with some puppet friends, photo: USFWS

Youth Fishing Derby at Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge

By Sarah Wyatt, Okefenokee NWR

This summer, 75 children from communities near Lakeland, Georgia, participated in the fifteenth annual Youth Fishing Derby at Flatlanders Lake. The event is held in conjunction with Georgia Free Fishing Day and National Fishing and Boating Week, which promotes safe and responsible fishing, boating, and water stewardship.

Children tossed their lines in at Flatlanders Lake to compete for the title of "most fish caught" or "largest fish caught" in each age group. Winners were awarded for the age groups: 3-6 years old, 7-11 years old, and 12-15 years old. During the derby, the children and their families saw a live alligator, skins and skulls, and even got their faces painted.

While enjoying free food and drinks donated and prepared by the Valdosta Bassmasters, visitors tried their hand at



A winner of a well-earned trophy, photo, USFWS

worm grunting and knot tying. They also challenged their fish identification skills. Joining the fun and providing additional educational exhibits were representatives from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Stephen C. Foster State Park,

Harris Neck Ecological Services Office, and Banks Lake Outdoors. The fishing derby is a successful partnership between the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Valdosta Bassmasters, Okefenokee Wildlife League, the City of Lakeland, and the Lanier Chamber of Commerce.

What You Didn't Know About Me

Why I took up Chinese

By Nadine Siak

As a child, the word “Chinese” meant one thing to me: sugar! That’s because we used to regularly eat at a Chinese restaurant that had teeny-tiny cups for the tea, and a big canister of sugar on each table. For some reason -- maybe because they were preoccupied with mastering their chopsticks -- my parents never noticed how much of the latter I would pour into the first. I basically downed multiple cups of sugar with a dash of tea in them at each meal. That’s all I can remember about eating “Chinese food” as a child, and that was the extent of my interest in China.

So my decision to give up French and start studying the Chinese language as an undergraduate was not rooted in some long-term fascination with the 5,000 year-old culture or familiarity with world-class Chinese cuisine. Why then? When asked by job interviewers, I sometimes have said I chose to take Chinese because I believe that one should study in college something one couldn’t study in high school. When asked by others, I often refer to the fact that first semester of classes at Johns Hopkins is on a “pass-fail” (i.e., no grade) basis for everyone. Chinese was being offered for five credits rather than the usual three, and I thought it would be a good way to bank some low-pressure credits.

Those both played a role in my decision; but, to be honest, it came down to this: French class would’ve met at 8:00 in the morning, while Chinese was set for 3:00 in the afternoon.

I immediately fell in love with the written language, however. Memorizing Chinese characters was both like a riddle and a game – and I mean that literally. It was for me a game similar to the one my sister and I made up when we were little. To play, one of us would draw a squiggle on a piece of paper, and the other would have



Nadine writes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Chinese, photo: Jennifer Strickland, USFWS

to make a picture out of it. Armed with a pencil and some imagination, random scribbles were transformed into animals, objects, faces, and flowers. The artist would get points for how well the squiggle was incorporated into the picture. Studying Chinese characters became like a fun game of “Squiggle,” but (better yet) for academic credit.

The riddle I had to solve was how to turn a particular Chinese arrangement of lines into what it meant in English. So, by mentally adding a head and two arms, the Chinese character for “person” could be turned into a man striding forward, as seen by the side. By mentally adding a happy face, the Chinese character for “big” could become a boy holding his arms out wide for a big embrace. Since the word for “adult” in Chinese is the combination of the characters for “big” and “person,” I could then add another word to my growing vocabulary.

This particular game of “Squiggle” of mine has been going on for more than 20 years. Still, each time I feel I have a new character securely memorized, I can only think: Sweet!

Nadine's Chinese name means "beautiful and graceful thunder," photo, Jennifer Strickland, USFWS



Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit."

--Conrad Hilton