



Chief Editor: Elsie Davis

March - April 2015

Deepwater Horizon fifth-year anniversary issue

This issue of E-Grits is dedicated to the 2,000 Service responders who worked in 2010 to recover wildlife and the Gulf from the effects of the nation's largest oil spill. Five years later, some employees and Service partners are still actively involved in that effort. Hat's off to your endeavors then, now, and in the future.



RD's Corner

Last month, we held our first region-wide broadcast. It was exciting and ushered in a new way for us to communicate and share

information on a more regular basis.

I couldn't think of a better issue for this first broadcast than sharing the results of the Pulse Check survey.

One of the things I liked about the broadcast is that you got to see and engage with many of the people on your regional leadership team. As you begin to see some of the actions we are taking as a result of your input, I believe you will get to know our team better. We also will learn more about the challenges you face and the opportunities in front of us as we continue to be a solution-driven conservation partner in one of the country's most ecologically diverse regions.

Between 2007 and 2012, the Regional Directorate Team (RDT) held nearly a dozen listening sessions and out of those came many perspectives, learning opportunities, greater awareness, and a number of good ideas that helped us improve the way we all work.

The Pulse Check survey we shared in October verified for us what we knew – that we needed to get back on track with our internal work.

We heard you clearly – all 602 of you that completed the survey. Two big themes emerged from the results. First, we need to do better communicating generally and more specifically around the work

we are doing and why we are doing it. Second, we need to provide you with more clarity around our regional priorities and do a better job acknowledging the amazing work you're already doing day-in and day-out, year after year.

For us, it's not just about communicating to you, it's about communicating with you. That's why you will begin to see RDT members visiting field stations to talk with employees in the months ahead. Within the last few weeks for example, Bill Uihlein visited several South Florida national wildlife refuges and the South Florida Ecological Services office. Jeff Fleming stopped by Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge and soon will be visiting employees at the Alabama Ecological Services office.

To expand our awareness about what you do and the implications of decisions made at every level, we've created a mechanism for you to invite RDT members to your field station to learn about your work and give you a chance to learn a little about our leadership team – who we are and what we are about.

John Stanton from the Migratory Birds program in North Carolina submitted the first opportunity to get an RDT member on the ground to learn more about aquatic vegetation surveys at Lake Mattamuskeet. We will be sharing highlights from this visit and look forward to more opportunities to spend time on the ground with you.

We believe we are in a good place, though we are not where we want to be. We found good news in several places. You told us you understand what is expected of you at work. You told us your supervisor is someone who truly cares about you as a person. You are able to balance work and personal life. You told us your colleagues cooperate with you to get the job done. These are some of the things that make our region strong.

continued on page 2

RD's Corner continued...

Successful conservation in the Southeast is built on strong relationships, clear communications, mutual respect, transparency, and shared goals.

What I call the survey's other good news helps us understand where we need to do better. For example, you told us you don't believe you can get your work done in a typical 40-hour work week. You told the RDT that we're not communicating effectively and sometimes our actions don't match our words. You also told us something else we instinctively recognize and struggle to address, and that is you don't have enough resources to get the work done the way you want to get it done. It's important to note that unlike a number of federal agencies, the President's budget request for our agency for the upcoming fiscal year includes a \$130 million increase over FY 2015. Dan, Mike, me, and others are emphasizing the importance of this increase as a first step to begin rebuilding our capacity in the field.

We made a commitment to you during the broadcast that we will get better. We believe we will stay true to that commitment and you'll see improvement.

We've begun work to revamp and update our regional priorities. Just this month the RDT has taken steps to establish a team that will look at the progress we have made on the 2011-2013 priorities. We recognize that these priorities are due for an evaluation and will use them as a foundation to update our regional priorities for the next three years (FY2016-2018). We're working on a process for you to engage.

We will resume holding listening sessions. We are developing a mechanism for idea sharing where we will address the 'ideas that rise to the top' based on need and interest.

We expect you will see change – gradual, sustainable change - in the months ahead.

You are out there every day tackling some huge conservation challenges and collaborating with partners in innovative ways and you have done this even as we faced more than our share of floods, wildfires, hurricanes and other disasters over the last five years. And yet, we continue to persevere and lead the way in many conservation efforts.

We know things are not always great. In fact, sometimes they can be downright challenging. We are grateful for your feedback – both the good things and those things that can be hard to hear but are so necessary if we are to get better and achieve even greater results.

We know listening to you is one of the best things we can do and you will see changes in the months ahead even when the decisions aren't the easiest.

If you didn't get a chance to join us for the broadcast, you can find it on our InsideFWS web page here: <https://inside.fws.gov/index.cfm/go/post/r4-pulse>. While there, you can find the Pulse Check results and more about what we are doing over time.

The RDT is renewing our commitment to you and the conservation work we all endeavor to accomplish.

You are making a tremendous difference for southeastern fish, wildlife and habitats every day because conservation is your passion, and for that, I thank you. I'm proud to be part of this region and look forward to building on these ideas moving forward together. ❖

- *Cindy*

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill at five years – it's far from over

By Nanciann Regalado and Nadine Siak, NRDA

Five years ago this month we heard the devastating news – BP's Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil rig had exploded and was spewing oil into the Gulf of Mexico. As Service personnel were lining up to support the immense response effort, the evening news was delivering an unending stream of gut-wrenching reports.

The breaking news tonight is heartbreaking news for anyone who counts on the gulf coast for a living or simply loves the natural beauty of it; it is murder for the animals that call it home. The first fingers of the massive oil slick ... are just a few miles off shore. The slick is enormous - 120 miles wide... the doomed well is dumping 210,000 gallons of oil a day into the Gulf. Making matters worse, there is no indication that crews can cap the flow. This spill is already America's second worst environmental disaster on record after the 1990 Exxon Valdez spill. At the rate it's going, it could be the worst.

CNN's Sanjay Gupta made this report in early May 2010:

To our horror, the Deepwater Horizon well gushed oil for 87 days and did surpass the Exxon Valdez by a factor of ten.

[TC infographic on relative size of the DWH oil spill]

The Service responds quickly

The Service has been addressing the impacts of the DWH spill for five years. First came the initial emergency response, to which the Service assigned an unprecedented level of resources. About 2,000 Service responders, or more than 17 percent of our workforce, assisted in the effort. Some Service personnel even made multiple deployments to the Gulf. At one point, 722 Service personnel were working on incident command, wildlife reconnaissance and recovery, sensitive habit and endangered species protection, finance and other administrative tasks, safety, and more.

continued on next page 3

COMING SOON TO YOUR INBOX

2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

April 27 - June 8

All Permanent Employees Invited to Participate

Thank you for your feedback!

Deepwater Horizon continued...

The Service assesses injury

The Service is now part of a federal-state coalition working on the largest natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) ever undertaken. Service members, along with DOI colleagues from the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the US Geological Survey, are collaborating on this effort. DOI, representatives from the five Gulf states directly impacted by the spill and NOAA, EPA, DOD, and USDA make up the DWH NRDA Trustee Council, which oversees the entire process.

The NRDA process typically starts with a multi-year assessment of injury to natural resources and lost human uses of those resources that result from an oil spill. This is followed by restoration planning and implementation. As part of this effort, the Service is currently assessing DWH-caused injury to our trust resources including endangered species such as the Gulf sturgeon, beach mouse, brown pelican, and sea turtles. Assessing injury involves everything from Service staff counting the number of oiled birds and sea turtles (alive and dead) to surveying damage to wildlife habitat such as the dunes and beaches essential to nesting birds and sea turtles.

The Service restores early

The DWH NRDA is unique not only for its size, but because one of the parties responsible for the spill agreed to make funds available for extensive “early restoration” -- restoration that could begin before the injury assessment was completed. Under an agreement reached in April 2011, BP agreed to fund up to \$1 billion in early restoration projects. Thus far, the NRDA trustees have approved 54 early restoration projects with a combined price tag of about \$700 million. DOI’s early restoration projects include those that enhance beach nesting habitat for birds and sea turtles along the Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi coasts; restore North Breton Island, part of Breton Island National Refuge; and improve recreation opportunities and access at Gulf Islands National Seashore.

The Service participates broadly

The Service also is participating in Gulf of Mexico restoration through its membership in the RESTORE Council, a state-federal entity established in 2012 by the RESTORE Act. The Council’s 11 members include the Secretary of the

Interior, as well as the Secretaries of the Army, Commerce, Agriculture, and Homeland Security; the Administrator of the U.S. EPA; and the governors of the five Gulf states. The RESTORE Council is developing its first list of restoration projects to be funded by a portion of a \$1 billion settlement collected from Transocean, the company that owns the Deepwater Horizon oil rig that was used by BP.

On another front, criminal settlements with Transocean and BP provided the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation with \$2.544 billion to establish a Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. The foundation is required to consult with the Service and others as it identifies and prioritizes appropriate restoration projects to make use of this money. To date, the Service has worked closely with NOAA, NFWF and the five Gulf states to identify 50 projects that are being supported with nearly \$390 million from the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund.

The Service recognizes that in order to achieve a healthy Gulf of Mexico, conservation must occur throughout the greater Gulf watershed. More than half the continental United States drains to the Gulf of Mexico, as do parts of Mexico and Canada. To address these broader watershed needs and to facilitate coordination across the multiple gulf funding efforts, the Service recently established the Gulf Restoration Program (GRP). The GRP is comprised of employees from across five geographic regions representing all the Service Programs. Staff members associated with the GRP work with our partners at the field and regional level on Gulf restoration activities such as: habitat conservation, restoration, science, environmental compliance and communications. By investing in dedicated staff, the Service can actively engage in the many DWH-related efforts, thus maximizing benefits to our trust resources throughout the Gulf of Mexico watershed.

We are at the five-year mark, and while no one knows how much more time it will take to restore the Gulf of Mexico. We do know that the Service will remain steadfast in its commitment to restoring this precious water body and its watershed, and ensuring their survival well into and beyond the 21st century. ❖

Employee Spotlight



David Viker, southeast chief of Refuges, awards Steve Gard his 40-year plaque. photo: Paula Green, USFWS

From Cape Canaveral to the Mississippi Delta: four decades of wildlife conservation Steve Gard, manager North Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge, celebrates 40 years with the Service

By Jereme Phillips, and Ricky Ingram, Refuges

In September 1974, as Steve Gard began his Service career, the political and environmental landscapes of the nation were experiencing seismic shifts of such magnitude that there is no twenty-first century equivalent. Only a few weeks before, the President of the United States had resigned from office for the first time in history. The same president, Richard Nixon, had just signed the Endangered Species Act into law nine months earlier. In the previous two years, Congress had passed the Clean Water Act and the newly created Environmental Protection Agency had banned the pesticide, DDT, an action which would contribute to the recovery of many wildlife species on the brink of extinction. In the midst of this climate, somehow tumultuous and promising at the same time, Steve walked into a field office in Mississippi and started work on a distinguished career of wildlife conservation that continues today, more than 40 years later.

continued on page 4

Employee Spotlight continued...

Steve's first position with the Service was in Vicksburg, a town on the banks of the Mississippi River known for its antebellum mansions, river steamboats, and epic battles. Of Vicksburg, Lincoln said, "The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket." Jefferson Davis called the town, "the nail head that holds the South's two halves together." Vicksburg's location on the river, the reason for the town's place in military history, has also made it a strategic center for ecosystem management. For three years in the Vicksburg Field Office, Steve's duties included writing fish and wildlife coordination reports and reviewing permit requests for diverse projects that spanned across the surrounding Lower Mississippi River Valley. Steve's next career move was just 45 miles due east to the state capital.

In the late 1970s, area offices with multi-state responsibilities were often located in the field. Steve was selected to be deputy area supervisor for Ecological Services in Jackson, Mississippi. In this role, Steve oversaw land acquisition and budgets for seven field stations in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. His duties also included reviewing public works projects and wetlands permits. After nearly four years in the Jackson Ecological Services Office, Steve's next assignment would take him across the Southeast, but seemingly worlds away from the Magnolia State, to a small town along America's Space Coast.

Twenty years to the day after the Soviet Union began manned space travel with Sputnik, NASA successfully launched the first space shuttle, Columbia, on April 12, 1981. Four months later, in the middle of this new and exciting second phase of the US space program, Steve Gard started his new job as deputy project leader at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Located near Titusville, Florida, the refuge was created in 1963 as a buffer for the Kennedy Space Center. As a result, Steve and his staff had the challenging task of managing a refuge on one of the most biologically diverse estuaries in the country, Indian River Lagoon, while taking into account the property's primary purpose of launching rockets into space. In those crucial early days of the shuttle program, Steve helped to strengthen a partnership between the refuge and NASA which continues to this day.

At Merritt Island, Steve spent the next five years working to conserve sea turtles, Florida scrub jays, manatees, and the unique habitats found within this 140,000-acre complex of undeveloped barrier islands on Florida's Atlantic coast. One of the most important management tools that the refuge employs to manage its oak, scrub, and flatwood habitats is prescribed fire. Steve gained substantial prescribed and wildland fire experience during his time at Merritt Island. While at the refuge, Steve also completed federal law enforcement training and he still serves as a commissioned federal wildlife officer today. From Merritt Island, Steve left the rockets behind and traveled southwest for another new adventure.

In 1986, Steve became the first project leader for the Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Island National Wildlife Refuges. Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, located just east of Naples, Florida, was established to protect 24,000 acres of habitat in the Big Cypress Basin for the endangered Florida panther. Steve also managed the largest mangrove forest in the United States, Ten Thousand Islands NWR. After taking on the difficult, but rewarding, task of serving as the first project leader for two new national wildlife refuges, Steve made his way back to where his career began in the State of Mississippi.

The Mississippi Delta is a special place. A rich agricultural region known as the birthplace of the blues, the Delta is an alluvial plain stretching from Memphis, Tennessee, to Vicksburg, Mississippi. The region supports populations of waterfowl, Neotropical migratory birds, deer, black bear, and other native wildlife. In the middle of this historic and important floodplain of the nation's largest river lies the North Mississippi Refuge Complex. Based in Grenada, Mississippi, the refuge complex consists of Dahomey, Tallahatchie, and Coldwater National Wildlife Refuges. It is a place that Steve Gard has called home for the past 26 years.

As with so many other times in his career, when Steve first came to Grenada in 1989, he was blazing new trails. Steve served as the first project leader of the Mississippi Wetland Management District, which later became the North Mississippi Refuge Complex. With the assistance of his dedicated staff, Steve oversees the management of delta forests, moist soils, mudflats, agricultural lands, wetlands,

and other habitats. Steve has established strong partnerships through cooperative efforts to conserve fisheries and wildlife resources in the Delta.

Perhaps more than anything, though, Steve is known as someone who is always willing to lend a hand. He has served on numerous details to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, to assist other refuge complexes with vacancies, and to the regional office in Atlanta. Whether it is sharing heavy equipment, his time, or his staff to assist his colleagues, Steve exemplifies the concept of One Service. After more than 40 years of public service, Steve Gard is still leaving a legacy of conservation and dedication to the people and natural resources that he serves every day. ❖

What's Trending

By Katherine Taylor, External Affairs



Apps: Spring is here and that means time to tend those gardens! Vegetable Tree-Gardening Guide is a free app that is a must for beginner and seasoned gardeners. It has a "Plant Now" feature, which recommends what to plant based on location and season. The app also helps you track progress, alerts you when to harvest and offers a wide range of tips.

#MostSharedStory:

We celebrated Dr. Seuss' birthday on March 2, with a quote from the Lorax.

This post was shared 233 times and reached 31,000 Facebook users.

Social Media:

Pinterest has arrived!

Take a look: <https://www.pinterest.com/usfws/>

<https://www.pinterest.com/usfws/>

If you have photos you would like to submit please send them to katherine_taylor@fws.gov.

Culture: April means our 3rd annual At-Risk Species Awareness Month for social media. Be sure to follow our posts! www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast

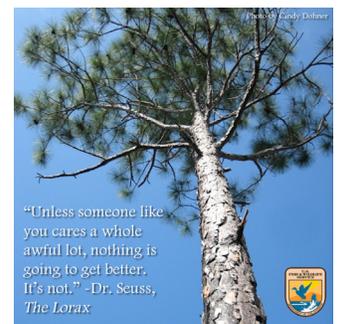


photo: *Cindy Dohner*

Deepwater Horizon's impact on Kemp's ridley sea turtles?

By Nanciann Regalado, NRDA

Researchers assessing Kemp's Ridleys

Following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) Trustees began multiple studies to assess the impacts of the spill on an array of wildlife, including the endangered Kemp's ridley. The trustees also augmented and expanded several long-running studies. The Kemp's ridley work is expected to be particularly helpful because an extensive pre-spill database of Kemp's ridley research provides an important source of baseline information for comparison to post-spill data as part of the NRDA.

Sea turtle assessment activities at nesting sites in Texas have included field and laboratory tests to determine oil-related exposure. In addition, scientists have fitted adult turtles with satellite transmitters to help assess the Kemp's ridley exposure to and injury resulting from Deepwater Horizon oil.

Will turtle eggs tell part of the story?

National Park Service staff members have worked for decades to increase nesting by Kemp's ridleys. Donna Shaver, PhD, chief of the Padre Island National Seashore Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Division, led an effort that sampled unhatched turtle eggs for analysis of exposure to oil from the spill. More than 2,100 samples from adult and unhatched eggs were analyzed by experts from government and academic laboratories led by U.S. Geological Survey investigators.

Will turtle tracks tell another part of the story?

During the nesting season, female turtles that came ashore to nest were fitted with satellite transmitters so researchers could track their movement. Satellite tracking of the Kemp's ridleys began in 1997 in an effort to promote the recovery of a species on the brink of extinction. This historical monitoring revealed that after the nesting season, most of the tracked turtles left south Texas and traveled northward, parallel to the coast, with their last identified location in the northern or eastern Gulf of Mexico. Recent tracking data shows similar migratory habits.

"The area off the coast of Louisiana has a high concentration of foraging females," noted Shaver. Her work and the work of



Researchers attach a satellite transmitter to a female Kemp's ridley. photo, Texas Parks and Wildlife

U.S. Geological Survey sea turtle biologist Dr. Kristen Hart, has shown that critical sea turtle foraging areas and migration routes overlap significantly with the area affected by floating oil from the spill. The five-month journey of turtle 47562 can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/0M8xIqg6A3w>.

Will nests tell the rest of the story?

Due to many years of conservation work in Mexico and the U.S., Kemp's ridley nesting increased 12-19 percent per year from the 1990s through 2009. Biologists believed that with continued high egg survival these increases would carry on for several years, and that the species was recovering and could likely be downlisted to threatened status in a few years.

The positive trend reversed abruptly beginning in 2010, the year of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, when nesting declined significantly. Annual nest numbers in Mexico and Texas rebounded during 2011 and 2012 to levels relatively similar to 2009. However, during 2013 and 2014 they decreased, despite the continued hard work of field biologists to find nests. In fact, 2014 nest numbers fell to an eight-year low, only slightly more than half the numbers found

just a few years earlier. Supported by data collected for the NRDA as well as from ongoing studies of the past 25 years, these findings may prove quite important to spill researchers.

The complete story is still unfolding. Data analyses for the NRDA are ongoing and will be used to determine the liability of responsible parties for injury to endangered sea turtles, as well as to their habitats and prey.



Female Kemp's ridley nesting at Padre Island National Seashore. photo: USFWS

To follow the movements of sea turtles being tracked with satellite transmitters, visit www.seaturtle.org/tracking and select "Padre Island National Seashore Kemp's Ridley Tracking Program-2012." This site includes maps and data showing the movements of 10 turtles tagged with satellite transmitters.

Protecting sea turtles with wildlife-friendly lighting



New LED light fixtures make Casino Beach on Florida's Santa Rosa Island more turtle-friendly. photo: USFWS.

By Nanciann Regalado, NRDA

Since the day of the spill, the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment trustees have worked to uncover how the Gulf environment and its wildlife were injured. At the same time, the trustees have been trying to restore injured resources to their pre-spill condition.

Sea turtles were one of the many kinds of wildlife oiled and killed by the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Two years ago, the trustees approved an early restoration project that is helping nesting sea turtles by replacing land-based white lights with amber light emitting diodes (LEDs). The \$4.4 million project will change lighting in many nesting locations along the Florida and Alabama coasts.

Lighting may not seem important to tourists and other beach visitors, but it can make all the difference in determining the future of sea turtle hatchlings. That's because sea turtles typically hatch at night

and are drawn to the light of the moon and stars as it is reflected off the ocean. Along developed shorelines, the bright white lights of coastal development cause hatchlings to get turned around. Amber colored LEDs greatly reduce this effect on sea turtles. While LEDs have been available at home improvement stores for a while, it wasn't until recently that a manufacturer was able to produce a commercially applicable amber LED and fixture that is certified as wildlife friendly.

Ben Frater is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service restoration biologist and the project manager for the turtle lighting project. "Sea turtle eyes are adapted to see underwater where they spend most of their lives," according to Frater. "They don't have the ability to see amber or red wavelengths so they simply don't see the light coming from the LEDs. That's why these LEDs don't attract the sea turtles." Frater also explained that the LEDs are more efficient than the old lighting; they will cost a fraction of traditional lighting to operate and maintain, and they're expected to last 15 years."

Sea turtles hit the jackpot at Casino Beach

One of the first phases of the project was recently completed at the Casino Beach parking lot, a public beach on Florida's Santa Rosa Island. Gulf Power, the Santa Rosa Island Authority, and Escambia County are partnering with the trustees to complete this project. Twenty-one 35-foot concrete light poles, each bearing 250-watt bulbs have been replaced with 38 shorter poles, most bearing four 100-watt LED light fixtures. That makes the lighting at the beach's parking lot significantly more turtle-friendly.

While sea turtles have yet to express their opinion of the lights, a substantial human fan club is singing their praises. W.A. "Buck" Lee, Santa Rosa Island Authority executive director, said public reaction to the lights so far has been positive. "Everyone here is turtle-friendly. So we're happy these lights will help turtles. We're also happy that while the lighting helps turtles, the lighting is actually better for people." ❖

Deepwater Horizon and DOI: Lessons Learned

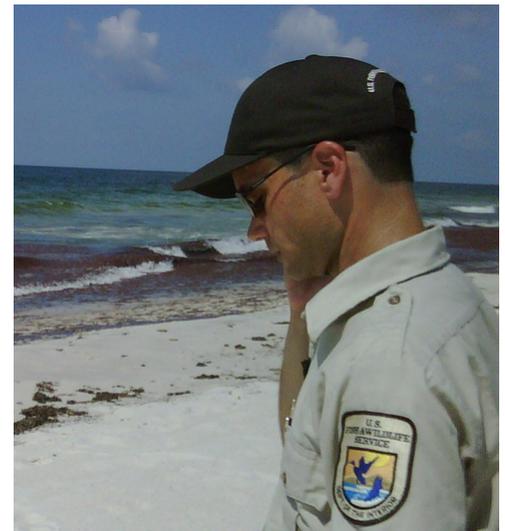
By Nadine Siak, NRDA

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill highlighted the need for DOI to build a cadre of natural and cultural resource experts trained to assist during disasters to help protect and minimize the impacts of response operations on sensitive resources.

To this end, a working group with members from across DOI formed in 2011. Using funds from a Deepwater Horizon oil spill supplemental appropriation, the group has been developing a training program known as the All Hazards Resource Advisor (AH-READ) Curriculum.

Jane Yagley, ESF # 11 National Coordinator for Natural and Cultural Resources and Historic Properties protection in DOI's Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance, is coordinating the effort.

Yagley says, "The driver was Deepwater Horizon, but ... even though it was primarily developed to respond to an oil spill, it is applicable to all disasters. This curriculum will help the department be a better steward for the resources we're committed to protecting on behalf of the American people."



Fish and Wildlife Service employee looks at oiled surf. photo: USFWS

DOI will make the entire training program (basic, intermediate and advanced courses) web-based in order to allow a quick expansion of capacity to meet the demands of responding to a catastrophic event. The four-hour basic-level course was launched in 2013 on DOI Learn, and made available on the National Conservation Training Center's server in order to allow employees at other federal agencies access to it. As of fall 2014, Two hundred and thirty people

continued on page 7

Lessons Learned continued...

had completed the basic course. Yagley says the working group will release the intermediate-level course by the end of this fiscal year; the advanced course and additional modules will follow.

The project builds on training efforts initiated by the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as on the lessons learned from the Deepwater Horizon response and the tremendous efforts undertaken by DOI staff during that major incident.

“We try to engage all bureaus across the board” in the creation of the curriculum, Yagley says, with some bureaus being well represented on the writing team and others better represented on the peer-review panels of the training material.

“Through Deepwater Horizon,” she adds, “we learned the value of working across the bureaus.”

You may contact Jane Yagley at 202/208- 304 for further information. ❖

Bragging Rights

Discover Your Service at NCTC

By: Andreas Moshogianis, Pathways Intern, Endangered Species Listing Program

The National Conservation Training Center held its Foundations - “Discover Your Service” course in January 2015, and I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend. As a newly-hired employee, I had the pleasure of meeting and interacting with other newly-hired individuals, in addition to veteran Service employees, from all eight regions and Headquarters.



Andreas Moshogianis holds an osprey chick during a bird banding survey. photo: USFWS

Our class included employees with diverse backgrounds and experience from all 12 of the Service’s programs, which allowed for an opportunity to make an attempt at understanding the complexities involved with running such a prolific agency.

In addition to networking with people from different regions and programs, this course allowed me to explore the remarkable history of the Service; from its roots as the U.S. Commission on Fish and Fisheries, through its evolution to the prestigious agency that we are today. The coursework was well structured and led, keeping students engaged throughout its duration. I also was able to learn about the critical principles and ideologies surrounding the Fish and Wildlife Service including leveraging diversity in the workplace, powerful communication techniques, and the importance of collaborating and partnering with other federal, state, and local agencies, municipalities, and volunteers.

I appreciated this incredible opportunity which left a lasting impression on me, one that has truly reinforced my ambition and eagerness to effectively carry out the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service. ❖

Leadership Quote:

“The next time someone starts listing all the reasons an idea won’t work or can’t happen, ask them to give three reasons it can.”

- Simon Sinek

Capture a Burmese python

By: Cassandra Skaggs, Loxahatchee NWR



Burmese python, photo: Ryan Hudgins, USFWS

The Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge hosted a Burmese python training on January 27, 2014, taught by staff from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. To transport live snakes with a valid permit, the classroom, field, and online training (REDDy training offered by the University of Florida) must be completed. Classroom training involves identification of various native and exotic snake species. The field portion requires successfully capturing and bagging a former wild python provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Although some parts of the Everglades have a growing and established population, there are no confirmed python sightings at the refuge. Residents of Palm Beach County are encouraged to report any exotic looking reptile species to 1-888-IVEGOT1, a hotline developed to report invasive exotic animals.

Burmese pythons can grow up to 20 feet in length, and they eat a variety of items from eggs to small deer. The average size of a



Marcie Kapsch captures python. photo: Ryan Hudgins, USFWS

Burmese python found in Florida is 8 to 10 feet. The largest one found so far is 18 feet, 8 inches. Unfortunately, Burmese pythons are not the only large invasive reptile found in south Florida. The list has grown to include Nile monitors, and Tegulizards, as well as reticulated pythons, boa constrictors, and African rock pythons.

Family Adventure Day 2015

By Angela Trahan, Louisiana Ecological Services



The Garbarino Family helps plant milkweed and other native wildflower seeds in the pollinator habitat. photo: USFWS, Angela Trahan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Louisiana Ecological Services Office participated in the Healing House's Family Adventure Day fundraiser and community outreach event in Lafayette. The Healing House provides support for grieving children.

There were 38 activity locations that families could visit throughout Lafayette, and the Service's station was one of the most popular with 371 visitors. At the Service's activity, families enjoyed exploring field techniques to evaluate fish and wildlife resources and learned about important conservation issues occurring in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast. Families participated in fisheries sampling and forested habitat assessment techniques, created a memorial pollinator habitat, received milkweed seed packets to plant at home, and learned about migratory bird conservation and at-risk species, including the reintroduction of the whooping crane. Children and parents were enthusiastic about the importance of the honey bee and to see an active beehive and beekeeping equipment.

This event could not have happened without the efforts of our partners including Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the City of Lafayette Acadiana Park Nature Station,



The Melancon Family learns about bees and pollination from the apiarist, Joey Runner. photo: USFWS, Angela Trahan

the Baton Rouge Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, and local volunteers, including a beekeeper from Runner Apiaries and a wood duck aviculturist. ❖

Three year old cancer patient visits Chattahoochee Forest National Fish Hatchery

By Kelly Taylor, Chattahoochee Forest, NFH



Christopher Branach feeds brook trout. photo: Crystal Thomas, USFWS

On Jan. 29, the Chattahoochee Forest National Fish Hatchery crew had the pleasure of meeting Christopher Branach and his family visiting from Florida. Christopher is a three-year-old going through chemo treatments for a rare cancer. His father Kevin called and asked if we could show Christopher around the hatchery and help him catch a fish. His father said, "Fishing is Christopher's favorite thing to do." Christopher was between chemo sessions and this was the only time the family had to spare for a fishing trip to Georgia. The hatchery crew was more than willing to help make this little man's dreams come true. Seeing my fair share of cancer in my personal life, I know every day is a toss-up whether it will be a good day or bad day. Christopher was having a good day, and we are glad that he had a great one trout fishing here in the north Georgia mountains. Christopher was a true inspiration to us all. We hope the best for Christopher and invite him back to see us again. ❖

Successful hunts at Dale Bumpers White River National Wildlife Refuge

By Arthur Hitchcock, Dale Bumpers White River NWR

Eight youths and five mobility-impaired hunters participated in the Cooks Lake Deer Hunts this winter at the Dale Bumpers White River National Wildlife Refuge. The popularity of these hunts is growing with about 100 applications received this year for the youth hunt. These hunts proved to be a success. Many deer were seen, friendships were created, four deer were harvested, and several deer narrowly escaped the rifle's crosshairs.



Brian Thorne, Jr with buck harvested during 2014-15 Cooks Lake Youth Deer Hunt. photo: Wayne Anderson

continued on page 9

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

White River continued...

In an effort to reach youths who have little hunting experience, another youth squirrel and raccoon hunt was held on January 30-31. This hunt proved to be an invaluable way to introduce kids to the outdoors through small game hunting with trained dogs. Following dinner on Friday evening, youths were taught the basics of squirrel and raccoon hunting and hunting with a dog. By midnight Saturday, more than 60 squirrels and four raccoons were harvested; making for a happy, yet tired, group of hunters, staff members, and dogs. ❖

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery partners with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension 4-H Fishing Club to make a splash

By Moria Painter, Wolf Creek NFH



Seven young, eager anglers. photo: Moria Painter

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery and the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service in Russell County kicked off a new season of the 4-H Fishing Club. The program runs from March through September 2015.

Children ages five and up will learn everything about fish and fishing, ranging from the parts of a fish to choosing tackle. The March meeting was exciting because kids were given welcome kits full of fun fishing information, handouts, and posters. The meeting ended with a hike to Hatchery Creek to discuss safety and fishing ethics. ❖

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery hosts 2015 Kentucky Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest judging

By Moria Painter, Wolf Creek NFH



Judges for the 2015 Kentucky Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest with the first place art pieces. photo: Moria Painter

Art helps children of all ages retain knowledge and think more creatively. The annual Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest utilizes this philosophy. The contest in Kentucky is promoted through combined efforts from four U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices: Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge, Kentucky Ecological Services Office in Frankfort, the Wildlife Inspectors office in Louisville, and Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery.

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery was proud to host the judging of the 2015 Kentucky Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest on March 20, 2015. With 978 pieces of artwork from 19 counties to choose, the judges had their work cut out for them. Thanks to the wonderful panel of judges: Robin Webb, State Senator and President of the Executive Council

of the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC); Deena Whelby Natural Resources Conservation Service's Assistant State Conservationist; Orville Crigler, Publisher's Press; Christopher Walden professional Wildlife and Landscape artist; and Moria Painter, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery. Out of the 978 entries, there were 100 first, second, third, and honorable mention winners. In addition 400 art pieces were selected for Special Recognition awards. Each of these students will receive a special prize thanks to our generous sponsors: Publisher's Press, the Kentucky Chapter of Ducks Unlimited, Louisville Gas and Electric and Kentucky Utilities, Friends of Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge, Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Higdon Outdoors, Unique Promotional Products, and Acorn Naturalists. ❖

Friends and Volunteers

A trip to Over the Horizon

By Katie Rittenhouse, Student Conservation Association Intern

Students who had met only hours ago at Chick-fil-A for breakfast huddled together with their new friends for warmth, on a windy ferry ride to Bull's Island. The students from Burke High School in Charleston, SC, and Wando High School in Mount Pleasant, SC, were on their way to the island for the Over the Horizon field study.

Over the Horizon is a project that teaches students the importance of cultural and biological diversity. The project, now in its third year, unites students from different races, cultural backgrounds, and economic levels. The project includes a day spent exploring and learning on Bull's Island, a barrier island in Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, SC.

continued on page 10

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Bull's Island continued...

Bull's Island is an ideal location for a diversity lesson with its variety of habitats: maritime forests, sandy beach, brackish impoundments and salt marsh. Within the diverse ecosystems of Bull's Island are an abundance of wildlife and plants which co-exist and depend on each other for survival. Gates Roll, a naturalist for Coastal Expeditions, led the students through the different ecosystems, sharing with them the abundant natural and cultural history of the island.

The first stop was at a barely visible foundation of the Martello Tower, where Gates told students about the Sewee Indians who first inhabited the area, the English Settlers who landed and later claimed the island, and that the tower was used as a lookout for pirates and also served during the revolutionary and civil wars.

Next was a visit to Boneyard Beach, where they posed for a group photo with their new friends on a fallen, sun-bleached tree. Students passed from the beach, through the maritime forest, to the marsh in mere minutes and learned that the diversity of the ecosystems is what creates a healthy natural community. In addition, they learned that, similarly, in a society where two or more different types of cultures come together, there you will also find a stronger, healthier community.

Back on the trailers, students discussed hobbies, jobs, and which colleges they were going to attend, realizing that despite any differences, there were many more similarities. At the Dominick House, conversation flowed effortlessly as they shared food from their lunches, played ball, braided each other's hair, and did yoga.

The final program of the day was a presentation by Vera Manigault, sweetgrass basketry artisan and Gullah Geechee historian. Students learned the history of sweetgrass basket sewing and its significance to the Gullah Geechee culture. They were even treated to a conversation in Gullah between Vera and Burke student, Aisha.

On the ferry ride back, new friends took photos and exchanged contact information. The students gave an enthusiastic "Oh Yeah!" when asked if they had had an enjoyable Over the Horizon experience. ❖



Wando and Burke High School students at Boneyard Beach. photo: Katie Rittenhouse

Wolf Creek hosts Kentucky FWS employee annual meeting

By Moria Painter, Wolf Creek NFH



Wolf Creek Dam spillway gates open. photo: Moria Painter

On a beautiful spring day in March, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery hosted the Kentucky All Fish and Wildlife Service Employee Annual Meeting. Employees from the Ecological Services Office in Frankfort, Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge in Benton, Office of Law Enforcement in Louisville, and Wolf Creek attended. Thirty-five Service staff members came together to share their current projects including station updates, fish passage, Monarch butterflies, Endangered Species listings, mussel propagation, Whitenose syndrome, and many other topics. In addition, representatives from Ecogro, Stantec, and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources presented the group with an update on the Hatchery Creek extension project.

Following a catered lunch provided by the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, the group went on a tour of the Hatchery Creek extension project with the engineer and staff members from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. The group also was treated to a rare sight of Wolf Creek Dam with all 10 spillway gates open, something that even locals had not seen since February 18, 2004.

What you didn't know about

Leroy Koch talks mussels with Prince Charles

By Elsie Davis, External Affairs

There are only six different mussel species in the United Kingdom compared to more than 300 different species in the U.S., yet Leroy Koch, a biologist in the Kentucky Field Office and Prince Charles share common interests in conservation and mussels.

Leroy met Prince Charles at a private reception the evening of March 20, 2015, at the home of Christina Brown, who is involved in the non-profit Kentucky Waterways Alliance. Prince Charles visited Louisville that day for several events on sustainability.

Leroy told Prince Charles about the spectacle case mussel with a British connection. Its scientific name is *Cumberlandia monodonta*; and the name Cumberlandia came from the Cumberlandian River and Region in southeastern Kentucky. An early explorer, Dr. Thomas Walker, is credited with discovering and naming the Cumberland Gap and Cumberland River back in 1750. He used the name Cumberland after the Duke of Cumberland, who was a son of King Edward II.

"I enjoyed the reception very much," Leroy says. "There was an interesting mix of attendees, along with musicians



Leroy Koch with Prince Charles. photo: Gordon Garner, Kentucky Waterways Alliance

located at various locations, some in elegant tents covering the yard."

Among the attendees were Governor of Kentucky Steven Beshear and Mayor of Louisville Gregory Fischer.

Following the reception, Leroy sent Prince Charles, via Ms. Brown, a couple of books about mussels that were donated by their authors: *North American Freshwater Mussels: Natural History, Ecology, and Conservation* by Wendell Haag and *The Freshwater Mussels of*

Ohio by Thomas Watters, Mike Hoggarth, and David Stansbery. He also sent Prince Charles a children's book entitled *Russell the Mussel* by Adele Conover, Richard Biggins, and Richard Neves.

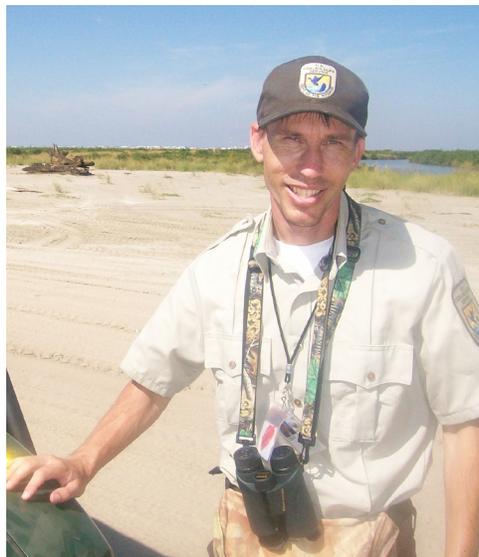
"It was a real treat to be able to say I shook hands with Prince Charles and actually had some time, although very brief, to talk about mussels," Leroy says. "He only was at the reception about 30 minutes, so any time at all with him was special." ❖

Coming and Going

Welcome Jim Gruhala

By Roxanna Hinzman, Ecological Services

Jim Gruhala is the new Southeast Regional 10a1A Permits Coordinator. Jim comes to the Regional Office from the Kentucky Ecological Services Office, where he has worked the previous six years as a Fish and Wildlife Biologist. Prior to Kentucky, he worked in the Louisiana Ecological Services Office as a Wildlife Technician. Jim is originally from St. Louis, and he majored in Wildlife Conservation and Management



Jim Gruhala, photo: Brian Novosac, USFWS

at Missouri State University. He began his wildlife and natural resources career as a forest technician on the Mark Twain National Forest. Since then, he worked in other positions with the USDA Forest Service, and the US Bureau of Land Management. Jim's interests include wildlife, forestry, fishing, and kayaking. Jim will begin his new position during the first week of May.