



Focus on "Friends"

Southeast Region

Friends Group News

Note from the Regional Director

One year ago on April 20, the Deepwater Horizon oil platform and BP's Macondo well exploded. The floating rig ultimately sank. Worse, 11 lives were lost. That explosion set off the largest oil spill in U.S. history and dramatically altered the course of our work in this region.



Reflecting back, it was an amazing effort. Within hours, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees had engaged in the emerging response. As the gravity of the spill and its potential impact on one of the world's most diverse ecosystems became clear, we understood the weeks and months ahead would be very difficult. Without the Herculean effort of nearly 1700 Service employees who deployed to meet the extraordinary challenges associated with the response, the Gulf Coast ecosystem may not have weathered the impacts as well as it has.

We're not out of the woods yet and likely won't be for years to come. The assessment and restoration work associated with our Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration program continues. Today, nearly 75 Service employees are deployed or working directly with the response and our NRDAR effort and the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. We continue to facilitate cleanup of oiled beaches and tar mats around Breton NWR and Bon Secour NWR.

Over the last year I have been aware of the great work done by our Friends Groups to either directly support refuges along the gulf coast or share concern and offers of help. This has not been unexpected since you share the same passion and dedication to our conservation mission. Whether it is helping to plant vegetation on sand dunes at Bon Secour NWR, supporting activities

that connect people to nature at Savannah NWR, or assisting with interpretation at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery your work inspires me. What makes me especially proud is when the great work you do is recognized nationally, as was the case last month at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. I was so proud and happy to be present when the Friends of Chassahowitzka NWR were awarded the Friends Group of the Year by the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

As we celebrate the great accomplishments this past year, we are mindful of the impacts that occurred to families and resources along the gulf coast. Our work continues. I want to thank you for all your hard work and support of the Service's conservation mission at our refuges and hatcheries.

- Cindy

Friends of Chassahowitzka Wins National Award

Big accomplishments sometimes follow big disappointments. Such was the case for the Friends of Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex. In 2005, the group had helped pull together the pieces on a multi-million dollar campaign to buy an important area for manatees called Three Sisters Springs. They were beat out by a better offer, and development appeared likely.

But the Friends didn't stop.

"Perseverance was our mantra," said Friends President Lace Blue-McLean. "Whenever we had board meetings, we'd say 'Let's all remember our focus and our mission.'" With funding from the Service, the state, and local governments, the City of Crystal River and the Southwest Florida Management District bought 57.8 acres surrounding Three Sisters Springs and four other natural springs for \$10.5 million. Management of the property was turned over to the Service in July 2010, as an addition to the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge.



Visitors encounter manatees at Three Sisters Springs. Tom MacKenzie/USFWS

Michael Lusk, refuge manager for the Chassahowitzka complex north of Tampa, said the Friends Group made the deal possible. "They reached out to a very broad spectrum of partners to save a very unique piece of property, one of the last of its kind in Florida," Lusk said. "They were very instrumental in raising awareness."

On March 17, in Kansas City, Blue-McLean accepted the Friends Group of the Year Award from the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for "being exemplary community leaders and advocates for the Refuge System." This award recognizes a Friends Group that has shown outstanding leadership as a voice of the community and as an advocate for the protection, conservation, and enhancement of local refuges and the National Wildlife Refuge System overall.

In addition to securing Three Sisters Springs, the Friends also have donated a \$40,000 manatee rescue truck and rescue net, were instrumental in planning the 2010 Regional Friends Group Conference, completed a mile of trails and oversaw the construction of an observation tower, pavilion and canoe and kayak launch at the Salt Marsh Trails property.

Blue-McLean said the group's 200 members are excited about the national recognition, but "in the bigger picture, the award is the actual success in acquiring that property. It's a coup."

For more information about the Friends Group, please visit <http://friendsofchazz.org/>.

Refuge News

Friends Inspiring Idea: Visit Puerto Rico

Article by Refuge Rangers Gisella Burgos, Cabo Rojo NWR and Gracie Gooch, Okefenokee NWR

Inspiring new ideas happen from reading the Refuge Update Magazine. It stated, "Bosque Del Apache made over \$2000.00 for their Friends group having a travel agent plan a week trip to Coast Rica. The trip for 12 people cost \$3000.00 per person plus a \$200.00 donation per person to the Friends Group." Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) volunteer Sally Webb wondered why their Friends Group, Okefenokee Wildlife League (OWL), could not contact other Friends Groups and exchange visits. It did not take long until she contacted Refuge Ranger Gisella Burgos at Cabo Rojo NWR in Puerto Rico and presented this idea to her. Gisella was pleased with the idea and said, "Come on down. Our Friends would love to hear how Refuge Ranger Gracie Gooch continues to run a successful volunteer and Friends program at Okefenokee." This visit would not only serve as a fundraiser for OWL, but also a learning and networking experience for all the Friends Groups.



Friends from Okefenokee NWR explore the beach at Vieques NWR.
USFWS

In Puerto Rico, there are two groups that work very closely with Vieques and Cabo Rojo NWR. TICATOVE, Vieques NWR's unofficial Friends group, works with the refuge monitoring sea turtles. For over 6 years, this volunteer group has helped the refuge immensely with their sea turtle program and are on their way to finishing the paperwork to become an official Friend of the refuge. Meanwhile, at Cabo Rojo NWR their Friends Group, Caborrojeños Pro Salud y Ambiente, work s very closely with the refuge providing environmental education and interpretation opportunities for visitors. They have been Cabo Rojo NWR's Friends since the mid 90s.

Okefenokee NWR's Friends group, OWL, was established in March of 1990. They have a long, successful history of assisting the refuge with educational, interpretive, scientific and other public service activities. The invitation to spend one exciting week in Puerto Rico was extended to all members of the Okefenokee NWR staff, volunteers, and of course Friends. The approximate cost of the trip was \$1200.00 plus \$50.00 donation to OWL. Response was immediate and eight slots were filled. Schedules were e-mailed back and forth and plans were cemented. "Yes, we sure do want to see the Rain Forest! Yes, we sure do want to learn all about Vieques! Yes, please teach us all about sea turtles! Yes, we would love to have some time to shop! Yes, we want to learn about Cabo Rojo! What? You have dry forests and mountains and salt mining for over 500 years! And, what about old historic San Juan? How are you propagating parrots?" There was much anticipation and interest as the group left for Puerto Rico on February 27th.

Once the Okefenokee group arrived, they immediately began learning about Puerto Rico. They were continually awed by the scenery, temperature fluctuations, accommodations, Spanish language and outstandingly friendly people. After fun and play, it was time to meet and greet. The visit culminated with OWL sharing their experiences during two very productive meetings with the Friends groups from Puerto Rico. Ideas and information were exchanged and all groups left with a clearer view of the challenges Friends group face. "Next year, hopefully, Gisella will bring her Friends group to the Okefenokee," stated Gracie. This was not only an excellent fundraiser initiative, but also an excellent learning opportunity and a chance to make new friends.



Cabo Rojo and Okefenokee NWR's Friends and Refuge Rangers Gracie and Gisella.
USFWS

Fisheries News

Nature Rocks! Family Nature Club Kicks Off at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

Article by Amanda Patrick, USFWS

Although cold temperatures and the chance of snow do not normally set the scene for spending much time outdoors for most people, January 2011 was a special month for Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery as the hatchery kicked off its 2011 Nature Rocks! Family Nature Club series. The year-long program, coordinated in partnership with the Russell County Public Library, offers an engaging family oriented activity monthly to help encourage parents and guardians, along with their kiddos, to get outdoors and better connected with the environment. Each month has a different theme, ranging from "Tracks and Scat, OH MY!" to "Bountiful Birding" to "Spider Web Wonders." Healthy snacks are also provided to all participants during the free 1 ½ hour program. To help ease the driving distance and to better accommodate families who might not otherwise be able to make it too, the two partnering organizations also rotate locations alternately, the hatchery hosting monthly activities during the "odd" months and the public library in Russell Springs, Kentucky on "even" months. To help purchase materials, such as healthy snack items, the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc are supporters of the monthly meetings as well.



Intern Christin Roberson displays artwork made during a monthly Nature Rocks! Family Nature Club meeting. Glenda York/ Jamestown Public Library

Check It Out

Youth Ambassador Program: Great Opportunity for Friends to Get Involved!

In the spring of 2010, the Southeast Region developed the volunteer based Youth Ambassador Program to create opportunities for youth around the region to connect with nature, the work of the Service, and each other. Ten field offices around the Southeast Region were selected to participate in the program: three wildlife refuges, three fish hatcheries, three ecological services offices, and one law enforcement office. Each office recruited a junior or senior aged high school student (or a freshman in college for the ecological services offices) to be their Youth Ambassador for one year. Youth Ambassadors are required to use social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and blogs to expose the many great things our Service employees are doing at field stations. Also as a Youth Ambassador, each participant becomes heavily involved in the daily operations of their station, including taking photos and video of events at their station, participating on the Friends group board and working with public affairs officials to broaden their office's communication capacity. To learn more about the Youth Ambassador Program please visit <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/youthambassadors>.

In the future, we are hoping the concept of the program can be passed along to many other field stations through Friends group support. For more details on the future of the program and how you can get involved please contact Sharon Fuller at sharon_fuller@fws.gov.



Cody Meshes, who is the YAP at Warm Springs NFH, assists with a cryopreservation project at the Fish Technology Lab. Jaclyn Zelko/USFWS

Calendar of Events

May 14:

- **International Migratory Bird Day** - Go Wild, Go Birding! is this year's theme, chosen to highlight the focus on reaching out to involve new youth and adults in learning about birds, bird watching, and bird conservation. [Click here](#) to download activities, games, and more!

June 4:

- **Banks Lake Youth Fishing Derby and Casting Competition Show** - 8 am - 2 pm - Fun Fishing Derby for children age 3 -15 and a Reel Kids Casting Contest. Attend a knot tying demonstration and discover which knots are best for different test lines. Find out how folks "grunt worms" for bait. Bring a plain t-shirt and get free fish art to wear home. Take home free fishing information and fun gifts.

July 6 - 8:

- **Grant Writing for Conservation (OUT8116)** - NCTC - Learn how to interweave the grant proposal writing process and strategic thinking for successful grant management once awarded. The grant development planning process will engage participants in how to undertake pre-project planning, where to go to seek alternative funding sources and how to write the essential elements of a solid grant proposal. Questions: Shayna Carney, 304/876 7302 (Shayna_Carney@fws.gov)

President Signs National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Improvement Act

President Obama signed into law the National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Improvement Act of 2010 (H.R. 4973) on Tuesday, January 4th. This stand-alone legislation passed the House and Senate with no opposition. Under this legislation, volunteers and Friends group members can continue to support our organization and help the Southeast Region with almost every aspect of our work. Last year in the Southeast Region, 8,220 volunteers and Friends group members gave 345,847 hours of volunteer service. That is equivalent to 166 full time employees and has a value worth over \$7.2 million.

Questions? Please contact the Regional Volunteer Coordinator, Stacy Armitage at 404/679 7178.

[Click here](#) for more information about H.R. 4973.

Joanna Webb Is New National Friends Coordinator

Welcome Joanna Webb to the Washington Office as the national Friends and partnership coordinator. Webb comes to us from the Southeast Region, where she worked at several refuges in visitor services programs for the past 15 years. She began her Service career at the Patuxent Research Refuge, MD, and brings a strong and diverse field background to share with Friends organizations and partners. She expects her first order of business to be continuing to build national training, mentoring and grants support programs for Friends and staff, in addition to identifying new partnerships for visitor services programs. Webb also will be working with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to manage the Friends grants program, which offers seed grants (\$1,500 to \$5,000) for Friends organizations and community partners. For additional information about the Refuge System Friends program, contact Webb (703/358 2392; Joanna_Webb@fws.gov).



New National Friends Group Coordinator; Joanna Webb. USFWS

Tip of the Quarter

What follows is a condensed list of expectations for the relationship between the Service and Friends groups. The entire text and additional usable tools like this one can be found in “Soaring to New Heights-A Guide to Creating a Sustainable Friends/Refuge Collaboration”. <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/friends/SoaringToNewHeights.html>

Guiding Principles for the Friends/FWS Relationship	
Friends Role	FWS Role
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use consistent, regular, honest communication. • To be independent advocates work to protect the natural resource, assist in accomplishing refuge projects. • Respect and trust USFWS employees and have reasonable expectations. • Agree to always discuss differences of opinion. • Become educated and know the refuge mission • Fully commit to keeping up the partnership. To not undercut agency and refuge management. • To buy into a shared vision that both sides work to create. • To help the Service personnel to be and feel productive. • To understand and respect the operational pressures and boundaries that affect the Service. • To provide a positive community influence. Be the doorway to the public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use consistent, regular, honest communication. • Have a true sense of partnership with a “no surprises” philosophy and a full sharing of information. • Work to protect the natural resource and fulfill FWS mission as mandated by Congress. • To trust and respect the Friends. • Agree always to discuss differences of opinion. • To understand what it takes to have a Friends group. • View the Friends groups as a long-term, personal friendship. • Work to infuse support for Friends throughout the agency. • Help the Friends to be and feel productive. • Teach Friends about the government systems to make the job easier. • Provide consistent follow-through and active support (training, mentoring and providing the resources) of Friends groups from the Washington office, the regional offices, and the field.