



Focus on "Friends"

Southeast Region Friends Group News

Note from the Regional Director

It's a brand new year, and there is a buzz of anticipation in the air in the Southeast Region. Are you feeling it? It's all about the opportunities that lie ahead for us as we carry out the conservation work that we are so passionate about.

I'm a "count your blessings" kind of person, more so the older I get. And when I look out at our Region, the people that work here, the Friends that support us, and the job we get to do, boy do I count my blessings. You are supporting work we truly care about at the core of our beings. I go to bed every night knowing that we are "the guys in the white hats" in trying to leave this Region, our nation, and the world a little better than we found it.

Leadership is challenging us to "think bigger" and take risks in the face of some really daunting challenges to the Service's conservation mission. And we are united as a Service and with you, our Friends, in our desire to do everything we can to ensure that our kids and their kids will have the enjoyment and prosperity that comes from abundant, healthy fish and wildlife resources.



Volunteer and Okefenokee Wildlife League (OWL) member Sally Webb demonstrates pine straw basket weaving at the Okefenokee Festival, credit Nathan McMillan.

I guess that's why I'm excited about our prospects for the New Year. We, Service staff, need to work more closely than ever with our Friends, State and Federal partners to integrate our conservation efforts and to address threats to fish and wildlife resources and habitats. We have the engagement of the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in developing a climate adaptation strategy to help ensure sustainable populations of species impacted by a rapidly changing climate. We are also working with our partners in standing up Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, and they are making good progress.

We have launched an initiative to work with partners to deal with the 435 plants and animals that are candidates

for protection under the ESA through a concerted effort to more fully use Candidate Conservation Agreements that give assurances to landowners. And our Friends remain critical partners in efforts to lead environmental and interpretive programs, operating nature stores, and being our avenue to outreach and communication with the local community.

Those are only a smattering of our accomplishments. I see more good things out ahead for us in 2012. My desire for all of us is that we will be thoughtful and strategic in what we are doing and why we are doing it, looking for ways to innovate, to see possibilities where others see only problems.

Are we up to it? If it's true that the past is the best predictor of the future, then the answer is a resounding "Yes!" We've got the track record to prove the sky's the limit here in the Southeast Region.

So here's wishing you the happiest of new years and the thrill and satisfaction that comes from doing good things for fish, wildlife, plants and people.

Cindy

Refuge News

Ask and You May Receive!

Article by Byron Fortier, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex

If a Friends group has not pursued grant writing or doesn't have much experience, it may seem like a big task, maybe overwhelming. But the money is out there, and most granting organizations are anxious to work with dedicated non-profit groups that submit good proposals.

It's true that grant writers get better with practice. Fortunately for The Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, Treasurer Jim Schmidt has had lots of practice, and the happy result was six grant awards during 2011. Jim attributes FLWR's success with grants to a number of factors learned over time.

Paying careful attention to grantor's guidelines, develop a straightforward proposal with clear goals and action-oriented outcomes. Don't make the reader struggle to understand what the grant will achieve. Remember that what seems familiar at your field level may be mysterious to the faraway team reviewing proposals from many federal, state, and local agencies, plus private non-profits, all with their own jargon and methods of doing things.

Jim values close collaboration with Service staff in developing grant concepts and refining proposals.

"We have had a fantastic collaborative working relationship with FWS staff. Usually two FWS staff and I take a look at the grant opportunities. Once we decide what we want to do, one of us takes a shot at writing a rough draft. The other two who add/delete/modify, and the "draft" goes back and forth until all are comfortable with it. If we need technical help from other staff, we get their input. Grants are seldom submitted without all three of the "grant people" and the Project Leader approving of the grant and its content."

The result has been proposals that clearly represent a "meeting of the minds" between the Friends and the staff. Jim feels that this comes across to granting organizations when proposals are reviewed, and makes the proposal feel practical and grounded.

Two of the best sources for learning about available grants are email listservers from the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Regional Office in our region, Southeast, also does a great job of alerting us to grant opportunities.

A few more tips:

- Be realistic as to what you can achieve.
- Projects that involve kids and families, volunteers, and the community at large have a "leg up" during the review process.
- Be thinking of project ideas all year long, as requests for proposals sometimes appear with short deadlines.
- Cultivate a good relationship with granting organizations – once you have shown them that you can achieve goals and honor commitments, you'll have a head start the next time a proposal is submitted.
- Maintain a "pool" of cash that can supply a match when needed, without relying on other sources. Make it confirmed, not promised.

According to Jim, "The grants have helped to bring together and strengthen the Friends group, and the process has helped bring the Friends and refuge staff together and nurtured that relationship."

The successful grant proposals submitted over the past year included:

\$500 from Wal-Mart to support the annual Youth Fishing Event at Bogue Chitto NWR

Almost every refuge has a Wal-Mart not far away, and they like to support community-oriented events. No match is required for this one, but there is usually a long lead-time between submission of proposals and approval and release of grant funds.

\$2,400 through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Friends Capacity Building program for on-site education and outreach

The grant funded two programs: outdoor canoe adventures for individuals and families on Big Branch Marsh refuge's Cane Bayou, and a new Friends Photo Club. And, aside from getting visitors involved in these two programs, each also had as an integral goal the development of the Friends group itself.

In this project, the Friends played a hunch that charging a small fee for formerly free canoe tours would result in more people actually showing up! Free trips in the past often had no-shows on the tour day, and canoes left at the landing.

This time around, participants paid a small "donation" charge (\$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12, and only \$5 for Friends members). These trips also filled quickly, and the minimal "investment" in the form of the donation increased participation to 100%. Money collected goes into a special Friends fund for canoe maintenance, life jacket replacement, and stipends for future visitor services interns, providing the capacity to continue the canoe adventures for years to come.

The Friends Photo Club was established with "advice and wisdom" from volunteers of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge Photo Club, and was an immediate success, with 41 interested individuals at the first meeting. The Photo Club meets monthly and has conducted workshops, "photo shoots" on our refuges, and mounted their first show at October's NWR Week Wild Things event.

In addition to getting lots of folks out enjoying the refuges, the canoe "adventures" and the Photo Club have together increased membership in the Friends group by 53%!

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A Good Year for the Friends of Tampa Bay Refuges

Article by Gisela Chapa, Tampa Bay NWRs

“Whatever it takes, the Friends rise to the occasion!” that was the closing remark at this past Annual Conservation Celebration, held December 14, 2011, when the St. Petersburg Audubon Society presented the Friends of Tampa Bay Refuges with the “Conservationist of the Year” award.

The Friends are strong advocates for the protection of the habitats and wildlife of the Tampa Bay area. Not only have they contributed their time to hands-on conservation, they also focus their efforts to outreach and education within the local community.



Board members of both St. Pete Audubon and Friends of Tampa Bay, from left to right, Barbara Howard, Judi Hopkins, Dave Kandz, and Dave Howard. Credit: Dave Kandz

Perhaps one of the largest accomplishments the Friends have contributed to conservation is the Bird Steward Program at Egmont Key NWR. Egmont Key lies at the mouth of Tampa Bay, wild and undeveloped, providing pristine habitat to thousands of nesting seabirds – brown pelicans, royal and sandwich terns, laughing gulls, among others, nest in the tens of thousands during the hot summer months in the designated bird sanctuary. Birds Stewards, a group of volunteers, dedicate their weekends to the protection of these hard working parents-to-be by educating the recreating public about the deadly impacts of disturbance to nesting birds.

This hard working group of Friends was also recognized for its perseverance conducting Refuge clean-ups. With the help of a local college and volunteers, the Friends work to free habitats from marine debris that constantly wash on shore, as well as getting rid of deadly monofilament that tangles

on the vegetation and claims the lives of thousands of birds. If a bird is, found injured on the Refuge, the Friends coordinate the rescue and transport to the Seabird Sanctuary – a non-profit organization dedicated to the rehabilitation of injured birds. Every volunteer in these efforts get to experience firsthand the delicate balance of the Tampa Bay ecosystem.

Public outreach and environmental education have also been a priority for the Friends to promote environmental stewardship within the local community. Through the year, they have participated in over 17 local festivals as well as major education outreach events. The EE committee is dedicated to providing lessons at local schools and has now started to lead school groups on field trips to encourage conservation within our youth.

What a great way to end the year – this recognition awards the merit of this hard working bunch. Their dedication will continue to benefit Tampa Bay’s wildlife and many human generations to come. Keep up the good work!

Ask and You May Receive!

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\$5,000 through National Environmental Education Foundation

This grant was for Friends Capacity Building, and specifically targeted the group’s capability to maintain adequate communication with various communities — members, community groups, volunteers, etc. It has also targeted internal organizational capacity. The project funded two desktop computers, a laptop, and related software. The computers are “networked” so volunteers can access information on any of them. The laptop will also be used for presentations to community groups and for environmental education programs. Through NEEF, the Friends have also become participants in a series of webinars they offer focusing on Friends organizational development.

\$2,500 from The Outdoor Foundation

This grant is for the *Take Me Fishing* program, and will fund a fishing program

this spring for 120 at-risk third graders from area schools. Participants will learn how to put fishing rods together, tie a “fisherman’s knot”, bait the hook, cast, and catch fish. The project will also use the *Take Me Fishing* website as a way to engage with participants. Four programs with 30 children each will be conducted by a multi-generational group of volunteers. Each participant will be provided with a spin casting rod, reel, and tackle to take home. The pond is being stocked with catfish — 12-18 inches long to assure a “good” catch.

\$12,000 from the National Wildlife Refuge Association

This grant is for restoration efforts at Breton National Wildlife Refuge. The islands have been ravaged by repeated storms over the past decade, reducing their size and suitable nest habitat for important populations of colonial nesting birds.

“Sand fencing” will be used to trap windblown sand, create dunes, and help restore a part of the island, and for the planting of grasses to stabilize the dunes. The project will be conducted by volunteers under the supervision of the Southeast Louisiana Wildlife Refuge staff. Breton NWR provides habitat for colonies of nesting wading birds and seabirds, as well as wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. Twenty-three species of seabirds and shorebirds frequently use the refuge, and 13 species nest on the various islands. The most abundant nesters are brown pelicans, laughing gulls, and royal, Caspian, and Sandwich terns. Threatened and endangered species found on the refuge include the least tern and piping plover.

\$100,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

This grant will help fund wetland restoration at Delta National Wildlife Refuge. This project involves the construction of small-scale sediment diversions and a number of earthen terraces near the sediment diversions. By utilizing the natural soil depositing processes of the dynamic Mississippi River, this project will continue to improve and function for several decades following construction. This creates long-term benefits for a host of faunal species. Earthen terraces have proven to be an effective method for the rapid establishment of emergent marsh and the growth and establishment of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV’s).

New Accessible Blind at Eufaula

Article by Steven Lewis, Eufaula NWR

This fall the Friends of Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge completed the first of two accessible blinds (waterfowl hunting, wildlife viewing and photography) located on the refuge's Kennedy Unit (Alabama). Construction of the blind was made possible through a joint effort. While funding for the structure was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the vast majority of labor needed for design and construction was provided by volunteers. This effort was led by the Friends' Volunteer Coordinator, Ted Papsis, with the assistance of multiple volunteers. Ted has a true passion for duck hunting and has been an integral part of Eufaula NWR's blind maintenance program for many years. When the refuge staff approached Ted with the idea of building an accessible blind, he jumped at the idea! In total, 315 hours were donated to the project by volunteers and Ted accounted for 94 of those hours.

The refuge had the first hunt in the new blind over the Christmas holiday. The hunt was a success with the hunter harvesting several birds. We plan to have five more hunts throughout the months of January and February. After hunting season, the blind will be available to wheelchair users and their assistants by contacting the refuge office.

Though the primary use of this blind will be for waterfowl hunting, it will also serve as an accessible viewing platform and photography blind. Throughout the year, a myriad of species could be observed: waterfowl, sandhill cranes, wood storks, other wading birds, shorebirds, raptors, songbirds, American alligators, white-tailed deer and who knows what else. This blind will provide opportunities that previously did not exist on Eufaula NWR.



Eufaula NWR Accessible Blind, credit: USFWS

Now for 2012, the supplies have been purchased for another blind and we have a commitment from our Friends group to construct an additional accessible blind on the Bradley Unit (Georgia) next year. The refuge staff is very excited about this project and looks forward to the spring when they will again work with Ted and his volunteers to complete another great project.

With the close proximity of Fort Benning to the refuge, we hope to provide multiple recreational opportunities for wounded soldiers. Hopefully, these blinds can provide high quality opportunities for wounded men and women to participate in hunting, wildlife observation and photography. The refuge plans to take applications for these blinds along with the other waterfowl applications during late summer of 2012.

Fisheries News

Outdoor Eco Adventure

By Amanda Patrick, USFWS

On October 18th, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery served as co-organizer and host for the 5th Annual Outdoor Eco Adventure. The event, which is a partnership with the Russell County Soil Conservation District and the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, is an annual endeavor designed to bring all 4th grade students from Russell County, Kentucky to the hatchery to learn about a variety of nature related topics, ranging from water to energy to aquatic habitat explorations.

To maximize learning, all presenters are encouraged to center their activities on environmental education related topics, to make their stations as fun and hands on as possible and to correlate their activities to state teaching standards. Over 250 students participated in the event.



Outdoor Eco Adventure participants cycle through learning stations to discover a variety of nature related topics, credit: USFWS

In addition to all of the great learning, students and teachers were treated to goodie bags before heading home for the day. This was made possible via donations from all participating station presenters and their respective agencies along with funding from the local conservation district board. Over 300 students, teachers, volunteers, presenters and hatchery staff went into making the day a resounding success. With such positive feedback from all teachers, the event will continue to be an annual one.

Tip of the Quarter

Stewardship

Article by Birgie Vertesch, Executive Director, "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society

Earlier articles in the development process focused upon building a good database of prospects, donors and volunteers to making the solicitation through direct mail.

Now that you have received gifts and developed a list of supporters, the work does not stop. What are you doing to keep that donor?

There are numerous nonprofit "competitors" in your back yard and around the corner working to attract these same people to support their worthy mission.

If your Friends group doesn't keep your donors engaged and feeling appreciated, it will be very easy for another organization to "move in" and convince them to support their work instead.

Thoughtful, meaningful and well-timed communications is key to keeping your supporters. It is much easier to retain an existing donor than it is to bring in new donors. As a result, **stewardship** is as much a part of development as seeking the gift.

The majority of giving is emotionally based, and **through good stewardship, giving will continue and increase.**

So, what can your Friends group do to strengthen your stewardship efforts and keep your donors engaged and giving?

Thank, thank and thank again.

People need to know their gifts are appreciated and are being invested wisely. Without this, most individuals will not give again. Acknowledgments should be mailed within three days of receipt. In addition to letters, phone calls of thanks, even if it is left on an answering machine can be very powerful.

Personalization of letters.

With technology today, it is easy to personalize correspondence and thank you letters in particular should always be personalized and signed by hand and include a small personal note if possible. Use board members and volunteers to help. Donors like that personal touch.



The Friends of Savannah National Wildlife Refuge hold their first membership benefit event. Fifty members of the Friends group joined the refuge staff for an evening hayride and enjoyed a cook-out. Credit: Monica Harris/USFWS.

Share Stories.

Share stories in thank you letters; solicitation letters and most importantly through a newsletter, which is also an important stewardship tool. Include photos that tell a story as well as the direct impact on the wildlife being protected; students receiving scholarships or internships or the schoolchildren visiting the refuge and their experience of wonder. It gives the donors a sense of their dollars making a real difference and direct impact.

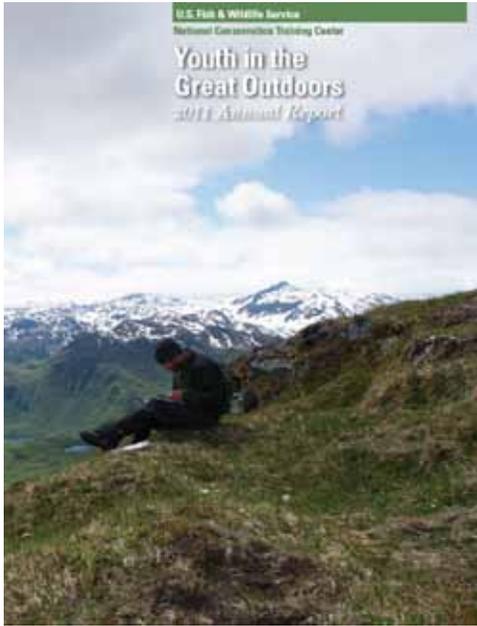
Inform.

Just as in the newsletter, it is important to communicate with your supporters beyond the ask. It is said that people should receive seven to ten "touch" points of communication which includes the solicitation, but also other forms of communication, such as the newsletter, FaceBook; electronic emails, like Constant Contact, update letters, newspaper articles, editorials etc. When your donors feel informed and connected, they are more likely to give and continue to give.

Personal visits.

Letters, emails and phone call are effective, but there is nothing more effective to inform a donor than through a face-to-face visit. This could be a personal tour of the refuge; at a coffee shop; in the donors' home or office. The location is not as important as the ability to meet personally. Not everyone can be visited and not everyone will want to be visited, but do your homework and meet with those you feel warrant the time to personally meet and enhance that relationship further.

The mission of our national wildlife refuge system is wonderful and making an impact on our wildlife and wild lands. The bottom line to development and stewardship is that your donors feel connected and see that their support is making a difference and they will continue to make gifts and encourage others to do the same.



Check it out! FWS Youth in the Great Outdoors Annual Report

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Youth in the Great Outdoors 2011 Annual Report is now available online <http://nctc.fws.gov/documents/YGOAnnualReport2011.pdf>.

Highlights of the report include:

- The FWS increased youth employment by 2,389, with 1,103 of them through external partnerships with the SCA, AmeriCorps, and others.
- The National CPWN Working Group created funding guidelines for the development of activities and programs to engage pre-high school aged youth.
- Hundreds of thousands of youth and their families participated in FWS environmental education programs focused on the importance of the great outdoors, increasing environmental literacy, and providing opportunities to practice natural and cultural resource stewardship on public lands.

Calendar of Events

Saturday, February 11

8 am - 4 pm

13th Annual Everglades Day Family Festival

The Everglades Day Festival is the largest event at Loxahatchee NWR each year. This year's theme is "Mysteries of the Everglades." Discover live animals, solve insect riddles, uncover archeology and much more! Enjoy wildlife demonstrations, games, conservation exhibits, nature walks, fishing demos, canoeing, music and entertainment.

13th Annual Everglades Day Festival
Saturday, February 11, 2012
8:00 am - 4:00 pm
All Day — All Free
Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
 10216 Lee Road, Boynton Beach off State Road 7/US 441
 2 miles south of Boynton Beach Blvd. / 3 miles north of Atlantic Ave.
 Parking at Monte's Packaging 1/2 mile south of Refuge entrance.
 Free shuttle to and around Refuge.

Mysteries of the Everglades
 Promoting awareness, appreciation and an understanding of the Everglades

Including: wildlife presentations • canoeing • kayaking • fishing demos • birds of prey • music • educational programs • guest speakers • espanol presentations • exhibits • food • interactive activities • bus shuttle to Strazulla Marsh • LIA tours • explorations

Over thirty exhibitors from agencies, clubs and non-profit organizations.

For more information, call 561/734 8303.

In partnership with: Friends of the Loxahatchee NWR, The Audubon Society of the Everglades, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Palm Beach Post, the South Florida Water Management District and Palm Beach County Cultural Council

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is committed to providing access to the Everglades for all generations. Please contact your local representative for more information on the South Florida Water Management District at (561) 734-8303 or www.sfwmd.com. In order to visit, all attendees must have a valid Florida driver's license or ID. Open to the public through January 28, 2012. Please contact your local representative for more information.

March 12 – 16 Connecting People with Nature through Birds

St. Marks NWR, Florida,
Contact: Michelle Donlan, 304/876 7685,
Michelle_Donlan@fws.gov

May 18 Endangered Species Day

The Endangered Species Program is partnering with the Endangered Species Coalition to encourage participation, including in the Endangered Species Youth Art Contest for grades K-12. Contest entries are due March 15. For event tools and more information, check out <http://www.stopextinction.org/esd/197-esd-toolkit.html>.