



# Focus on "Friends"

## Southeast Region Friends Group News

### Note from the Regional Director

*There is no doubt that life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is stressful. Information is coming at us from every direction; managing traffic requires a strategic plan complete with "windows of opportunity," our family schedules are booked to the hilt with outside activities. At work, it's not much better—we have so much to do that our lists need lists! The question before us every day is "work/life balance," how to maintain our equilibrium in the midst of the pressures of modern life. I say one answer is that we "take Refuge."*

While the demands on our time are great, we in the Fish and Wildlife Service are blessed to work for an organization that manages the very places that can restore us in body, mind and spirit. I've been on the road visiting our southeastern National Wildlife Refuges in the past few weeks, as has Mark. I've been to Carolina Sandhills, Alligator River, Clarks River, Pocosin Lakes, Hobe Sound, and the National Key Deer Refuge Complex, with fly-overs of Pea Island and Currituck NWRs; and Mark visited Savannah NWR and was at Tensas River NWR for a hunting and fishing festival and dedication. We both have been reminded



*Three Sisters by USFWS/Cindy Dohner.*

once again that our Refuges are places that help remind us of why we do what we do. They put things in perspective, while also providing outdoor recreational pursuits that can satisfy every age group and every interest.

You want to fish or hunt? There's a Refuge for that. You want to take photos of wildlife? We've got you covered. ([Take a look at a few of mine!](#)) You want to do absolutely nothing but take in the great outdoors minus freeway exhaust fumes?

*continued*

## Note from the Regional Director *continued*

There's plenty of room to breathe at our Refuges, and at least one Refuge in every state in the Region and the nation.

*Whether our work for the Southeast Region is growing fish, providing admin support, recovering imperiled species, preventing crime, writing press releases, or managing budgets, our National Wildlife Refuges belong to all of us. As a Region and as a Service, we are a family whose members have many different roles to play, but who are interdependent with one another for our ultimate mission success.*

Ecological Services, for example, is helping to lead the development of three proposed new National Wildlife Refuges in three southeastern states. Fisheries, Science Applications, Migratory Birds, Ecological Services, and the Refuges program are collaborating on proposals in support of the new \$5.4 million "Cooperative Recovery Initiative" aimed at preventing extinctions and showing success relative to endangered and threatened species conservation on and around National Wildlife Refuges.

We also have cross-program support for a critically important carbon sequestration project underway involving three Refuges—Alligator River, Pocosin Lakes, and Great Dismal Swamp. These three Refuges (the first two of which are in the Southeast) cover 375,000 acres and comprise the largest ownership of pocosin wetlands in the eastern United States. Under natural conditions, these carbon-rich peat soils soak up rainfall, and the vast stores of carbon they contain remain stable, locked away in the deep soils that reach 12 feet or more below the surface. Without enough water, the peat dries up and releases carbon into the atmosphere. When released, carbon (as a greenhouse gas) significantly contributes to climate change and is also a major and costly fire hazard. Fire suppression at these three



*Regional Director Cindy Dohner holds a hawk at Hobe Sound NWR, credit: USFWS.*

Refuges has cost \$50 million since 2008. Our Refuges and the Ecological Services program are working with multiple partners, including NGOs, Federal agencies, and universities, to share scientific and funding resources that will help us to ensure that this pocosin carbon continues to be locked away for the sake of wildlife and people.

Like any family, we not only have the responsibility to support one another but also the pleasure of celebrating one another's milestones and accomplishments. One accomplishment certainly worth heralding is the recent addition of two Refuges to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Valle de Oro and Rio Moro NWRs in New Mexico became the 559<sup>th</sup> and 560<sup>th</sup> Refuges added to our 150 million-acre system of lands and waters set aside to conserve our nation's wild life and wild places.

Our National Wildlife Refuges contribute to many aspects of our American quality of life, including to local economies. Our Refuges are attracting some 45 million visitors each year, 90 percent of whom reported in a survey of 10,000 adult participants' satisfaction with refuge recreation, information and education, public service, and conservation. We are three-quarters of the way through 2012. If you aren't numbered among the visitors to a National Wildlife Refuge this year, now's the time to treat yourself and your family to a respite from the cares of the world. Take Refuge—I guarantee you will come back inspired to keep on doing great things for fish, wildlife, plants and people.

*Cindy*

## Calendar of Events

### November 10-12 Federal Fee Free

days in observance of Veteran's Day weekend.

### November 15 2013 National Wildlife Refuge System Awards Request For Nominations

To learn more about the awards program and to download the required nomination forms, please visit [refugeassociation.org/people/awards/](http://refugeassociation.org/people/awards/) or contact Debbie Harwood at [dharwood@refugeassociation.org](mailto:dharwood@refugeassociation.org) or 202/417 3803 x 16.

### March 18 - 22 Interagency Wilderness Interpretation & Education Training

The training, offered at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, will be a great opportunity to network, meet visitor services specialists and park rangers from nearby land management agencies, learn about the Wilderness Act, pick up valuable interpretation and environmental education skills, and learn about celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act (2014). You don't have to have wilderness at your refuge to participate!

### Tip of the Quarter 501(c)(3) and Lobbying

Did you know 501(c)(3) organizations are restricted in how much political and legislative (*lobbying*) activities they may conduct? By IRS definition a 501(c)(3) must operate exclusively for exempt purposes and cannot be an "action" organization. For a detailed discussion, visit the [IRS's Political and Lobbying Activities](http://www.irs.gov/charities-philanthropy/publications/501c3-lobbying-activities) website.

## Fisheries News

### *Hatchery Friends Group Stays Busy*

*Article by Wm. Russell Cain,  
Friends of Dale Hollow NFH*

The Friends of Dale Hollow National Fish Hatchery have been quite busy lately. This is the time of year that the hatchery begins receiving over five million rainbow, lake, brook, and brown trout eggs. The eggs arrive in Styrofoam coolers and need to be unpacked, water hardened, disinfected, and placed in hatching jars. Friends group members have been helping the hatchery crew process these eggs as they arrive at the hatchery. This has freed up the hatchery staff to catch up on other fish culture and maintenance chores.

Friends group members have also been actively involved in setting up cold water aquarium systems in local schools in support of the Friends group's "Trout in the Classroom Program." Special systems allow students to observe rainbow trout eggs hatch and develop into fingerlings in the classroom. There are aquariums set up at Hermitage Springs School, the Discovery School in Murfreesboro and Gainesboro TN High School. Three other schools have made application and will be set up pending funding. Plans are underway to work with area fly fishing clubs to set up similar systems in other area schools. Cooperation continues with the Tennessee Ecological Service Field Office to develop a warm water version of the "Trout in the Classroom" project. We are awaiting a special permit from the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency.

*The Friends group will also be help in a new Mussels project coming to the hatchery. Exciting things are happening. It's a lot of hard work but a lot of fun, too. The Friends group meets the fourth Thursday of every month. Check out [tennesseetailwatertrout.com](http://tennesseetailwatertrout.com) for more details.*



*Rep. Terri Lynn Weaver helps pour eggs into hatching jars, credit: USFWS.*

### *Check It Out*

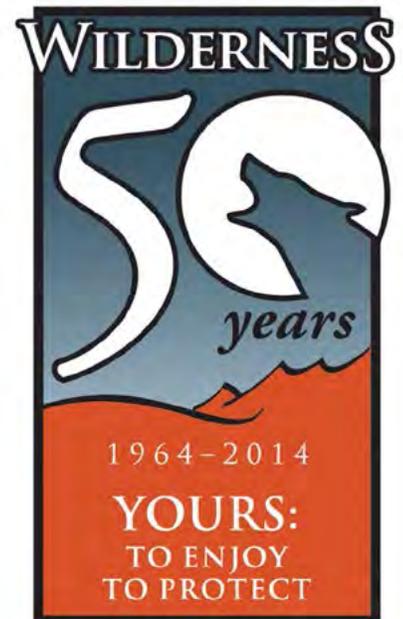
## The 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Wilderness Act: Building Knowledge about Wilderness

2014 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act. Wilderness is a place where the imprint of humans is substantially unnoticed. It is where natural processes are the primary influences and human activity is limited to primitive recreation and minimum tools. The Wilderness Act established a clear, unambiguous national policy to preserve wilderness, recognizing wilderness itself as a resource of value and established the wilderness preservation system.

Four federal agencies, including the Fish and Wildlife Service, manage designated Wilderness in the U.S. The Southeast Region has 18 refuges that have areas that are designated Wilderness and are part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, totaling 465,718 acres.

Friends are encouraged to get involved with Wilderness celebrations. A toolbox containing information and educational resources for planning local or regional events is available at [www.wilderness.net/50th](http://www.wilderness.net/50th).

Want to learn more about wilderness? Check out [www.wilderness.net/](http://www.wilderness.net/) and the training courses offered at [www.wilderness.net/NWPS/training](http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/training) or contact [Deborah Jerome](#) Regional Wilderness Coordinator for further details.





*St. Marks Refuge Association Hosts Visitors to the Refuge, credit: Lou Kellenberger.*

### *St. Marks Refuge Association Hosts Visitors to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge*

*Article by Lou Kellenberger,  
St. Marks Refuge Association*

The St. Marks Refuge Association (SMRA) hosted 30 visitors from the Friends of Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges and the Egmont Key Alliance, Sunday, September 16, 2012 at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

*The group was treated to a tram tour of the refuge along with a stop at the St. Marks Lighthouse.*

*On the tour, guests saw a bald eagle, wading birds, alligators, two bobcats and a deer. Bird watchers in the group enjoyed seeing blue-winged teal, glossy ibis, purple gallinule and sora rails.*

Our visitors spent the warm and sunny morning viewing the beautiful St. Marks NWR scenic canals, pools and marshes.

Betsy Kellenberger, St. Marks Refuge Association President, talked about the history of St. Marks NWR, flora and fauna on the refuge, our environmental

education programs, the Nature Store and the SMRA financial and volunteer support of the refuge.

Royce and Carol Phillips, RV camper volunteers, helped with Royce driving the tram and Carol assisting the group with their purchases in our Nature Store, which is run by the SMRA. The Nature Store is the Association's primary source of income which is used to help support the mission and programs of the refuge.

Ranger Barney Parker greeted our guests in the Visitor Center and answered questions about the refuge.

Betsy thanked the group for coming to the St. Marks NWR and told them "we always enjoy sharing our refuge with others."

## *It's All About Education*

*Article by Carla Garbin,  
Member of Friends of Tampa Bay Refuges*

Because “our” refuges are islands located at the entrance to Tampa Bay from the Gulf of Mexico and accessible only by boat, Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges recognized from its outset in 2005 that outreach was essential to informing the public about the refuges and the habitat and critters they protect. The result is a two-pronged approach: educational outreach programs offered to elementary students located in low-income areas and adult outreach through seminars held at a local resort.

*The school outreach programs are offered both at their school for students in grades one-five and through field trips to parks or preserves for students in grades four-five.*

The on-site programs are 45 minutes each and include hands-on studies of fiddler crabs, antlions, water stewardship, and environmental observation skills. The field trips are three hours in length and provide hands-on environmental learning experiences in coastal environments. Field trip transportation costs are paid for by grants awarded to Friends for that purpose. In addition to the topic at hand, students learn about the Tampa Bay Refuges and the important habitat they provide for fish and wildlife. In the 2011-2012 school year, Friends reached 500 students through its school outreach programs.

*The second outreach approach targets adults and families by offering evening programs on environmental topics.*

These free-of-charge programs are held in large meeting rooms at one of the area’s premier Green Lodging certified properties, the Guy Harvey Outpost at Tradewinds Beach Resort. Tradewinds, which has a strong reputation for supporting environmental causes, provides the meeting room and setup at no charge to Friends. In turn, Friends lines up the speakers, focusing on areas of special interest and relevancy to Tampa Bay residents. The speakers, all experts in their topic, also do not charge Friends, although it does pick up their



*Participants pack the house for one of Friends education programs, credit: USFWS.*

out-of-pocket expenses including hotel, transportation, and meals if needed. Rarely does this amount to much since speakers are Florida based and most are from the immediate area. Speakers come from such organizations as Audubon, Florida Fish & Wildlife, Florida Wildlife Research Institute, and the US Fish

& Wildlife Service. Prior to the main speaker, a short presentation is made by Friends about the Tampa Bay Refuges and their importance to the region’s ecosystem.

These evening programs are promoted through press releases, Friends’ web site, and email broadcasts to its members and to members of other Tampa Bay area environmental groups. The result: a consistent draw of plus 100 people, increased knowledge about the refuges, their habitat, critters, and challenges, and public awareness of Friends and its role supporting the refuges.

Prior to establishing its current relationship with Tradewinds, Friends used various venues in the area. Now that a great venue in a central location is readily available, Friends plans to increase the number of programs it offers to the public.

Through student, adults and family outreach programs, Friends has found a significant avenue to educate Tampa Bay residents about its refuges, the refuge system, coastal habitat, fish and wildlife, conservation, and stewardship. In short, it’s all about education.



*Volunteers help rake Grape Arbor, credit: USFWS.*

## *Okefenokee Celebrates National Public Lands Day*

*Article by Gracie Gooch, Okefenokee NWR*

On Saturday, September 29, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) celebrated National Public Lands Day from 8:00 am – 12:00 pm.

The event began at the historic Chesser Island Homestead, where 55 volunteers participated in a service project. Accomplishments included cleaning the historic house, trimming vegetation

along the Homestead and Deerstand trail, raking and hoeing the yard and much more. Tools, gloves, and lunch were provided.

Volunteers included members of the Okefenokee Wildlife League, Charlton County High School Student Council and FCCLA, Charlton County Sheriff’s Department, and a Boy Scout Troop from Kingsland, Georgia.

## *“Ding” Darling NWR Receives National Phoenix Award*

*Article by Chelle Koster Walton, DDWS*

*The Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) recently presented its 2012 Phoenix Award to the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge and “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS).*

Nancy Hamilton, associate SATW member and communications director for the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB), accepted the award on behalf of the refuge and Friends group at a September 13 luncheon during the SATW’s annual convention in Indianapolis, IN. The VCB oversees worldwide tourism promotion for Sanibel Island, which is part of The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel.

The Phoenix Award has been given each year since 1969 to recognize conservation and preservation efforts of individuals and organizations. SATW members are invited to nominate individuals, communities, or organizations that have contributed to a quality travel experience through conservation, preservation, beautification, or environmental efforts.

“Ding” Darling was among six award recipients that ranged in geographic scope from the Charleston City Market in South Carolina to Kula Eco Park in Fiji.

SATW journalist Jane Ockershausen from Pittsburgh, PA, nominated the refuge for the award following a research visit in May 2012.

“Ding’ Darling makes for an easily accessible and highly educational wildlife experience,” her application read. “A number of free programs and tours are available in the winter and summer to add to the appeal of communing with raw nature.

Volunteers are on hand to answer questions, and everyone seems just so excited about nature – it’s contagious,” Ockershausen wrote.

She specifically praised the new iNature Trail that the refuge unveiled last summer in an effort to reach young visitors by using smartphone/smartpad and QR (Quick Response) code technology.

“Without this refuge, Sanibel would not be the environmentally sound island that it is,” wrote the SATW Phoenix Awards committee in its analysis.

*“We are deeply honored to accept this prestigious award,” said Birgie Vertesch, DDWS executive director. “It once more underlines the incredible staff and teamwork between the refuge and friends group.”*

SATW’s membership includes writers, editors, photographers, journalists, filmmakers, and communications professionals who specialize in the travel industry. SATW promotes responsible journalism, provides professional support and development for its members, and encourages the conservation and preservation of travel resources worldwide.

For more information visit [www.dingdarlingsociety.org](http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Vertesch at 239/292 0566 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).



*The DDWS received a letter of congratulations from Director Dan Ashe this month for celebrating 30 years of friendship. Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik presents the letter to John McCabe the President of DDWS, by USFWS.*