

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge Newsletter



January 2017

From the Desk of the Refuge Manager



Above: Kevin Sloan, Project Leader of Chincoteague NWR with outgoing Secretary of Interior, Sally Jewell

First and foremost, I would like to wish our dedicated staff, volunteers, members of our community and our visitors a Happy New

Year! We look forward to many exciting changes and events, including new and recurring activities such as beach cleanups, waterfowl week, and the annual Chincoteague pony swim. Working alongside the awesome staff here at our refuge as well as with our great local leaders, we will continue to protect and manage this treasured public land for the American People. As we all know, this refuge is unique in countless ways, and we look forward to

another successful year of conservation.

Living Shoreline Restoration



This past year, refuge staff in collaboration with TNC and VRMC installed over 2,000 feet of oyster castles. This greatly increases the resiliency of the salt marshes, and restores a natural filter to the area.

Refuge Updates

The Eagle Camera was repaired in December 2016 thanks to a generous contribution. This included the

installation of a new high resolution camera and coordination with staff to minimize stress on the nesting eagles. The

camera feed is live in our visitor center at our Eagle Camera Exhibit.

Freedom Hunters Hunt

On November 2016, our refuge hosted the non-profit group Freedom Hunters for a special white-tail and sika hunt. Hunters coordinated with refuge staff, law enforcement, and volunteers to ensure a safe and successful hunt. This is an on-going partnership to promote veteran participation in wildlife dependent recreation.



About the Refuge

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge includes more than 14,000 acres of beach, dunes, marsh, and maritime forest. Established in 1943 to provide habitat for migratory birds, the refuge today provides habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and song birds as well as other species of wildlife and plants including threatened and endangered species. The refuge also provides wildlife dependent recreational opportunities such as fishing, hunting, wildlife photography and observation, interpretation, and environmental education.

Expanded Opportunities

In 2016, we made significant changes to our hunt program, aligning it more closely with the Commonwealth of Virginia's regulations and seasons. The multiple zone system and all but one lottery has been revised. All hunts except the first 4 days of firearms are first come/first serve. Refuge hunt fees have been eliminated. The hunt orientation is available online, and your signed application for archery and firearms now serves as your hunt permit.

Kegotank Elementary Classroom Completed



Above: A student and teacher immerse in the outdoor garden. Credit: Kegotank ES

After months of planning, construction, and collaboration with numerous community partners the Outdoor Classroom at Kegotank

Elementary School opened in October 2016. Members of the Accomack County School Board, US Navy, Eastern Shore Master Naturalists, refuge staff and leadership, and numerous school staff were on-hand for the grand opening. The outdoor classroom features raised planting beds, an outdoor awning, raised seating, a weather station, greenhouse, rain collection barrels, composters, a raised walkway, sandbox, outdoor low obstacle

course, and incorporates a native pollinator garden. Students and teaching staff have started growing vegetation to facilitate science based learning objectives. Our refuge is grateful for all who participated to make this a success.

Below: Students planting broccoli. Credit: Kegotank ES



During the last weeks of December 2016, a Snowy Owl (*bubo scandiacus*) spent some time around the beaches of Tom's Cove. The owl created a sensation and a rare opportunity for visitors to photograph and enjoy this majestic creature. Visitors were reminded to keep a safe distance when viewing the owl. Inquire at visitor center for recent sightings.

Recreational Beach Re-Location

Preliminary planning has begun to provide a sustainable recreational beach for current and future generations of refuge visitors.

Another workshop and collaboration session is scheduled for February 2017 to continue exploring design concepts for the new recreational beach, parking lots, and facilities to be located in the vicinity of C- and D-dikes, 1.5 miles north of the current recreational beach.

The concepts will be used to craft design

alternatives to be analyzed through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The public will have an opportunity to provide input on alternatives throughout this process.

Planning for the new beach is a collaborative effort. Partners include: NPS, FHWA, the Town of Chincoteague, Accomack County, NASA, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Important design elements discussed at the

workshop include:

Visitor experience: A great visitor experience at the new beach for the same number of visitors who use the current beach.

Walking distance: Placement of parking lots and facilities far enough away from ocean to account for storms and westward migration, while also taking visitor walking distance into consideration.

Resiliency: Incorporating a dune accommodation zone that preserves existing dunes and associated vegetative

cover that will provide protection.

Environmental compatibility: Design and placement of roads, parking lots, and facilities to blend into natural surroundings.



For more information:
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/chincoteague>

Phone: 757-336-6122

Fax: 757-336-5273

Email: fw5rw_cnwr@fws.gov

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge
8231 Beach Road
Chincoteague, VA 23336

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Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge



@ChincoteagueNWR

