

## Volunteering From a Volunteer's Perspective

I wonder what we will do today? I ask that question each day I go to do my volunteer work at the SEWEE Center.

I chose to volunteer for the Center after reading a very well written article in the local paper describing the beneficial things performed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Forest Service personnel there, and asking for volunteers. But I had no idea I would be called upon to perform such a wide variety of tasks.

My first assignment was as a receptionist at the Center facility on Hwy 17. After receiving my handbook and a short training session from "Ranger" Trish, I was now ready to greet visitors and provide them with information, pamphlets, maps, etc to help them enjoy the wonderful nature that exists here in the South Carolina Low Country. In addition to being the receptionist over the next few weeks, I helped with a youth "Career Days" activity, worked on automating the office volunteer data base, removed unsightly weeds from the "Red Wolf" den, and cleaned and organized the Headquarters garage area.

I hardly got to learn where everything was located at the Center when I was asked to help the maintenance team at Cape Romain Wildlife Refuge where I enjoyed meeting and working with Wayne and Greg. We would work on so many different activities either at the Cape Romain area or Bull's Island.

Each week I would arrive not knowing what was in store for the day. Neil (another volunteer) and I worked on building storage areas and shelves, putting new drywall in the ceiling, rebuilding a Boston Whaler, cleaning out old storage areas, building guard rails around a rice "trunk" (dam), and repairing equipment. Where else can you get to ride an ATV around Bull's Island to fetch tools and equipment? We solved water pumping problems, equipment malfunction problems and continually found "work-arounds" to keep things going at Bull's. I helped an AmeriCorps Youth Group clean up miles of beach on Bulls Island removing a dump truck load of garbage that we humans had dumped into the Atlantic Ocean. In between these assigned tasks, I was asked to help do some major construction projects as well.

I became very adept at cutting and assembling major wood pieces for a kiosk at Bull's Island and a pergola at the Center. Part of that challenge was working in 90+ degrees heat with little shade. And each day on the Islands was accentuated by the lovely boat rides in the early morning (quiet, peaceful, serene) and evenings (windy and bumpy). We would experience high and low tides where one low tide (due to wind and tides) made the refuge look like a wet lunar landscape.

One island adventure was to Lighthouse Island where we cut a wide path (using "weed eaters") to the lighthouses for a special tour outing. Forgetting my waders in my truck, I had to be carried by one of the rangers through the pluff mud to dry land.

I also experienced the amazing efforts of government employees and volunteers associated with protecting loggerhead sea turtles here in South Carolina. We would boat out from McClellanville in the early hours and spend the day riding the beach on an ATV searching for "turtle crawls", checking and marking nests and relocating nests if necessary. I marveled at the dedicated people who did this very tough task day after day.

My friends ask me why I would work so hard, as a volunteer. "I am not sure", I tell them but I do enjoy it. Maybe it is the idea that you are doing something good, that someone has got to do it, that they need me, maybe it is the wonderful people I have met and work with... All I know is that even though I come home dog tired, I really enjoy the day helping out. I volunteered for the SEWEE Center to keep my self active and use my physical and mental skills in my retirement years. I just had no idea that the activities would be so varied, so interesting and so much fun. I recommend it highly to anyone who is retired, wants to have fun and contribute to the well being of our beautiful natural world here in SC.

Volunteer Dave Shuckstes