



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

Southeastern Currents

NOVEMBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

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Firefighters from the J.N. "Ding" Darling NWR assist on the second prescribed burn in September - two inches of rain fell the previous day but the vegetation in the Keys sure doesn't mind given the fire behavior in the photo. Photo by Chad Anderson, FWS.

Fire managers complete two prescribed burns on the National Key Deer Refuge; the first prescribed burns in five years

Wildland Fire and the Florida Keys sounds like an exotic combination, but travel 100 miles south of Miami, Florida, across emerald islands linked by historic bridges which span vistas of azure water and you will find yourself on 10-square-mile Big Pine Key, home of the tiny Key Deer and 4,600 residents. Surrounding you will be the fire-dependent pine rocklands, one of the rarest ecosystems in the world. Imbedded within dense stands of Slash Pine, choked with an understory of dangerously flammable palms, are a myriad of homes and businesses which are vulnerable to high intensity wildfire.

Like most of the landscape of South Florida, fire is essential to maintain the biological diversity of this pine forest that gives Big Pine Key its name. Tropical hardwoods shrubs and trees more common to the Caribbean are a fascinating feature of pine rocklands, but periodic fire would normally keep their encroachment in check. Without fire, the hardwoods would rapidly increase in number and stature, resulting in a reduction in the amount of light reaching the forest floor. Conditions would become less favorable for pine regeneration, and the rare herbaceous flora would be shaded out and lost. Four hundred native plants, 31 found nowhere else on earth, seven of which are listed as federally endangered, reside in this unique landscape.

Prescribed fire had long been used on the refuge to specifically benefit the endangered Key Deer by maintaining openings and promoting new plant growth. Over the past five years, obstacles such as limited staff, island-wide recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Wilma in 2005, and public concerns about the effects of fire upon wildlife has prevented prescribed burns from occurring on the Key Deer Refuge. This delay coupled with hurricane debris has caused hazardous fuels to accumulate to dangerous levels.

Recognizing the obvious risk to the islands residents from wildfire as well as the ecological benefits, Refuge Manager, Anne Morkill, ARM Loxahatchee NWR prescribed fire specialist, Jon Wallace, and other refuge staff began an interagency and community based effort to reduce fire risk on the island. Planning began in 2006 with public meetings and a convening of the Lower Keys Wildfire Hazard Reduction Initiative Working Group. Kim Ernstrom, fire management officer, hired in 2007, joined the effort and six more meetings for planning and public information were held from 2007 – 2009. Finally in August 2009, in the face of much public concern, the stars aligned, and a 2.5- acre- burn was completed. Fire management resources from nine locations across South Florida teamed up to execute the first prescribed fire on refuge land on Big Pine Key since 2004. Participants from the Florida Panther, Merritt Island, Loxahatchee, J. N. "Ding" Darling and the National Key Deer Refuges, Everglades National Park, Florida Division of Forestry, the Missoula Fire Lab, and Monroe County Fire and Rescue sweated and labored in the 92-degree heat and 70 percent humidity to ensure the burn was a complete success.



Key Deer peaking out from thick underbrush, without fire the understory of the pine rocklands becomes thick with woody vegetation and palms, making it difficult for the deer and other species to utilize the woods. Photo by Chad Anderson, FWS.

Using valuable lessons learned from this first controversial treatment, a second burn was successfully completed three weeks later on September 10. Many positive comments were received from the public, and the interagency cooperation has set a precedent for more burns to come.

Since 2006, the refuge has hosted a total of 11 public meetings and workshops to share current information and explore new strategies for the fire management program. Fire managers also are collaborating with researchers from the Missoula Fire Lab and other universities to conduct a variety of studies on the refuge, which will provide additional information to help refine strategies to reflect different site characteristics among forest stands and between islands, and to predict future changes that may result from sea level rise and hurricanes.

Many challenges remain, but momentum is on the fire managers' side now that success has been proven by doing rather than just talking and meeting. It will take many more burns and some innovative fuels treatments to begin to significantly reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on the National Key Deer Refuge, but with continued public and interagency support the creatures and plants of the pine rocklands, including the humans, will be able to enjoy their unique and rare landscape in the future.

Submitted by Kim Ernstom, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Naples, Florida

Behind the Scenes--



Judy Toppins and son Jasper prepare to march with beetle puppets in a local parade to promote Hemlockfest 2009. Photo by Ashley Toppins.

Hemlockfest!

For the last few years, Judy Toppins, Outreach Coordinator for the Fisheries Program, has been involved in an all volunteer effort to help save the Eastern and Carolina hemlock trees of North Georgia from an encroaching, devastating infestation of the non-native hemlock woolly adelgid.

Through a group called the Lumpkin Coalition, she volunteers her time to help plan a three-day music festival, with all proceeds going to benefit labs at area universities created to propagate predatory beetles which feed exclusively on invasive adelgids.

Hemlockfest takes place the first full weekend in November each year (November 6-8, 2009), and offers great live music in a beautiful outdoor venue. The festival also includes educational seminars, arts and craft vendors, primitive camping, a child's nature play village, free canoeing, and many other activities for those who love the outdoors and want to help save the remaining hemlocks.

Visit www.hemlockfest.org for more information, and come boogie with Judy on November 6-8, to help support this cause!

Submitted by Judy Toppins, Fisheries, Atlanta, Georgia



Hemlockfest poster designed by Judy Toppins.

Bragging Rights --



Wildland Fire Management Exhibit.
Photo by Jennifer Hinckley, FWS.

Fire gets attention at National Forestry Convention

The Fish and Wildlife Service's Fire Program booth impressed professionals and college students who attended the 2009 Society for American Foresters Convention in Orlando, Florida. Fire staff members Greg Titus and Jennifer Hinckley from St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, and Jim Durrwatcher, director of the Prescribed Fire Training Center, spent three days greeting hundreds of visitors and recruiting numerous students for potential employment.

"Our exhibit is a very good eye-catcher and has gotten a lot of good comments," said Bob Eaton, regional fire management coordinator for the Southeast Region, who attended the convention. "Lots of folks here were not even aware we existed."

The booth included a large full-colored background display, a table of informational materials, and a monitor showing a rotation of fire-related images in forested ecosystems on the Service's lands and refuges. The exhibit was on display at the convention on Sept 31 to Oct 2, 2009.

Submitted by Jennifer Hinckley, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, St. Marks, Florida

YCC students assist Panama City Ecological Services Field Office

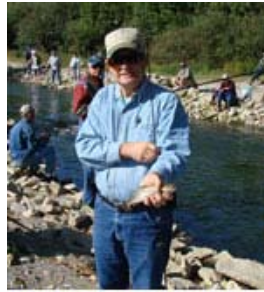
Multi-taskers Extraordinary! That describes Chance Hanna and Trevor Benton, two YCC enrollees, who spent eight weeks this summer assisting Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services biologists. One of the first tasks they tackled was repairing and straightening more than a mile of monofilament gill nets! With the nets repaired, Chance and Trevor made good use of them by collecting Gulf sturgeons in the Apalachicola, Brothers, and Ochlockonee Rivers and completed the job by weighing, measuring and tagging the fish. In addition, they assisted in conducting electrofish surveys on St. Marks and St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuges and became proficient in measuring water quality and recording data. They assisted the Army Corps of Engineers in an experimental study by using a trawl to collect newly hatched Gulf sturgeon in the Brothers River - the project succeeded in capturing three fish.



Trevor Benton and Chance Hanna preparing a Gulf sturgeon for release. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

In addition, they assisted Panama City biologists by conducting outreach activities, maintaining equipment, and doing house-keeping chores. One of the high points in their work schedule occurred when the Natural Resources Division, located at Tyndall Air Force Base, Panama City, solicited them to reroute a half mile trail through some very dense vegetation. They completed this task in two weeks and followed that up with constructing twenty wood duck and blue bird houses for the base. Chance and Trevor are fine examples of how the YCC program has helped the Service and Tyndall Air Force Base complete a number of tasks – work that was a lot easier with their extra hands! Thanks YCC! More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Frank Parauka, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office



A Catch a Smile participant is all smiles as he proudly displays his catch of the day! Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.

Catching smiles and reaching for rainbows with fall fishing derbies

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery staff and volunteers enjoyed two great days of trout-tastic fishing fun as the team organized the second annual Catch a Smile Senior Fishing Derby and the second annual Reaching for Rainbows Special Kids Fishing Derby.

Ninety seniors aged 62 attended the Catch a Smile derby on Tuesday, September 29, and 57 children with physical and/or mental disabilities enjoyed the Special Kids Fishing Derby on Wednesday, September 30. These students were from the local Russell and Clinton County School Districts.

Crew members from the hatchery, the Friends of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Inc., and several community businesses, organizations, and

volunteers, worked to plan and organize the two days of fall fishing fun. More than 32 sponsors donated an estimated \$3,731.81 (either cash or items). Both of these fall fishing events are proud examples of the benefits of partnering together to make a difference in the lives of those in the community. Through such teamwork and an overall spirit of volunteerism and partnership, the events occurred with little or no cost to any one agency.

During the Catch a Smile Senior Fishing Derby, the seniors were treated to lunch and enjoyed a chance at winning one of many door prizes generously provided by community sponsors. The students also had lunch and were awarded medallions and t-shirts during the Reaching for Rainbows Special Kids Fishing Derby. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Amanda Patrick, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Jamestown, Kentucky

Outer Banks Scenic Byway receives national designation

The Outer Banks Scenic Byway received national status on Friday, October 16, 2009, as one of America's Byways®, placing North Carolina Highway 12 on the map, so to speak, for its fascinating coastal heritage and unique natural landscapes, making the leg of the historic two-lane highway from Nags Head, North Carolina to Down East a perfect autumn drive for exploring the beauty of the barrier islands and connecting with the coastal communities that set the destination apart.

"The Outer Banks touch people in different ways. Part of that connection, whether it is to the beach, or the landscape, or to the memories made while vacationing here is inextricably linked to the drive," explains Lee Nettles, managing director for the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau. "When you round the curve of North Carolina 12 and see Oregon Inlet and Hatteras Island for the first time, for example, that never leaves you. Those moments of surprise and wonder continue the whole length of the Outer Banks Scenic Byway." (www.outerbanksscenicbyway.org)

The itinerary for this newest national byway features drives along barrier islands featuring national landmarks and coastal villages and two car ferry rides. The byway travels through two national seashores, Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout, and two national wildlife refuges, Pea Island and Cedar Island. Along the byway are four historic lighthouses and world famous stopovers for migrating song birds and waterfowl.

To explore the natural world that created byway stories, Wings over Water offers a six-day celebration of the wild side of the Outer



Heading north from the village of Rodanthe, North Carolina, Highway 12 appears as a fragile vein running through Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. FWS Photo.

Banks region. The Nov. 3 to 8 celebration features over 100 adventurous field trips, including kayaking at sunrise and sunset, exploring shifting sands, and venturing to the close-by Gulf Stream to view seabirds. www.wingsoverwater.org

Article courtesy of Aaron Tuell, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, Manteo, North Carolina



Tree talk

Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and Army Corps Of Engineers staffs examine results of forest management to achieve Desired Forest Conditions on White River NWR. Photo by John Watkins, FWS.

In September, seven partners in the Forest Resources Conservation Work Group of the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture shared their knowledge about the application of Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) and Desired Forest Conditions (DFC) for hardwood forests managed as wildlife habitat with two more groups. Personnel from Migratory Birds, Federal Aid, and Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, along with experts from Arkansas Game and Fish Foundation, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries assisted the staff of White River National Wildlife Refuge in hosting Tree Talk for 26 Wildlife Management Area field staff and supervisors from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and the Mobile District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Tree Talk follows and builds upon lessons to this group at Birding Boot Camp and a tree marking workshop in Mississippi. (See lead article by Randy Wilson, Project Leader for the Migratory Birds Program Office in Jackson, Mississippi, for E-Grits in August 2009.) Field-based workshops like these provide on-the-ground training in application of the approaches of and critical delivery portions of SHC.

The attendees were a diverse group of biologists specializing in Habitat, Turkey, Small Game, Deer, Waterfowl, and Private Lands. Participants were exposed to SHC and DFC in the classroom and the field at the Potlatch Conservation Education Center operated by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission at White River National Wildlife Refuge, along with other field sites on the White River National Wildlife Refuge, the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge, and the Wattensaw Wildlife Management Area in east Arkansas.

Discussions were led by subject experts from Migratory Birds, Refuges, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Federal Aid provided assistance to the state agencies for this successful scientific effort. As a result of this effort and previous consultations on DFCs with subject experts, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks' Wildlife Bureau intends to adopt and implement plans to obtain DFCs in its forest management for wildlife habitat on many Mississippi Wildlife Management Areas. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Jeff Denman, White River National Wildlife Refuge, St. Charles, Arkansas

NFH, USFS, and LDP partner on fishing rodeo

For the second year in a row, Private John Allen National Fish Hatchery helped Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership (LDP) and the U.S. Forest Service bring fishing opportunities to children from Mississippi's south delta.

Meg Cooper, LDP coordinator, enlisted assistance from Ricky Campbell, Pvt. John Allen's hatchery manager, to stock catfish in Blue Lake on the U.S. Forest Service's Delta National Forest, near Rolling Fork, Mississippi. The two federal partners, along with several local sponsors, helped LDP hold its Fourth Annual Youth Fishing Rodeo on October 3, for children up to age 15.



Trey Eason needed a helping hand to hold his big catfish. Photo by Meg Cooper, LDP

About 40 catfishin' kids showed up to cast their lines. Many fish were caught with the largest one weighing in at nine pounds and one ounce. The big cat earned its fisher boy a prize while another amateur angler received a reward for the smallest catch. And, one fisher girl got a gift for the most fish caught during the event. All the children at the fishing rodeo were given treat bags for participating.

Parents, family members, Delta National Forest staff and volunteers aided the young fisher folk during their outdoor adventure. And, after the fishing was done, everyone enjoyed a hot dog lunch in the woods.

The LDP Youth Fishing Rodeo is the only event of its kind in a seven-county, low-income area of the state where most of the residents are minorities with limited opportunities. Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership expressed appreciation to its federal partners for helping LDP promote the use of public lands and encourage young people to get outside and experience nature.



Shirley Whittington caught a whopper. Photo by Meg Cooper, LDP

Submitted by Connie Dickard, Mississippi Field Office, Jackson, Mississippi

Help the Hooch Clean-up and Watershed Festival

In an effort to support local environmental groups, Sandra Nipper of the West Georgia Ecological Services Field Office participated in the 15th Annual Help the Hooch Clean-up and Watershed Festival Activities on October 17, 2009.

This event was hosted by the Keep Columbus Beautiful Commission and involved local community groups, schools, and businesses in volunteering efforts to keep the Chattahoochee litter-free. Sandra served as the site captain and organized a group of 14 volunteers who gathered over 200 pounds of trash from the bank of the Chattahoochee River. She also hosted an information tent in collaboration with Warm Springs Fish Hatchery, distributing literature packets and coloring books. Kids and parents enjoyed participating in face painting and the animal track display. More photos in [Photo Album](#).



Sandra Nipper hosts an information tent at the Watershed Festival. FWS Photo.

Submitted by Sandy Tucker, Georgia Ecological Services Field Office, Athens, Georgia



Cutting the ribbon is U.S. Representative Henry Brown and Acting Southeast Regional Director Cindy Dohner. Photo by Ray Paterra, FWS.

Waccamaw hosts grand opening of Environmental Education Center

On a warm October day, nearly 150 people assembled to commemorate the grand opening of the Waccamaw Environmental Education Center. As the tranquil Pee Dee River flowed in the background, local, state, and federal dignitaries joined refuge and Regional Office Staff in recognizing all the people and organizations that assisted the staff of Waccamaw NWR.

U.S. Representative Henry Brown thanked the Service for their work, and former State Senator Arthur Ravenel who was the Master of Ceremonies thanked the Winyah Bay Task Force for their vision in getting the refuge started. Acting Regional Director Cindy Dohner recognized long-term partners like The Nature Conservancy, The Historic Ricefields Association, and Director Sam Hamilton for his actions which led to the refuge's establishment in 1997. Refuge Manager Craig Sasser thanked everyone involved in the new Environmental Education Center, including the SEWEE Association and several foundations and key individuals. In the end, two essential things became clear. Waccamaw NWR has grown by leaps and bounds in a short period of time, and it takes a cadre of dedicated individuals working together to establish, develop, and maintain a refuge like Waccamaw NWR. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Ray Paterra, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina



Samuel Patterson ties for second place. Photo by Tricia Lynch, FWS.

Sewee Center brings families together for a day of fishing

Kiara Lemons threw back the rod and made her cast. However, the large worm didn't hit the water but instead, got stuck on her little sister's pants. Two-year-old Aaliyah freaked out! It was a matter of seconds to get the hooked worm out of her pants and into the water and, put the small rod into Aaliyah's hands. A few minutes later, Aaliyah caught a catfish! This time, it was a different type of excitement as her mom reeled her line in. And so the day went – a lot of fish and a lot of fun. Rods were given as prizes to three children who caught the most fish. Caitlyn Fleming took first place with six fish, followed by Nathan Boatwright and Samuel Patterson who each had four catfish.

Twenty-one children and their families met at the Sewee Center on October 21, to spend the day fishing in the Sewee Pond. The event was sponsored by Family Connection of South Carolina, an organization founded in 1989 by parents who have children with disabilities and special needs. This is the third year that FCSC has partnered with the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center to provide the family fishing event. East Cooper Fishing Club of Mount Pleasant provided the children with rods, tackle, and bait. FCSC received gift certificates from Wal-Mart for the hot dog lunch. Family Connection staff and volunteer parents organize the event to give families the opportunity to enjoy an outdoor activity not readily available to parents of children with disabilities and special needs.



Antrix and Tyrell McCray catch a bucket of catfish. Photo by Tricia Lynch, FWS.

Submitted by Tricia Lynch, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina



Audrey Peterman (middle), an environmental consultant and public lands activist spoke at a recent brown bag lunch. FWS employees Alisha King (l) and Sharon Fuller (r) helped staff exhibits. FWS Photo.

Regional Office hosts brown bag event to promote diversity on our public lands

While exploring and discovering our refuges and other natural areas, what do you observe about the other visitors? What is their ethnic background? What age class do they represent? Are they as diverse as the habitats that surround them? Unfortunately research shows there is less participation in outdoor activities from minorities and our younger generation. So what does this mean for the future of these natural areas that we manage and love? What can be done in our local communities to increase awareness and support for our beautiful wildlands?

On Wednesday, July 22, the Regional Office Visitor Services team invited Audrey Peterman, an environmental consultant and public lands activist to come speak with our regional office staff. Audrey and her husband Frank are co-founders of Earthwise Productions, whose mission is to increase awareness and involvement in safeguarding our environment, particularly among under-represented segments of America's culturally diverse population. Audrey enlightened us on some of the wonderful natural areas they have seen on their travels and what they are doing to diversify outdoor participation on our public lands. The event was a great success in which forty employees attended and participated in the open question-answer session.

The program also provided a great opportunity to discuss the Breaking the Color Barrier in the Great American Outdoors conference which convened in Atlanta in late September. The Peterman's were co-producers of the conference and the Service was a sponsor. The Service had representatives from Region's 2, 4, 5, and 9 who participated in the conference. It was a great networking opportunity in which most who attended received a considerable amount of contacts from local, non-profit, state, and federal conservation organizations. One of the most exciting accomplishments for the Service was receiving the Inaugural Outstanding Conservation Award for our continued support and participation in the conference. Several Service members will continue to be involved in conference working groups.

Submitted by Sharon Fuller, Visitor Services, Atlanta, Georgia



FWS employees prepare to provide information and answer questions from conference attendees. During the conference the booths received around 350 visits from students and professionals. FWS Photo.



The mule cart rides were a great hit. Photo by Andrea Dunstan, FWS.

Noxubee hosts Family Fun Day

Family Fun Day, Noxubee's National Wildlife Refuge Week event, was better than ever this year. With over 500 visitors attending and over 25 different booths, activities, demonstrations and crafts, the day was fun for all. All of the refuge staff participated in the day in one capacity or another whether presenting, teaching, instructing, setting up or tearing down. Visitors came from as far away as Tupelo and Birmingham.

The presenters included the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians demonstrating rabbit stick throwing, the Corps of Engineers with water safety information, the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science with endangered species, Private John Allen National Fish Hatchery with an aquarium of native fish and hand-outs, the Mississippi Extension Service with shooting safety and a pellet gun booth, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks provided their laser shot system, and several departments of Mississippi State University were represented. A neighbor even showed up with his mule cart. Everyone had a great day!



The children enjoyed seeing native fish of many types in the aquarium from Private John Allen NFH. Photo by Andrea Dunstan, FWS.

Submitted by Andrea Dunstan, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, Brooksville, Mississippi



Lonesome flamingo at Culebra National Wildlife Refuge. FWS Photo.

Puerto Ricans give wings to their wild side and high fives to volunteers

From the western to the eastern refuges of the island, we gave wings to the wild side and high fives to our volunteers. The National Wildlife Refuge Week celebration in the Caribbean started at Vieques National Wildlife Refuge with a 7 a.m. bird walk through subtropical dry forest led by José Salguero, a member of the Puerto Rican Ornithological Society (SOPI). Bananaquits, Yellow Warblers, Common Moorhen and Spotted Sandpipers were just a few of our feathered friends spotted during the walk.

By mid-week, it was time to thank our volunteers. For the past years, a group of volunteers at Vieques NWR known as TICATOVE have helped monitor sea turtles and have assisted in other projects. To express our appreciation, the Vieques staff organized a dinner and celebrated their outstanding

accomplishments.

At Cabo Rojo NWR, the refuge's staff and a Boy Scout troop removed exotic grass to improve habitat area for the an endemic grass called *Aristida chasease*. This grass is only found at Cabo Rojo NWR and Laguna Cartagena NWR.

The National Wildlife Refuge Week celebration culminated at Culebra NWR with a bird walk along Laguna Flamenco, led by Verónica Méndez, a member of SOPI. The highlight of the walk was viewing a lonesome flamingo. For years, flamingos haven't visited the area; but, since early this year, a lonely flamingo has been enjoying the refuge. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

By Gisella Burgos, Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Boqueron, Puerto Rico

Diversity training offered during NWR town hall meeting

On October 6, Greg McGinty and Shari Brewer of our Diversity and Civil Rights Office (DCR) conducted diversity training for more than 70 National Wildlife Refuge managers during a refuge town hall meeting. The meeting was conducted at scenic Big Branch Marsh NWR located on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana.



Refuge employees in team building exercise, The Human Knot. Photo by Garry Tucker, FWS.

The training included a presentation and facilitated discussion on harassment and discrimination in the workplace, which raised awareness of the behaviors that lead to a hostile work environment and the outlined employee responsibilities in its prevention. Greg and Shari also presented an overview of the DOI's CORE PLUS Program and an overview of the services provided by the DCR office. The employees also participated in activities to highlight diversity awareness and team-building.

"The DCR is much more than a complaints processing division," explains Greg McGinty. "We also offer diversity training, coordinate special emphasis programs, and conduct Service outreach and recruitment efforts."

Many participants shared that the training was not only an interesting and informative way to complete their required annual diversity training, but it also provided valuable resources for dealing with difficult situations in the workplace.



Refuge employees in team building exercise, The Human Knot. Photo by Garry Tucker, FWS.

If interested in having DCR staff conduct diversity training, please contact Greg at 404- 679-7148 or Shari at 404 679-7080. Also visit DCR's intranet page for diversity training information and options.

Submitted by Shari Brewer, Diversity and Civil Rights, Atlanta, Georgia

Celebrating National Hispanic Heritage Month

During October, the DCR Office sponsored several activities for National Hispanic Heritage Month 2009. Acquanetta Reese, currently on a detail to DCR from Ecological Services, coordinated the activities, with the assistance of Greg McGinty, Shari Brewer, and Marion Campbell. The activities included e-mails to employees consisting of Hispanic facts, as well as trivia questions for employees to answer. The trivia questions sparked an overwhelming response within the Region. Congratulations to the six trivia question winners: Rebecca Elliott Roca, Charleston, South Carolina; Stacey Pieters and Aaron Valenta, Atlanta, Georgia; Matthew Harwell, Boynton Beach, Florida; Anthony Ford, Daphne, Alabama; Jaclyn Zelko, Warm Springs, Georgia; and Sophia McBride, Jacksonville, Florida.



Participants sample delicious Hispanic dishes. Photo by Tom MacKenzie, FWS.



Essay Contest winners: Ruth Benson and Betty Jarous. Photo by Tom MacKenzie, FWS.

In addition, DCR sponsored a Lunch and Learn video presentation on "Challenging Hispanic Stereotypes: Arturo Madrid." As employees watched the documentary, they also partaked in the sampling of authentic foods, drinks, and even candy! Employees were asked to present an essay in 50 words or less on what this year's theme "Embracing the Fierce Urgency of Now" meant to them. There were two winners of the contest: Betty Jarous, branch chief of Realty; and Ruth Benson, Refuges' Assistant.

If you are interested in viewing the documentary, please contact Greg McGinty at (404) 679-7148 or Acquanetta Reese at (404) 679-4197.

Submitted by Acquanetta Reese, Diversity and Civil Rights, Atlanta, Georgia

Wildfest 2009

Wildfest 2009 marked the end of National Wildlife Refuge Week at Alligator River and Pea Island NWRs. This event geared towards children from pre-school to 12 years old brings together numerous partners to teach children about wildlife and the wild lands around them. Although the damp, wet weather and the opening day of hunting season were instrumental in keeping many families from attending, more than 100 children with adults in tow passed through the various stations to participate in fun and educational activities. Some came as far as an hour away to "Go Wild at Wildfest!" Children were given a passport when they arrived. After completing an activity at a station, the child's passport was stamped. Before leaving for the day, a completed passport was exchanged for a goodie bag. Goodies were donated from various organizations and businesses in the area.



The "critters" are always a hit!! Photo by Bonnie Strawser, FWS.

The featured guests were the live reptiles and amphibians provided by the North Carolina Museum of Natural History. Other critters represented included sea turtles, black bears,



Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society Acting President Stanley Oliver coaches a youngster on surfcasting. Photo by Bonnie Strawser, FWS.

red wolves, and sharks. In addition to learning about wildlife, the children were able to act like an animal in the Wildlife Olympics. They also could drown a rubber fish with paint and place it on a paper to make a fish print. At the shark table, children were given a shark tooth, while another table provided an opportunity to make a pine cone bird feeder.

Outside, they could learn about wildlife conservation at the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's Sensory Safari Trailer. Older children could try their hand at surf casting while younger children could step inside and "Go Fish." While a D.J. played music in the background, many children were entertained by the costumed critters making their way around the crowd. Refreshments were provided by the Manteo Middle School's A.V.I.D. members who were raising funds for college visits. Even with the less-than-usual turn-out, the participants and exhibitors had a great day. Many were quick to ask when next year's Wildfest would be and remarked that they will be back.

Submitted by Cindy Heffley, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Manteo, North Carolina

Regional Office's Migratory Bird Team hosts successful national Migratory Bird coordination meeting

In September, The Service's leading migratory bird conservationists met in a "gathering of the minds" when the Southeast Regional Office Migratory Bird Division hosted the National Migratory Bird Coordinators Meeting in Atlanta. The meeting is hosted by a different region every year so the Region 4 showed our "Southern Hospitality" to the 64 participants who attended. The meeting featured break-out sessions for migratory bird chiefs, as well as game, non-game and permit branches which allowed the opportunity for discussion amongst their program areas. Important topics included Climate Change, Land Conservation Cooperative's (LCC's), Joint Ventures, Urban Bird Treaties, finalizing the proposed 2009 list of Birds of Management Concern, funding, and several other administrative and program specific concerns.

An inspirational opening session on the importance of communication and working better together and with the public by Kirk Weisler set the tone for this productive and successful annual meeting. This meeting also provided a great opportunity to develop a format for how the national Migratory Bird Program will coordinate among regions and consistently begin issuing the new eagle take and eagle nest take permits authorized by new regulations that become effective November 10, 2009.

In addition to a productive meeting, the participants were able to enjoy a couple of great outdoor experiences. The planning team organized a live raptor program by Scott and Carol McCorkle with the Avian Reconditioning Center in Apopka, Florida, to educate attendees about techniques used in training live birds for educational programs. An early morning birding trip to nearby historic Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park led by Region 4's own expert birder Dean Demarest offered a chance to hear and see early migrants, as well as common local species which are uncommon to visitors from other regions!

The meeting provided a great occasion to address the future in Migratory Bird Conservation and allowed time to begin preparing for the new fiscal year and new challenges it may bring. As quoted by David Viker, Region 4 chief of the Migratory Bird Division, during his welcome introduction, "From the Appalachians to the Brooks Range and from the southern pine savannas to the northern coniferous forests, the landscapes we are entrusted to conserve are connected by annual cycles of migratory birds. Our hope is that such connectivity serves as the principle motivation behind our need to "connect" and coloring our efforts to improve as a single, coordinated, national program."

That and more was accomplished during this productive, enjoyable, and memorable week! As the planning team looks ahead to attend the meeting next year, just know they are already thinking on ideas to host another triumphant meeting that is only nine years away!

Submitted by Sharon Fuller, Migratory Birds, Atlanta, Georgia

Wild Things 2009 at Southeast Louisiana Refuges

A sparkling fall day greeted visitors to the twelfth annual Wild Things festival Oct. 17, at the Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex in Lacombe, Louisiana. A record crowd of over 3,200 people enjoyed exciting exhibits, live animals, canoe and pontoon boat tours, and more. And, it was all free! Food and drink sales benefited the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges, who covered entertainment costs, as well as promotional costs to get the word out about this celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week.



Visitors enjoy the Youth Wildlife Art Show at Wild Things. Photo by Diane Barth, FWS.

Events and attractions were spread around the 110-acre Complex headquarters site, so the hayride shuttle provided a fun way to get around and see the sights, with stops at the main parking area, the new Southeast Louisiana Refuges Visitor Center, the boat launch, and the casting pond, where dozens of youngsters aimed for floating buoys and prizes. Four bands kept the scene humming, with a second stage at the bayou added this year to entertain those waiting for pontoon and canoe tours. New carpeted display panels, secured through a Friends and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, made for a snazzily-mounted Youth Wildlife Art Show. The art show was jammed with over 325 entries, and whole families came to see their youngster's art. A record 34 guest exhibitors were on hand representing many local and national conservation and wildlife organizations, and over 75 volunteers helped to make the big day a success. Quote of the day, from a visitor: "I've been here all day, and I've only seen one kid texting on a cell phone!" More photos at [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Byron Fortier, Southeast Louisiana Refuges Complex, Lacombe, Louisiana



Big Sit participants watch refuge bear. Photo by Cindy Heffley, FWS.

Alligator River vs. Pea Island at the Big Sit

Staff and volunteers at Pea Island and Alligator River NWRs enjoy having two very different refuges to be a part of on a day-to-day basis. On the second Sunday of October, however, a group of volunteers, and sometimes staff, at each refuge find themselves competing - hoping to out-do each other during the Big Sit event. In a competition to see or hear the most number of species of birds in a 24-hour period while sitting in one place, many people would wonder how competitive participants could possibly be. Most of these competitors are avid birders, while some are just interested in socializing with others on a Sunday. But thanks to cell phones, the competition becomes quite evident as the hours pass by, and each team calls the other for updates on species recorded.

Since Pea Island is on the coast of North Carolina and midway on the Atlantic Flyway, the number of species recorded during Big Sit events has reached into the top ten for the country. Alligator River is further inland and doesn't have the expansive number of bird species. Most years a majority of volunteers gather at Pea Island for the Big Sit, while not as many sign up for slots at Alligator River. (Everyone wants to be on the "winning" team!) For some reason, this year more showed up at Alligator River! The weather was a bit raw and wet. Perhaps people realized that, although the Big Sit is a birding event, Alligator River participants are sure to see a lot more than birds.

This year was no exception. Although at least three bald eagles and a wide variety of raptors and other birds were spotted, the real treat was the large, tagged black bear that meandered down the side of the field and right past participants. Fortunately, the viewing platform is a stake-body truck which raises everyone four feet off the ground. The bear was so close that its breathing could be heard! It stopped once in awhile and then continued on its way. This was one of at least seven different bears spotted during the Big Sit. So, even though only 36 species of birds were recorded for the event at Alligator River this year compared to 67 species at Pea Island, it proved to be a great day for observing wildlife. They say if you are patient and sit long enough, wildlife will come to you. The Big Sit is an example of how to do just that.

Submitted by Cindy Heffley, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Manteo, North Carolina

Modeling Godfrey's butterwort habitat



Probability surface model for the Godfrey's butterwort. The red and orange areas show areas with the highest probability of occurrence based on the model parameters. Created by Paul A. Lang, FWS.

The Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office recently completed its initial draft of a probability distribution model for the threatened carnivorous plant Godfrey's butterwort. The probability distribution model was developed to help identify new areas, throughout the species known range, where it was most likely to occur. The model was based on habitat and feature associations. Field Office staff used known point locations for the plant to identify the features within the following layers: soils, wetlands, land cover, elevation, and slope. Frequency distributions were generated for the features within each layer in order to calculate the probability of occurrence for each feature within each layer. Probability layers were generated for each layer and an overlay analysis was conducted to produce an overall probability surface for the likelihood of occurrence of the plant.



Godfrey's butterwort. Photo by Vivian Negron-Ortiz, FWS

Submitted by Paul Lang, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office

National Wildlife Refuge Week Celebration in the Regional Office



Employees enjoy cake in celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week. Photo by Jennifer Strickland, FWS.

On Tuesday, October 13, 2009, the Regional Office's Refuges, Visitor Services, and Migratory Bird teams hosted an eventful celebration for National Wildlife Refuge Week. Held in the Regional Office's front lobby, about 60 visitors had an opportunity to discover what refuges the Service has in the Southeast, learn tips to identify common animals of Georgia, make animal tracks, and view the 2009 Junior Duck Stamp artwork. The location of the event attracted Service employees and patients at a children's health center that is located on the first floor of the building. Families enjoyed learning about the many benefits to going outside and about our "Let's Go Outside" initiative.


The celebration concluded with cake and the opportunity for employees to sit back and view "America's Wildest Places" videos and discuss experiences on refuges with others.



Employees view artwork from the 2009 Junior Duck Stamp Contest. Learn more about National Wildlife Refuges. Photo by Tom MacKenzie, FWS.

Submitted by Sharon Fuller, Visitor Services, Atlanta, Georgia

Friends Group --



Save The Date!
April 9 -11, 2010
2010 Regional Friends Group Conference

The Conference will be in Crystal River, Florida, hosted by the Friends of the Chassahowitzka NWR Complex. Planning is already well under way, but we could use your help to make the conference the best it can be! If you are planning on attending the conference, please visit:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=YrYFuCL_2fAZSlm7G2bQdmhg_3d_3d

and take the brief "Specialty Sessions" survey. The survey results will be used to ensure the Conference sessions meet your needs! Be on the lookout for registration packages to be mailed in early December. Prompt replies will be appreciated.

If you have any questions please email or call [Stacy Armitage](mailto:stacy@chassahowitzka.com) (404/679-7178) or [Lace Blue-McLean](mailto:lance@chassahowitzka.com) (352-201-0149).

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Hats Off -



Amanda Patrick accepts the 2009 Excellence in Environmental Education Award for an Outstanding Individual from Jen Adler. Photo by Deb Spillman, KAAE board member.

Amanda Patrick wins state and national environmental education awards

Amanda Patrick, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery's environmental education and outreach specialist, received the 2009 Excellence in Environmental Education Award for an Outstanding Individual from the Kentucky Association for Environmental Education (KAAE). The award, presented annually to the person who exemplifies the highest standards in environmental education, was presented to Amanda at the 2009 KAAE Conference on Saturday, September 19, 2009, at General Butler State Resort Park in Carrollton, Kentucky. Jen Adler, the 2009 KAAE Conference Chair, nominated Amanda for the award.

Amanda also was honored as the 2009 WOW! – Wonders of Wetlands Facilitator of the Year by Environmental Concern, Inc., an organization located in St Michael, Maryland. WOW!, which has been called "the most comprehensive introduction to wetland issues and definitions" by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), includes a network of trained facilitators from across

the United States.

"I love helping people and doing the work that I do," says Amanda. These awards are humbling because they remind me of the people I serve - - the visitors, organizations, colleagues, supervisors, and others who are the reason I'm here doing what I love to do."

Amanda has more than 13 years of experience in outdoor-related programming. She has worked three years with the Service and 10 years with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. She also has worked either in a paid or volunteer capacity with Kentuckiana and Wilderness Road Girl Scouts Councils, 4-H, Boy Scouts of America, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and others.

Submitted by James Gray, Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery, Jamestown, Kentucky

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 4 -- 2008 Highlights

Since 1984, when the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation was first created by an act of Congress, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has been the Foundation's lead federal agency partner. Since its inception, the Foundation has awarded more than 10,000 grants in all 50 states and more than 50 countries, and invested more than \$1.5 billion in direct grants and partner match in conservation. Cooperative conservation involving multiple partners, from private landowners to community leaders to students, has remained a key priority for the partnership. Funds from FWS have supported conservation efforts focusing on at-risk species, habitat enhancement, community-based stewardship and education.



2008 Foundation Grants to Region 4 -- In Region 4 in 2008, the Foundation awarded 85 grants, investing \$8,282,694 in federal funds and \$2,922,608 in non-federal funds, matched by \$43,359,233 from grantees, for a total investment of \$54,564,535.

Region 4 Refuges and other divisions received 12 awards directly from the Foundation, representing \$734,192 in federal and private funds for priority projects.

Growing Funds for Conservation

The Foundation raises funds to augment its federal appropriations in a number of ways, including corporate and agency partnerships. As with our other grant programs, these funds are available for projects that benefit the Service's mission. Examples of funds with relevance to Region 4 include:

- \$2.7 million for the *Acres for America* program, in partnership with Wal-Mart, for land acquisition;
- \$1.5 million for *Shell Marine Habitat Program* for projects benefitting the Gulf of Mexico;
- \$1.14 million for the Southern Company *Power of Flight (birds), Longleaf Legacy, and Five Star Community-Based Wetlands Restoration* programs;
- \$800,000 for ConocoPhillips *Spirit of Conservation Fund* to benefit migratory birds;
- About \$900,000 for the *Pinellas County Environmental Fund (Tampa Bay)*.

NFWF's New Strategic Plan Complements R4 Priorities

The Foundation's new, focused, outcome-based approach to conservation investing enhances our ability to support R4 priorities. Through Keystone Initiatives, the Foundation will increase investments in a limited number of objectives, seeking improved progress toward measureable conservation outcomes.

Southeastern grasslands (including longleaf pine forests), American Oystercatcher, Red Knot, seabirds, corals, oysters, sea turtles, and river herring are some of the R4/NFWF shared priorities that will benefit from this approach. Visit the NFWF.org website to see draft business plans for these species.

2008 Grants Directly to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 4 Four awards were made from the NFWF National Wildlife Refuge Friends Group to R4 Refuges:

- \$5,000 to the Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc., in Louisiana to promote membership;
- \$4,425 to the Friends of Mackay Island, Inc, in North Carolina for K-6th grade environmental education;
- \$5,000 to the Friends of Clark's River NWR in Kentucky for students to prepare scrapbooks about their experiences on the Refuge;
- \$5,000 to the Supporters of St. Vincent NWR, Inc., in Florida to promote membership.

Two awards were made through the NFWF Nature of Learning program to R4 Refuges:

- \$8,600 to the Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc., in Louisiana for environmental education to 7th-8th graders;
- \$9,660 to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association in Florida for field research experience for high school students.

Other awards to the FWS include:

- \$137,000 to the Cahaba River NWR for longleaf pine restoration on 325 acres through the NFWF

partnership with Southern Company for the Longleaf Legacy program;

- \$128,485 to the USFWS in North Carolina to eradicate beach vitex at about 200 sites on the North Carolina coast;
- \$50,000 to the USFWS Region 3 to support regional infrastructure of Fish Habitat Partnerships that includes Alabama;

- \$54,000 to the Alligator River NWR to help control the spread of phragmites in the

Roanoke-Tar-Nuese-Cape- Fear Ecosystem;

- \$82,000 to the USFWS in Florida to survey and protect loggerhead sea turtle nests; and
- \$245,022 to the USFWS to develop a population-based framework for the reintroduction of the eastern flock of migratory Whooping Cranes.

2008 NFWF Grants Supporting the R4 Mission – Examples

- \$8,743 to Southeastern Wildlife Conservation Group for **Alabama beach mouse** habitat restoration on **Bon Secur NWR**;
- \$9,995 to the University of Puerto Rico for education projects involving coral reef conservation on **Cabo Rojo NWR**;
- \$41,016 to Conservation Fisheries to reestablish **rare stream fishes** in the southeast. Federal funds for this project came to NFWF through a coop agreement with R4 Ecological Services;
- \$68,250 to Operation Migration to support reintroduction of the eastern flock of migratory **Whooping**

Crane; awarded through the NFWF partnership with Southern Company for the Power of Flight program;

- \$137,000 to Milliken Forestry Company to support Joel Casto's efforts to increase **Red-cockaded Woodpecker** translocations from the Apalachicola forest to other southeastern populations; awarded

through the NFWF partnership with Southern Company for the Power of Flight program;

- \$194,350 to American Forest Foundation for a **gopher tortoise** habitat credit bank;
- \$500,000 to The Nature Conservancy to acquire 870 acres of longleaf habitat for the **Okefenokee NWR**, funded through the NFWF partnership with Southern Company for the Longleaf Legacy program; and
- \$1,000,000 to Georgia Department of Natural Resources to help acquire 8,430 acres of longleaf pine and wetlands habitats on the former International Paper Experimental Forest in the SW part of state, with significant benefits to **gopher tortoise**, **Red-cockaded Woodpecker**, and other species.

For additional information on the Foundation's partnership with R4 and grant opportunities, please contact Mike Slattery at Mike.Slattery@nfwf.org or Suzanne Sessine at Suzanne.Sessine@nfwf.org , or visit www.nfwf.org.

Fact Sheet courtesy of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

I Gave '8' --



Jeff Howe, a biologist with the South Florida Ecological Services Office, picks up trash from Round Island Beach. Photo by Sandy Cardenas, FWS.

Community Corps cleans Round Island Beach

Thirteen staffers from the South Florida Ecological Services Office (SFESO) could boast: "We gave eight!" after they and about six of their family members, plus John Galvez, Project Leader, South Florida Fisheries Resource Office volunteered to pick up trash along a south Florida beach Sept. 19, in conjunction with the Ocean Conservancy's annual Coastal Cleanup Day.

The staffers' effort was the first of a new initiative at the SFESO called Community Corps, where volunteers perform community service activities as official representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Our Community Corps hit the beach early that morning. It was hot and humid. We hauled a lot of trash," said Sandy Cardenas, office automation assistant. "Round Island Beach is a little cleaner today because of our efforts. It was our first community project since our group, including Sandra Sneckenberger, Steve Traxler, Miles Meyer, and me, came up with the idea of a Community Corps during a leadership training class in March."

The Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup is a year-round program designed to keep the ocean and waterways free from trash and safer for people and wildlife. Its flagship event -- held on the third Saturday of every

September -- is among the largest single-day volunteer efforts of its kind.

"There was a great turn-out -- not only from our office, but from the community as well," said Sandra. "It was nice to see our staff members out there with their kids making a difference by cleaning up the environment."

SFESO staffers who participated in the cleanup included:

- Dave Bender
- Andy Caron
- Sandy Cardenas
- George Dennis
- Winston Hobgood
- Jeff Howe
- Chuck Kelso
- LeeAnn Kelso
- Marilyn Knight
- Patrick Pitts
- Liberta Scotto
- Sandra Sneckenberger
- Jane Tutton



From left, Joe Cardenas, LeeAnn Kelso, Sandra Sneckenberger, Marilyn Knight, John Galvez, Patrick Pitts and Andy Caron relax after removing several bags of trash from Round Island Beach. Photo by Sandy Cardenas, FWS.

Submitted by Ken Warren, South Florida Ecological Services Field Office, Vero Beach, Florida



Emma Blount explores a creek.
Photo by Theresa Blount.

I gave two hours and received tenfold in return

My brother's wedding facilitated the congregation of my extended family in a cabin in the North Carolina mountains this summer. The rains were non-stop. After two days of indoor sitting, cabin fever crept in. It did not take much prompting to get my son, two nieces, and two nephews (ages 4 to 8) to venture outside, weather be-darned! A brief stop on the hill-side rope swing, a dash through the open grassy field, a quick look at the zip-line (not so safe from young ones) lead us to the mountain creek. With the promise of five dollars to whoever finds the coolest object, the search was on. I heard the words: "look Aunt Patty at what I found," and "Mommy, what is this?" many times. We collected acorns, rocks, crayfish, a turtle shell, bones from something, leaves, saw fungi and poison ivy, bugs, and so on.

I spent two hours with these kids, but received something more in return. I received hope. Hope that with small investments of time spent taking children outside, that this generation of children will gladly carry the torch to assist the Service in achieving its mission. Not necessarily as biologists, but as voters and citizens who might remember those two fun hours in the woods long ago. They might understand the importance of protecting special areas so their children might ring out with the same tones of laughter and excitement as they did that one rainy summer day. Only my son asked for the five dollar payment!

Submitted by Patty Kelly, Panama City, Florida, Ecological Services Field Office



Matthew Blount and Ryan Purrell in the woods. Photo by Theresa Blount.



Paula Sisson (middle) with several of the visitors at the Haulover Canal manatee viewing platform on Merritt Island NWR. Photo courtesy of Paula Sisson.

Educating people about gentle giants

Paula Sisson, a fish and wildlife biologist, with the North Florida Ecological Services Field Office in Jacksonville visited Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge recently to volunteer as an interpreter on the manatee Haulover Canal viewing platform.

Manatees congregate in large numbers on Canal's north side in warmer months providing a wonderful opportunity for public observation. The platform is a great place to catch sight of them and to learn more about these gentle giants.

Although temperatures were high, many visitors showed up to watch the 1,200-pound endangered species lumber about in the cool waters.

At one point, there were 16 manatees counted including three juveniles.

While many visitors were frequent guests of the observation deck, many asked interesting questions giving Paula the opportunity to speak about the behavioral, physical, and social aspects of the animals, as well as human-related threats.

Submitted by Chuck Underwood, Jacksonville, Florida Ecological Services Field Office

Photo Album --

YCC students assist Panama City Ecological Services Field Office -- more photos



Chance Hanna admires a young Gulf sturgeon. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.



Trevor Benton measuring water quality on the Apalachicola River. Photo by Frank Parauka, FWS.

Catching smiles and reaching for rainbows with fall fishing derbies -- more photos



A Reaching for Rainbows participant claps for her fellow fishing derby friends as each participant is called up by name to be awarded their medalion and t-shirt. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.



Although his catch was small, this participant in the Catch a Smile Senior Derby was all smiles. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.



A large crowd gathered for the senior's cook-out and door prize drawing. Photo by Amanda Patrick,



A participant poses with his catch of the day at the Reaching for Rainbows Fishing Derby. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS.



Children lined the hatchery stream, eager to try their hand at catching a few rainbows in the gurgling stream below. Photo by Amanda Patrick, FWS

Tree talk -- more photos



Supervisory Forester Jeff Denman of White River NWR pointing out forest ecology and habitat issues to Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and Corps of Engineers, Mobile District staffs. Photo by John Watkins, FWS.



Administrative Forester Eric Johnson of Cache River NWR, Randy Wilson of Jackson, MS Migratory Birds office, and Forester Donald Lacasio of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries lead field discussion of management options of restored forest on former agricultural field. Photo by John Watkins, FWS.

Waccamaw hosts grand opening of Environmental Education Center -- more photos



Refuge Manager Craig Sasser and his son Marshal release a red-tailed hawk. Photo by Ray Paterra, FWS.



SEWEE Association Executive Director Karen Beshears presenting SEWEE Association President Ginny Prevost with a limited edition print. Manager Craig Sasser assists with the presentation. Photo by Ray Paterra, FWS.

Help the Hooch Clean-up and Watershed Festival -- more photos



Sandra Nipper and her son pick up trash from the bank of the Chattahoochee River. FWS Photo.



Volunteers who participated in the Help the Hooch Clean-up. FWS Photo.

Puerto Ricans give wings to their wild side and high fives to volunteers -- more photos



Birders at Culebra National Wildlife Refuge. FWS Photo.



Fossils at Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. FWS Photo.



Habitat improvement for the endemic grass at Cabo Rojo National Wildlife Refuge. FWS Photo.



Birders at Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. FWS Photo.

Wild Things 2009 at Southeast Louisiana Refuges -- more photos



The pontoon boat returns from a tour on Bayou Lacombe at Wild Things. Photo by Donna Bush.



The Sarah Boddie Band entertained Wild Things visitors at the Bayou Stage. Photo by Donna Bush.



The Hayride Shuttle transported guests around the Wild Things grounds. Photo by Donna Bush.



Wild Things guests dissecting owl pellets. Photo by Donna Bush

Visitor Services --

Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center celebrates 110 years



Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center receives 2009 National Environmental Management Award. L to R: Bill Bouthiller, Chad Shirey, Rosta Plant, Haile Macurdy, Carlos Echevarria, Joe Starinchak from Fisheries in Arlington, Virginia; Jaci Zelko, Vince Mudrak, Cindy Williams from Fisheries in Atlanta, Georgia. FWS Photo.

A beautiful, sunny, but somewhat hot, September day greeted visitors to the Open House held September 26, for Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery. The celebration honored the hatchery's 110th year of operation. An estimated 250 to 300 visitors were able to visit and discuss with the staff and its partners the many services and fisheries programs of the Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center. The Friends of the Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery also welcomed sponsors, showcased their activities, and provided refreshments. Radio Station Mountain 94.5 broadcasted the event.

Invited guests included Bill Stembridge, Senator Saxby Chambliss's Regional Representative; Joe Starinchak, Outreach Coordinator for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation in the Service's Washington D.C. office; and Cindy Williams, Fisheries Program Supervisor for the Service's Southeast Region, who made a formal presentation to the Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center. The Environmental Management System Team for the Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center received the National 2009 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Environmental Leadership Award.

In front of the Aquarium, a Welcome Tent and table greeted visitors to the day's events. Other tents featured a coloring contest station where children of all ages could submit a completed endangered species coloring page; the "Name that Mussel" tent featured native mussels with demonstrations and discussions led by Columbus State University (CSU) partner Carson Stringfellow and CSU Student Andy Hartzog. The Lake Sturgeon and Robust Redhorse tent and displays were manned by Hatchery Manager Carlos Echevarria who was available to discuss hatchery programs involving these species.

In the Holding House, visitors saw many pieces of heavy equipment used by Electrician Chad Shirey, who also holds title as one of the Southeast Region's Heavy Equipment Operator Instructors. Chad discussed how each piece of equipment was used in hatchery operations, one of which he helped design and construct to lift heavy loads of fish for pond harvesting. Visitors were also able to view pond seining demonstrations led by Assistant Hatchery Manager Haile Macurdy. Aquarium tours were conducted by Jaci Zelko, hatchery fish biologist.

The Fish Technology Center featured fish related activities involving cryopreservation, genetics, and National Fish Strain Registry work. Hatching systems, dewars holding cryopreserved straws of frozen sperm, microscopes, and computers were used to explain the scientific work of the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center. Fish Technology Center staff people who helped with Open House festivities included Bill Wayman, Bill Bouthillier, Nicole Rankin, and Ashantye Williams.

The Warm Springs Fish Health Center featured fish diagnostic work showcasing the National Wildfish Sampling initiative by which state, private, and federal partners send wild caught fish species for diagnostic review to determine where naturally occurring diseases are being found. The Fish Health Center staff Norm Heil, Brian Hickson, and Devin Chappell discussed their work with Private Industry partners on the Triploid Grass Carp Program where Warm Springs is the national leader for the industry. A variety of equipment was on display and was used for discussion to answer the general public's questions.

Friends of Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery, a.k.a. F.I.S.H. (Friends in Support of Hatchery), set up the Friends room located on north end of Aquarium, to provide brunch foods for the t-shirt sponsors of Kids Fish for Fun, as well as for the many invited guests. F.I.S.H. Board Members including President Ray Schmeck, Treasurer Mike Plant, Editor/Secretary Frida Powers-Coates, and National Fish Friends representative and Former Regional Director Noreen Clough were on hand to discuss with visitors the need for a 501©3 non-profit to support Regional Fisheries Center initiatives and how the general public benefits by having a formal group solicit membership, raise funds, and secure grants to offer programs which feature conservation, environmental education, and youth related Connecting Kids with Nature activities. The F.I.S.H. members took an active role by purchasing radio advertising for the event, providing door prizes and raffle items, as well as providing food and drinks for the event. F.I.S.H. members and volunteers Anastasia Olkhovaya, Cheri Heil, SCA Gary Eddy, Suzanne Wilson and others assisted with Open House activities.

Center Director Vincent Mudrak, Administrative Officer Lawrence Ford, and Park Ranger Rosla Plant assisted in the various aspects of Open House festivities including conducting special guest introductions and tours, setting up for the event, and general behind the scenes activities.

So many fond memories of local residents, who have come to the hatchery through the years to feed the fish, picnic and enjoy the natural beauty and cool stream waters, were again and again expressed to staff. Visitors from California expressed their delight to be able to visit with staff and learn how vital the services offered are similar to those by their federal agency on the West Coast!

Submitted by Rosla Plant, Warm Springs Regional Fish Center, Georgia

Wage Grade Profile --

Toby Price of Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge



Toby Price gears up for another long day as a sawyer on a wildfire in Northeast Washington. Photo by Casey Mefford of Big Oaks NWR.

In early June, Toby Price, a wage-grade equipment operator at Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, traveled to Washington State to serve on the Blue Goose Fire Crew, a Type II Initial Attack hand crew. It is the only Fish and Wildlife hand crew in the country and is devoted to providing quality on-the-job training through task performance. Toby spent a full fire season of three months fighting wildfires in Washington and California.

When the crew was not fire fighting they supported Little Pend Oreille NWR in Colville, Washington, Turnbull NWR in Cheney, Washington, and several national forests. They accomplished many acres of hazard fuel reduction treatments by hand thinning and piling, and they constructed miles of hand line for upcoming prescribed burns.

Toby spent most of the summer sleeping on the ground and often going a week at a time without a shower. While Toby sacrificed many comforts, he learned many new techniques for fighting fires outside of the Southeast in very steep terrain, and he gained valuable leadership skills. Toby served as a sawyer, a line-construction crewmember, a tool-master and a squad boss trainee. Toby was the only wage grade employee on the crew this season, and his service to the Fish and Wildlife Service and to the Southeast Region's fire program is greatly appreciated.

Submitted by John Mason, Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, Hillsboro, Georgia



In Metlaine Falls, WA, Toby Price helps grid the green around a wildfire for potential spots or sleepers. Photo by Bob Pluess of Horizon NWR.

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