



Friends of the
Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys
National Wildlife Refuges

Annual Report to Members
2016-2017

THANK YOU... To the Leadership and Staff of our refuges!

Andrew Gude
Refuge Manager



The Entire
Refuge Staff!!!

Welcome Dan Frisk –
North Florida Complex
Manager

Larry Woodward
Deputy Refuge Mgr.

David Viker
South East Chief

NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
REFUGE

Advocating for Our Refuges and Their Mission

- Provided in-kind support for the Conservation Fund's grant providing \$3 million for conservation easements on adjacent lands
- Worked with manager of the North Florida Refuge Complex and other refuge Friends groups in the Big Bend region on shared goals
- Worked with refuge staff to restrict military flights over the Cedar Keys' waterbird nesting colonies during critical times of the year
- Friends President Maria Sgambati participated in Fly-in Lobbying Day on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC

Advocacy Highlight: The Lukens Tract

The Lukens Tract

- Extraordinary value owing to its natural beauty, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem services, and also its nearness to Cedar Key.
- Friends organization and Friends members acted on several fronts to help ensure unimpeded public access to Lukens.



- We wrote a letter and sponsored field trips, and many members joined with community leaders to act and advocate for public access.
- Outcome still uncertain; take-home message is the strong support for the refuges in the community.





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Google Earth

Getting the Word Out

- Published monthly (or more frequently) e-mail News Briefs to 500 recipients, with timely news and information on the refuges
- Published three issues of the *Ibis*, distributed to (500 email and 50 snail mail); also available to local libraries and refuge visitors
- Maintained the acclaimed Friends website, which averages 1,500-2,000 visits per month
- Managed the popular Friends Facebook page, periodically distributed to nearly 500 followers

Communications Highlight: An Integrated Communications System

An Integrated Communications System



The News Brief, the Ibis, the Website, and the Friends Facebook page together provide real-time and in-depth news and information to a wide range of members and non-members. In 2016, another element, the Neon member communication system was added, greatly increasing our ability to interact with members.



Connecting with the Public

- Operated festival booths in Cedar Key, providing information, consultation, and promotional merchandise about the refuges
- Worked with refuge staff to develop new informational panels for the Tram Ridge trail
- Contributed speakers and financial support to the Cedar Key Library and the Town of Suwannee Tech Center
- Provided volunteers for Seahorse Key open house events
- Maintained and expanded the refuge pollinator garden
- Sponsored a two-day member gathering at the Okefenokee NWR to highlight the Suwannee River ecosystem

- Members led nature walks on the refuges on a twice-monthly basis during the winter season
- Developed brochures and informational materials for free distribution on the refuge and by local chambers of commerce

Connecting with the Public Highlight: New Trails

Highlight: New Trails

Working with Refuge Staff, Friends helped develop new trails in Dixie County and improved the new Tram Ridge trail in the headquarters area, including writing and printing trail guides for the Tram Ridge and River trails, placing benches at rest stops along the Tram Ridge Trail, and producing informational signs.

At the end of this boardwalk you reach the splinters. A sign explains the value of the in-maturing pine forests which once dominated much of the Florida peninsula. A short path then a right turn to the parking area puts you on the trail. To the left of the trail is a small area of scrub-oak dominated by scruboak, a forest consisting of small, twisted oak trees.

If you have time, follow the Tram Ridge Loop Trail, where you will learn more about habitat management for Florida wildlife.



TRAM RIDGE LOOP TRAIL
(2.8 mile loop)

Part of the Tram Ridge Trail follows a historic train road (railroad bed) built to haul lumber to rail by sawmills. Walking to the right at the sign, you begin the trail in pine barwoods where most of the larger trees are slash pines. These fast growing trees have been planted in close rows by timber companies. Historically these areas were dominated by widely-spaced old growth longleaf pine, with scattered slash and cypress pines in wetter sites. Restoration of the longleaf pine forests is ongoing in several parts of the Refuge. In areas like this one, planted trees are severely stressed to recreate the conditions of the past. Pine barwood habitats, and wildlife that live here, are critically dependent on this every two to four years which promote the growth of diverse low-growing plants.

Just beyond a park bench on the right is a small coastal saline filled depression with cypress trees. And a bit further along the trail on the left is a dry sand hill covered with thorny, scrubby-looking plants. This diversity of habitats in close proximity is the reason that the southwest and the Florida peninsula are recognized for their world-class birdwatching. Typical wildlife species found here include Bachman's sparrow, brownie sparrow, gopher tortoise, and fox squirrel.

As you continue on the trail, the pines begin to disappear and transition to a bottomland hardwood forest, then another stop into a cypress dome dominated by bald cypress and black tupelo. Diversity and abundance of plants dramatically increases in the transition zones between these forest types. Some wildlife, such as salamanders, depend solely on these narrow ecotones.

On the very northern portion of the trail, sand live oaks dominate a sandy ridge, creating a study zone that naturally attracts fox. These areas favor oak toad, Cooper's hawk and black bear.

Looking toward the south you come reach the old railroad bed. It runs along the top of a slight, sandy ridge for nearly half of its length. In some broken sections, sitting and firing were needed for the roadbed. These sections created clear and wetter conditions than occurred naturally and interrupted normal water flow. The vegetation near the tram road probably little resembles what occurred there naturally here and elsewhere on the Refuge. Road building and other logging activities have had dramatic and long lasting effects on landscapes and habitats.

Trail guide - Bee Hill, Friends of DeLeon, A Lory Woodard County Refuge Manager
Design - Debbie Wicks, Friends of DeLeon
Map - David Roward, Refuge Friends
www.FriendsofRefuges.org
© 2014 Friends of DeLeon






Little Turkey Island

© 2016 Google

Google Earth

Helping the Refuges Achieve their Mission

- Provided financial support for the annual Cooperators' Lunch, for local conservation-based governmental organizations
- Hosted, organized program, and provided support for the Refuge Open House and Friends Annual Meeting
- Provided a public access wifi network for refuge cooperators
- Helped to maintain refuge trails
- Friends volunteers joined the Great Suwannee River Cleanup in clearing Hurricane Hermine debris from refuge lands
- Developed and placed a new refuge kiosk in Suwannee

Highlight: Brazilian Pepper Removal

For the third year the refuge and the Friends received grant funding and operated a significant volunteer effort to remove exotic vegetation from the refuge and nearby lands.



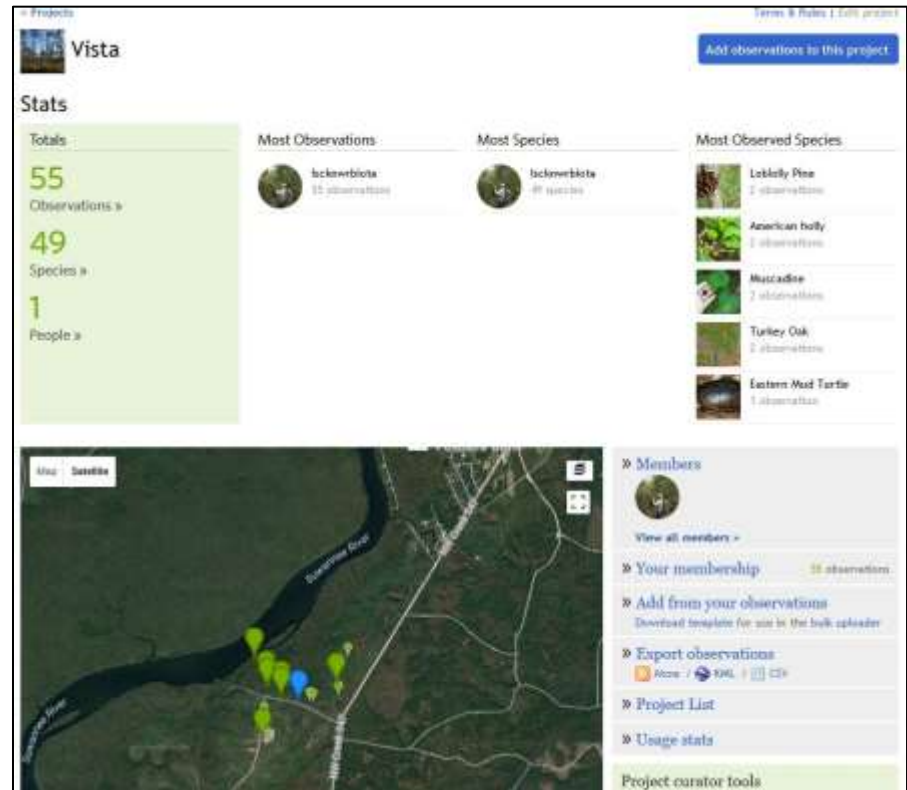
Science

- Served as a sponsor for the first Big Bend Science Symposium, and Friends members actively participated in symposium events
- Participated in financially supported the Cedar Key Horseshoe Crab Citizen Science survey in cooperation with the University of Florida
- Recruited speakers for the Cedar Key Library lecture series to report on research findings of significance to the refuges and their management

Science Highlight: Bioblitzes

Highlight: Bioblitzes

Initiated a series of regular volunteer surveys to document biodiversity on refuge lands undergoing restoration.



Looking to the Future

Highlight: Vista

Began advanced planning for Vista as a potential refuge visitor center to highlight information about land use history, natural history, the heritage of the timber industry, and habitat restoration.



	2016	2015
Cash Receipts	\$10,666	\$9,344
Cash Disbursements	\$7,327	\$5,012
Excess Receipts over Disbursements	\$3,338	\$4,332
Cash at Beginning of Year	\$29,715	\$23,288
Cash Balance	\$33,053	\$29,715

Farewell and Appreciation to Outgoing Board Members



Slate of Board of Directors for 2017

Officers:

President: *Russ Hall*

President Elect: *Bill Dummitt*

Past President: *Maria Sgambati*

Treasurer: *John McPherson*

Secretary: *Ed DeHaan*

Directors:

Libby Cagle (2018)

Peg Hall (2018)

Jim Hoy (new, 2019)

Debbie Jordan (new, 2019)

Dan Kline (new, 2019)

Kit Lane (continuing, 2019)

Doug Maple (new, 2019)

Roger McDaniels (continuing, 2019)

Debbie Meeks (2018)

John Thalacker (continuing, 2019)

Linda Tyson (new, 2019)

Margy VanLandingham (2018)





A tropical beach scene with palm trees and a blue sky. The foreground shows a sandy beach with some driftwood and dry vegetation. The middle ground features several tall palm trees and dense green foliage. The background shows a clear blue sky and a calm sea. The text is overlaid in yellow with a black outline.

Interesting Times

May you live in interesting times!
an ancient Chinese curse

A tropical beach scene with a tall palm tree, blue sky, and ocean waves. The text "Challenges and Opportunities in the Year Ahead" is overlaid in yellow. The background shows a sandy beach with waves, a tall palm tree, and a clear blue sky. The foreground is filled with dry, tangled vegetation and driftwood.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Year Ahead

Challenge: Loss of refuge staff

Lower Suwannee staffing stands at 6, down from 14 a few years ago; the Regional Office has withdrawn salaries of vacant positions in the field

Opportunity: An independent Friends organization can help by –

Increased volunteering (e.g. visitor contact)

Petitioning the Fish and Wildlife Service to fill key positions

Challenge: Changes in the political environment

The Federal government is firmly in the hands of people who believe the nation has too much government

Opportunity: An independent Friends organization can help by –

Mobilizing broad-based community support for the refuges*

Communicating the refuges' regional economic impact

Advocating for the refuges through direct political action

Challenge: Declining financial resources

Refuge operating funds are declining, and support for capital improvements is unlikely to come through appropriations

Opportunity: Vast unspent funds from Deepwater Horizon remain available, and an independent Friends organization can help by –

Mounting a campaign to create the Big Bend Visitor Center

Challenge: Limited land base

Although huge at 50,000 acres, our refuges alone cannot conserve all the region's wildlife populations

Opportunity: Nestled within the largely undeveloped Big Bend Region, an independent Friends organization can help by –

Joining with other citizen-based and non-governmental organizations to form alliances working to promote wildlife conservation on private lands



30.494 -85.800 Degrees



Flc

Challenge: Lack of visibility

Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys lack the star-power of refuges like Ding Darling and Crystal River, and fail to attract needed attention and the resources that come with it

Opportunity: The Friends can help by continuing

To increase memberships and member engagement

To communicate about the refuges to the public

Our work to enhance visitor experiences

And put us on the map...by getting that visitor center

Parting thought:

The responsibilities of ownership





FRIENDS OF THE LOWER SUWANNEE & CEDAR KEYS

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES