

THE IBIS



April 2015, Jay Bushnell, editor

OUR MISSION

is to provide active advocacy and physical support for the successful stewardship of the Refuges.

Advocating

Educating

Volunteering

Funding

Fellowship



President's Message

First and foremost, thank you to Jay Bushnell for leading the effort to publish the IBIS. Because this newsletter is the preferred contact method by some of you, so it remains an important tool in our communications tool box.

Being in contact with one another and spreading the work and values of the Friends, and the many ways each one of us appreciates the Cedar Key and Lower Suwannee NWR's is more important than ever. As more of us participate and add our voices and labor and financial resources to the protection and enhancement of these refuges the more valuable, protected and appreciated they become. Thank you for your support and efforts invested in these incredible places.

Our refuges provide significant direct and indirect economic and social benefits and they are on the front lines of our efforts to protect and improve water quality of the great Suwannee

River, and the Gulf, are home to an incredible diversity of flora and fauna, so you would expect that they would receive adequate Federal support. Sadly, that is often not the case and our refuges have seen a serious reduction in staffing and funding of critical programs. The lack of adequate support for our refuge system was clearly illustrated when a dysfunctional congress forced the shutdown of our national parks and refuge system for 17 days in October 2013, a disgrace I will never forget nor forgive.

Today, it is more important than ever that our Friends group is strong and getting stronger. We are now well over 300 members and growing. Although we cannot and should not assume the day-to-day management of the refuges, we can continue to support the refuge mission and excellent work of our refuge staff and perhaps most importantly, help each other gain a deeper appreciation of our refuges while we enjoy them. One of my goals this year is to expand the reach of the Friends so that the value and appreciation of our refuges continues to grow. We have the tools and opportunity to reach out to those who don't yet understand the values of *their* refuges, reach out to those who simply take for granted these many thousands of acres of wilderness and vast expanses of fresh and Gulf waters, communicate with school children who are waiting for us to pass on the values of stewardship and conservation, and challenge the decision makers and each other to make wise decisions that are larger and longer lasting than ourselves. Please consider how you might reach out to one or more friends or family or neighbors this year and invite them to participate and support the Friends' mission.

Respectfully, your president, Greg Lang

By the numbers:

- 2006-the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys NWRs had 14 refuge staff with a full time manager but no biologist.
- 2015-still no biologist but now have a part time manager and by June we will likely be down to 7 refuge staff.
- 2006-there were 500 National Wildlife Refuges
- Today-we have over 560 refuges
- Proposed funding for refuge system for 2016 is only \$508.2 million which fails to fully fund the system
- Yet for each dollar spent on funding of refuges generates a return of \$4.87
- Do not hesitate to contact our Congressional members about the importance of funding the refuge system.

Friend's Annual Meeting and Refuge's Open House

What started out as a nasty day end up being



pretty nice day. Out going president, Bob Hudson did a masterful job recapping the events of last year. New board members were installed. Then Dr. Coleman Sheehy, III's presentation described the dynamic ecology of our coastal islands. The rain stopped long enough for everyone to enjoy Kenny McCain's yummy chicken, ribs and swamp cabbage. Several friends members complimented the meal with side dishes and desserts. Again, the silent auctions was a success thanks to the hard work by Barbara

Hudson. Equally, important was all the organization and folks who contributed.

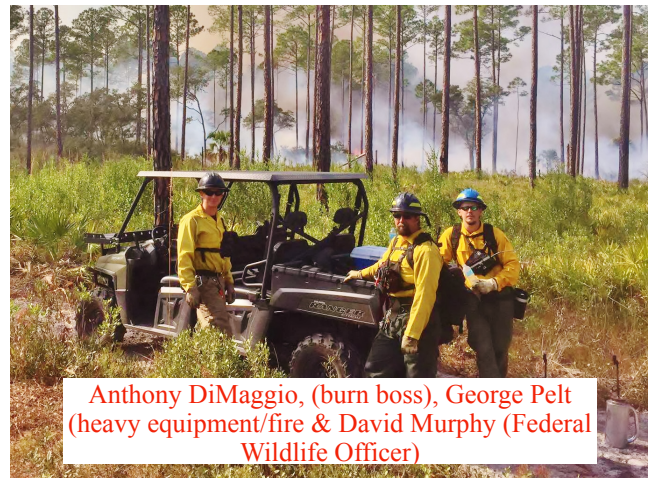
Refuge updates

A new hiking trail is nearing completion

The Refuge is nearing the final stages of completing the foundation of a new hiking trail located adjacent to the existing River Trail. The entire trail is approximately 2.5 miles long and meanders through a diversity of habitats such as cypress dome swamps, bottomland hardwoods, pine flatwoods, and live oak ridges. This trail also follows a historic tram levee that held the rail system from day's gone by. The refuge is in the process of interpreting both the habitats along the trail, management strategies, as well as the rich history that existed on this site. George Pelt (Refuge Heavy Equipment Operator) has taken on the monumental task of marking, constructing, and developing this trail almost single handedly. His passion and dedication to this project are obvious when you walk the trail.

Smoke is in the air (the good kind)

The fire staff has begun a new year of strategically applying fire to the forest habitats in order to improve these valuable ecosystems for critical wildlife species. Favorable weather events have created optimal conditions needed



Anthony DiMaggio, (burn boss), George Pelt (heavy equipment/fire & David Murphy (Federal Wildlife Officer)

for prescribed fire operations allowing the fire team to burn approximately 3,000 acres this season thus far. These operations take a lot of planning, and preparation, as well as hard work in tough environments. We have an outstanding fire crew always eager to use burning to properly manage our natural resources.

Panther Ridge Tract

The refuge has just acquired a two hundred acre parcel of property located along the south side of Shell Mound Road in Levy County. This new tract is a narrow tract that lies between Shell Mound Rd. and the Cedar Key Scrub State Park and stretches from CR345 to existing refuge property known as the Shell Mound Unit.

Nature Coast Middle School

After a semester partnering with Nature Coast Middle School's Wild Things elective, the Refuge provided a boat trip to Seahorse Key. John Lohde, former Friends Board member,



Ranger Pam, and 15 teenagers arrived at the island for history, ecology, and marine science. The most outstanding student was awarded a Jansport backpack with binoculars and field guides by the Refuge. (Picture: John Lohde with his class.)

New sign on Seahorse Key

Check out the new sign on Seahorse Key erected by Deputy Manager, Larry Woodward, and Law Enforcement Officer, David Murphy



and retired Kenny McCain, well not exactly retired.

Noah's Wood + Two Guys + Friends \$\$ =

Suwannee River Benches by John Thalacker

There are now three slightly used, but 'repurposed' wood benches at the very end of the River Trail board walk to enjoy. Contributions of pressure treated wood came from former board member, Jay Bushnell, who retrieved the wood from the river as they came past his home in Fowlers Bluff. That wood is probably from Noah's Ark, ...or so Jay reports. The Two Guys, Jay and Board member John Thalacker spent about 8 hours preparing the wood and constructed the benches on site. Jay points out that this does not count the time salvaging the wood. "They may not be pretty, but at least they're unique" John announced. "It is a perfect place to see the migrating and leaping Gulf Sturgeon." Friends paid \$4 for the decking screws.

Friends and staff efforts this year have included two other benches on the trail as well as seven truck loads of limestone to strengthen the surface and cover emerging roots and cypress knees. For anyone with limited mobility, these



were MAJOR improvements. But the River Trail is not finished.

Ahead are preliminary plans for a kiosk at the end of the earthen trail that will provide shelter and tell, with a pictograph, of the former days when that space was a logging deck for logs flowed down the Suwannee River. More signs to

identify plants and trees and perhaps a trail to an old giant cypress that escaped the loggers saw are also under consideration.

Friends Board and Refuge staff hope you enjoy the additions. Bring a picnic and enjoy the view of the river.

North American Butterfly Association's 4th Annual Butterfly Count in the Refuge

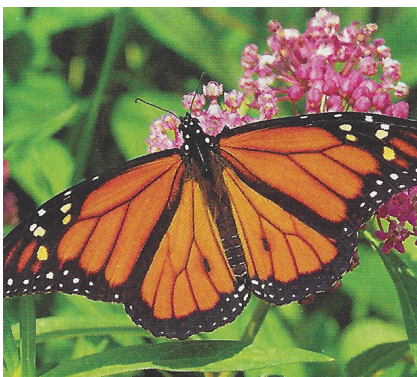
by Donna Thalacker

On Saturday, April 4, Barbara Woodmansee of Gainesville, from the North American



Butterfly Association, led her 4th annual field trip for butterfly enthusiasts through the Refuge. At least one of the visitors came as far away as Tallahassee to join in the butterfly viewing and count.

It was a perfect day for spotting butterflies, and about 24 people joined in the hunt to increase the number of butterflies found in the Refuge. Barbara has been searching the Refuge woods, roads and trails for many years searching for butterflies. She has compiled a list of butterflies seen in the refuge that numbers close to 90! If you would like to see color pictures of butterflies found in the Refuge, please visit www.ceraunus.zenfolio.com and choose the LSNWR gallery.



By the numbers

- It takes 4 generations for Monarch butterflies to complete their migration, amazing!
- Yet there has been a 90% decline in their population in last 20 years
- Due to increased use of GMO crops & use of glyphosate herbicides like Round up=decimation of native milkweed.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service to study the issue for a year to make recommendations.
- Take action contact Congressional representatives and plant native milkweed.

Update Dixie Side Trail Development

by

Debbie Meeks

Refuge forester, Daniel Barrand, mapped out three possible hiking trails off the Salt Creek overlook road. Suwannee residents Debbie Meeks, Richard Herman and Leroy Harmon walked each of them. They believed a 1/3 mile loop near the overlook is probably the most likely, because it does not include a platform or bridge. Their recommendations were sent to Daniel. The loop roads cycling tour brochure is also moving along. As training for their Camino trek, Peg and Russ Hall hiked all four loops with Debbie Meeks. They remarked on the unique features of each loop and look forward to a return walk. Debbie plans to use their observations in the brochure.

Advocacy at the Art festival

By all accounts, this years Art festival was a major success. It truly attracts some talented artist. Kudos to Bev Ringenberg's leadership and the many volunteers who made the festival a successful.

Of course, the festival also provides us a great opportunity to spread

the conservation message of our refuges and the refuge system.



Nature Walks in the Refuge

by Donna Thalacker

We have had a wonderful winter season for walks in the Lower Suwannee NWR! Most walks have been well attended, with up to 9 present. The walks have ranged anywhere from 2 miles to one walk through the deepest part of the refuge, that was close to 9 miles in length. But that was a special walk and only Sally Beveridge and myself attended. Most walks have been 2 – 3 miles in length and most have been behind the gates to see the wildlife and the different habitats in this wonderful refuge of ours. During the spring months, we focus mostly on butterflies and migratory birds as they arrive on the refuge.

Right now is a perfect time to visit. During the last two weeks, I have seen and heard Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Swallowtail Kites, 4 different kinds of vireos and many, many warbler species, including the Northern Parula, Hooded and Prairie Warblers. More are arriving each day. Butterflies are in abundance now as well. If you don't feel like walking to see them, then take a slow car drive along the Nature Drive and you will see plenty of the larger butterflies,



like the Palamedes Swallowtail, the Spicebush Swallowtail and the Eastern Tiger Swallowtails. All beautiful to see! My last nature walk of the season will focus on the migratory birds in the

refuge and the new refuge trail. At least for now, it is called the Tram Trail. We will meet at the parking lot at the River Trail, near Refuge headquarters, at the north end of the refuge off CR 347 at 9am on Thursday, April 23. Those coming from Cedar Key can meet me at the Cedar Key town park parking lot at 8:30 so we can carpool to the trail. This will be a longish walk, close to 3 miles, on a rough trail, not a

logging road. Please bring water, binoculars and be sure to check for ticks when the walk is over!



Update on the Headquarters Butterfly Garden

by Donna Thalacker

Visitors to the Refuge Headquarters will notice a 25% increase in the size of the butterfly garden, with funding from the Friends group and the efforts of Donna Thalacker. About a dozen more drought tolerant, butterfly attracting plants were placed in the garden. All are native Florida plants and all suitable for the sandy, dry environment. If anyone is interested in helping



with the watering until the plants have a chance to get established, please call Donna Thalacker at 352-543-6738.

Pepper Busting update

There continues to be a concerted effort with many volunteers working with refuge staff to get the invasive Brazilian pepper under control. For several months, on a weekly basis, weather permitting, the focus has been on the Luken tract of land managed by the Refuge. Efforts have also been directed to specific locations in and around Cedar Key.

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