



## 2023 National Wildlife Refuge Association O'Brien Prize

The National Wildlife Refuge Association is pleased to announce our fourth O'Brien Prize for a well deserving Refuge Friends group/s. This prize is a grant that will be disseminated to Refuge Friend's groups whose project will help build their connection with their community. This application will be used to determine which Friends group will receive the grant. **Please submit a request for up to \$6,000.**

Projects must: (1) heighten the public awareness of the Friends Group, (2) bring an enduring value to the Friends Group and bring benefit to the refuge, and (3) the prize money must cover the full or nearly full cost of the project.

**Proposals are due May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023.** Please submit your applications and direct any questions to Courtney Phelan at [cphelan@refugeassociation.org](mailto:cphelan@refugeassociation.org) or 202-577-3200.

### Proposal Information:

**Project Name:** Community Outreach Mobile Education Trailer

### **Point of Contact, with name, phone, and email:**

Debbie Meeks, 352-278-5088, [dmeeks352@gmail.com](mailto:dmeeks352@gmail.com)

### **Friends Group/NGO Name and Address:**

Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges, Inc.  
PO Box 532, Cedar Key, FL 32625

### **Refuge Manager Approval (e-signature and name):**

ANDREW  
GUDE

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ANDREW GUDE  
Date: 2023.05.22  
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**Project Budget:** \$5,800= 6'x12' trailer \$3,600; window \$900; graphics & shelves \$1,300

### **Describe your Friends group:**

We are a 501(c)3 established in 2001 to support the mission of our Refuges. Our all-volunteer group is active in promoting awareness of these refuges, their habitats, and re-wilding programs. We have an engaged, 17 member board. Cathy Allen, consultant with the Board Doctor, LLC, cites the board meeting she attended as the most functional she had yet witnessed. We have over 250 members, more than 600 newsletter subscribers and 30 active outreach volunteers.

**Describe your project:**

A community outreach mobile education trailer will allow Friends to broaden visitor services by traveling to popular as well as under-served locations on and off our 53,000 acre refuge. Meeting people across our rural communities.

In Friends efforts to build community support for our Refuges, one of the most significant gaps we face is the lack of infrastructure related to visitor education. Information services are critically important to engage the public and inform them about the Refuge's role in conservation. Our Refuges get an estimated 500,000 visitors per year, but have few visitor services. The Lower Suwannee Refuge spans both sides of the Suwannee River in two counties and encompasses one of the largest undeveloped river-delta estuarine systems in the United States including a significant archaeological site, Shell Mound.

After the Refuge's education specialist retired eight years ago, Friends volunteers stepped-up to provide part-time visitor services using the front desk at Refuge headquarters. When that office space was re-assigned to Fish and Wildlife staff, the Friends ability to provide visitor services was left without a base. Friends has since been setting up a table on weekends at the Cedar Key Welcome Center and at various locations around the refuge but an outreach mobile education trailer will be more eye-catching and will increase awareness of Friends' presence and our visitor services program. It will add value to Friends' work by providing shelter for the volunteers and storage for more outreach material. An outreach mobile education trailer will allow us to add to the limited amount of information possible with only a table and canopy. To our current things-to-do brochures we could add:

1. Habitat and hydrologic restoration work education and updates
2. Show-and-tell items relating to wildlife in our refuges
3. Formation of our refuges illustrated with maps, pictures, and narratives
4. Displays by local and regional conservation partners
5. Merchandise to sell to raise funds
6. Junior Ranger information and guidance

Friends believes we can educate and assist visitors more effectively by meeting people where they are—at popular locations and peak visitation times such as weekends when Headquarters is closed. An outreach mobile education trailer is an important tool to help Friends fulfill our mission and advocate for conservation.

**Additional Information:**

Reporting: within one year of receiving the grant, please prepare a short report addressing the project and how it benefits your Friends group. Include all photos, press, and important information.