

# THE IBIS



JANUARY 2016-because some folks have asked, please note that the last issue was April of 2015

The IBIS is the journal publication of The Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges-Friendsofrefuges.org

## OUR MISSION

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

***Advocating***

***Educating***

***Volunteering***

***Funding***

***Fellowship***

### **Renewal Time**

Except for life members, it is time to renew your membership. Basic Family membership is \$20 but a full outline of other membership levels can be found on our web page. You may send your membership to Friends of Refuges, P.O. Box 582, Cedar Key, FL 32625 or you may register at our annual meeting. Please let us know your major interests.

### **President's message**

It's been a pleasure and a privilege to serve as the Friends President this past year. I've been impressed with our Friends Board of Directors and membership. We all share a deep respect for the land and water, history, quality of life, and economy that we enjoy, in a large part, due to the protections, education, advocacy and resources the Cedar Key and Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuges provide.

Looking back over last year, I have been very impressed with the Friends commitment to being

a reliable refuge and community partner. As I write this message, Friends President-elect, Maria Sgambati is in Washington, DC meeting with Federal leadership and advocating for our refuges and the refuge system. Other Friends are championing efforts from art, education, paddling, biking and hiking trail creation and enhancement, developing a long-term vision for the historic Vista property, the Big Bend Conservation effort, producing and distributing trail and wildlife guides and other initiatives.

Looking ahead, I see opportunities for the Friends to work closely with our dedicated refuge leadership and staff, local, regional, state, and federal partners to continue our supporting role to help protect, enhance, educate and advocate for our refuges and it's role in a sustainable environment and economy.

Strengthening and supporting these vital partnerships has become very important given the challenges and opportunities ahead. Quality partners may not always agree but they share long-term goals and objectives larger than their own individual interests.

The recent armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters in Oregon is an example of what failure looks like. When that small group of disgruntled thugs leaves or have been arrested, then the collaborative work of conservation and adaptive management will continue. Closer to home, when one of our



public properties was threatened, the response by area residents, county, state and agency leadership and stakeholders who went to work in a respectful and collaborative manner, is an example of what success looks like.

The work of supporting and advocating for our refuges will not always be easy nor will it always be successful but thanks to your support the Friends of the Cedar Key and Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuges will continue to be a respectful, collaborative partner with a seat at the table and vision for the future. *Your president, Greg Lang*

### **Annual Meeting**

**Please check your calendar, the date has been changed to March 19**

On behalf of the Friends and Refuge staff we are so sorry. We will explain why at the meeting. Now, we are working to have another marquee event. Chef, Kenny McCain will have his signature chicken, ribs and swap cabbage, yum! The day will be filled with talks, walks, and a lot of social interaction.

One new event will be a photo contest. We were saddened and stunned by the unexpected passing of board member, Bill Kilborn. He was a joy to be around. He freely gave many hours of his digital expertise to us and the community. He is missed but not forgotten.

Bill's passion for photography inspired the Friends of the LSCKNWR Bill Kilborn Photo Contest. We are asking for photos to be donated, to be judged and auctioned off. The proceeds will be used to purchase benches memorializing Bill on our hiking trails. You do not have to be a professional photographer. It will be fun. So, dust off your cameras and donate a photo.

Here are the guidelines for participating:

1. Your donated photo must be an **8"x10" photo of nature that has been matted.**
2. The photos can be from anywhere as long as the focus is on nature.
3. You may submit 2 entries.
4. Your name must not be printed on the photo.
5. Anonymously judged, "the people's choice" will determine 1st, 2nd and 3rd ribbons.

6. A silent auction with a minimum bid of \$10 will be used to purchase each photo. Those not purchased will be returned to the owner.
7. **Deadline for submitting photos is Thursday, March 17th.** Please submit your photos in a large sealed envelop with your name on the outside. You may drop it off at the Cedar Key Art Center, 457 Second St., mail it to Friends of The Lower Suwannee/ Cedar Keys NWR, P.O. Box 532 Cedar Key, FL 32625, or call 352-493-1807 or 352-278-5088 for other possible arrangements.

### **Friends business items**

The nominating committee, Roger McDaniel, Debbie Meeks and Allison Nelson will submit the following list of proposed board members: President Elect-Russ Hall, Secretary-Bill Dummitt, Directors-Libby Cagle, Carmelo Echevarria, Peg Hall, Margy Van Landingham, Jennifer Kolinek, Bob McKinstry, and Debbie Meeks. Nominations may also be made from the membership as long as those nominated agree to serve. At this time, we have a vacancy for treasurer. If interested, please let Roger know.

Treasurer, Libby Cagle reports that we took in \$9344 and spent \$5012. Our year end balance is \$29,736. The board continues to earmark monies from that balance for the eventual development of the Vista Visitor's Center.

### **Refuge Update By Deputy Manager, Larry Woodward**

The refuge staff is ready to enter into another exciting and challenging year of resource protection and management. Although we face yet another year of vacant office spaces and budget reductions of a projected 4% to 5%, I cannot shout loud enough for how proud I am, and I hope you are as well, of the staff stationed at the Lower Suwannee NWR and Cedar Keys NWR. They are a scrappy small, and getting smaller, group of unselfish and dedicated employees that are focused on a mission to protect these natural resources with which they are entrusted. Without hesitation, they are quick

to assist other refuge program areas to conquer critical management projects.

Compartmentalized program areas do not exist on our refuges as we all have to wear many hats and work shoulder to shoulder if we are to exceed the bold goals and objectives that we set before us. Later in this issue, Vic Doig will cover some of the accomplishments for this past year.

The refuge was fortunate this past year to receive authorization to replace one of our three vacant positions, and fortunate enough for us; we hired an outstanding employee to occupy the vacant Engineering Equipment Operator (Fire). You will learn more about Josh Havird elsewhere in this issue. The bad news is that we have not been granted permission to seek a replacement for the vacant Park Ranger (Visitor Services / Environmental Education) or the Forestry Technician (Fire) positions. Both positions are mission critical, but I will tell you that not having a park ranger to fulfill those particularly important duties are crippling. What exactly are we giving up by not filling the park ranger position? Leading and teaching local school programs, Interpretive programs, environmental outreach, news releases to both news outlets and social media, fewer public events, less contact with the public, and a vacant chair to greet visitors at the office as well as answer the many questions called in on a daily basis.

As you may have noticed as you entered the refuge office / shop compound, the entrance sign states that the gate may be closed during regular scheduled office hours due to reduced staff. This has been the case several times since the first of the year.

I would like to conclude by saying that our refuge staff stands in solidarity with our brothers and sisters at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. Malheur, like every other refuge within the National Wildlife Refuge System, was strategically established to protect wildlife and their habitats that are of “National” significance. Without Federal protection, these valuable

resources (i.e. migratory birds, endangered species) would no doubt be in peril, if not expunged. Their very existences were hanging in the balance until President Theodore Roosevelt halted this downward trajectory by creating the National Wildlife Refuge System.

### **Habitat Management Work on Our Refuges** by Vic Doig

Despite staffing shortages, the crew at Lower Suwannee has been able to accomplish a substantial amount of habitat management work over these past several months, much of it with the assistance of our partners and volunteers. Our core mission refers to conservation, management, and restoration of wildlife and habitat, and this important work will always be the top priority on our local Refuges.

The fire crew has suffered losses and seen some turnover. While Jaclyn Solodovnick and George Pelt have moved on, we were able to fill George’s vacant position with Josh Havird (profiled in this edition), and we just hired a temporary student intern Sam Matelski to help out as well. Sam hails from Wisconsin and is fitting in nicely, despite his cheese-head accent.

Exotic vegetation poses a serious threat to the integrity of natural ecosystems, particularly ‘Class I’ exotic species such as Brazilian Pepper and Cogongrass. The Pepper Busting volunteer crew, led by Friends Board Member Roger McDaniels, accomplished significant eradication of BP on the Lukens and Shell Mound tracts. Refuge staff and contractors also worked heavily around the Refuge lands on both species, for an approximate total of 140 acres treated for exotic vegetation.

Re-establishment of the longleaf pine ecosystem on the highest and driest of the Refuge pine lands remains a priority as well. Under Daniel Barrand’s leadership, we were able to replant approximately 33 acres in small clearings across the Refuge with longleaf pine seedlings, and another 80 acres of open pine uplands were prepared for planting early in 2016 with the use of selective herbicide techniques designed to

maximize wildlife habitat value by enhancing grassy and herbaceous growth while reducing the density of low-value hardwood shrubs in areas where fire alone has been unsuccessful in controlling the undesirable vegetation.

### **Meet Josh Havird**

Josh joined us this fall and was quickly assigned to pepper busting detail, where he and other staff work with the Friends volunteers. Josh grew up in Lake City where he got a two year degree in Forestry Tech in 2007. Now get



this, he is following in dad's footsteps. His dad is a professor in forestry at the community college. Really nice. In 2009, he got a degree from the University of Florida in Natural Resources Conservation. From 2009-2011, he was stationed a St. Marks NWR. From 2011-2015, he was stationed at Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR. The cranes there do not migrate and he pointed out that there is some discussion about whether they are, as often described, a separate sub-species of sand hill cranes.

He is married and his wife works as a health administrator at Shands. Be sure to welcome him to our team. He is a major addition to a much depleted fire crew.

### **Advocacy update by Maria Sgambati**

Maria Sgambati, our President-Elect, is packing away her flip-flops, leaving the balmy Florida winter, and heading to Washington, DC to represent our local Friends group. Friends group representatives from across the nation will attend this two-part event that stretches across 5 days.

Sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA), the first part of the trip –

“Standing up Wildlife Fly-In” will take place January 19-21 and includes Advocacy training with the NWRA staff; a dinner with the Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Cynthia Martinez, Chief of Refuges; and meetings with Florida Congressional staffers to discuss the value of Refuges.

The second part of the trip – “Moving Friends Forward”— is a two-day training that will take place January 22-24 at the National Conservation Training Center, in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. More than 200 Friends and 100 Service Staff are expected to attend this training from across the United States. The training will focus on three areas of learning toward fulfilling common missions of serving people and wildlife: engaging people, partnership and nonprofit management, and communications and marketing.

She is scheduled to squeeze into this schedule appointments on January 20 with staffers from Rubio, Nelson and Yoho's offices. She will give them brochures: the Friends Advocacy in Action,



plus the FWS Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys NWR brochures. She will also invite them all to visit! (editors note: Be sure to thank Maria for her effort. She was in Washington D.C. during the recent storm.)

## Nature walks

Donna Thalacker has been our go to person on the Levy County side for nature/hike walks. Here is the group for the Dennis Creek walk.



Donna describes the January 1st walk, “no fooling”, as a great walk despite the weather. Thirteen people showed up for a 3 mile walk on the Barnett Creek Trail. Because of the distance, it was meant to be a walk in nature, rather than a walk to identify plants and animals. This trail is



one of my favorites because it passes through a number of habitats and wildlife sightings are common. Part

of the trail is along the Barnett Creek Road, through mixed woodland, some freshwater swamp and alongside a salt marsh. The trail continues on an old logging road behind one of the Refuge gates and continues for another two miles through the mixed deciduous woods and swamp.

Because of the weather, I did not have high hopes of wildlife sightings, but we were surprised. We saw over a dozen different kinds of birds, including warblers, kinglets, woodpeckers, a sapsucker, wrens, and a hawk. The biggest surprise, especially because of the very cool and gray weather, was a Pygmy Rattlesnake lying in the middle of the trail. It was thin but definitely alive and alert! Thanks to Ed DeHaan for the fabulous Pygmy Rattlesnake photo. It was another great walk in the woods! Please join me for our next nature walk in the

Cedar Key Scrub on January 28. Because of ongoing controlled burns in the Scrub adjacent to SR 24, we will walk in the Scrub section along CR 347. Those who wish to carpool from Cedar Key, meet me, Donna Thalacker, at the Cedar Key Park parking lot near the beach at 8:30. Or meet at the Cedar Key Scrub along CR347 entrance parking lot around 8:45. If you wish additional information, call 352-543-6738.

## Salt Creek Loop Trail by Debbie Meeks

Our go to person on the Dixie County side for trail development is Debbie Meeks. Here is her



update. There is a new reason to explore the Salt Creek spur road off the Dixie Mainline, a 1/3

mile loop trail has recently been cut and signs posted. The loop offers three vistas across the salt marsh, a fresh water marsh pond and several stately grand-daddy live oak trees.

Furrows are apparent when you walk the trail. Daniel Barrand, Refuge Forester, says they are evidence of past timber planting. He also points out a higher windrow about half way around the trail that was made by raking and piling logging debris into a long row. He says the refuge once experimented by knocking down a windrow and found that many of the long-dormant native seeds sprouted. What was once an unwanted plant is welcome again. Daniel Barrand is pleased to see so much plant diversity as we walk the Salt Creek loop trail including native blueberry, persimmon, cedar and wire grass.

A 14 1/2 mile cycling trail is described in a new brochure by the Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys Refuges. The cycling or hiking route encompasses 5 refuge roads, 4 of which loop back to CR 349.

The trail is the brainchild of Charlie Adkins and Caroline Nobbs, Refuge volunteers during the winter of 2014. who are pictured in the brochure. Peg and Russ Hall hiked the trail as training for their Camino de Santiago trek and provided Debbie Meeks with habitat information for the brochure. Daniel Barrand, Refuge Forester, crafted the map.

The “CR 349 Refuge Cycling Tour” brochure is available at the Suwannee Tech Center, the Dixie Mainline kiosk, and Refuge Headquarters near Fowler’s Bluff.

**Suwannee Waterways Cleanup by Debbie Meeks**

Despite the stormy forecast on November 19, the Suwannee Waterways Cleanup only had light



sprinkles- great weather to gather garbage. Folks often overlook trash while pleasure boating but when 18 kayak, canoe and power boat volunteers searched... they found 429 pounds! It is tricky to find a spot to disembark near Suwannee due to slippery mud banks but the litter payoff is huge when you walk the high-water line. The most unusual find was a message in a bottle.



The Suwannee Community Center was filled with 34 guests who enjoyed a pot-luck meal featuring smoked chicken by Jerry Everett, owner of the Waterfront Market. After lunch, Tom McLaulin, from the Florida Paddling Trails Association, talked about Suwannee’s role as a Blueway Community. It is also a stop on the FPTA’s Circumnavigation Trail. The Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys Refuges ended the afternoon with their monthly board meeting.



Four non-profit groups joined together during this event in one effort: The Suwannee Chamber of Commerce, The Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys Refuges, Florida Paddling Trails Association and Paddle Florida.

**Pepper Busting Update by Roger McDaniel**

Brazilian Pepper Control on the Refuge has been going on three years. Volunteers and Refuge employees have worked the Lukens Tract. Recently we’ve started going back over some of the areas and finding lots of small plants sprouting from seeds but easy to pull up, plus some re-rooted plants to cut and spray and a few missed ones. Clearly, our efforts are making a big difference. We’re working the West side of SR24



at this time. Future plans include working some

of the off-shore islands. Anyone interested in participating contact Roger at [rogermac4@yahoo.com](mailto:rogermac4@yahoo.com) or 321-698-1688

### **Red Bay Extinction by Jay Bushnell**

You may have noticed riding around the Lower Suwannee or boating on the river a lot of trees with dark reddish brown leaves. These are dead



red bay trees. Around 2002, the ambrosia beetle hitched a ride on pallets from Asia into the Charleston or Savannah areas. The beetle lays its eggs in red bay which then creates a fungus that kills the tree. The infection in our area has been around for at least 2-3 years but this year it has really become apparent. Ironically, the laurel wilt, as it is called, can be seen for years as the leaves stubbornly hang on even after the tree has been dead for some time. Not surprisingly, other



live forms are threatened. The palamedes swallowtail butterfly is dependent on the red bay. Avocado trees are also affected. Here are a

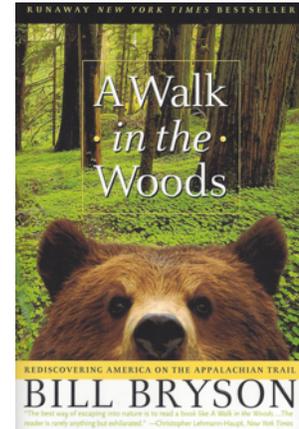
couple of areas you can easily witness the death march. One on the loop road in the Lower Suwannee and one on the river. Notice the dark reddish brown color of the dead red bays.

### **Book Review by Jay Bushnell**

Bryson, Bill, (1999) *A Walk in the Woods Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail*

This summer I saw the movie, "A walk in the woods", starring Robert Redford and Nick Nolte. Despite what critics wrote about the movie, I really enjoyed it. The movie seemed to tap the humor of Bryson's

style. Because I enjoyed it so much, I decided to reread the book. The story line is about Bryson and a high school buddy taking the challenge of hiking the Appalachian trail. The humor that I so well remembered was still as funny as ever.



What I had not remembered as well was the conservation messages sprinkle through out the book. Bryson reminds the reader that the forest of the trail is dramatically different from just a 100 years ago. He describes the tragedy of the American chestnut, the long leaf pine and the disastrous mistakes made by the US Forestry department. He described the extinction of the passenger pigeon, the Carolina parakeet, small-headed flycatcher, carbonated warbler, or the Blue Mountain warbler. "Gone everyone, when will the ever return," if I can borrow a phrase from an old song. Extinction is forever.

He also make some social observation about how much we depend on the auto-even driving half a mile to walk on a stair master. He pointed out that in twenty minutes walking on the AT, he walked more than average American walked in a week.

This is a fun and informative read.

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