

THE IBIS



May 2016- editor Jay Bushnell

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



President's message

Dear Friends,

Last week, after our Board meeting at the Refuge headquarters, I wandered the River Trail to the edge of Suwannee. I often don't take enough time to simply enjoy the refuge. It was restorative. Bald cypress knees rose up in the dark waters and everywhere there was the smell of dampness and richness that I associate with this place. I reflected back on my first walk down this trail in February 2013. I had come to have coffee with then newly arrived Refuge Manager Andrew Gude. I was still living in Washington, DC but nearing my decision to return to Florida, the land of my childhood. What I recall from that day is the dryness of the same trail after years of less rainfall and how different the river floodplain seemed then.

But still the seed was planted in me to come to here: a coastal place in Florida where nature not human development was the dominant feature. We are fortunate to live in such spectacular

beauty of landscape and seascape: abundant with biodiversity and ever changing. I also feel grateful for the depth and engagement of our Board; they make my job as President easy and joyful. As the Friends group enters its 15th year as an organization, we've grown and contributed a great deal. We hope to continue to help support the refuge and it's mission of conserving, protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations.

For the present, we continue to grow our communications presence with a dynamic website, Facebook page, and monthly electronic NewsBrief and the quarterly Ibis. Friend's members organize Nature walks and talks, pull pounds of trash from the Suwannee and other areas through cleanups, and help purchase trail items like the recent benches and interpretative signage for the Tram Trail. We help support meetings such as the Cooperators lunch and the Big Bend Science Symposium, both important efforts for our local Refuge as well as emerging regional conservation efforts. For future generations...we are growing our advocacy efforts, helping to lend our Friends group voice to both national and international Refuge conservation issues, as well as weighing in on local issues. And we've begun a long term visioning process with Refuge staff about the Vista property, a land gift to the Lower Suwannee Refuge.

There will surely be challenges ahead for all of us, as there are challenges now. But I feel confident that we will be able to face them collectively, with thoughtfulness, integrity and compassion. Your president, Maria Sgambati, M.D.

Annual Meeting Report

Despite the rainy weather, the annual meeting was fine, eventually the sun even came out. Maria Sgambati, our new president, did a great



job conducting the meeting. Tom Hoctor, Director the Center of Landscape Conservation Planning, gave a important timely talk on the importance of planning for climate change. Of course, Kenny McCains' chicken, ribs and swamp cabbage were outstanding.



The Bill Kilborn Memorial Photo Contest was really nice.

Debbie Meeks, Ann Kamzelski and Jay Bushnell delighted in setting up 36 outstanding photos. Judged by

the members, winners were: 1st place Ben West, 2nd-a tie with Frank Morgan and Ann Kamzelski and 3rd to Don Gambrell. Over \$450 was raised, which will help purchase benches for our trails. Clearly, Bill was loved and is missed.

Refuge Update

by Deputy manager, Larry Woodward

A wonderful site to see, as each day passes, new species of birds arrive to our refuges donning their best attire for the season. Butterflies are fluttering from one nectar soaked flower to the next and in the pre-dawn hours the chuck-wills-widow shouts its morning greetings to us as we arrive at the office. Witnessing the entire orchestrated conundrum going on in the forest and wetlands allows me to conclude that these ceremonies are result of resource management gone right. We are blessed to have received, from previous refuge employees, a sound canvas

to paint, and our current refuge staff have mastered the brush as well. We continue to make great progress in forest and wildlife management, introducing fire into critical fire dependent habitats, and maintaining the many public use facilities and roads.

We are most thankful that our fearless leader, Andrew Gude, is back with us full time. Serving as Complex Manager for the Chassahowitzka NWR for the past two years or so, he has come home to play in our own sandbox, which is a great sandbox.

Dan Frisk has been selected as the new Project Leader over the North Florida National Wildlife Refuge Complex which includes both the Lower Suwannee NWR and Cedar Keys NWR, as well as St. Marks NWR and St. Vincent NWR. He will begin working in this position in late May.



Terry Peacock will fill the role as Deputy Project Leader over the North Florida Complex.

We embarked on a fantastic new partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Smithsonian Institute's Migratory Bird Center. Bryant Dossman installed an array (antennae) onto our existing radio tower at our shop complex that is capable of tracking all birds equipped with Motus "nano" tags. Encounters will mark the identity of each bird which passes through an area approximately 15 kilometers in either direction of the antennae. Bryant's focus is to determine stressors and vulnerabilities of individual neotropical migrant "songbirds" wintering in the Caribbean and migrating through this area toward summer habitats and vice versa. For more information on this technology visit: <http://motus-wts.org/>

Despite a reduction in permanent employees stationed at the refuge, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to host several short term interns, as well as seasonal positions. Many of you may have met Sam Matelsky, a seasonal fire fighter stationed with us for 2016, we have been informed that additional grant funding has been awarded to continue this position in 2017. In addition, we will be hosting a Forest Intern for the summer, as well as a summer internship



sponsored by the Nature Coast Biological Station UF/IFAS that will direct his attention on much needed biological monitoring. The refuge will also

continue the Youth Conservation Corps program by employing 4 high school students this summer for an eight week program.

Please come out and enjoy the season and explore the splendors of YOUR National Wildlife Refuges.

Advocacy update

by Jay Bushnell

The Friends board has agreed to ‘partner’ with The Conservation Fund on an grant application from the Natural Resource Conservation Service of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. TCF is applying for NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding for the *Lower Suwannee & Gulf Watershed* conservation easement project. The areas in red are lands being targeted for conservation easements which border much of the Lower Suwannee NWR. Our



manager, Andrew Gude, was instrumental in the early stages of the effort. Now that he is back on station full-time, he plans to hit the ground running on this initiative.

Tram Ridge Trail

by Russ Hall

The new Tram Ridge Trail on the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge in part

follows an old railway embankment once used to



transport logs out of the forest. The 2.8 mile trail covers a variety of habitat types, including the



scrub-covered sand ridge that carries part of its namesake railroad. Perhaps most interesting is the portion of the trail that traverses pine flatwoods. Refuge personnel have severely thinned the slash pine trees which commercial foresters had planted in close rows. The thinning allows sunlight to penetrate beneath the canopy, promoting diverse stands of low-growing plants and benefiting many kinds of wildlife. This thinning has converted the former tree farm into a habitat that functionally resembles the longleaf pine savannas that once covered much of peninsular Florida.

The flatwoods crossed by the trail are interspersed with cypress domes and sandhills that provide fine-scale habitat diversity important for many plant and animal species. The new trail is an important addition to the refuge's other trails, each of which provides a good introduction to the refuge's riverine and maritime habitats. There are benches along the trail allowing one to sit and enjoy the scenery and look for birds.

Nature Walk Barnett Creek Road

by Donna Thalacker

Every walk in the Lower Suwannee NWR brings at least one surprise, and today was no different. Cindy Leiner, Nita Cox, Kit Lane, and Joyce DeHaan joined me for a nature walk along Barnett Creek Road. We saw lots of flowers in



bloom, some butterflies and birds including a close view of a Barred Owl next to the road that Cindy was first to spot. There were Sora calling to each other, but other than a brief glance

by Nita, they were mostly heard and not seen.

On the Nature Drive, Nita spotted a Swallowtail Kite that we were all able to see close up as the Kite flew low overhead. Then later, the really big surprise of the day, was hearing about 10 feet away, a bull alligator roar! He was heard and not seen since not one of us volunteered to jump down from the platform to check him out!

It was a great morning to be in the woods. I have yet to go for a walk in our Refuge without at least one unusual bird, butterfly, amphibian or flower to surprise me. Really, today's alligator roar was quite the surprise and to be so close (yet safe) was a treat. We are so fortunate to have such a wonderful place so close by to visit.

Communications Team report

Team members are Debbie Meeks, Jaime Jerrels, Kit Lane, Paul Ramey, Jenny Kolinek, and Peg Hall.

With meetings in January, February, March, and April the team has been working hard to spread the word. Here is a sample of their efforts:

News Brief

The email News Brief now has 500 subscribers. Five editions were sent since the January Ibis. They were opened by about 875 readers. They provided information about Friends activities and news about the Refuges.

Facebook Page

The Friends of the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys Facebook page now has 410 fans. Since the January report, our posts have reached more than 8,000 Facebook users.

Friends Website

The Friends website, www.friendsofrefuges.org, had over 6,000 unique visitors since January.

Those people viewed various pages just over 30,000 times, meaning that each person on average went to 5 different pages on the website. The homepage, paddling panels, and trail guides pages are the most visited.

Other Achievements since the January Ibis include --

- A new logo was designed and adapted
- The Tram Loop Trail informational panels designed, printed, and awaiting installation
- The Refuge Cycling brochure was updated and re-printed because of its popularity
- Articles about the Refuges ran in all local media as well as The Gainesville Sun and on TV20

Spreading the word at the Art Festival



Brazilian Pepper Report

by Roger Mc Daniels

BP(Brazilian Pepper) Control-I wish to thank all the great help from volunteers and the Refuge staff for another successful program. We finished up the Spring by surveying and treating several plants in the East end of the Lukens



Tract. We also did a lot of work on the islands of Cedar Key. One of the highlights of the past few months was our trip to North Key collecting

several bags of trash from the beaches. I look forward to seeing everyone back this Fall. A special thank you to Vic Doig for his support.

Lukens Friends Outings

by Jay Bushnell

You may not have known of a struggle going on over public access on a designated conservation easement, called the Lukens track. The tract of land is on the south side of CR 24 just before the first bridge heading to Cedar Key. A 20 acre piece (the former CK dump site) was purchased and the owner has been trying to close off public access. Until this happened, the property was managed by the Lower Suwannee NWR for the Suwannee River Water District. My first exposure to the land was during pepper busting. What a beautiful piece of land complete with live oaks, marsh land, and a launch for canoes/kayaks. The recreational opportunities are stunning. The SRWD folks are holding onto the conservation easement as defined despite the new owner's wishes. They are also working to the defuse tensions. We thank them for this effort.

Recently, the Friends pepper busters spent two days working the section again. There were also



two field trips to the site described here. Lukens Tract landing is a wonderful place for a picnic as the group shown above can tell you.

First Lukens Tract Nature Walk

by Donna Thalacker

Twenty people enjoyed perfect weather for our first Lukens Tract nature walk. Donna Thalacker and several others on the walk had Special Use Authorization (SUA) from the Suwannee River Water Management District so we could introduce our beautiful Lukens Tract peninsula to visitors to Cedar Key and long time residents as well. We spent a delightful hour or more

walking along the SRWMD right of way admiring hundreds of butterflies, including the smallest Florida butterfly, the Eastern Pygmy Blue and our state butterfly, the Zebra Longwing. The butterflies were in abundance, probably numbering in the thousands, nectaring on nearby blooming wildflowers.

Though we heard more birds than we saw, there were Northern Parula Warblers, Blue-grey Gnatcatchers, Yellow-throated Warblers, Cardinals, Snowy Egrets, White Ibis, Clapper Rails, White Pelicans flying overhead, and Great Crested Flycatchers sharing the property with us this morning. Sometimes it was difficult



knowing where to look because there was so much beauty to see.

We walked out to the end to see the kayak launch pad and a terrific overlook into the extensive salt marsh. While we were on our way back, a group of kayakers were driving out to the launch pad to begin their kayak trip into the Waccasassa Bay.

Please use the Lukens Tract property to kayak from and explore the salt marsh and bay, and to bird and butterfly watch. This is a beautiful and ecologically rich property that is close to Cedar Key. Most of this is public property and should be utilized by the public. One needs a Special Use Authorization (SUA) form to properly access the Lukens Tract. The form is simply a sheet of paper that you may obtain by telephoning the SRWMD at 382-362-1001 and asking for Mr. McCook. Leave a message with your name and mailing address and Mr. McCook will mail you an SUA in the US mail.

What's in a name?

by Jay Bushnell

Of course, the answer is that names provide a reference point. We do not even have to know the



significance of a name. Who was Barnett or McCormick? Think about it a minute. Once named, we can even forget what the name might mean. Until recently the launch

site off the loop road was mislabeled, at least according to geodetic maps. According to maps, McCormick Creek forks to the left from Barnett Creek Bay when coming in off the Gulf. The Creek actually crosses under Barnett Creek Road (no doubt another misnomer). Barnett Creek continues to the right from where McCormick branches off and continues under the loop road just before you turn to the launch if coming from CR 347.

If you were coming from the Gulf and looking for the McCormick Creek launch using the geodetic map, you would have been more than a little confused. Interestingly, this was confirmed while we were making the correction to the sign by adding 'Barnett &'. A kayaker stopped and thanked us for making the correction because folks had been confused.

Horseshoe citizen science survey

By Maria Sgambati (SKML) and Tiffany Black (*Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission*)

Have you recently noticed groups of people wandering along the beaches with white buckets. These groups of people are part of the newly launched "I Love *Limulus*": The Horseshoe Crab



Citizen Science Project. The horseshoe crab – also known by its Latin name *Limulus polyphemus* – spawns on the beaches and islands of Cedar

Key. In Florida, spawning can take place year

round, but the peak times are spring and fall. When mating, male horseshoe crabs move parallel to the shoreline on sandy flats and intercept females as they pass by. A male attaches himself to the top of a female's shell by using his specialized front claws, in a position known as amplexus, and together they crawl to the beach. The male fertilizes the eggs as the female lays them in a nest in the sand. The citizen scientists count the crabs in certain areas at specific times and then record data regarding their size, health,



age, etc. and then tag the horseshoe crabs (300 have been tagged).

This Citizen Science project represents a partnership between two University of Florida entities:

Seahorse Key Marine Laboratory and the UF Biology Department; the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC); and the Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. Scientists Jane Brockmann, PhD, Professor Emeritus from the University of Florida, studied horseshoe crabs for more than 2 decades at Seahorse Key Marine Laboratory.

Based on her work, several novel discoveries about



reproduction and mating were described. Despite all this research, Dr. Brockmann, along with Dr. Mary Hart, (UF) and Tiffany Black, Florida horseshoe crab project leader with the FWC, believe there are still critical things we don't know about these enigmatic creatures.

While populations in the mid-Atlantic states have seen dramatic decreases, horseshoe crab populations in Florida are thought to be relatively stable. However, this is based on fairly little population data. If you have had or ever will have

surgery, you owe success in part to the horseshoe crab. As humans, we directly benefit from this quirky creature. Horseshoe crabs unique copper-based blue blood contains a special substance called Limulus Amebocyte Lysate, or LAL. The substance, which **coagulates** in the presence of small amounts of bacterial **toxins**, is used to test for sterility of anything that enters the human body, from medical equipment to all injectable drugs and vaccines.

Additionally, research on the **compound eyes** of horseshoe crabs has led to a better understanding of human vision.

But threats to horseshoe crabs, including the bait and aquarium trades, loss of spawning habitat, and power plant intakes, make it harder to know true population status. The vision is that the 'I Love Limulus Citizen Science' project will continue for decades, perhaps even become a statewide effort and help contribute ongoing knowledge about these important animals.

Book Review

by Jay Bushnell

Tercek, Mark R. & Jonathan S. Adams, "Nature's Fortune: How business and society thrive by investing in nature"

Mark Tercek, President and CEO of the Nature Conservancy, was recruited from Goldman Sachs. Jonathan Adams is a science writer and conservation biologist. Their teaming together may represent an increased realization that capitalizing on nature through conservation and not consumption equals long term financial gain. Going down the short term gain road is not sustainable. The authors point out, nature has great economic value and saving "...it also means saving ourselves." They use a three legged stool analogy for describing possible success. Success will require a strategy where businesses, conservationist, and governments work together with the very best scientific

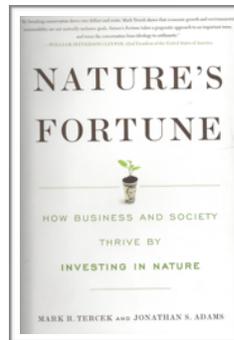
management practices. Remove any one of the legs and failure is assured. The

655,000 gallons-average American water foot print 2004
56 gallons /liter of Coke
70% water usage worldwide with irrigation

goal is to change the way humans relate to nature and each other. Pollution should not be free. "Putting a price on carbon is the single most important thing to do regarding climate change" p.136. This idea has been supported across party lines. There should be a win-win shared vision for all.

Now here are examples of what has worked. Fresh water conservation is critical. Access to drinking water is "...a human right." It should not be given away as was done in Florida when Nestles paid the State \$230 for a 10 year lease of Blue Spring State Park water! A 'water foot print' should be evaluated. There is a realization that our consumption rate is not sustainable. Companies like Coke and Pepsi are working to be water positive. The sugar industry in Columbia is also working to protect water.

Instead of having to use a 'gray infrastructure' to clean up polluted water, New York City has been using what the authors call 'green infrastructure'. The City uses tax funds for conservation of lands in the Catskills Mountains, the source of the cities drinking water. Some 90% farmers in the Catskills participate in a very cost effective land conservation program.



The authors describe the need for best practices in worldwide agriculture stating that "Almost nobody uses fertilizer "just right." One area of positive agriculture practices described is in Brazil. Cargill, McDonald's, and Green Peace have worked together to stop the Amazon deforestation due to soy production by using best practices. Cattle production still remains the biggest cause of deforestation.

A model for how trust has improved conditions is with the California fisheries. In these fisheries, there were established 'no fishing' preserves. The preserves protected the breeding stock which increased overall fish stocks. Not only does this provide sustainable fisheries, the value of the fish has gone up. Perhaps most important, fishermen had ownership of the process. They monitor the share quotes that are based on best scientific management practices.

**FRIENDS OF THE LOWER
SUWANNEE & CEDAR KEYS
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES
P.O. BOX 532
Cedar Key, FL 32625
WEB PAGE
www.friendsofrefuges.org**

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