

# THE IBIS



**April 2013 Jay Bushnell editor**

The IBIS is the quarterly publication of The Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges

## **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**

It is an honor to again serve as your president. As you know, the last years Friends' board has outlined an ambitious agenda for this year. Our challenge will be to make it work. The objective is to develop action initiatives that enrich our efforts to better fulfill our mission. Of course, we also like to do things that are fun and enriching for us. You will read about some of these initiatives in this issue. The Friends' champions (individuals who are point people for each initiative) will work closely with the Refuge staff champions to develop and initiate these projects.

That was the good news of my message. Now the bad is that the biggest challenge for all of us will be how to help the Refuge staff during this 'sequester' mess. It will hit them hard.

It is frustrating the way politicians and the media throw around words without defining them, as if the word says it all. Remember the words subprime or derivatives? Now what is a definition of sequester that makes sense in this context? One definition of sequester is "isolate or hide away." I wonder, are we hiding from ourselves. Well, another definition is, "take legal

possession of (assets) until a debt has been paid or other claims have been met." This may be the definition that is being thrown around. If so, the question is, 'who is taking possession of what' and 'who will be paying the 'debt'. Never mind that there is very little discussion about how the debt was created. Certainly, it was not caused by those folks ill prepared to pay. Furthermore, there is little discussion of the environment as a casualty. Clearly, we face a major initiative to encourage the Congress to work together. We all need to put on our advocacy badges to lobby for our refuges. Your president, Jay Bushnell

## **ANNUAL MEETING OVERVIEW**

What a wonderful day despite the flood conditions on the river. Great talk, yummy food, and outstanding fellowship, what could be better. David Viker, Chief of the SE Region's NWR who grew up in Bronson, joined the festivities. Dr. Peter Fredrick



summarized his research on the plight of oysters in our area. The bottom line is that a healthy estuary is dependent upon a

healthy Suwannee River.

Thanks to the efforts of Barbara Hudson and Donna Bushnell, and the generous donors, we raised \$2425.00 at the silent auction! Of course,



lunch prepared by Kenny McCain was top drawer.

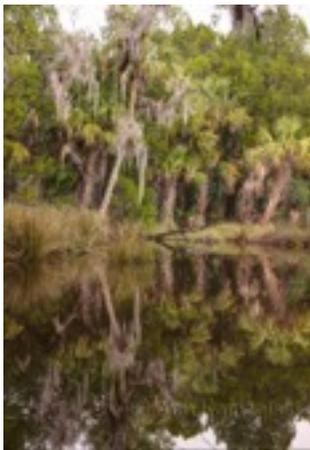


Now looking ahead to next year, this years' event drove home the reality that we may well have hit the limit of what the facility can handle. At this point, the Board has discussed some kind of RSVP for next year, so stay tuned.

### INITIATIVE PROGRESS REPORTS

As you read through these brief description, keep in mind that you are encouraged take an active part. Don't hesitate to let us know of your interests.

**Art in the Refuges:** Ann Kamzelski and Ed DeHaan are developing a program titled, "Art inside the gates". Identified artist of various mediums will be provided guided opportunities to seek out artistic vantage points not normally accessible. In return, these artist will be expected to exhibit some of their work at the Cedar Key Art



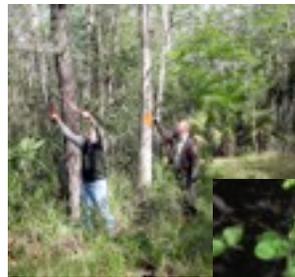
Center during March 2014.



**River walk update:** With the leadership of John Thalacker, his crew continued the enhancement of the River Trail with makers identifying trees/bushes.



**Trail initiative:** Donna Thalacker and Refuge Forester, Daniel Barrand, have mapped out a new hiking trail off Barnett Creek Road. The 2.8 mile trail is named the Barnett Creek Road Loop Trail. The trail is marked and a guide pamphlet is



available at refuge headquarters. The guide provides not only a map but also a detailed description of the habitats on the trail. You will want to bring your camera.



### **Dixie County**

**Enhancement:** Jane Connors, working with Pam Darty and with help from Linda Headley, has taken on the initiative to strengthen the Friends base on the Dixie side of the Lower Suwannee. A trail initiative was kicked off with Leroy Harmon guiding on a trail by the Salt Creek Lookout. Looks like a real adventure with lots of critters!

Jane and crew are also working on having speakers for the summer as a part of a refuge conservation awareness effort.



**Education Enhancement:** Donna Bushnell is working with Ranger Pam Darty to align lessons to the Sunshine State Standards with the goal of developing lessons to present to school administrators. Donna and board member, Jennifer Seavey, are working on an adult overnight research field trip to Seahorse Key in the Fall. They are also exploring ideas that combine adult & child activities that would provide ways for different generations to enjoy and learn about the refuges.

**Science inventory/survey of refuge biota:** Russ Hall and Jennifer Seavey are developing a program titled 'Citizen Scientist'. Working with scientist and/or naturalist, lay folks will be given opportunities to participate in field studies. These studies may monitor habitat changes, identify migratory patterns, or survey species types in the refuges. Skilled photographers or illustrators will be a valuable part of the research being done.

**Refuge Restoration Projects:** Roger McDaniel has submitted a grant for a proposal Fall eradication project of the invasive Brazilian Pepper.

**Communications report:** Peg Hall who has rewritten and administered our web page reports that we are now getting over 2,000 hits /month with 2,818 this March. Wow! Kudos, Peg.

### **BOOK REVIEW** by Jay Bushnell

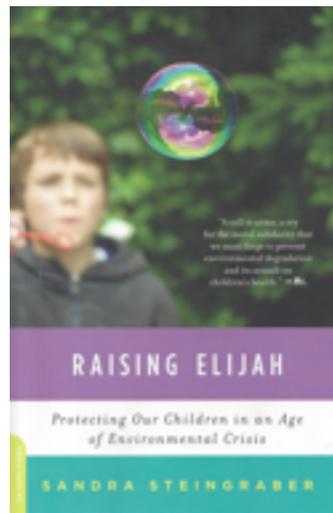
**“Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis”, (2011), DA CAPO Press by Sandra Steingraber**

Put this book at the top of your list of books to read. Not only is it well written, it describes element of our world that we all should be concerned. We are all negatively affected.

‘Raising Elijah’ is about problems facing a mother trying to protect and raise her children in our hostile petrochemical world. Using real life situations encountered as a parent, Dr. Steingraber, a biologist, humanizes very serious and technical problems caused by our failure to monitor the petrochemical industry.

While she is describing the problems created by the lack of regulations on the safe use of petrochemicals, she stresses that the standards set for **safe level of toxicity** (or poisons) is set for adults not children. Children are much more adversely affected by toxic chemicals. Furthermore, she believes that “...toxicity should not be a consumer choice.” Clearly, this would apply to everyone.

She points out that a parent or any adult cannot navigate the maze of chemicals pouring into our environment. Take food. The old phrase, “you are what you eat,” was and is still used to stress the idea of eating healthy. Well, true you and Sandra’s children are affected by what is eaten. Yet the food eaten is not necessarily healthy. For example, no matter what they look like, say strawberries, apples or peaches, they are not necessarily healthy. It depends upon what is in these fruits. You



cannot see, feel or taste the pesticides so often used. Still the negative health effects can be detected. Pesticides with **organophosphates** (of which there are hundreds) attack the nervous system. This can lead to possible retardation, attentions deficits, or autism to name a few maladies discovered. **Methyl bromide**, a United Nations internationally recognized threat to the ozone, was granted a special exception to its banned use so that farmers in Florida could grow tomatoes and strawberries! Children often prefer these fruits. Methyl bromide is a neurotoxicant.

There are pesticides like **atrazine** and chemicals like **bisphenol A, (BPA)**, that are hormone disrupters. In short, they adversely affect normal genetic development like a child’s sex organs.

The good news about all this is that organic grown food really is better for children and you. It lacks the pesticides and herbicides. Despite the claims of corporate agriculture, it is actually more efficient. But organic farming is not subsidized like corporate farms.

Who we are goes beyond what we eat to include what we breathe, touch or drink. Again, children are most affected. Take **arsenic pressure treated lumber, (CDC)**. When arsenic was removed from agricultural use because of a recognized cancer risk, it was then commercially transferred to wood preservatives. Children’s playgrounds, porch decks, and general house construction became the recipient of this lumber without any attempt to test for safety. Turns out

that the arsenic can be absorbed by touch or breathing. It is no longer produced (maybe) but it is still widespread in our environment and the problem is how to get rid of a product you should not use, burn, or bury!

Okay, if that did not make your day read on. Guess what PVC and vinyl are made from. **Chlorine gas**, the same gas used in WWI that has been declared illegal in warfare by international agreement because of its nasty/caustic characteristics. Chlorine gas is combined with **phthalate** (a hormone disruptor) to produce these two ubiquitous products. These have the same characteristic issues as CDC lumber. They leak toxins. They should not be burned or buried.

Finally, Dr. Steingraber's ends the book with the issues surrounding fracking, the process of pumping millions of gallons of fresh water with concoctions of chemicals deep into shale formations to release methane sometimes referred as 'natural gas' that has been trapped for over 400 million years. What could possibly be the problem with this, after all, it helps us become energy independent? Never mind that what chemicals are used is protected information. Never mind that leaking methane is worse than CO2 as a green house gas. Never mind that fresh water is being consumed and lost. Never mind that we are bringing up unknown potential contaminants that have laid doormat for over 400 million years.

A question to ask is how could this happen? Well, in 1976 when the Toxic Substances Control Act was set up, it was doomed to fail from the start. All 65,000 chemicals known then were given a free pass. The petrochemical industry did not have to demonstrate these chemicals were safe to use. Today there are an estimated 80,000 chemicals and still the industry does not have to demonstrate their safety. What makes this even more problematic, is that there is not even a registry of chemicals in use.

If this is of concern to you, **take action**. Start by contacting your Congressional Reps. Good news is that the Senate is already addressing the issue with Senate Bill, S847 (S696), titled 'Safe Chemical Act' sponsored by Senator Lautenberg and 29 other senators included our own Bill Nelson. It is working its way through the Senate. The goal of the bill is to provide standards to regulate the safety of all chemicals being used and developed. Opponents to the bill, petrochemical industry and some politicians, take the position that the industry should not have to

provide proof of safety. It seems to be a buyer or user beware mentality.

## **REFUGE UPDATES**

### **Sequestration affect on learning by Pam Darty**

Last April, the Refuge submitted a grant for \$7,000 to support Cedar Key School's *Learning in Florida's Environment*

(LIFE) environmental education program. The funding not only pays for the bus and driver, but will be used to buy much needed science

technology tools. These tools are used in real world work for testing of water quality, soil temperature, light refraction, and many more measurements. Because teaching now involves as much, or more paperwork than one would ever dream, time for planning field trips is minuscule and getting to go on a trip is even rarer. One field trip for Cedar Key's middle school classes took place in January this year at Fletcher's Landing in the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge. The learning experiences will not be soon forgotten. Kids were energized by the experience.



Now sequestration has come along to kill this program. USFWS grants have been pulled back. Cedar Key School will no longer have Refuge funding for technology, busses, or drivers. The students will go at least another year without in-the-field experience to keep them competitive and ahead of the FCAT game. The local LIFE team of teachers, government conservation educators, and other partners, have hit a brick wall while we all await word from capitol hill.

### **Cogongrass – A Nasty Exotic on the Refuge by Vic Doig**

The Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys are relatively free of exotic vegetation when compared to lands in south Florida, but one nasty pest plant that seems to be expanding on the Refuge is cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*). The plant is native to Japan, and has become established in the southeastern United States within the last fifty years, with Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida having extensive acreage of roadside, pasture, and open pinewoods

infested with cogongrass. Cogongrass first appeared in the area around Grand Bay, Alabama as an escape from Satsuma orange crate packing in 1912. It was then intentionally introduced from the Philippines into Mississippi as a possible forage in 1921. Closer to home, and much more problematic for us, cogongrass was introduced into Florida in the 1930s and 1940s as a soil stabilizer and for potential forage.

In the past 30 years or so, it became evident that cogongrass was of little economic benefit and could become a serious pest. Consequently, it was placed on the noxious weed list, which prohibits new plantings. Unfortunately, cogongrass was, and still is, spread by illegal plantings and inadvertent transport during mowing and roadway construction, as well as hay. It does not survive in cultivated areas but becomes quickly established along roadways, in forests, parks, and mining areas. It is now found throughout Florida from the panhandle region well into south Florida, but is most common in the northern and central peninsula. The real problem on the Refuge is the ability for cogongrass to grow in a dense monoculture in open pine stands and quickly outcompete native herbaceous vegetation, which has a much greater value to wildlife.

The occurrence of cogongrass on the Refuge in the past 10 years has increased substantially, from 2 known occurrences in 2004, to the current 26 known occurrences, ranging from a few stems along portions of the Dixie Mainline, to 2-3 acres near gate 5 in Levy County. Patches are treated annually until there is no sign of recurrence, but the plant is very resilient and hard to kill.

Repeated multiple herbicide applications along with regular vigilance are necessary.

Folks who see a patch of cogongrass on the Refuge are encouraged to report it to the Refuge Manager so that we can catch and treat these patches early, before they get much bigger, spread into adjoining woodlands, and are difficult to treat effectively. Patches along the forest roads need to be treated before mowing, as that activity quickly spreads the noxious exotic plant. At the present time, there aren't many other practical treatment options, but there are scientists exploring biocontrol agents, which may hold the key to eradication of this nasty pest plant in the future.

As a footnote: Ted Palfy and Jay Bushnell have been patrolling behind the gates for trash and general cleanup of downed trees and branches. On one of their trips, Ted identified a patch of

cogongrass. Of course we notified, Andrew and we also visited the site with Roger McDaniels. Roger brought research documents that clearly illustrated how to identify cogongrass.

The leaf is about one inch wide and the vein that runs the length of the leaf is off center. The leaves can be up to 6 feet and the root system is matted. Keep your eyes open for this invasive.



### **A VISITORS CENTER**

As we all recognize, a visitor center will help us better serve the conservation mission of the Friends group. When we finally do get a visitors center, we want to be prepared. At our April Board meeting, members brainstormed a vision of our Refuge Visitors Center. What follows is a listing of phrases associated with the Boards initial vision. The center would contain exhibits with some interactive of the timber



industry, prehistory, history on the river, flora and fauna in the refuges, and the fossil and geology record of the area.

There are so many stories to

be told.

We see the center reflecting a rustic outdoor appeal that communicates the local authentic 'cracker' architecture of the area complete with rocking chairs and porches. Reference material and a book store would provide access to further information for visitors.

The entire complex would feel inviting, informative, engaging and comfortable. The grounds would be accented with tables and chairs in a nonintrusive design that would lend itself to a relaxed experience of communing with the Suwannee River. The grounds would have signage that might focus on the boat house, or provide stories about past floods like the one in 1948. Landscaping would be eco friendly. Native plants complete with a butterfly garden would accent the grounds.

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