

Friends Forward



From the Chief Find the “Jessicas” in Your Town



Jim Kurth

“Never tell a young person that anything cannot be done. God may have been waiting centuries for someone ignorant enough of the impossible to do that very thing,” said the poet John Holmes.

For sure, don’t tell

16-year-old volunteer Jessica Flory.

She’s been calling attention to the growing problem of marine debris by wearing a dress she made from 87 balloons that Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge staff collected from a coastal island where turtles mistake the mylar scraps for food and choke on them.

Yes, she’s been getting stares. But she believes that wearing the dress in the right places will get people to understand that their birthday balloons just don’t disappear into the sky—that their actions have consequences.

Let’s not just hail Jessica. Let’s imbue a million youngsters with the same understanding and get-it-done spirit.

How?

I have three suggestions:

Make a personal connection. Invite the kids up the street or the second grade teacher you know to experience a wildlife refuge. Follow up with a conversation about what they want to get out of their

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Sara Blocker/2012 NWRA Photo Contest Finalist

Friends of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM, helped raise funds to expand the refuge in 2007.

Growing the Refuge System Wisely

The Strategic Growth team, as part of the *Conserving the Future* implementation, is working on recommendations to sharpen the Refuge System’s focus so lands are added effectively and strategically. Ultimately the team’s recommendations will become Refuge System policy.

The team is outlining the Refuge System’s most important conservation objectives, ensuring that lands and waters are acquired to help achieve priority objectives, such as recovering threatened or endangered species, implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, or conserving migratory birds with declining populations.

The need to identify priorities has never been clearer. The Refuge System’s

recently completed “rapid assessment” of land protection projects showed that more than five million acres could still be purchased within the acquisition boundaries of existing wildlife refuges. “That would take 100 years to complete at current funding levels,” says Eric Alvarez, chief of the Refuge System Division of Realty.

Friends Important to Refuge Expansion

Refuge Friends groups often play a significant role in helping refuges expand their boundaries. In other cases, community organizations that subsequently became Friends groups were instrumental in establishing new refuges.

Some Friends groups have raised money for small land acquisitions or provided matching funds for larger land

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New Ways to Teach Invasives

What happens to a river invaded by non-native zebra mussels? Why were gypsy moths intentionally introduced to the United States? How do you know if you are pulling up a mile-a-minute vine or good native ground cover?

An updated environmental education curriculum and a new app for smartphones provide some answers.

Wild Things: Investigating Invasive Species offers basic information and activities for grades six to eight. The booklet explains the harm caused by native and non-native invasive plants and animals, provides fact sheets on several widespread invasives (leafy spurge, melaleuca, round goby, zebra mussel, brown tree snake) and gives detailed instructions for several activities—including ways young people can help control invasive species.

The information and activities may be incorporated into field trips or class visits or distributed to local middle schools. One page shows how the curriculum helps educators meet the specific national science curriculum standards followed by public schools in most states. Find *Wild Things* online at fws.gov/invasives/nwrs.html (under “What’s New”).

Zapped with an App

A new smartphone application designed for several New England refuges enables users to identify plants, photograph and map them. The “National Wildlife Refuge Early Detection Network for New England” can be downloaded for free on an iPhone, iPad or Android device. Staff and volunteers from six refuges received training on the app last summer. Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, MA, plans to use it during the 2013 field season, where several Friends are among the trained volunteers.


As the name suggests, the app can increase opportunities for “early detection rapid response” (EDRR). The app “narrows which species are most important to find early, so that we can



Invasive Plant Atlas of New England

A new smartphone app will enable volunteers to identify the mile-a-minute vine and help control it before it invades multiple states.

recognize species as they arrive,” when it’s much easier to control them, explains Cynthia Boettner, coordinator for the invasive plant control initiative at Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge in New England. The mile-a-minute vine, for example, is already in Massachusetts but not yet in New Hampshire. Boettner will be training volunteers throughout the Connecticut River watershed to limit the vine’s spread.

The app was developed by the University of Georgia EDDMaps (Early Detection & Distribution Mapping System). For anyone without a smartphone, there is also a Web site (www.eddmaps.org/) with printable fact sheets and full-color flashcards for many invasive species. 

Refuge Friends Connect

Join the new Refuge Friends Connect Web site to share information and experiences. RefugeFriendsConnect.org includes a directory of Friends organizations, resource articles, forums to pose questions and get advice, Refuge System news and a calendar of Friends events.

Sharing Refuge System Experience Abroad

Russia's 100-plus nature reserves have traditionally been open to researchers but closed to the public. That is beginning to change as the nation seeks both to attract more visitors and foster a culture of volunteerism. The Refuge System is helping provide some advice.

In fall 2012, about 100 people participated in the first-ever Washington, DC-to-Moscow video conference organized by EcoCenter Zapovedniks, a group of conservation experts that trains staff for Russian nature reserves. Focusing on volunteer recruitment and retention, Joanna Webb, national Friends and partnership coordinator, presented information on how refuges recognize volunteers, how volunteers are supervised and the economic benefit of using volunteers.

"It was an eye-opening experience," says Webb, because of the lack of volunteers in Russia. "In our minds, we have a hard time getting volunteers, but actually we have an amazing gift here." In 2011, 42,000 volunteers donated 1.5 million hours to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In summer 2012, Refuge System representatives traveled to Lake Baikal in Siberia and Kronotsky Nature Reserve in Kamchatka in far eastern Russia to suggest improvements to opportunities for foreign birdwatchers.

Supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland from J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, FL, helped design two bird-focused visitor centers on Lake Baikal. Westland and Great Lakes regional visitor services chief Maggie O'Connell drew site plans for a particularly remote area, including space for rangers to live and cook, housing and other facilities for visitors as well as exhibits for avid birders.


At a second visitor center on the shores of Lake Baikal, Westland and O'Connell designed exhibits, for families, including programs related to the bird banding



Refuge System representatives and their Russian colleagues examine the site of a new visitor center near Lake Baikal in Russia.

station there. "We offered what we know works at 'Ding' Darling," said Westland. She recommended a very popular build-a-bird exhibit that lets children put together a bird on a carpeted wall to see how its beak and feet are adapted to different habitats. The Russians learned that visitor centers need to be open during regularly-scheduled hours. O'Connell and Westland recommended

touch tables where visitors can hold objects from the wild as well as exhibits next to windows, with binoculars for people to look for birds.

"Russia has unique ecosystems," says Steven Kohl, with the Service's Division of International Conservation, "and the Service has an international reputation for designing visitor centers that convey a conservation message." 

Sense of Wonder Award

Sheila McCartan, visitor services manager and park ranger at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, WA, received the 2012 Sense of Wonder Award, recognizing outstanding contributions in interpretation and environmental education. McCartan has worked at Nisqually Refuge since 1995, when she was instrumental in starting the refuge Friends group and its nature store. Proceeds from the store support McCartan's many environmental education projects, including an outdoor Nature Explore area that hosts preschool groups as well as families with young children.

McCartan has remained closely involved with the Friends, which she feels is critical to nurturing a spirit of cooperation and partnership in meeting the refuge mission. With Friends help in 2013, McCartan will spearhead one project to attract more birders to the refuge and hire a local artist to paint a mural of the Pacific flyway on the walls of the new education center.

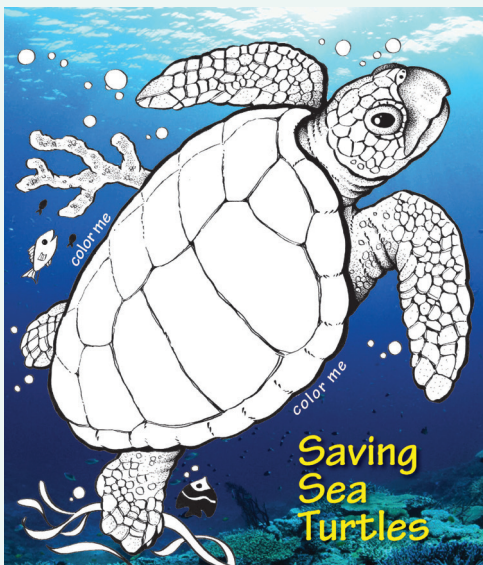


from friend to friend

share your
success
stories

FLORIDA—Sea Turtle Education

With the help of an \$18,350 grant from the Sea Turtle Conservancy, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has expanded educational outreach about turtles to children and other visitors to the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. The Wildlife Society purchased life-sized replicas of a loggerhead hatchling and adult, a Kemp’s Ridley adult and a cross-section of a loggerhead sea turtle nest. The models will provide hands-on familiarity with turtles in the “Ding” Darling Education Lab. The grant also will help refuge staff design and purchase sea turtle activity booklets and fund brochures to be distributed during nesting season at hotels and resorts and through the Chamber of Commerce.



The “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society will distribute this brochure about sea turtles to hotels and other resorts during nesting season.

“We hope to educate the public about the significance of various sea turtle species as well as the importance of avoiding sea turtle nests and filling in holes on the beach to improve the survival rate of hatchlings,” said Birgie Vertesch, Wildlife Society executive director.

Materials are available at www.dingdarlingsociety.org/kids-page. For information, contact Bergie Vertesch at director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

NEW JERSEY—Celebrate Urban Birds!

It all started with a request for help from teachers leading after-school enrichment programs at two low-income schools in Pleasantville, NJ. The Friends of Forsythe Environmental Education Committee obtained a \$500 Celebrate Urban Birds mini-grant from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO) (celebrateurbanbirds.org.) For the past three years, Friends volunteers have been visiting the schools every two weeks to teach third graders about urban birds—starlings, robins, crows, mourning doves, pigeons.

Each week’s program focuses on one of 16 birds and draws 15 to 20 children. The Friends group provides binoculars for a brief outdoor session.

The day starlings were featured, the children discovered 500 perched on a power line. Tallies of all the birds seen are sent to Cornell; the children learn they are citizen scientists helping Cornell University gather data about urban birds.

Each year, CLO provides a poster, information about the birds and sunflower seeds for each child. In one session, the Friends help the kids make milk carton birdfeeders.

Volunteer instructor Mar-Jo Attack says, “Most of the children walk to school but don’t even realize there are birds in the city. One came back after our program and said, ‘Guess what? I saw a robin when I was coming to school.’” For information, contact Mar-Jo Attack at marjoa14@aol.com.

WASHINGTON—Restoring a Barn

The land now part of Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge was homesteaded by more than 200 families, forming a close knit community complete with schools, a post office and regular



Children make milk carton bird feeders in a Celebrate Urban Birds program organized by Friends of Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, NJ.

David Blood

social events. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a succession of homesteaders built and used what is now called the Hartnett-Simpson barn. Typical of the log barns ubiquitous in the area, its steeply pitched roof shows that the original builder knew how to deal with heavy snow fall.

At the request of refuge manager Jerry Cline, the Friends of Little Pend Oreille worked with an expert in historic restoration and the regional archaeologist to restore the barn, peeling logs and installing new foundation supports. Friends member Dan Price says volunteers will continue to work to reverse some earlier modifications so the barn is as close as possible to its original configuration.

The barn is slated to become one of the first stops on a new auto tour through the refuge. Interpretive signs will be placed in the spring. For more information, contact Jerry_Cline@fws.gov.

TEXAS—Nature Kiosk

Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge has no visitor center and no nature store, but the



Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, TX, uses a traveling nature kiosk to sell merchandise and promote the refuge.

Friends wanted to generate revenue and attract visitors. A nature kiosk fit the bill. The Friends received a \$5,000 National Environmental Education Foundation capacity-building grant to

purchase the traveling kiosk from Cart King International. The Friends Web address and a photograph were added to a “custom wrap” on the kiosk, which includes a locked storage compartment and a grid to hang merchandise.

“We think this will open some doors for us,” says board member Jim Nosler. The kiosk will be open on weekends even if the headquarters office is closed and Friends will take it to community events to promote both the refuge and the Friends. Two people can lift the kiosk into the back of a pick-up truck. “Just make sure it fits where you intend to store it,” warns Nosler. make sure it fits where you intend to store it, warns Nosler. For more information, contact jnosler@gmail.com. 🦋



Friends of Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge, WA, helped restore this 1892 homesteading barn.

Jim Nosler

Friends of Little Pend Oreille

Draft Plan for Volunteer and Partnership Involvement

The *Conserving the Future* Community Partnership implementation team's draft strategic plan for volunteer and partnership involvement recommends:

- Over the next five years, add 50 Friends organizations or formal community partnerships for staffed refuges that don't now have such an organization. In the next decade, the Refuge System hopes to have a Friends organization for every staffed refuge. Today, 139 staffed refuges have no Friends organization.
- Work to hire full-time volunteer coordinators at refuges or refuge

complex that get more than 200,000 annual visitors.

- Enhance recruitment, orientation and incentives for volunteers, especially among diverse communities.
- Strengthen Friends training not only through the Refuge System Friends Academy, but also through national conferences and regional workshops.
- Redesign the Friends mentoring program.

As draft plans are posted, Refuge Friends and others may comment online at

americaswildlife.org/about-the-network or by emailing conservingthefuture@fws.gov. 

Comments are being accepted through March 15 on a draft plan to expand the Friends mentoring program. Find the plan at americaswildlife.org; click on Social Network, then Groups, then Community Partnerships.

From the Chief—Continued from page 1


encounter with the natural world. And how the Refuge System might fulfill their personal or organizational goals. The first step is extending a personal invitation.

Talk their language: Young people use Facebook and Twitter. Are we using these media as well and as often as we might? Are we using language that resonates with the audiences we want to reach? Do we insist on using messages that we like rather than listening to the messages our target audiences value?

Go places where we usually don't travel.

If we want to introduce the world of conservation to people who don't usually connect with the outdoors, then we have to travel their road. Reach out to organizations outside of your typical sphere. For example, sororities and fraternities are major civic organizations among African Americans during and even after they graduate college. Is there a chapter in your community, and do they know you? Perhaps you partner with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Do you know

the Big Brother or Big Sister organization in your community?

There are scores of Jessicas—motivated, intelligent young people—in your community. Introduce more of them to your local wildlife refuge. 

Growing the Refuge System Wisely—Continued from page 1

purchases. For example, the Friends of Bosque del Apache, NM, raised \$63,000 to purchase Chupadera Peak in 2007. The Friends of Chassahowitzka, FL, helped raised \$2 million toward the purchase of the Three Sisters Springs manatee habitat in 2010.


“We need Friends talking in their communities about the importance of land to protect wildlife and meet the mission of the Refuge System,” says Alvarez.

All land acquisition proposals must identify priority conservation objectives

and the surrogate species that represent them (see *Friends Forward Fall 2012*). The recently established Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area in Florida, for example, provides habitat for both endangered species and migratory birds.

Planning for Refuge System growth will be enhanced by the scientific capacity of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). The Refuge System will look to state fish and wildlife agencies and other partners to provide input on the strategic growth policy. The Service will look to its partners to work

within the LCC framework to help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identify new lands for the Refuge System.

Additional information about the work of the *Conserving the Future* implementation teams may be found at <http://americaswildlife.org/>. 

Q&A *send us your questions*

What Are the Secrets to a Great Nature Store?

- **Consider a selection committee to choose books.** “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society, FL, has a committee of five, including a refuge staff person and Friends selected for their knowledge of specific areas such as birding or photography. Merritt Island Wildlife Society, FL, nature store manager Sandee Larson recommends an odd number of committee members; her committee meets monthly.
- **Attend wholesale markets.** Friends of Necedah, WI, store manager Audrey Traver looks for new and unique items at the Minneapolis Mart. This year she found relatively high priced but beautifully painted plates and bowls that “made a beautiful display and sold out right away.”
- **Biggest sales may not add up to biggest profits.** “Our biggest sales come from books,” says “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society store manager Lise Bryant, “but our biggest profits come from clothing. By using template ideas from several t-shirt companies we create t-shirts that are truly our own.” Larson says autographed copies of popular nature publications are big sellers at Merritt Island Refuge.
- **Move merchandise around the store.** Add new items frequently.
- **Talk to people about the refuge even if they are not buying.**
- **Offer discounted items and an area where children can read and touch.** “We had 200 stainless steel water mugs for two years. When we put them in the clearance cart at a 50 percent discount, they sold immediately,” says Traver.
- **Choose a computerized point of sale system carefully.** This provides regular sales records, including times



Friends of Necedah's Karner Korner, WI, promotes Friends membership right along with the merchandise.


of highest sales so the store can be staffed accordingly.

- **Vary the displays.** Friends of Necedah invites different local wildlife artists to display and sell their work each month.
- **Volunteer or paid staff.** Friends of Necedah's Karner Korner is staffed solely with volunteers at least six days a week, year round. “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society store has a paid staff member, which Bryant feels is essential to growing the business. In either case, provide adequate training and on-site information (including how to handle sales when the computer goes down).



Custom caps, magnets and t-shirts are popular sales items.

• Key questions to ask when opening or expanding a store:

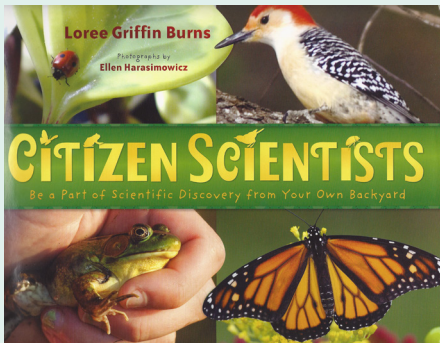
- Who are your customers (school groups, retirees, tourists, locals, anglers, birders, hunters)?
- Are your sales seasonal or year round?
- Which species are bringing people to your refuge?
- What storage facilities do you have? Balance the benefit of ordering large quantities with the need to keep inventory in line with costs.
 - What insurance will you need to protect the store, the inventory and employees or volunteers?
 - What state laws govern sales by nonprofit organizations (permits, tax forms, etc.)? 



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Book Shelf

Imagine putting a tag the size of a child's fingertip on the wing of a monarch butterfly. Children do just that in the pages of *Citizen Scientists: Be a Part of Scientific Discovery from Your Own Backyard*, by Loree Griffin Burns. This book, filled with photographs by Ellen Harasimowicz, is an inspiring invitation to young people to participate in citizen science, which the author calls "the study of our world by the people who live in it."

Friends Forward— Going Digital?

More and more publications are saving trees by going digital. Should we do the same with the quarterly *Friends Forward*? We are considering ending the printed newsletter and instead creating a digital-only format that you would receive every two months, enabling you to open individual articles right from your email. Send your opinions to Karen_Leggett@fws.gov along with your email address so you will be ready to continue receiving *Friends Forward* if we decide to make this change.

Friends Forward

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