



Credit: USFWS

## North Carolina National Wildlife Refuges have something to CROW about! Our Volunteers are pretty AWESOME!

Staff from North Carolina Coastal Plain National Wildlife Refuge Complex recently honored volunteers for their hours of dedication to North Carolina refuges. Visitor Services Manager Bonnie Strawser mentioned,

*"We are overwhelmed with the awesome attitudes, solid work ethic, and passion for wildlife and people that are the shared traits of these folks! SALUTE! Thanks so much for all you do!"*

Volunteers help fulfill the missions of Alligator River, Pea Island, Pocosin Lakes and Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuges by interacting with visitors at visitor centers, helping with maintenance, conducting outreach and education programs, assisting with biological programs, and many other behind-the-scenes duties. This year, 254 individuals donated 23,000 hours. Volunteers include seasonal interns, Resident Volunteers, community service groups, and local residents.



Dennis Pohl was awarded his Volunteer-of-the-Year certificate and jacket from Project Leader Rebekah Martin, credit: USFWS.

The highlight of the evening was the awarding of Volunteer of the Year to Dennis Pohl who helps with the sea turtle program, van tours, and assorted maintenance duties.

Volunteers are awarded certificates and/or pins recognizing their cumulative hours spent volunteering.

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NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

## Biological Program Update

Submitted by Becky Harrison

Another busy sea turtle nesting season on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge has come to a close! Refuge staff, interns, and volunteers searched the beaches daily for sea turtle activities from May 29 through September 1. Thank you to everyone who participated in Turtle Patrol this season! This year, we documented 69 turtle nesting activities including 37 false crawls, 30 loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) nests, and 2 green (*Chelonia mydas*) nests. In 2016, we observed a record number of 41 nests (all loggerheads). Several nests were lost to overwash events from various hurricanes.

We are grateful to all the volunteers and interns who participated in our Turtle Watch program monitoring nests. Special thanks to Andy and Cindy Bullwinkel, our Resident Volunteers and Turtle Watch gatekeepers! Turtle Watch volunteers monitored active nests nightly (when possible) July through October and observed hatchlings emerge. If there are no activities documented at nests, they are excavated ~80 days after they are discovered. We are still calculating total hatch success rates and nest emergence rates so stay tuned for a seasonal summary.

With decreasing temperatures, sea turtle stranding events may occur. Sea turtles can become cold-stunned when water temperatures drop rapidly below 55°F. When this occurs, sea turtles become hypothermic and lethargic, inhibiting their ability to swim or dive. As a result, cold-stunned sea turtles can be observed floating motionless on the water's surface and are pushed by wind and currents until they wash up along inshore beaches. If you observe any stranded sea turtle (or marine mammal), please report it immediately to the Supervisory Refuge Biologist, Becky Harrison, at 252/473 1132 ext. 231. If you are unable to reach anyone at the refuge, you can also call the NC Wildlife Resources Commission Emergency Stranding cell phone at 252/241 7367. Do not handle or move any stranded animals. Certain precautions need to be taken when responding to cold-stunned events, and it's important to let refuge staff know as soon as possible so they can follow the proper protocol to ensure the safety of turtles during transport if needed.



A nesting female loggerhead sea turtle on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, credit: USFWS/Broad.

The colder temperatures and shorter day length also bring wintering waterfowl to the refuges. These areas are roughly at the midpoint of the Atlantic Flyway migration corridor and include valuable feeding and resting areas for numerous species. Management of the refuge's moist soil units, impoundments, and marshes for waterfowl is important for providing sufficient sanctuary areas that offer undisturbed resting and feeding areas for waterfowl.

*Some species are already starting to show up at Pea Island refuge including large groups of dabbling ducks such as Northern pintails, gadwall, buffleheads, and American wigeon. Tundra swans and American white pelicans are also beginning to arrive and are visible on New Field and South Pond.*

If you are interested in seeing what's using Pea Island now, we encourage you to explore the wildlife trails at North Pond or Salt Flats. Alligator River refuge is a great place to see tundra swans and large groups of dabbling ducks like Northern pintails, green-winged teal, and gadwall as well as diving species like ring-necked ducks.

## 2017 Wings Over Water a HUGE success!

*The 21st annual Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival main session in October was a huge success due to fantastic weather, great leaders, and enthusiastic participants. Over 300 participants from 27 states and Great Britain, along with 50 trip leaders, came to see thousands of birds, bears, alligators and other wildlife. They visited six national wildlife refuges in six northeastern North Carolina counties to bird, paddle, take photos, learn to draw and paint, and much more. This fun, mostly outdoor festival, has proven to be a great way to introduce people to and bring them back to the beautiful Outer Banks region.*



Alligator River Refuge Sunset Canoe Tour, credit: USFWS.



Artist John Sill with participants of the Bird Drawing and Watercolor program, credit: USFWS



Alligator River Refuge Van Tour, credit: USFWS.

## Resident Volunteers Annette Malinak and Susan Wheatley (Pea Island)

### February through April

Annette retired from teaching in 2012. While on the road in her RV, she likes to volunteer, see new sights, and meet new folks. At home in New Mexico, Annette likes to garden, hike the Sacramento Mountains, watch wildlife, and geocache. Also, she has taught herself to fly fish and thrashes water with the best.



Annette Malinak

Susan retired from a 30-year career as a paralegal in 2011. She has spent her retirement volunteering for the US Forest Service and the Red Cross. She has been busy in her community and campaigned for public office in 2016. In 2017, she caught the RV bug and has spent the ensuing months camping at New Mexico's state parks where she hikes, fishes, watches wildlife, and meets folks from all walks of life. Having grown up near the Texas Gulf Coast, Susan also is very fond of everything a coastal environment brings.



Susan Wheatley

## Out and About in the Community



*Federal Wildlife Officer/Senior Field Training Officer Jay Eddy and Federal Wildlife Officer Cody Smith gave a presentation to the Public Safety Class at Manteo High School in December. Both Officers spoke about their educational backgrounds, experience with prior agencies, and highlighted cases they have had throughout their careers, credit: USFWS.*

## Resident Volunteers Rick Hulkenberg and Mick Oxendine (Pea Island)

### January through June

This is the first volunteer opportunity Mick and Rick have taken on since they retired in September, 2017. They live full-time in their motorhome with their dog, Rex, and canary named Will. Mick spent his career in hotel services while Rick worked in different capacities for the federal government. According to Rick,

*"Together, we look forward to many years traveling the country and volunteering as work campers to get to know this great country better. We love meeting new folks and learning their stories and are happy to share ours, too."*



Mick Oxendine and Rick Hulkenberg

## Support Your National Wildlife Refuges - Donate to Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society

*Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society exists to support interpretive, educational and volunteer programs of eastern NC national wildlife refuges with a focus on Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges and the National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center on Roanoke Island.*

Your contributions to the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society help make it possible to provide this support.

Your donation helps support local K-12 schools by assisting with educational programs and funding transportation grants for students and teachers to visit the refuges and the National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center. It also helps to maintain refuge land and water trails, provides refuge visitor services staff, assists with the annual Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival, and supports dozens of refuge projects and programs.

Please support your national wildlife refuges by donating \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100 or more. Send check or money order to, Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society, P.O. Box 1808, Manteo, NC 27954. You can also use a credit card by calling 252/216 9464 or visiting <http://www.coastalwildliferefuge.com/donate.html>.

## Wings

Alligator River & Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges  
PO Box 1969 (mailing)  
100 Conservation Way (physical)  
Manteo, NC 27954  
Phone: 252/473 1131  
Fax: 252/473 1668  
E-mail: [alligatorriver@fws.gov](mailto:alligatorriver@fws.gov)  
[http://www.fws.gov/refuge/alligator\\_river/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/alligator_river/)

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## National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center Invaded by Hyde County Sixth-graders!

Recently staff and volunteers were thrilled to have sixth-graders from Mattamuskeet Middle School visit the Coastal NC National Wildlife Refuges Gateway Visitor Center to learn about our bears and participate in the exhibit hall scavenger hunt! This field trip was one component of the AmeriCorps VISTA



Visitor Services Specialist Cindy Heffley teaching the students about the importance of national wildlife refuges in North Carolina, credit: USFWS.



Resident Volunteer George Radecsky helping the students during the scavenger hunt in the exhibit hall, credit: USFWS.

## Creef Cut Trail Boardwalk Rehabilitation



RV Volunteer George Harrison with NCCC team members, credit: USFWS.



NCCC team members on the rehabilitated Creef Cut Trail Boardwalk, credit: USFWS.

The River3 team from AmeriCorps NCCC Southern Region arrived in October. After a full day of orientation, they went to work rehabbing the Creef Cut Boardwalk which had been in need of repairs due to storms and normal wear and tear. They were an awesome group of hardworking young people and finished the project right on schedule.

Other accomplishments included helping with installation of road signs throughout the refuge and assisting with other work being done on the refuge. The boardwalk looks incredible! Thanks Team River3 from AmeriCorps NCCC Southern Region (Official).

## Red Wolf Caretaker Intern January - March



Maggie Veith has a Bachelor's degree in Biology and a Master's degree in Environmental Science. Originally from Maryland, Maggie's previous experience involves over seven years working with domestic animals and wildlife in shelters and private veterinary practices. Her ultimate goal is to work in wildlife conservation, especially involving wolves and human-wildlife conflict. On her days off, Maggie enjoys hiking, kayaking, and other outdoor activities, as well as spending time with her dog, Jax.



American holly is a small evergreen tree native to the eastern United States. It occurs on Alligator River, Pocosin Lakes, Mattamuskeet, and Swanquarter National Wildlife Refuges in the understories of forests, credit Bob Glennon.



Newfoundland, Canada, credit: USFWS



Black Flag 56 Piping Plover, credit: USFWS

## Visitor from Canada!

On October 16, 2017, Pea Island Refuge Biologists located a banded Piping Plover foraging along the beaches of the refuge during a routine bird survey. Upon reporting the information to other biologists, they learned that this bird, Black Flag 56, was banded on July 6, 2017 as a chick on Short Sand Beach, Newfoundland Canada. Along its southerly migration, it was previously seen twice on Assateague Island in Virginia in August. While conducting another routine survey on October 27, Refuge Biologists were again able to locate the bird foraging along the beaches of the refuge and capture some great photographs. BF56 was hatched on June 19 and was banded with its three siblings on July 6.



The weather may be cold during the winter months on the tram, but visitors are treated to seeing hundreds of waterfowl and numerous raptors such as Bald Eagles and Northern Harriers. Occasionally a black bear or river otter is also seen, credit: USFWS.