



# Friends Newsletter

September 2015

## Message from the President

This year has proved to be an interesting and productive one. Fundraising for the **Kingfisher Pond Discovery Center (KPDC)** project continues to ramp up. We hope to break ground on the Center before the end of the year. One way you can contribute is to purchase a KPDC t-shirt from our online store or at the Gator Hole. You can also donate using our new web page on [The Giving Marketplace](#).

We are now offering a **10% discount at The Gator Hole** for members of the Friends of the Savannah Coastal Refuges. Tell the store clerk you are a member and the 10% will be applied to your purchase. The only exceptions are Duck Stamps and sale items.

**Refuge Week** events are from October 9th to 11th. The events include: a bison burger dinner with Teddy Roosevelt (Joe Wiegand) the evening of Friday, the 9<sup>th</sup> at Sgt. Jasper Park in Hardeeville; a full day of activities at the Savannah NWR Visitor Center on Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup>; the popular yearly riverboat cruise on the Savannah River on Sunday the 11<sup>th</sup>; and "An Evening with TR" on Sunday evening at St. Peter's Episcopal Church on Skidaway Island. Mark your calendar now!

**Volunteers Needed!** We are a volunteer organization, and we rely on the willingness of our members to donate their time and energies to fulfill our mission. There are many great opportunities to volunteer your services from clerking at The Gator Hole to joining a Friends Committee, to assisting in one of the educational activities supported by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Friends. Please contact us if you want to become a volunteer. Remember: "Work to make a living...volunteer to make a difference!"

Rick Shields, President

## Refuge Week Activities Announced

It's that time of year again! Mark your calendars for National Wildlife Refuge Week activities the weekend of October 9-11, 2015. Registration for the Friday and Sunday evening events will open on Monday, September 14 on our website ([coastalrefuges.org](http://coastalrefuges.org)). Cruise reservations for Friends group members will open the same day by phone only (call Amy at 843-784-9911.) Non-members must purchase cruise tickets directly from the Savannah Riverboat Company at 800-786-6404 or online [HERE](#). **Tickets are limited for these three events.** No reservations are needed for the Saturday, Oct. 11 full days of events.

### **Friday, October 9. 9am – 11am: Paddle the Savannah River.**

Join the **Swampgirls Paddle Club** for a beautiful six-mile paddle with the current down the Savannah River along the border of Savannah NWR. This has become a very popular annual event led by Friends Board member Linda Etchells. The trip will begin at Millstone Landing at 9 am with a shuttle up to Beck's Ferry Landing and end back at Millstone Landing. There will be 4 loaner kayaks available for a suggested \$45 donation. A \$20 donation is suggested for those using their own kayaks or canoes. A one-year Friends membership is included with your donation. Reserve early as space is limited. Contact Linda Etchells at: (843)247-9191 or email at [swampchicks@aol.com](mailto:swampchicks@aol.com). See **Paddle 2015** article below for more details about the trip.

### **Friday Evening, October 9. 5:00pm - 8:00pm: "Buffalo Burgers and TR in the Park"**

A bison burger dinner is planned with [Teddy Roosevelt \(Joe Wiegand\)](#) at Sergeant Jasper State Park in Hardeeville. We recommend that attendees donate \$20 or more for adults and \$10 for children 10 and under. A one-year Friends membership is included with your donation. Refuge staff will prepare the bison burger dinner, also included. Hamburgers and hotdogs will be available if your taste does not run to bison.

### **Saturday, October 10. 9am – 4pm: Refuge Week at Savannah NWR.**

A full day of activities for the whole family at Savannah NWR Visitor Center co-sponsored by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Bird walks, games, "TR", educational exhibits, archery, and equipment displays are just part of the fun. Hot dogs and snacks provided. No reservations needed, come by any time.

### **Sunday, October 11. 1pm – 4pm: Savannah River Refuge Cruise**

Join us for a leisurely cruise up the Savannah River into the Savannah NWR aboard *The Georgia Queen*, a Savannah Riverboat Company replica paddle wheel steamer. This is our 5th cruise and it has been a big hit with previous guests. The cruise is co-sponsored by US Fish & Wildlife Service. "TR" will perform and Refuge staff will present a State-of-the-Refuge talk.

**Reservations: Tickets are limited. Free tickets for Friends members.**

Each **Individual** Friends member may reserve a maximum of 1 free ticket in advance. Members at the **Family** membership level or higher may reserve up to 2 free tickets. Cruise reservations for Friends group members are by phone only (call Amy at 843-784-9911). If you are not a member join now. >> [Join the Friends](#).

Pickup you Member tickets at the Friends table on the dock. Lunch is not included. If you would like to have lunch onboard purchase vouchers at the Savannah Riverboat Company ticket office.

Non-members must purchase cruise tickets and optional lunch vouchers directly from the Savannah Riverboat Company at 800-786-6404 or online [HERE](#).

### **Sunday Evening, October 11. 6pm – 8pm: “An evening with TR on Skidaway Island”**

Join us for “An Evening with TR” at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church on Skidaway Island. Attendees will be asked for a \$20 donation (\$5 for kids 10 and under) which includes a Friends membership. Joe Wiegand puts on a show as TR that you don’t want to miss.

## **The Gator Hole – Member Discount & Annual Sale**

**New Member Discount.** Friends of the Savannah Coastal Refuges active members will now receive, as of September 1st, a 10% discount at The Gator Hole store for all purchases except for duck stamps and sale items. Tell the store clerk you are a member and the 10% will be applied to your purchase. People who join the Friends at the time of purchase will receive the 10% discount.

**Annual Holiday** - December 5. Once again the Friends will offer 20% off all eligible merchandise at The Gator Hole on Saturday, December 5! Be sure to mark your calendar.

**New Kingfisher Pond Discovery Center Project Shirts.** Thanks to the staff at Bahama Joe's in Savannah for the beautiful eight-color Kingfisher Pond Discovery Center Project shirts. We hope to use the shirts to raise awareness of the project and to increase donations to move the project forward. Please consider buying shirts for you and your family. All net proceeds will go to the KPDC Project.

**New Online Store.** [Click Here](#) to go to our new on-line store, or stop by **The Gator Hole** at the Savannah NWR Visitor Center.

## Paddle 2015

This year's Swampgirls Paddle Club will be on Friday, October 9<sup>th</sup>. This paddle is on the beautiful Savannah River paddling from Beck's Ferry Landing to Millstone Landing in Hardeeville, SC.

This is a one way 6 mile trip with the current down along the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge and also through Historical Purrysburg. You will pass by an old abandoned Rice Barge, a rusty old 1900 vintage Tug Boat partially sunken along the bank and the remains of the railroad trestle from the Argent Railroad.

The trip is along the upper portion of the refuge and you will see birds and wildlife along the way. The Swampgirls have been doing this trip for several years and this year's donations will be going towards the Friends newest project the "Kingfisher Pond Discovery Center" which will in the future provide a new place for refuge activities located at the Kingfisher Pond on the Refuge.

Bring water and a snack to enjoy along the way. There will be 4 loaner kayaks available for a suggested \$45 donation made out to "The Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuge" or those of you with your own kayaks or canoes for just a suggested \$20 donation. This trip will be led by Linda Etchells.

The trip begins at Millstone Landing at 9 am with a shuttle up to Beck's Ferry Landing and end back at Millstone Landing. Reserve early as space is limited. Contact Linda Etchells at: (843)247-9191 or email at [swampchicks@aol.com](mailto:swampchicks@aol.com).

## Kingfisher Pond Discovery Center Update

Funds donated to date for the project are \$57,000. This is an ambitious project for the Friends. This building will provide much-needed instructional space (including classroom and lecture space, wet labs, a library and AV equipment) to bring local student and community groups into first-hand contact with the wildlife and wildlife habitat preserved by the Savannah NWR and managed by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. The four-season free-standing building at the Kingfisher Pond Recreation area will be located on the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge.

We are soliciting donations from individuals, groups and local corporations and foundations, and we are pleased to announce that as of April 17, 2015 we have surpassed our Phase 1 goal of \$50,000 in contributions! A big Friends group thanks to the **IKEA Distribution Center 490** in Port Wentworth which is our **Phase 1 Lead Supporter** having donated \$18,300 in cash with a promise of up to \$10,000 more in in-kind contributions of furniture for the Center when completed. This means we can now begin the permitting process and hope to begin clearing the building site soon. Big thanks also to Dr. Todd Cellini, President of the Savannah

campus of South University for all his efforts promoting the project as Chair of our KPDCP Advisory Committee.

Please make a tax-exempt KPDC donation. Donations can now be made online using [The Giving Marketplace](#) or [PayPal](#) from our website.

>> [Read more](#) about the KPDC on our website.

## Member Survey

The Friends of the Savannah Coastal Refuges (FSCWR) wants to better understand our member's expectations. Your answers to our questions would be appreciated. It will take you less than 5 minutes to complete the survey. The results will help us understand the preferences of our members. You should have received an Email about the Survey and a link to the Survey.

If you have not yet sent a survey to the Friends select the following link to take the Survey.

>> [Go to Survey](#)

## New Donation Service - The Giving Marketplace

We have made it easier for you to donate the Friends by using our new entry on The Giving Marketplace web site. Go to [The Giving Marketplace](#) to make a donation to the Friends.

The Giving Marketplace is a service of the Community Foundation of Lowcountry. The foundation is a non-profit organizations in the South Carolina counties near Hilton Head. There are more than 700 community foundations across the United States. Community foundations are tax-exempt public charities serving thousands of people who share a common interest—improving the quality of life in their area.

## Volunteers Needed

There many opportunities to be a Friends volunteer. We need your help to continue to support the refuge, provide programs for our members, fund the KPDC and more.

**Join a Committee** - We need volunteers to join our committees: KPDC Advisory, Membership, Communication, Finance/Audit, The Gator Hole, and Strategic

Planning. Joining a committee is a great way to work with the Friends Board of Directors (BoD) with the possibility of becoming a BoD member.

**Savannah NWR Visitor Center:** The Savannah NWR Visitor Center is one of the most important places we have to interact with visitors. We see folks from around the country and the world who want to know more about our refuges and the refuge system. The visitor center is also home to *The Gator Hole*, our book and nature store that last year generated more than \$42,000 in sales. This represents a major portion of the Friends' income – income that is used to support projects on our refuges.

Volunteers are needed to staff the Information Desk and The Gator Hole. Shifts are Mon-Sat, 9 AM-12:30 PM and 12:30 PM until 4:00PM. You may sign up for as many or as few as fit your schedule. Training is available and Refuge staff is always on hand to assist. Our iPad based sales system is very user-friendly. >> [More Information](#)

**Special Skills** – The BoD requires expertise on an infrequent basis for legal advice, accounting advice, grant writing, all aspects of KPDC construction, etc. If you have a skill that you think may be beneficial to the Friends let us know.

#### **Volunteering Contacts**

The Gator Hole: Rick Shields ([refugeman@comcast.net](mailto:refugeman@comcast.net))

All Other Positions: John Petraglia ([johnpetr17@gmail.com](mailto:johnpetr17@gmail.com))

### **Savannah Morning News' Readers' Choice Contest**

The Savannah NWR is a nominee in the 2015 Savannah Morning News' Readers' Choice contest for "*Best place to take your kids*" in the Food and Entertainment category (near the bottom of the list). To vote follow this link:

<http://savannahnow.com/readerschoice>. It's easy to vote. Winners will be tallied and announced in coming weeks. Thanks for participating!

If you have participated in a Savannah Morning News Second Street Voting Contest before, just click login/register to the right and enter your email address and password.

If you have not registered to vote before, also click login/register to the left, enter your password and then click "forgot password." Within a few minutes you should receive an email with instructions for creating a password. Once you have logged in/registered, just proceed with voting by selecting your favorite places or people in the categories below or write-in your choice.

## Leverage Your Amazon Purchases

The AmazonSmile Foundation has a program that allows you to aid the Friends with every Amazon purchase without cost to you. Once you have registered with the program, the Friends receive 0.5% of the cost of your eligible purchases. The only thing different you need to do is register, then shop through [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com). Each purchase is a small amount, but they do add up. Please consider taking advantage of this painless way to help the Friends by starting your shopping at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com).

## Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex Welcomes New Staff

In September, the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex will welcome two new members to the staff. Both newcomers are veteran US Fish and Wildlife Service employees filling slots vacated by recently retired staff members (hope you are enjoying retirement Jane and Peter!)

**Holly Gaboriault** (no photo yet) will serve as the new Project Leader for the complex. For the past two years Holly has served as Refuge Supervisor overseeing the Arctic, Alaska Marine, and other National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska. Prior to her service in Alaska, Holly served as Deputy Region Supervisor for Area II in Region 4 based in Atlanta, so the geographic change shouldn't be such a big adjustment for her.

Also coming to us from Alaska will be **Joel Vos**, who will join the Visitor Services staff as Environmental Education Specialist. He is currently stationed at Alaska Maritime NWR.

## Pinckney Island NWR - New Viewing Scope

A Mark I viewing telescope was installed next to the Ibis Pond on Pinckney Island NWR on August 24<sup>th</sup> to enhance the wildlife observation experience for the nearly 400,000 people who visit Pinckney Island NWR every year. US F&WS staff completed the installation.

Purchase of the scope was made possible through the generous contributions of: friends and family of long-time Pinckney volunteer Clem Dietze; the Hilton Head Audubon Society; Bluffton resident Janice Scully; and Elizabeth Gephart, Antoinette Starr, and Joan Thayer (descendants of the previous owners of Pinckney Island). A commemorative plaque to publicly acknowledge their generosity is in the works. Be sure to check it out on your next visit.

>> [Article with Picture](#)

## Pinckney Island NWR - Chinese Tallow: AmeriCorps to the Rescue (Reported by Ben Goggins)

Visitors to Pinckney Island number 400,000 annually. From now on they won't encounter all the invasive Chinese Tallow (*Triadica sebifera*) trees they would have at the start of the summer. Thanks to a group of young AmeriCorps members.

You've got to be young to tough out the kind of work they did. It's right up there with Army Ranger training. It doesn't get any hotter or steamier than the dense woods of Pinckney in June and July, which is when, for six weeks, the AmeriCorps team of eight performed their heroic labors.

These are America's best and brightest, college kids and recent college grads in environmental fields, with a drive to be a part of national and community service. Like the Depression-era CCC of old, they make a lasting difference.

While at Pinckney they worked under 23-year-old team leader Conor Mark. They stayed in the bunkhouse and rose at daybreak to hit the woods by 7:00. Working in two-person teams, they attacked the areas of the refuge that had the highest density of the invasive tallow trees and that most needed habitat restoration.

Mark said that members of the team never grumbled or slacked off. They used GPS to track their work and used a "hack and squirt" method that was absolute manual labor. One member would score the tree with a hatchet; the other would squirt on the herbicide, which contained a dye to show trees treated.

With heat indices over 100 degrees every day, Mark said that the Corps members were careful to stay hydrated in the dense, off-the-trail terrain. But persist they did.

At the end of their six-weeks serving the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, they had treated thousands of trees, covering 180 acres of Pinckney. Native flora and fauna large and small will be breathing deep sighs of relief for years. Left unchecked, the invasive tallow trees take over at incredible speed and crowd out the native forest, wetland, and swamp vegetation, ecosystems that have evolved over centuries.

Coastal Refuges Wildlife Specialist Chris Cooley, who oversaw the project, said that he was "absolutely elated" at all the work that the AmeriCorps team accomplished. Taking the occasional "break" from their invasive species marathon efforts, they also restored 10 miles of hiking trails, and conducted three environmental education workshops that taught 120 students.

I'd say that these AmeriCorps kids are the kind of invasive we all need.

>> [Article with Pictures](#)



## **Blackbeard Island NWR - Diamonds in the Rough\* (Reported by Kimberly Hayes)**

### **A beautiful eastern diamondback rattlesnake meanders across the "front-yard" of the research quarters on Blackbeard Island NWR.**

The eastern diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*) is the largest rattlesnake species in the world and was once a common inhabitant of the lower Coastal Plain of the southeastern United States. Diamondback rattlesnakes are perhaps the most maligned and misunderstood creature of the coastal area. They are top-level predators and are important to a healthy ecosystem feeding on a variety of prey. Population levels of diamondbacks have declined precipitously throughout its range because of habitat loss, direct persecution, introduction of exotic species, and other human-related activities. Conservation of diamondback rattlesnakes through education and habitat management is important to stop or reverse their population declines.

Through a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Inventory and Monitoring Program, the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex entered into an agreement with Davidson College in North Carolina and University of Arkansas to inventory diamondback rattlesnakes on Wassaw, Blackbeard Island, Wolf Island, and Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuges. In addition to establishing baseline information on rattlesnake populations, researchers also will develop a protocol to assist refuge staff in monitoring populations over time. The initial fieldwork to inventory snakes was completed in the spring of 2015 and we await the results of the effort. The refuge staff continues to work with Davidson College to develop the monitoring protocol and hope to have a monitoring plan in place by the spring of 2016.

**Diamondback Terrapins.** Diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*) are a unique estuarine turtle threatened by activities associated with coastal development. Considered a poster species for salt-marsh ecosystems, diamondback terrapins have received international attention from conservation organizations because of range-wide declines. Diamondback terrapins were heavily harvested in the early 1900's for turtle soups and stews. Populations declined drastically and terrapins were wiped out in some local areas. However, as demand for turtle soup declined terrapin populations rebounded but have not reached the levels they once enjoyed. Today, terrapins again face significant threats to their already stressed populations. Coastal development, sea level rise, and abandoned crab traps or "ghost traps" may pose even greater threats to the terrapin population along the Georgia coast.

Through the Service's Regional Quick Response program, the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex partnered with Davidson College in North Carolina to collect baseline population information on diamondback terrapins on Wassaw, Blackbeard Island, Wolf Island, and Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuges.

The Quick Response program is a cooperative effort between U.S Geological Survey and the Service to address key scientific and information needs that will best help the Service make

important conservation and management decisions. Similar to the eastern diamondback rattlesnake project, this project will include establishing a baseline inventory of diamondback terrapins as well as a monitoring protocol. In addition to the fieldwork directly associated with counting terrapins, this project will coordinate with local crabbers to get an idea of terrapin locations and mortality in traps. The initial inventory of terrapins was completed in August 2015.

### **Save the Date**

Saturday, November 21, 2015  
Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge  
Diamondback Terrapin Day  
Learn more about terrapin conservation  
Activities and programs for all ages  
Stay tuned.....

>> [Article with Pictures](#)

\* We kiddingly call these projects "Diamonds in the Rough" since we are working with Davidson College on both of them and they both have "diamond" in the species name.

### **Blackbeard Island NWR - Sea Turtle Activity (Reported by Kimberly Hayes)**

The 2015 Blackbeard Island National Wildlife Refuge sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nesting season began with the first nesting female arriving on May 11th. From that point forward it has been a busy record setting season on the island with a total of 321 nests to date. The sea turtle crew monitors the beach each morning looking for possible new nests, false crawls and nest emergences. Daily nest inventories are done on each emerged nest to determine the success rate of each nest. This year's Blackbeard Sea Turtle Crew consists of 4 team members: Nancy Hickey - Supervisory Biological Technician, Melissa Roark - intern, Tyler Buckley - intern (2nd year), and Melisa Jeffers, volunteer.

Mark Dodd, GA DNR sea turtle biologist, recently announced that loggerhead nesting hit a new all-time high record in GA with a newly laid nest on Little Cumberland Island on August 27th. Final statewide totals are predicted to be between 2,330-2,350 nests. The staff on Blackbeard Island NWR maintains a high level of scientific integrity through their quality, detailed work. We are fortunate to have a dedicated staff that goes over and beyond for sea turtle conservation. You can follow the progress of Blackbeard Island NWR sea turtle nesting and other locations along the coast on [seaturtle.org](http://seaturtle.org).

>> [Article with Pictures](#)

## **Blackbeard Island NWR - Feral Hog Control Update (Reported by Kimberly Hayes)**

Feral hogs have been an ongoing issue on Blackbeard Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Two years of consistent trapping, hunting and other control measures by refuge staff and volunteers has greatly reduced the number of hogs on the island. This year there have been 47 hogs dispatched on Blackbeard Island NWR. This number is down from 118 in 2014 and 90 in the last six months of 2013.

The Complex applied for and received funding totaling \$15,500 from the Southeast Regional Office's Invasive with Volunteers Grant Program to support the feral hog control programs on Blackbeard Island and Wassaw NWRs. Funds were used to purchase a "Boar Buster" trap for Wassaw, which allows staff to view a live video feed of the trap from anywhere with cellular service and then trigger the trap when desired using a cellular phone app. The remainder of the funds was used to purchase five traps, corn and ammunition for Blackbeard Island NWR. In 2013 the Friends received a \$1,500 grant from the Savannah Presbytery M. K. Pentecost Ecology Fund to purchase traps and supplies for control efforts on Blackbeard.

There are currently nine sites with bait and/or traps with cameras spread strategically throughout Blackbeard Island. These sites are being monitored daily by the sea turtle crew and refuge staff. Currently, there are three feral hogs utilizing these sites. The Boar Buster trap has been installed on Wassaw NWR and staff is working on making it fully operational.

## **Harris Neck NWR - First Nesting of Roseate Spoonbills (Report by Kimberly Hayes)W**

**Welcome to the Neck** - It finally happened. This was the first year a Roseate Spoonbill pair nested at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge. We've been waiting for them ever since the first Georgia nesting pair was documented in June 2011 in St. Mary's.

The pair at the Refuge was discovered nesting in the rookery on Woody Pond. Woody Pond is home to Georgia's largest Wood Stork rookery. In addition to Wood Storks, a variety of wading bird species nest in the rookery. Each year Roseate Spoonbills can be found visiting the Refuge but they have never nested....not until this summer.

Mary Ellen Urbanski, Wood Stork program volunteer, found them nesting alongside other wading birds in the rookery. Their bright pink plumage might have given them away. As Mary Ellen, other dedicated volunteers and staff monitored the Wood Stork colony throughout the summer, they kept an eye on the spoonbills.

Harris Neck NWR is happy to report that the parent Roseate Spoonbills did a great job fledging 3 chicks! This is the second documented site in Georgia to have nesting Roseate Spoonbills. We are hopeful they will return next year... with friends.

>> [Article with Picture](#)

### **Harris Neck NWR - Summer of 2015 Youth Conservation Corps (Reported by Kimberly Hayes)**

This summer at Harris Neck NWR, 4 local youth were given the opportunity to participate in the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Participants Brandy Gay-18 (Youth Leader), Jonathan Miller-18, Seth Ricker-15, and Hiram Moody-15 were mentored by YCC Adult Leader Chris Thornton.

They participated in several projects on the refuge including: capture and banding of threatened Wood Stork chicks, banding of Mourning Doves, monitoring threatened loggerhead sea turtle nests on Blackbeard Island NWR, and various maintenance and grounds projects.

Several educational field trips were conducted to foster an interest and awareness in coastal Georgia's diverse natural resources. The YCC group was exposed to all levels of conservation work (both maintenance and biological) that are needed to keep our National Wildlife Refuges thriving.

>> [Article with Pictures](#)

### **Wassaw NWR - Sea Turtle Activity (Reported by Kris Williams)**

GREAT year for loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nesting in Georgia! As of August 19, GA has recorded 2,274 loggerhead, only 17 nests from the record set in 2013 (2,291)! Wassaw NWR is also having a great year, documenting 217 nests, making it our second highest year recorded since 1973. At least 105 individual turtles have been identified on Wassaw, and 70% are new turtles who have never been tagged before. Additionally, four of the turtles have nesting histories that started back in 1996! Ninety-seven of the nests have emerged to date, releasing over 7,000 hatchlings into the water.

The *Caretta* Research Project (CRP), a hands-on research, conservation and education program that has been protecting the threatened Loggerhead sea turtles that nest on Wassaw NWR, is currently in its 43rd season! The CRP began in 1973 as a cooperative effort between the Savannah Science Museum, the USFWS Savannah Coastal Refuges, the Wassaw Island Trust, and is one of the longest continually running saturation-tagging programs in the world. The primary goals of the CRP are to: (1) conduct research on the population trends and nesting biology of loggerhead turtles, (2) protect and monitor loggerhead turtle eggs and hatchlings, and (3) educate and involve the public in research and conservation efforts of the loggerhead turtle.

The longevity of the CRP is critical to long-term preservation and management of loggerhead turtles in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean. Because loggerhead turtles can take 25-35 years to reach sexual maturity, only long-term projects – like the CRP – are capable of thoroughly assessing the conservation status of this threatened species. For this reason, the long-term dataset amassed by the CRP was recently sought out and utilized by government agencies during the development of the Loggerhead Recovery Plan drafted in 2009. The enduring commitment of CRP staff, volunteers, and supporters has helped managers critically evaluate the status of this population and implement conservation measures to ensure the long-term preservation of these amazing creatures.

The CRP also has a longstanding commitment to education and community involvement. People from all over the world have participated on the project, and our mission to involve volunteers in all research activities is truly unique among other research projects. We encourage full participation of volunteers in nightly beach patrols, nest protection, and data collection, and we train volunteers as potential scientists. Such community involvement is critical for increasing public awareness and appreciation of the value of scientific research in conservation and management. CRP volunteers are also directly involved with saving sea turtles by protecting eggs and hatchlings that would otherwise have been lost to erosion or predation. Lastly, but mostly importantly, CRP volunteers return to their hometowns all over the world with the knowledge and experience to be ambassadors for the plight of our world's sea turtles.

After 43 years, the CRP has tagged 1,491 turtles, protected nearly 3,700 nests containing about 420,000 eggs, involved and educated over 3,000 volunteers, trained 22 interns who have gone on to other environmental/educational careers, and published more than 50 scientific papers in collaboration with innumerable academic institutions.

We will start to take reservations for the 2016 season in December. If you are interested in participating on the project or in being a boat captain to help transport people and gear to and from Wassaw throughout the summer, please contact Kris Williams at [wassawcrp@aol.com](mailto:wassawcrp@aol.com).

>> [Article with Pictures](#)

**[Join the Friends!](#)**

**[Renew Your Membership](#)**

**Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges, Inc.**

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**[www.coastalrefuges.org](http://www.coastalrefuges.org)**

We would hate to see you go, but if you no longer wish to receive e-mails from the Friends, click on the link below to unsubscribe.

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