



Friends Matter

A Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2011

Save Egmont Key

Get the full scoop from Jeff Raley, a beach erosion expert
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Fall Education Outreach

Fall programs taking off with a bang as over 700 students are already booked to participate in Friends sponsored field trips to Weedon Island and on-site school workshops.
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Continuing education and development

Jen Funk and Emma Mason represented FTBNWR at a FWS national conference held in Madison, WI this summer. Emma Mason attends a two day marine workshop on Pigeon Key
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Bird stewards contribute over 1,100 volunteer hours protecting birds and habitat

Thanks again to the 38 bird stewards who provide such a valuable service
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The fall calendar--volunteers needed to fill in slots for activities ranging from bird surveys to fall festivals.
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Visiting our Refuges is a real treat--where else will you see tens of thousands of nesting birds in Tampa Bay?

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Save Egmont Key: Why We Must!

The Save Egmont Key initiative has the support from many local environmental and historical organizations. Because beach nourishment can be a controversial subject, we thought it would be helpful to hear from Jeff Raley, a beach erosion expert with the Florida Park Service responding to a series of comments posed to Pete Krulder, Superintendent of State Parks including Egmont Key.

As a side, there is a push to do away with the term beach "renourishment" in favor of simply using beach "nourishment" to indicate a project of placing sand on a beach. (It's kind of like eating, instead of re-eating.) Beach nourishment and beach renourishment are, at this stage, interchangeable terms.

Comment: The renourishment project is ineffective on the the island as witnessed by 3 prior renourishments.

RALEY: Because the Egmont channel prevents natural replenishment, the nourished sand is intended to be sacrificial: it is lost for the sake of protecting the resources and facilities. Beach nourishment is effective at providing a low impact means of protecting upland resources and facilities. At Egmont Key, it keeps a feeder source of sand at the south beach allowing a very important shorebird habitat to continue existing. I don't think the Egmont Key



erosion can be stopped except by completely armoring the Island, and I don't think anyone wants that.
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Comment: The sand tube barriers have failed to work due to high
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Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation

by Jen Funk

In July representatives from U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the National Wildlife Refuge Association, and Friends groups from all over the country descended upon Madison, WI for the largest gathering of minds regarding the future of our Refuges in well over a decade. These conservation guardians had one agenda: the future of our Refuge System.

Emma Mason and I were fortunate to represent Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges at the conference. Participants came together to wrap their minds around a new vision document; created to guide us in maintaining the Refuge System while engaging today's technologically advanced youth.

The vision we adopted is comprised of ten themes: America's Great Outdoors, Climate Change, Strategic Growth, Science, Friends/Volunteers, Urban Wildlife Refuges, Communication, The Policy Piece, Increasing the Constituency, and Leadership.

Each theme is a stepping-stone, building one upon the other, to create strong public interest and ownership in our refuges. Each of the themes were addressed during the conference and ultimately twenty-four appropriate recommendations ad-

ressing the specific needs of the refuge system were adopted.

Amidst the many break-out discussions geared specifically towards those recommendations, our days were supplemented with sessions presented by a myriad of incredible speakers.

"Her Deepness Herself," Dr. Sylvia Earle, held us captive and we were challenged to find our role in the conservation process by none other than Jane Goodall. Juan Martinez renewed our faith that the millennial generation, my generation, really is ready for the challenge of protecting our refuges. The sessions challenged us to combat our fears, from technology to finding volunteers to just finding support in our local communities as our fears will only hold back the unlimited potential we, as Friends, can offer to our respective refuges.

Dan Ashe, USFWS Director, said it best when he said that now, more than ever, Refuges need Friends, their strength, their unwavering support, and their strong



commitment to helping maintain and strengthen our refuge system.

This conference was an incredible opportunity to network and build a bond with other Friends, Refuge personnel, and conservationists. It's time for all Friends to join the conservation conversation still being held about the vision document and the future of our refuges. The conference archives are available at <http://americaswildlife.org/conference>, and the vision document can be found at <http://americaswildlife.org/vision>. It's time to go all in for fish, wildlife, our refuges, and our future: our youth.

Fall educational outreach programs to reach over 700 students

Thanks to a grant from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, this fall we'll be offering about 500 students from Campbell Park and Sawgrass elementary schools even more opportunities to get outside and learn about their natural environment.

The grant money supports busing the students to Weedon Island Preserve, where Friends volunteers meet them and spend the next four hours leading

them in a variety of activities focused on our coastal environment.

In addition to the field trips, we're also offering school on-site programs on a variety of environmental issues. As of the date of this newsletter, we've already scheduled 150 students for the water quality session at McMullen Booth.

Interested in learning more? Email Emma Mason at e.mason@knology.net.



Summer bird stewards continue to achieve impressive results

by Joyce Galiardo

Bird stewards once again generously donated their time to help safeguard the nesting birds on Egmont Key. A total of 38 stewards volunteered 1,135 hours on weekends and holidays this summer from mid-May to Labor Day.

Working with the Florida Park Service and USFWS, stewards were stationed at the closed boundaries of the sanctuary ensuring that visitors to the island did not cross into the sanctuary and disturb the birds. They also answered many questions about birds, sea turtles and the island.

Pelicans, ibis, laughing gulls, oystercatchers, common terns, royal terns, sandwich terns and osprey are among the species that use Egmont as their nesting grounds. A survey done May 20th of this year resulted in a total of 30,186

nesting pairs of birds, further demonstrating how important Egmont Key is to our local bird populations.

Many thanks go to all who volunteered their time. Anyone interested in volun-



teering as a bird steward next summer, please watch for emails and notices in Friends' newsletters or visit our website, www.TampaBayRefuges.org, for information on how to sign up.



Professional development supported by Friends strengthens its educational outreach

by Emma Mason

Representing Friends, I attended a Professional Development Workshop on Pidgeon Key in the Florida Keys from June 17 to June 19 this summer. Pidgeon Key is a five acre island that was the most southern staging area for the Flagler railroad line to Key West. As a Florida historical landmark, it is currently operated by The Pigeon Key Foundation, a non-profit, whose mission is historic preservation, marine science education, and research. Formerly it was operated as

a research station by the University of Miami and then Mote Marine Laboratory.

The workshop was incredibly valuable in my role as the curriculum developer for Friends' educational outreach programs as it significantly increased my knowledge of marine species.

We studied marine species identification, dissected a shark and squid, and studied biodiversity in marine invertebrates. The grand finale was a half day snorkeling trip to Sombrero Reef (the third largest coral reef in the world), which was fantastic.

In the spring Friends will be offering schools field trips to Fort Desoto (busing is paid for by a grant that we have from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program) where students will go dip net-

ting in the Bay and learn about the many creatures that inhabit our waters. As the program leader, the new information I gained will be incredibly useful in further enhancing our curriculum.

Working with students through the educational outreach program has been a great experience and we're excited about the opportunities we have this school year.

We're always looking for volunteers to join us as the program continues to grow. No teaching or science experience is necessary. What is essential is a love and enthusiasm for the natural environment and working with elementary grade students--typically 4th and 5th graders. We feel great about what we do and we love doing it. If you're interested, contact me at e.mason@knology.net.

Save Egmont Key: Why We Must (continued from page 1)

current swirling at the north end of the island, probably because of the proximity to the Tampa Bay channel.

RALEY: The barriers, geotextile groins, were intended to help stabilize beach width at the north end of the island and protect its cultural resources. As the beach south of the groins diminishes the groins become more and more exposed. Their function will diminish as they either sink from being undercut or as they get roll and ripped apart from being exposed too long to heavy surf. They have not “failed” but will do so eventually if periodic nourishment does not replenish the sand.

Comment: The cost or renourishment is prohibitive

RALEY: That is a perspective shared by many. Is it worth the cost? We give an unqualified “Yes.”

The placement of beach quality sand by the Army Corp of Engineers during maintenance dredging events is considered “beneficial use” that is promoted by regulatory agencies (rather than the alternative of dumping good sand offshore or onto disposal sites). Placing good sand that is dredged from navigation channels onto Egmont Key’s beach is a great conservation practice. The additional cost is somewhat justified from a mitigation perspective, since Egmont Channel dredging contributes to the erosion.

However, the cost difference of placing maintenance dredged sand on Egmont Key beach from nearby channels is highly dependant on regulatory stipulations, type of dredge equipment used, and distance from the dredge site. For those paying the

navigational dredging bills, the economic cost tends more and more to outweigh best conservation practice.

A recent Corp study indicated that an “Egmont Key Beach Fill Plan” alternative added to a channel widening project would cost nearly \$2 million more than the cost to dump it at an offshore site. While that cost comparison made



some skewed assumptions, “the cost is prohibitive” seemed to be a strong stance.

This cost prohibitive argument was further supported by concerns of liability, for example, if damages to historical/cultural resources were to occur during the beach placement of the sand, who is liable? Ironically, I guess no party is to blame if erosion takes down the historic structures that sand placement could save. Bottom line: the Tampa Harbor Widening project is moving forward in permitting without any Egmont Key beach placement of sand. We do know that the cost of the 10 acre hard-bottom mitigation for this channel widening project will far exceed any cost difference of placing beach quality sand on Egmont Key.

Throughout Florida, if a 250 acre island of private investment properties

along a 2 mile stretch of sandy Gulf of Mexico beach was severely eroding, beach nourishment would be considered part of the maintenance costs necessary for living and doing business on a paradise beach. The funds would be raised by the private stakeholders.

Egmont Key is a “public” 250 acre island with limited private investment, but significant (some would say irreplaceable) natural and cultural resources to protect. If the politicians, taxpayers, and private contributors agree “the cost is prohibitive” then Egmont Key will continually erode away at an estimated average rate of 4 acres per year unless some unforeseen geologic change reverses this erosion trend.

If we in Florida do not invest in preserving public beachfront that is managed for the cultural and natural resources, eventually only private developed beachfront will remain. Obviously, many agree that Egmont Key preservation is worth the cost, as long as sustainable beach nourishment options exist.

Comment: Prior erosion control projects have failed at both Battery MacIntosh and Battery Mullen. These projects took a good deal of money and manual volunteer labor and in a matter of months, when the sea oats died, the erosion started up again. Then a similar project when the berms built and planted with agaves at Battery MacIntosh failed.

RALEY: It is implied in this comment that “prior erosion control projects” primarily means planting sea oats. Sea oat plantings have many benefits, however, even deeply rooted sea oats cannot hold up to sustained storm

Save Egmont Key: Why We Must (continued from page 4)

wave pounding or significant saltwater overwash. A buffer of beach nourishment sand or a structural breakwater is required to keep the vegetation protected. Without a beach nourishment program, I would advise against additional sea oats plantings as the vegetation line will continue to retreat about 21 feet per year on average. If a routine beach nourishment program can be established, it would make good sense to help dunes recover by planting sea oats.

Now some REALLY good news: Some sand that is being washed up on the southern tip of Egmont is expanding the US FWS Sanctuary and will help expand sea turtle nesting and bird nesting to that protected end of the island, which is a far

better place than the NW tip that has to be protected for both birds and sea turtles from human disturbance. The NW tip continues to have a wall of erosion making it impassable for sea turtles to lay their eggs.

What needs to continue is the protection of the gopher tortoise population and box turtles on the island and so far the US FWS and State seem to be successful at doing this.

The down side: the spit will also recede if beach nourishment is discontinued; the southern tip's only sand source is the beach eroding from the southwest part of the Island, and this southward flow of sand should slow as more trees fall and the erosion cuts further into the upland.

As the erosion progresses, I think the scarping that is at the north end will extend south as the erosion cuts deeper into the upland, further limiting sea turtle habitat. The upland habitat for the box turtles and tortoises will become more and more condensed. When Egmont Key breaches (as becomes more likely) the breached areas will not likely re-join, and the erosion will likely accelerate on all remaining portions.

Comment: What is the consequence without beach nourishment.

Response: Many years down the road, I imagine a remnant of Egmont may remain emergent with some interesting dive sites all around. That would be great for boaters and divers....



Save the Date

Fall Volunteer Activities

Saturdays*

October 15 – Egmont Key Workday in partnership with Egmont Key Alliance

October 22 – Refuge Day at the Crystal River Headquarters

November 5 - Art Arbor at Boyd Hill

November 12 – Discover the Island on Egmont Key – educational booth

November 19 – Pinellas Bird Survey

Sundays*

October 2 – Pinellas Refuges Cleanup

October 9 – Pinellas Refuges Cleanup

October 16 – Pinellas Bird Survey

November 6 – Art Arbor at Boyd Hill – educational booth

November 13 – Discover the Island on Egmont Key--educational booth

December 11 – Pinellas Bird Survey

*Saturdays work best for some, others prefer Sundays. Either day, we need your help. To volunteer, please email us at Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org. Thanks sooo much!

A Trip to the Refuges Each Summer is Indeed a Special Treat...



It's **AWSOME**: the sight of tens of thousands of birds nesting on Egmont Key. Each summer, on the island's southwest corner, you'll find a blanket of royal and sandwich terns, adults and chicks: literally thousands of them.

Tens of thousands of laughing gulls choose to nest on the southeast end of the island, and they are not quiet about it. Egmont has also become the in-place for brown pelicans,

white ibis, and a few pairs of oystercatchers and osprey to nest. Importantly, Egmont Key is now designated as a globally significant bird habitat by BirdLife International and the National Audubon Society.

Not to be ignored, the Pinellas Refuges in Boca Ciega Bay host hundreds of our exquisite wading birds many of them with really funny looking chicks sporting "bad hair" days.

Summer is the time that reminds us why we support the Refuges and its mission. While building out our beaches and the land in the Bay's surrounding counties, we failed to leave enough suitable space for many of our feathered friends to nest. Thanks to the Tampa Bay Refuges, we can still provide precious nesting places for at least some of our beautiful shore birds.

Thank you for your continuing support of the Refuges through both your membership in Friends and your countless hours volunteering with education, outreach, habitat restoration (cleanups), and wildlife monitoring. Your membership is ever so important as we reach out to find funding for the Save Egmont Key project and not lose one of the last prime nesting habitats we have left in Tampa Bay.

Barb Howard, President

Go Green: Say No to Styrofoam

When you eat out, plan ahead and bring your own reusable plastic containers for leftovers. Styrofoam is harmful to the environment both when it is produced and disposed. If you forget to bring your own (it happens...), ask to have the left-overs wrapped in aluminum foil that can be re-used or recycled.

Just Say No

We are always seeking volunteers to assist the Refuges. From now through fall activities include monthly bird surveys of the Refuges, manning our information booth at environmental festivals, working with elementary students to increase their understanding and appreciation of their natural environment, and refuge clean ups.

To learn more about volunteering, email us at Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org.

Board meetings are held the 3rd Monday of the month 6:30 PM (except December) at Panera Bread, 2285 Ulmerton Road, in Clearwater. Everyone is welcome to attend and participate.



Board of Directors

Barb Howard — President
Sid Crawford — Vice President
Jen Funk — Vice President
Martha Gruber — Treasurer
Joyce Galiardo — Secretary

Directors: Dave Howard, Carla Garbin, Janica Johnson, Ric Hoover, and Dave Kandz

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