



# Friends Matter

A Quarterly Newsletter

Spring 2011

**Save Egmont Key**

*The north beach is rapidly receding and nourishment is No. 1 on our list of immediate needs for federal funding.*

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**Bird Stewards Protect Seabirds, Sea Turtles, and Habitat**

*From May through Labor Day, volunteer bird stewards contribute mightily to Friends' mission.*

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**Field Trips: Educational, Beautiful, and Fun!**

*Our first field trip takes us to the Chassahowitzka Refuges, Crystal River, and Three Sisters Springs.*

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**Why We Must Support Beach Nourishment at Egmont Key**

*Barb Howard*

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## Save Egmont Key: Beach Nourishment A TOP Priority for Federal Funding

If you haven't visited Egmont Key in the past two years or so, you'll be shocked by what you see. The north beach, home to thousands of seabirds and an increasing population of sea turtles, is eroding away.

Heretofore upland vegetation is dying and tree roots are increasingly exposed as the sand erodes and the saltwater moves inland. Without beach nourishment, the island is at huge risk of joining its sister, Passage Key, underwater sooner rather than later. Because its one of the few safe harbors left for seabirds and turtles in our built-out urban area, failure to renourish will substantively impact the populations of many species including: royal terns, sandwich terns, laughing gulls, brown pelicans, white

ibis, American oyster-catchers, loggerhead sea turtles and gopher tortoises.

To date, Friends has worked with FWS and the Egmont Key Alliance to engage a number of partners to help to achieve funding in the upcoming budget year. Needless to say, this is a huge, intense, and challenging project--especially considering the budget climate. *Save Egmont Key* t-shirts, listing our partners, will be our signature clothing attire as we meet and lobby for the funding.



You'll be hearing much more about this initiative in the coming months, along with requests for action with our legislators. Please feel free to email us, [Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org](mailto:Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org) with your questions. and thoughts.

## Protecting Egmont Key's seabirds, and educating the public on the essential function the island's beaches play in the survival of these beautiful creatures, is one of Friends' key conservation roles.

by Joyce Galiardo

From early May through Labor Day, volunteers spend weekends and holidays overseeing the areas dedicated as bird sanctuaries on Egmont Key. As bird stewards they assist the US Fish & Wildlife Service law enforcement officers and staff, and the Florida State Park rangers to help protect the nesting birds. They help ensure that island visitors do not enter the closed sanctuaries, disrupting the birds and their habitat. Importantly, they also educate the public about the birds, their behavior, and why the beaches are protected.

In preparation for stewarding, new volunteers are given information packets that include pictures and talking points for educating the public. They learn that protected nesting areas are essential because of Tampa Bay's shrinking suitable habitat available for them and that even after newly hatched chicks have fledged, Egmont remains a crucial area for birds to rest. Stewards meet at Ft Desoto Park and are transported by Hubbard's Marina Egmont Key Ferry to Egmont. Depending on where the different species



Photo by Dave Howard

Gisela Chapa, FWS manager for the Tampa Bay Refuges and liaison with Friends.

of bird decide to nest, 4-6 volunteers are needed each day. Working in groups, with new stewards always paired with an experienced volunteer, they are assigned to an area of the beach.

Besides explaining to island visitors why certain beach area is closed, stewards share binoculars and spotting scopes for a close-up look at the birds and offer the visitors educational materials as appropriate.

Stewards also monitor the sanctuary's closed water zones, watching for boats trying to anchor or visitors who want to swim in the area.

Occasionally boaters try to bring their dogs on the island. Visitors are required to return the dogs to their boat and are educated about how harmful even a well mannered dog can be to nesting and resting birds. Most visitors respond positively as they learn

about the Refuge and its wildlife. Should a visitor disregard the stewards and go into the sanctuary, stewards notify the Fish & Wildlife Service officer or the State Park rangers for assistance.

The bird steward program has been in effect for six years and the simple presence of stewards has made a positive difference in the amount of disturbances to seabirds. Joyce Galiardo leads the steward effort on Egmont Key. If you'd like to learn more, or would like to volunteer as a steward, please contact Joyce at [galibird@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:galibird@tampabay.rr.com).



Photo by Joyce Kleen

# Chassahowitzka NWR, Here We Come!



Photo by Janica Johnson

Clockwise from Right: Ross Knudsen at entrance to the Chassahowitzka salt marsh trail; Kent Garbin and Dave Howard; manatees enjoying the water at Three Sisters Springs; a photo perfect moment at Three Sisters; the Chassahowitzka salt marsh as viewed from a platform in the Refuge.



Photo by Janica Johnson



Photo by Janica Johnson



Photo by Kent Garbin



Photo by Kent Garbin

It's an early February morning and the air is crisp with a hint of rain as about 35 Friends car-pool north to the Crystal River and the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuges on our inaugural field trip. Sandhill cranes watch our caravans go by, as they strut alongside the highway, apparently impervious to the dangers our cars pose at 60 MPH.

After connecting up at a local McDonald's, we head off to Old Homosassa where there is an access to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge,

to meet to meet with Ross Knudsen from the Friends of Chassahowitzka, who leads us on a hike through the Salt Marsh Trails. The beautiful salt marshes call out to us from a platform overlooking the Refuge.

After this birds eye look at the refuge we move on to the Refuge Headquarters in Crystal River, split into two groups, and head out to either Three Sisters Springs by car, or cruise the Crystal River to Three Sisters by pontoon. Both are terrific. Returning to the Headquarters, we flip transportation

modes to assure that everyone has the same experience.

There were about 40 manatees including some babies in the area, all enjoying the warmth of the 70 degree spring waters. The view of Three Sisters Springs from the newly acquired property surrounding them was very special since this is not yet open to the public.

It was a terrific day: educational, beautiful, and fun. Thanks to FWS and Friends of Chass for being such terrific hosts!

# Water Water Everywhere...

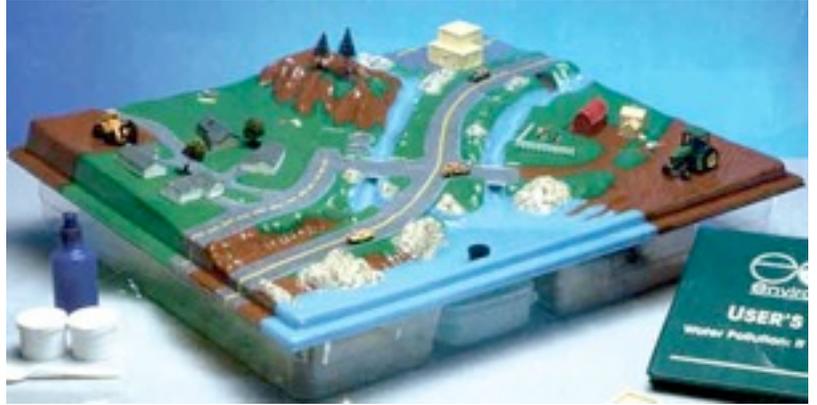
Thanks to an education grant from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, we now have an Enviroscape, a key watershed educational tool we will use to teach water quality and conservation principles to students in elementary grades 3-5.

We first learned about the Watershed Enviroscape from Friends' director, Martha Gruber. An environmental educator with Tampa Bay Watch, Martha let us borrow TBW's Enviroscape to learn how it dramatically illustrates the impact of behavior on water quality and the environment. Recognizing the value it could bring to our school outreach program, we included an Enviroscape in our TBEP grant application that was later accepted. The Enviroscape arrived this spring and we

couldn't wait to "try it out" as we learned the many principles it reinforces. This fall we'll be using it in both our school on-site and field trip programs to develop a hands on understanding of everyone's role in maintaining a clean water supply.

We're always looking for more volunteers to join our school outreach program. If you like kids and want to have a really terrific time (typically 3-6

hours a month) teaching about the natural world, conservation, and sustainability, why not join us. Just email us at [Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org](mailto:Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org) and we'll get back with you ASAP.



## Winter Accomplishments

*We are a Florida not-for-profit environmental organization supporting the mission of the US Fish and Wildlife Service at the Tampa Bay Refuges: Egmont Key, Passage Key, and the Pinellas Refuges. We provide volunteer resources and capital to enhance the operation of the refuges and protect and conserve their habitats and wildlife.*

### Festivals

Exhibited at the following festivals from January - April:

- Boyd Hill Wildlife Weekend
- Living Green
- Island Earth Days on Honeymoon Island
- Eckerd College Earth Day
- Marine Quest
- Green Thumb

### Technology

Updated the FTBNWR website and initiated email broadcasts to keep members informed of Friends' activities.

### Annual Meeting

Reconnected as a membership, reviewed 2010 accomplishments, elected 2011 Board of Directors, and heard from guest speakers, Troy & Lori Zaumseil from Alaska. Their talk on advocacy was excellent with tips on ways

to get our message across to our elected officials. Then we ate!

### School Outreach

Presented 4 separate programs to students in Kindergarten, and 2nd, 4th, and 5th grades at Campbell Elementary in St. Petersburg, reaching over 350 students.

Spoke on environmental volunteering and the Refuges at Sawgrass Elementary in St. Petersburg and Wiregrass Ranch HS in

Pasco County on Earth Day.

### Fundraisers

Provided volunteer support for BIRD-STOCK II, a 12 hour music festival on Corey Avenue in St. Pete Beach. We raised just under \$3,000, our single largest fundraiser yet!

### Communications

Updated our membership brochure. We are in the process of placing the brochures in the NWR kiosks at Fort De-

Soto, Maximo Park, and Egmont Key.

### Membership

Increased membership to 164 as of April 30.

### Field Trips

Car-pooled to Chassahowitzka and Crystal River to tour the Refuges and newly acquired Three-Sisters Springs property and the Chassahowitzka Salt Marsh Trail.

## Egmont Key Beach Nourishment: It's Essential!



Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges (FTBNWR) and Egmont Key Alliance (EKA) are leading a partnership of Federal, State, and non-governmental organizations in a plan to *Save Egmont Key*.

Egmont Key has lost over 250 acres since its original survey in 1877, leaving only about 280 acres now. Still, the island sup-

ports nearly 30,000 pairs of nesting seabirds yearly (that would be approximately 120,000 birds if each pair has 2 chicks)! It is also a prime Loggerhead sea turtle nesting site with 40-50 nests each summer. It is an amazing place.

With the support of the Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish & Wildlife, State agencies, and non-governmental organizations, nearly 1 million cubic yards of sand have been placed on Egmont since 2000. This sand came from operations and maintenance (O&M) projects from the Army Corps. Although beneficial, O&M projects do not occur on a consistent basis and quality and quantity of the sand varies.

The *Save Egmont Key* partnership will work with our congressional offices to pursue funding for this absolutely necessary beach nourishment project. We will still receive sand from Army Corps O&M projects but the partnership will request funding for additional sand and structure to reduce erosion.

Although beach nourishment may not always be the environmentally correct move, in this case it is preferable to losing the critical nesting grounds that our seabirds and sea turtles no longer have on the nearby public beaches. Just to the south of Egmont Key, the Passage Key National Wildlife Refuge has been lost to erosion and is now only visible at extreme low tides. That habitat has already been lost.

I encourage you to contact me, or any of our Board members, with questions you may have about the nourishment project and why we believe it is essential.

Barb Howard, President



## 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

## Contact Information

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