



# Friends Matter

A Quarterly Newsletter

Winter 2012

### 2012 Annual Meeting

Learn about 2011 achievements and challenges and 2012 plans...Sunday, February 19 @ 3PM @ Tampa Bay Watch  
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And we couldn't be prouder  
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Through volunteers, we're able to accomplish much  
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## Be There or Be Square! FTBNWR Annual Meeting

This year's Annual Meeting provides a terrific opportunity for members to gather together and receive updates on Friends financial position, 2011 activities and achievements, and plans for 2012.

We'll have a short business meeting, election of board members and officers, presentation, silent auction, all followed by a light supper. There will be plenty of opportunity to socialize and catch up with fellow members and volunteers. Importantly, we'll be discussing the Save Egmont Key initiative and the status of the long-awaited Refuge visitor center at the guardhouse which is moving forward for implementation in 2012. Join us for informative and fun afternoon.



Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges, Inc.



### Annual Meeting

Sunday, February 19

3 PM

Tampa Bay Watch



# Coming Up: Fun and Informative Member Field Trips

Thanks to board member Janica Johnson, members have great field trip opportunities to look forward to this year.

**February 10-12** we'll be traveling to the east coast for guided tours of the **Merritt Island NWR**, including hikes and a boat or kayak tour.

The Refuge, which is an overlay of the John F. Kennedy Space Center, was established in August 1963 to provide a buffer zone for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the quest for space exploration.

Approximately **one half the Refuge's 140,000 acres consist of brackish estuaries and marshes**. The remaining lands consist of coastal dunes, scrub oaks, pine forests and flatwoods, and palm and oak hammocks.

The coastal location of MINWR, with its **seven distinct habitat types** and position between the subtropic and temperate zones contribute to the Refuge's importance as a **major wintering area for migratory birds**.



Over **500 species of wildlife** inhabit the Refuge with 16 currently listed as federally threatened or endangered. Several **wading bird rookeries**, **approximately 10 active bald eagle nests**, **numerous osprey nests**, **up to 400 manatees** and **an estimated 2,500 Florida scrub jays** can be found on the Refuge.

Participants should plan to arrive Friday at lunchtime, bringing with them a sack lunch, to share information and take a **guided tour of the Refuges visitor center**. Dinner will be on your own, with most participants joining up to share their experiences.

Saturday morning brings a **guided tour of the Black Point Wildlife Drive** and that afternoon, participants will have their choice of **kayaking or a boat tour** (for an additional charge to be paid directly to tour operators). Dinner will be at Dixie Crossings in Titusville.

On Sunday morning you'll join other members for a **walking tour of the trails at either Merritt Island or the Enchanted Forest Sanctuary**. Those wishing to extend their visit into the afternoon may want to tour the nearby Kennedy Space Center.

There is no cost to members for the field trip other than for their out-of-pocket expenses for lodging, food, and Saturday's kayak or boat tour. The cost for non-members is \$25 plus the same out-of-pocket expenses. Janica has arranged for lodging at group



rates at the Best Western Shuttle Inn (\$56 double).

Participation is limited to 20 people and reservations are required. Participants should/must book their own hotels. To register for the tours, email [Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org](mailto:Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org). To reserve a room at the group rates, contact the Best Western directly:

Best Western Space Shuttle Inn  
3455 Cheney Highway  
Titusville, FL 32780  
800-523-7654

## SAVE THE DATE

Coming this fall, **September 14 - September 16**, will be our second trip of the year to the St Marks NWR and Wakulla Springs State Park.

As with February's trip, participants will receive guided tours as well as have the opportunity to kayak the areas.

## St. Petersburg Audubon Awards FTBNWR its

### Conservationist of the Year Award!!!

On December 14, at its Annual Conservation Celebration, St. Petersburg Audubon presented its *Conservationist of the Year Award* to Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges.

In presenting the award, St Petersburg Audubon spoke of many of our accomplishments:

- The bird steward program on Egmont Key that protects tens of thousands of nesting birds annually.
- How we use spotting scopes to show visitors the birds and remind folks that the southern portion of Egmont is “for the birds.”
- Our rescue, triage, and transport of injured birds on the Refuge islands.
- The monthly bird census counts we conduct at the Pinellas Refuges.
- Our trash and monofilament fishing line cleanups that make the habitat safer.
- The assistance we offer FWS refuge managers in their efforts to protect wildlife and habitat.
- Our advocacy, both at home and in Washington, for the Refuges and wildlife and habitat protection.
- Our educational outreach programs offered to elementary students, including on-site programs that are offered at Pinellas schools and school field trips for fourth and fifth grade students.
- Our educational outreach to the public at festivals such as Boyd Hill’s Wildlife Weekend, Marine Quest, and USGS events.

For these reasons, St Petersburg Audubon chose Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges as the recipients of the 2011 Conservationists of the Year. We are so very proud and appreciative. Congratulations to all our members and volunteers for playing your part in making this award happen!



*Photos by Tom Bell*

## Spotlight: Tom Watson, Assistant State Park Manager for Egmont Key and the Skyway Piers

Did you realize that Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge is also a Florida State Park? In 1989, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, to better protect the wildlife, historical resources, and visitors to the island, entered into a cooperative agreement with Florida State Parks to create a State Park overlay of the Refuge.

That brings us to Tom Watson. If you have visited Egmont Key, you have most likely witnessed Tom greeting passengers getting off the ferry or patrolling the island on his ATV. Egmont Key is Tom's passion and it really shows in everything he says and does.

Starting as a volunteer for the State Parks in 1989, Tom's interest and support earned him the position of assistant park manager and, since 1999, he has lived on Egmont. His responsibilities include maintenance, resource management, visitor services, administration, and protection of the island. His strong connection with Egmont's wildlife and habitat coupled with his 24-7 presence positions Tom as the State Park and Refuge's eyes and ears .



### Let's Take a Field Trip!

Friends' educational offerings had a busy fall season complementing its school on-site educational programs with the addition of field trips to Weedon Island.

FTBNWR and the Egmont Key Alliance, the State Park's non-profit support group, depend on Tom's observations and direction. He proposes projects to keep Egmont safe for wildlife and visitors as well as the the preservation of its historical sites. Examples include removing invasive plants and animals, beach cleanups, trail maintenance, bird stewarding, and preservation of historical structures. He spends countless hours rescuing birds, picking up trash, clearing brush, and completing the constant maintenance the equipment on the island requires. Often thought of as a "MacGyver," he has been able to keep the old red tractor alive for years beyond expectation!

Patrolling with sea turtle interns, Tom helps to relocate nests that might be washed over during high tides or storms while insuring that the interns receive first class training from an experienced and passionate naturalist.

Severe budget cuts at the state level created the very real possibility that Florida might remove all financial and manpower support, including Tom's position. Fortunately, in part due to Friends and

From September - December, 164 students received on-site programs. In addition, 280 students from Campbell Park and Sawgrass elementary schools participated in 4 hour field trips to Weedon Island where they hiked, experienced the exhibit hall, and learned about Florida's early people and how they interacted with its environment. Bus transportation for the field trips is made possible by a Tampa Bay Estuary Program mini-grant that will also support trips this



Alliance advocacy, Egmont Key remains a State Park and the operating agreements are intact.

Tom's ability to communicate and advocate for Egmont with visitors, volunteers, and US Fish and Wildlife Service is invaluable. By diplomatically resolving issues as they arise, he is the essential piece that allows Egmont to be a destination for everyone to enjoy. When visiting Egmont Key, please be sure to thank him for all he does to support Egmont, its habitat, wildlife, and historical structures.

spring to Fort DeSoto for dip-netting and hiking.

Getting students outside and into nature is a huge addition to Friends' outreach program and one we hope to continue in the future through additional grants. A copy of the brochure we use outlining our school offerings is available on the website. If you have questions or would like to volunteer for school outreach, contact [e.mason@knology.net](mailto:e.mason@knology.net).

# Save Egmont Key: The Beach Nourishment Initiative

You won't be surprised to learn that the **Egmont Key initiative is alive and well**. Meeting regularly, representatives from Tampa Bay's many environmental and historical organizations along with business and civic partners such as the Pilot's Association, Egmont Key Ferry, and Gulfport, have been focused on a strong awareness effort to reinforce the importance of Egmont Key to Tampa Bay, US history, and wildlife.

As of the date of this newsletter, USFWS has been successful at briefing representatives from the relevant congressional offices, including Representatives Bill Young, Kathy Castor, and Vern Buchanan, and Senators Rubio and Nelson. Additionally, Friends member Jim Spangler who is also an active Egmont Key Alliance member, has been working on scheduling a briefing for the Hillsborough county commissioners. The Pilot's Association has agreed to a letter of support providing there is no conflict of interest

with the funding needed to widen the channel.

Friends is preparing to brief the FWS Regional staff and is asking the National Wildlife Refuge Association for assistance in working with congressional members to support FWS efforts.

The Corps is moving forward with the engineering and will be studying the sand that will be removed with the widening of the channel, scheduled for 2014, to see if it's suitable for Egmont's needs. On January 15 near shore sand is scheduled to be placed west of Egmont after which any sand migration can be studied to see if it reaches Egmont naturally.

In addition to all of this action, we're proud to announce that the **Save Egmont Key website is now live** ([www.saveegmontkey.com](http://www.saveegmontkey.com))! Members are encouraged to check out



the site and download a letter of support for nourishment that can be sent to congressional representatives, whose contact information is also available on the site.

Much thanks to Jen Funk and Gisela Chapa who made the site work. Jen has also set up a Save Egmont Key Flickr account (<http://flickr.com/photos/saveegmontkey/>) and members are encouraged to post any photos they have of the island and/or its erosion.

## Mark Your Calendar

### Pinellas Refuges Wildlife Surveys

- Sunday, January 22
- Saturday, February 25
- Saturday, March 17
- Saturday, April 14

### Merritt Island NWR Field Trip

- Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, February 10 - 12

### Annual Meeting

- Sunday, February 19

### Boyd Hill Wildlife Weekend

- Saturday and Sunday, March 10 - 11

### Honeymoon Island Earth Fest

- Saturday and Sunday, April 14 - 15

### Green Thumb Festival

- Saturday and Sunday, April 28 - 29

*We are always seeking volunteers to assist the Refuges. 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](mailto:Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org).*

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

## Behind the Scenes by Barb Howard, President

As a new year begins, I thought I would introduce you to some of our outstanding members who make all of our programs work so well.



In past newsletters you have heard about our educational outreach programs for grades K-5. Members Emma Mason and Kent Garbin have been the driving force behind these successful encounters with our young people. They have geared the programs to meet state requirements with a lot of fun

mixed in. When you watch them in action you can easily see their passion for the environment. What could be more fun than a barrel full of fiddler crabs or an ant lion safari?

The bird steward program on Egmont Key is expertly coordinated by member/director Joyce Galiardo. She schedules volunteers, working with Friends, Egmont Key Alliance, and Audubon, to cover every weekend and holiday during the summer nesting season. She shares information about the birds with visitors to the island and teaches new stewards the same. She also has experience in injured bird rescue and treatment. Many birds that are tangled in fishing line make their way to Egmont where Joyce evaluates them, treats if necessary, and arranges transportation to Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary. There is no better day than one sitting on the beach watching tens of thousands of terns, gulls, and their chicks.

Our member's field trips are coordinated by member/director Janica Johnson. She has been busy behind the scenes making contact with other Florida Refuges and planning great trips. She organizes behind the scenes tours, guided hikes with refuge staff or Friends, boat and kayak tours, and much more. This February we'll be visiting Merritt Island NWR and in the fall, St Marks NWR and Wakulla Springs State Park. She also finds great hotel rates and restaurants to keep us rested and full.

Member Jim Spangler and member/director Jen Funk have been busy with the *Save Egmont Key* initiative. Jim recently coordinated congressional staffer visits to Egmont Key so they could see the erosion problem first hand. He has been successful with government agencies in procuring sand for the island in the past as well. Jen has created a website dedicated specifically to *Save Egmont Key*, [www.SaveEgmontKey.com](http://www.SaveEgmontKey.com), which explains the erosion issues, the fix, and what we can do. She is also taking the lead at the partners meetings for the initiative, where various partner groups discuss strategies to get the word out.

Member Dave Howard coordinates the monthly bird surveys on the Pinellas Refuges. Both he and member Peter Burnett transport volunteers around the seven islands each month so there is a detailed wild-

life inventory. Both Dave and Peter have also transported volunteers for cleanups on the Pinellas Refuges and transported both volunteers and trash back to shore. Dave also finds volunteers for refuge staff when they need help with a project on or near the refuges.

Member/director Carla Garbin creates the magic as editor of Friends Matter. She has tamed her Apple computer to produce our wonderful quarterly newsletter and has created professional quality membership, education, and other brochures for Friends. If you have ever attempted any of these, you know how difficult they can be.

My thanks to the many other volunteers who also participate in these programs to make them a reality as well as the dedicated people who coordinate and run the programs. We couldn't do it without every one of you!

## 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

Barb Howard at 727.343.1272 or

[Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org](mailto:Friends@TampaBayRefuges.org)

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