



## Friends Matter Spring 2013



### Bird Stewarding

*“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.”*

From early May through Labor Day, volunteers spend weekends and holidays as bird stewards overseeing the refuge’s areas dedicated as bird sanctuaries on Egmont Key. A program of the US Fish & Wildlife Service, bird stewards assist the agency’s Law Enforcement Officers and staff, and the Florida State Park to help protect the nesting birds. Stewards 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, volunteers are trained by US Fish & Wildlife officers and staff and 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 not only in summer, but also spring and fall when migratory birds pass through.

Stewards meet at Ft Desoto Park and are transported by US Fish & Wildlife Service boat to Egmont. Depending on where the different species 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. In addition to explaining to island visitors why certain beach areas are closed, stewards share binoculars 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 that may try 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 Fish & Wildlife Service officers for assistance.

### Bird Stewarding (continued)

The bird steward program has been in effect for eight years and the simple presence of stewards has made a positive difference in the amount of disturbances to nesting seabirds.

Joyce Galiardo leads the bird steward effort on Egmont Key for the US Fish & Wildlife Service. 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).

### Federal “Duck Stamps” protect wetlands!

Did you know that you could help save critical habitat for birds and other wildlife by purchasing a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as “Duck Stamp”.



This \$15 stamp is a vital tool for wetland conservation. Ninety-eight cents out of every dollar generated by the sale of the “Duck Stamps” goes to the purchase or lease of wetland habitat for protection in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Without wetlands, many of the bird species we know and love would not survive. You can purchase the stamps at many US Post Offices and sporting goods stores. Your stamp will also be an entrance pass into National Wildlife Refuges when admission is charged. For more information on the Federal “Duck Stamps” and pictures of each one dating back to 1934 when they were first issued, visit [www.fws.gov/duckstamps](http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps)

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## **Stinging encounters**

As summer warms the Gulf waters, many more of us will be venturing into it. It also begins the season for stingrays and jellyfish to visit our shores. Most of the time, our days splashing in the water or sitting on the beach are uneventful. Sometimes we accidentally encounter one of our native sea creatures. This can result in a painful sting if we are too close.

There are things you can bring to the beach to minimize the pain from the stings. Just 2 bottles of water doctored up with some household liquids will help.

For stingrays, bring a bottle of water with a few squirts of Dawn or Palmolive dish soap. Leave the bottle out in the sun to get hot. Leave the barb in place if it breaks off in your skin and seek medical attention immediately. If the barb has come out, pour the hot soapy water on it. The soap cleans while the hot water minimizes the pain by altering the venom. Don't be alarmed if the venom oozes from the wound this is a normal reaction.

For jellyfish, bring a bottle of 80% water and 20% ammonia and leave it out in the sun to get hot. The venom from the jellyfish is protein based and the ammonia water will help with the pain. The jelly stings can cause a severe allergic reaction, so seek medical help immediately if symptoms appear.

Easy, 2 bottles of water – one with soap and one with ammonia, just in case.

## ***Earth Day, Earth Month, Earth Year***

The Pinellas National Wildlife Refuges lie just west of the tollbooth as you head south to the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. These seven beautiful mangrove islands allow thousands of birds a safe place to roost and nest. In monthly bird surveys, all types of herons and egrets, spoonbills, ibis, wood storks, brown pelicans, white pelicans, osprey, frigate birds, cormorants, kingbirds, red-winged blackbirds, prairie warblers, a variety of shorebirds, and even the occasional bald eagle have been found.

The biggest threat to the birds is the fishing line that makes its way to the branches of the mangroves and the vast amount of trash that washes out of our storm drains, as well as from the shore, and gets caught on the islands. The storm drains are not a part of the sewer system that goes to a processing center. The storm drains are a direct line into our precious waterways.

We've all seen the trash lying around on the ground, much of it not even near the water's edge. How many of us have walked right by it because it isn't our trash? How many of us bring a trash bag along on walks or in a parking lot and collect it along the way? If you aren't picking it up now, please consider getting in the habit. A grabber or pole with a spike on the end can keep you from having to touch it, or bring a pocket size hand sanitizer with you. The plastic grocery bags, urban tumbleweeds, are especially troubling. Once they get in the waterway the sea turtles eat them thinking the bags are jellyfish. This can and does kill the sea turtles. We have many sea turtles in the Tampa Bay waters all summer long that come up to nest on our beautiful beaches. The bag handles can also get wrapped around bird's necks or legs threatening their lives. What is worse than the threat to our local wildlife from the trash getting stuck on the Pinellas National Wildlife Refuges, Egmont Key, or any of our beautiful nesting islands? If the trash misses the islands where we do routine cleanups, it washes out to sea to threaten all sea life and pelagic birds. Eventually it will wind up in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch where there are hundreds of square miles of marine trash. From there, plastic breaks down into tiny pieces that seabirds mistake for food, ingest, and feed to their chicks, eventually killing them too. Non plastic matter winds up on the bottom of the sea threatening other sea life.

It is a simple thing to do. Pick up trash when you see it. The world will be a better place for our wildlife. You don't need to wait for Earth Day or an official cleanup – you can do a little every day.

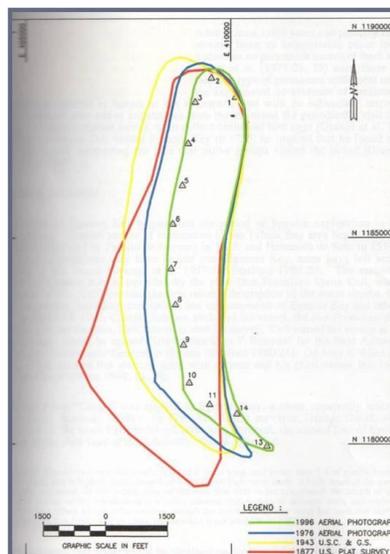


The **RESTORE Act** was signed into law on July 6, 2012 and provides a vehicle for civil and administrative Clean Water Act penalties from the Deepwater Horizon disaster, which occurred on April 20, 2010, to be shared across the Gulf. The Act provides that 80% of penalties collected as a result of the spill will be allocated to the five Gulf States in a variety of categories. In Florida, the 23 Gulf coastal counties have access to two categories, 35% directly to the counties; and 30% to a consortium of counties.

In order to provide an opportunity for the public to suggest potential projects for the state to consider submitting to the Council for consideration in the Comprehensive Plan, the DEP has created an [online project submittal form](#). In March, Dave Howard submitted the project entitled “Egmont Key Beach Renourishment and Habitat Restoration”. The form included historical background information about Egmont. Despite protection efforts by Federal, State, and local support groups, the island bears continuous erosion that threatens the availability and integrity of the habitats and structures.

Currently, Egmont is the host to over 110 species of nesting, wintering, and migrating birds. It is a nesting site for over 33,000 pairs of birds including brown pelicans, royal and sandwich terns, American oystercatchers, white ibis, black skimmers among other sea birds and the nesting site for an approximate 50 sea turtle nests. The Refuge is also host to State listed species such as the gopher tortoise. Egmont played a crucial role during the Third Seminole War, The Civil War, and it is better known for its 155 year old light house. Loss of Egmont Key due to erosion will also impact the local recreational community as it will displace an estimate 165,000 boaters and visitors to the island each year.

A lesson learned is that Passage Key NWR located just south of Egmont, slowly eroded down to a meandering sand bar now only exposed during low tides. Disappearance of Passage triggered immediate concerns regarding the fate of Egmont. In 2004, Congress mandated the Army Corp of Engineers to complete a feasibility study “Egmont Key Hurricane and Storm Reduction Project.” The 50-year plan proposes construction of a sheet pile wall and beach re-nourishment on a 7 year interval. A lack of sand and funds has kept the project from implementation. The initial 7-year project cost is an estimated \$16 million. Despite setbacks, the 2014 scheduled dredging of the Egmont channel has re-sparked interest in the project by the “Save Egmont Key Initiative” led by a group of 23 partnering agencies and non-profits. If the project occurs in conjunction to the 2014 dredging, a \$10 million dollar saving would occur. As such, we seek \$6 million in order to implement the initial phase of the Egmont Key Hurricane and Storm Damage Reduction Project. We encourage contacting: U.S. Representative Kathy Castor, U.S. Representative Vern Buchanan, U.S. Representative Bill Young, U.S. Senator Bill Nelson, U.S. Senator Marco Rubio to support the Egmont Key Initiative.



## **FRIENDS OF THE TAMPA BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES**

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### **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - Barb Howard**

#### ***America the Beautiful - the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass***



#### **You can earn this INTERAGENCY VOLUNTEER PASS through Friends**

Friend's volunteers can earn a free one-year pass to National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management and Reclamation sites that charge an entrance fee. This Interagency Volunteer Pass is given as a "thank you" to volunteers with 250 hours of service on federal public lands.

Tampa Bay Refuge volunteer hours on refuge projects qualify for this pass. What's really terrific is that hours accrue from year to year until you accumulate the necessary 250 hours and receive the pass. When you volunteer for Pinellas Refuge surveys or cleanups, Egmont Key bird stewarding or cleanups, teaching with our Education program for grades K-5, working the Friends booth at local events, or participating with other Refuge projects you earn hours. Each activity has a coordinator who will report your hours to our Tampa Bay Refuge Specialist, Gisela Chapa, who will record them. When you have reached 250 hours, even if it takes a few years, you will receive your pass.

Interested (and who wouldn't be...)? Check out the rules and regulations at the Fish & Wildlife website: <http://www.fws.gov/volunteers/pdfs/newHoursInteragencyVolPass.pdf>

#### **Friends Board**

*Barbara Howard, President/Treasurer*

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*Dave Howard*

#### **Mailing Address:**

*Friends of Tampa Bay NWR*

*PO Box 40782*

*St Petersburg, FL 33743-0782*

#### **Contact email:**

*friends@tampabayrefuges.org*

#### **Website:**

*http://tampabayrefuges.org*