



# Habi-Chat

Newsletter of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Volume 22 Number 1

Fall

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## MINWR Refuge Update

Excitement is growing as Refuge staff and Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) move forward with the planning for the future Community Conservation and Education Center (CCEC). Exhibit planning, wetland permitting, and tweaking of the conceptual building design are in progress. Funding for the first phase of building design and construction (\$1.8 million) will be allocated in early 2017. Phase 2 funding (\$2.2 million) will be allocated in early 2019. MIWA has been developing and implementing fundraising efforts to support the planning and construction of indoor and outdoor exhibits and related building enhancements. Groundbreaking for the CCEC will occur within the next 18 months!

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) selected design and consulting firm, Kimley Horn, to complete the planning, design and engineering (PD&E) for the Space Coast Trail on Merritt Island NWR and Canaveral National Seashore. The final plan for this project should be completed in 2018 with construction to begin soon after. FDOT is funding the PD&E and the future construction of this highly anticipated regional bike trail. The trail will be part of the Coast to Coast Connector Trail, a cross-Florida trail that will connect St. Petersburg to Titusville. A public meeting will be held in Spring 2017 to receive comments on the proposed trail route.

Projects such as the CCEC and the Space Coast Trail are wonderful examples of the partnerships that define Merritt Island NWR. The Refuge overlays Kennedy Space Center and jointly manages 34,000 acres of Canaveral National Seashore with the National Park Service. Now we are partnering with FDOT to design and build a world-class bike and pedestrian trail. But the 22-year partnership with MIWA is by far one of our most important. Through and with MIWA, the Merritt Island NWR continues to provide public outreach, education and volunteer opportunities that support and highlight our natural environment. Thank you for your past and continued support!

*Layne Hamilton, Refuge Manager*



## Call for Silent Auction Donations



Whew, summer is coming to an end here at the Refuge and that means we are getting ready once more for the MIWA Annual Meeting & Silent Auction Fundraiser on Friday, October 28. This event generally raises over \$3,000 through ticket sales and the silent auction.

To help make this year another success, we are in need of gift certificates, artwork, handmade items and anything with a nature theme. All donations are tax deductible and will be displayed with your name or company name. Donations can be dropped off or mailed to the MIWA office at the Refuge Visitor Center. The MIWA mailing address is PO BOX 2683 Titusville, FL 32781. Our shipping address (sorry no USPS out here) is 3.5 Miles East of Titusville, SR 402 Titusville, FL 32796.! Contact Connie at the MIWA office at 321-861-2377 for more information.

## Presidents Update

The Merritt Island Wildlife Association members and board are excited about the changes going on at the Merritt Island NWR. In addition to all the projects that the association members and board support, the new visitor's information center, called the Community Conservation and Education Center (CCEC), will be an exciting addition to the refuge. When you couple that with the new bike paths that will go through the refuge to the beach, this opens up many new opportunities for people of all ages.

The Fish and Wildlife Services has asked the Merritt Island Wildlife Association to provide the funds for the new exhibits inside and outside of the CCEC. Guest Wi-Fi will be one of the new added features to benefit those who enjoy staying in touch with friends and family, as well as providing the capability to research online for wildlife, plant, hiking, fishing and boating information.

The Community Conservation and Education Center is scheduled to open in the fall of 2018. We welcome anyone who would like to volunteer their time or make a donation to this wonderful project.

Contact us by email at [habichat@merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org](mailto:habichat@merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org) or make a donation at [www.merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org](http://www.merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org). For any questions please call the MIWA office at 321-861-2377.

*Chris Fairey, MIWA President*



### Merritt Island Wildlife Association

*A 501(c)(3) cooperating association for the Merritt Island NWR*

PO BOX 2683, Titusville, FL 32781  
 Phone: 321-861-2377 Fed ID# 59-3289841  
[www.merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org](http://www.merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org)

The purpose of the Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) is to promote conservation, awareness and appreciation of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and to provide assistance to Refuge programs.

**President** Chris Fairey  
**Vice President** Laurilee Thompson  
**Treasurer** Bob Champaigne  
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**Refuge Manager** Layne Hamilton  
**Refuge Liaison** Kim King-Wrenn  
**NASA Liaison** John Shaffer

The Habi-Chat is published three times a year.

**Newsletter Editors** Connie Cranston  
**Technical Consultant** Cheri Ehrhardt  
**Habi-Chat Committee** Connie Cranston & Kim King-Wrenn

THE MERRITT ISLAND WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION (REGISTRATION #CH29759) HAS COMPLIED WITH THE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS OF CHAPTER 496, FLORIDA STATUTES, SOLICITATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS ACT. A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE

## Thank You to our CCEC Donors

### Eagle

(\$100,000 and above)

### Pelican

(\$50,000 to \$99,999)

Laurilee Thompson

### Spoonbill

(\$25,000 to \$49,999)

Don & Janet Craig

### Ibis

(\$10,000 to \$24,999)

Lt. General Forrest S. & Ruth McCartney Trust  
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### Scrub Jay

(\$1,000 to \$9,999)

Dan Click  
 Tom Altif  
 Darleen Hunt  
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 Dixie Kirsch Family Foundation  
 Space Coast Audubon

For information about donations and donor categories please contact the MIWA office at 321-861-2377.

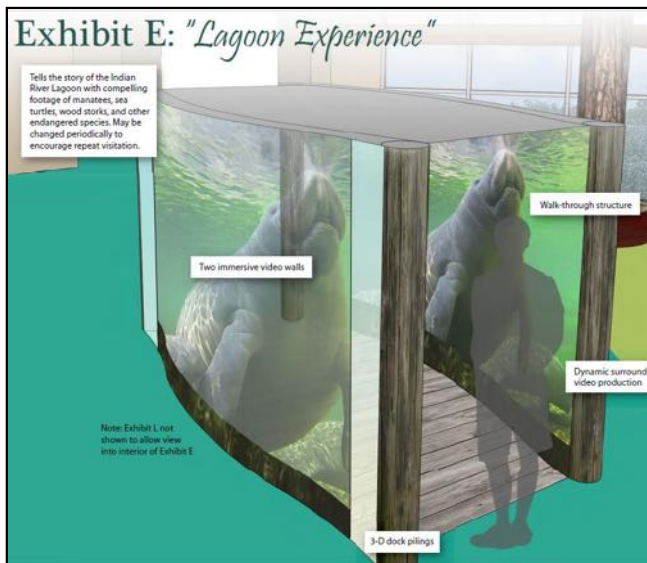
## New Community Conservation Education Center Taking Shape

The Fish & Wildlife Service is excited to announce that the concept design for the educational exhibits for the new center was completed earlier this spring. Wilderness Graphics, of Tallahassee, was awarded the exhibit contract for the concept design as well as the fabrication and installation of the new exhibits. Visitor Services Manager, Kim King-Wrenn explains “With over three decades of experience in creating exhibits for parks and refuges in Florida and across the country, Wilderness Graphics is an excellent choice for the project. The working relationship with the exhibit committee is off to a good start with the concept design plan.”

The design phase for the 1287 sq. ft. Exhibit Hall is well under way. Twelve exhibits will educate visitors about the partnerships which help FWS to manage the Refuge’s resources including endangered species, unique habitats, and wildlife. Other exhibits will focus on Merritt Island’s history and local recreational opportunities. A special children’s area with interactive exhibits is also planned. We have contracted with Wilderness Designs of Tallahassee for the overall design of the 12 exhibits. These include both static and interactive displays. We will be using elements such as the Eagle Tree from the present VIC as well as totally new exhibits.

Wilderness Graphics has estimated the cost of the exhibits to be \$750,000 to \$800,000. Photos of some of the exhibits are pictured below. We are also in the early phase of planning for an outdoor play/educational area which will be located where the present VIC stands. Construction will begin after the building is removed.

Contact Chris Fairey or Laurilee Thompson by email at [habicat@merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org](mailto:habicat@merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org) or call the MIWA office at 321-861-2377, to find out how you can make a contribution to this 4.2-million-dollar project.



Floor Plan

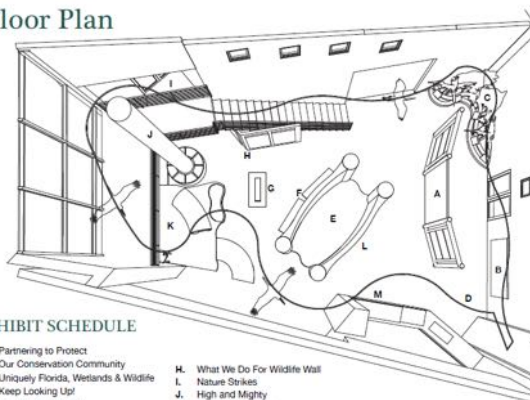


EXHIBIT SCHEDULE

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| A. Partnering to Protect                 | H. What We Do For Wildlife Wait  |
| B. Our Conservation Community            | I. Nature Strikes                |
| C. Uniquely Florida, Wetlands & Wildlife | J. High and Mighty               |
| D. Keep Looking Up!                      | K. Children's Corner             |
| E. Lagoon Experience                     | L. Our Past, Present, and Future |
| F. Healthy Habitats                      | M. Going Green                   |
| G. Healthy People                        |                                  |

## CCEC Exhibit Fundraising Campaign Update

The campaign continues to reach out to Brevard and Volusia County communities. There have been five presentations to churches and community clubs. We have received eight Resolution, Proclamations or Letter of Support from City Councils (Titusville, Palm Bay, Cocoa Beach, Rockledge, Satellite Beach, Melbourne, New Smyrna Beach) and the Titusville Chamber of Commerce. If your organization would like more information or a presentation about the Community Conservation and Education Center, please let us know.

Based on the projected schedule of construction for the Community Conservation and Education Center and the twelve exhibits (see floor plan), we have determined from the completed fundraising feasibility study, that a three year fundraising campaign will raise the funds needed for the exhibits, guest Wi-Fi, landscaping, informational lunches, marketing and support staff. If you would like to donate to the fundraising campaign, contact us by email at [habichat@merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org](mailto:habichat@merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org). Donations can also be made online at [merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org](http://merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org) or by phone at 321-861-3277. Checks or money orders can be mailed to the MIWA office at PO BOX 2683 Titusville, FL, 32781. Please make payable to *MIWA*.

**Laurilee Thompson, MIWA Vice President and Fundraising Chair**



Our crew in front of the Atlantis Shuttle exhibit  
 Photo by Kimlynn Nguyen USFWS Ranger

## Refuge Intern Collaboration Project

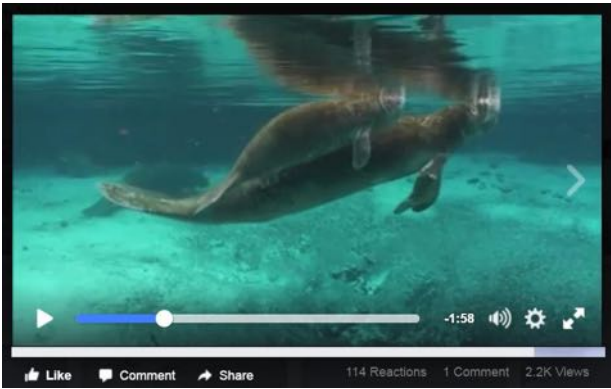
Invasive plants grow in such dense numbers they displace our native species. Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) and Lake Woodruff NWR (LWNWR) teamed up to combat the invasive plants. Our crew consisted of people from various organizations: seasonal hires, permanent employees, Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), Student Conservation Association (SCA), Greening Youth Foundation (GYF), volunteer biological intern, and MIWA volunteers. With a large crew, we were able to knock out a larger area, along with the sense of doing something good for our native plant life.

The first project was at MINWR, spraying Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*) and Simpleleaf Chastetree (*Vitex trifolia*). The Chastetree grew so densely, it was a struggle to get to the center of the plant! It was also just on the wrong side of the dune, so the ocean breeze was very much missed by everybody in the blazing sun. Our second project located at LWNWR, was to remove the cabbage palms that were draining the water from the marshes and blocking off sunlight from other herbaceous vegetation.

We were rewarded for our hard work by being given the opportunity to visit the Kennedy Space Center; organized by biologists Stan Howarter and Steven Trull. It was an amazing experience; seeing the actual Atlantis shuttle that was launch into space, the shuttle control room where it all happened, and the enormous size of the Saturn V rocket. It is always amazing to see how far we got and will get in exploring beyond our little green world.

**Kimlynn Nguyen, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge**

## Teens Use Their Talents to Help Refuge



The manatee video created by our teen volunteers can be seen on the MINWR and MIWA Facebook pages.

This summer several local teens volunteered to use their love of film production to benefit the Refuge. Communicating with our visitors and supporters is always a challenge for the small staff at the Refuge. We cannot be everywhere that we might need to be to deliver important information. In an effort to stay well connected to the public, the refuge staff tries to post regularly to our Facebook (FB) page. The immediacy of Facebook allows us to get information out in a timely fashion. Knowing that videos are very

popular with FB users, the refuge enlisted the help of several teens to create short videos for our page.

Volunteer Athena Wrenn created a 2:31 minute video documenting a prescribed fire set in the Black Point Marsh in July. The video shows up close footage of what it's like to be on site during a fire. It helped our visitors to see what was happening while the Black Point Drive was closed to the public. Through the video they could "participate" in the burn while staying safely out of harm's way.

Volunteers and friends Matthew Mizel, Evan Tatro and Tyler Tatro, created a video to help refuge visitors enjoy manatee viewing without harming the endangered animals. The video warns visitors which human behaviors are likely to lure manatees into harm's way and place them in danger of getting injured by boats. The popular 2:38 minute video has been viewed over 2000 times since it was posted in August and has been shared far and wide, helping to spread the word about protecting manatees.

*Kim King-Wrenn, MINWR Visitor Service Manager*



## Volunteers of the Year



Eric and Steve Volunteers of the Year!  
Photo by Kimlynn Nguyen

Their upbeat attitude, boundless energy, and endless optimism are always a thing to look for in our Fridays Guys. On Fridays you can see them around the refuge hard at work with trail maintenance, mowing, herbicide and invasive plant control, helping with educational programs, parking lot striping, trash removal, repairing equipment, and constructing needed parts around the refuge are just the few things they do here at the Refuge.

Eric started at Refuge at the end of 2011. When he is not at helping us here, he volunteers weekly for Habitat for Humanity, Florida Trails Association, and Wildlife Hospital in Melbourne. On his off days, Eric

enjoys hiking, kayaking, and spending time with his grandkids. Steve, a Titusville native, began at the Refuge in 2013. In his spare time, he enjoys backpacking through the Sierras, being outdoors and in the water.

In appreciation of our volunteers, we want to thank the Friday Guys, Steve and Eric, for all their hard work in making the Refuge a beautiful place for us to enjoy!

## Hellos and Goodbyes

During the past few months we have experience several personnel changes. In March, Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Corona accepted a new job at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge in Prairie City, Iowa. For 13 years Nancy served as the refuge's Volunteer Coordinator, Environmental Education Specialist, and Visitor Center Manager. Her constant smile, Brooklyn accent, tireless energy and "can-do" attitude will be sorely missed.

Also departing is Mary Bibler. Mary was a Pathways student trainee employee who helped with the fee program, outreach and environmental education. She recently graduated from the University of Central Florida and will be moving on to new adventures with the AmeriCorps program.

In April, Assistant Fire Management Officer Jay Mickey accepted a Fire Management Officer position at Wichita Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. We will miss both Jay and Sandy as they move west to the land of elk and bison. We hope to have Jay's position filled this summer.

New staff includes seasonal Firefighter Trevor Canada and returning seasonal Turtle Biologist Corey Lloyd. To help with the staff shortages in the Visitor Services program, seasonal Biologist Kimlynn Nguyen arrived a few months ago. It is always hard to see members of my refuge family leave, but I am so very proud of their accomplishments and know they will always be a part our lives. Additionally, I look forward to welcoming the new employees to our amazing Refuge!

*Layne Hamilton, Refuge Manager*



Emily DeLanzo

## MINWR New Volunteer Coordinator

We are pleased to welcome Emily DeLanzo as the new volunteer coordinator for the Refuge! Emily is a graduate of the University of Tennessee with a degree in environmental studies. While at school she interned at the Great Smokey Mountains National Park and has worked for the NPS since receiving her degree. Her environmental education specialization has helped her to be able to work in such diverse places as Redwoods and Denali national parks and Devils

Post Pile National Monument. Emily will be moving from Joplin Missouri where she currently works at the George Washington Carver National Monument. During her time at GWC, she has used the education program as well as social media to reach out to and attract new, diverse audiences to the park. When not sharing her passion for nature with others, Emily enjoys backpacking, reading and exploring farmer's markets. Emily and her cat, Cathy, will arrive at Merritt Island NWR the first week of November.

*Kim King-Wrenn, MINWR Visitor Service Manager*

## Welcome New Work Campers!

Our new work campers, Mary and Kevin Weiler arrived on September 9<sup>th</sup>. They come to us from Elizabeth A. Morton NWR in Long Island, NY and expect to be with us until the end of April. Both are Long Island natives but currently their only home is their R.V. They have been camping together for over 40 years and Mary says they chose Florida for their winter camping locale because there is no snow and "there is water wherever you go." We are sure they will love their time here on our beautiful refuge!

## Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Sea Turtles

Six miles of beach here at Merritt Island NWR are monitored for sea turtle nesting. Nesting typically begins slowly in April for species such as Loggerheads and Leatherbacks. The official Index Nesting Beach Surveys (INBS) begin on May 15<sup>th</sup> and ends on August 31<sup>st</sup>. While some nesting does occur later in the following months, the majority takes place during this time period. There are three species of sea turtles which nest on our beach, Loggerheads being the most common, Greens and Leatherbacks being the least common.

Loggerheads are classified as threatened in the U.S. but endangered internationally and populations are decreasing globally. Greens are endangered worldwide, however as of earlier this year Florida and Mexico populations of CMs are no longer classified as endangered and have been reclassified as threatened and populations are increasing globally. Leatherbacks are classified internationally as endangered and populations have been on the decline globally. However, twenty-nine years ago, in 1987, Turtle Excluder Devices (TED) became required for trawling nets. We are beginning to see the benefits of conservation efforts such as the implementation of the TED.

2015 was a record shattering year for Green sea turtle nesting throughout Florida. Previous to 2015, the highest recorded Green nesting year here at Merritt Island NWR was 2013 with 564 nests. As displayed below there is a massive disparity between last year's Green nests and our current count this year. The large difference is because Green sea turtles follow a cyclic pattern of high and lows years alternating every one to two years. Last year was the highest amount of CM nests recorded and the low nest numbers this year indicate the low portion of their cycle.

Loggerheads on the other hand are nesting more this year than ever before. The previous record for Loggerhead nests on the refuge was 1730 recorded in 1991. This year we have broken our previous Loggerhead nesting record with 1761 nests as of July 27<sup>th</sup>!

*Corey Lloyd, General Biologist at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge*



Loggerhead hatchling.  
Photo by Corey Lloyd.



Headed home!  
Photo by Kimlynn Nguyen

<b>2015</b>	<b>(End of Season)</b>	
Loggerhead (CC)	Green (CM)	Leatherback (DC)
1486	861	11
<b>2016</b>	<b>Through 7/27/16</b>	
Loggerhead (CC)	Green (CM)	Leatherback (DC)
1761	42	5

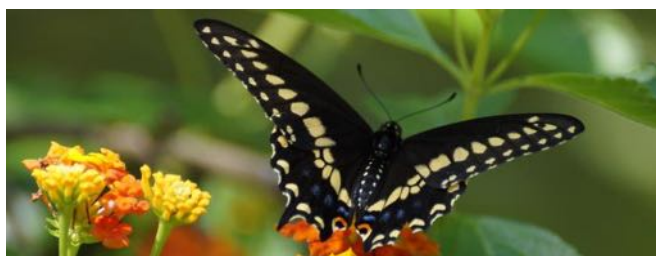
## MIWA Gallery: Jeff Thamert



The beautiful images that now hang in the MIWA Visitor's Center were taken by fine art photographer Jeff Thamert. Thamert has traveled the country participating in many fine art juried art shows and chooses to call Titusville home. In fact, Thamert and his wife own and operate **The Downtown Art Gallery** located in charming downtown Titusville where many more of Thamert's art graces the walls.

"Some of my favorite places to take photos are Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Canaveral National Seashore. I love to show people how beautiful our area is," the artist stated. The artist spends hours in the field working on his craft and does all his own printing, mounting and framing. His images are signed and numbered in limited edition. Thamert's artwork will be on display through September at the Visitor's Center and continuously at The Downtown Art Gallery located at 335 S. Washington Ave. downtown Titusville, 321-268-0122.

*The Downtown Art Gallery*



### *In Loving Memory of Chuck Tague*

Scott & Paula Wehr	Harold & Dennise Hartgrove
Doris Franklin	Kenneth & Carol Thompson
Louise Robertson	Thomas & Janet Kuehl II
Margaret Kern	Fredrick & Carol McCullough
M. Carol Branch	Richard & Katherine St. John
David & Sharon Baker	Mary & Steve Blackledge
Carol Gardner	William Klein & Marlys Breckle
Tingle Barnes	R. Kenneth & Patricia A. Hunter
Rachel K Ramsey	Donna Jean & Michael Foyle
Celine Sullivan	Thomas & Kathleen Perez
Paul Smith	Mr. & Mrs. Eoin Gormley
Martha Keller	Patricia & Charles Pora
Barbara Fish	Mr. & Mrs. L. Matteson
Christine Dann	James & Elza Philips
Jack Solomon	James & Dorothy Valimont
Joan Tague Jr.	Debra Cousman
W.R. & V.F Judd	Wayne & Barbara Peterson



### *In Loving Memory of Glenn Otto*

LeeAnn Bronson	Ken & Brenda Goldstein
Lori Gutman	Brian & Ann Montgomery
Robert & Joyce Hood	Dana Otto
Norman & Jane Stoll	Nancy Vandyke
Winston & Debra Gardner	Debra Counsman
Farley & Mary Stallard	John & Glenda Fairey
Christine Nell	Jimmie Shehane
Winston Gardner	Jess & Cheryl Commerford



*Donations in remembrance of loved ones  
& friends can be sent to MIWA at  
P.O. Box 2683 Titusville, FL 32781*

## Indian River Lagoon and the Refuge

The recent fish kills in the Indian River Lagoon have brought a lot of attention to the issues of water quality and health of the estuary. The problems with the Lagoon are complex and the result of long term degradation from an ever growing population. The Refuge has no control over outside inputs such as septic tanks, lawn fertilizer, and sediment runoff. However, the Refuge does manage much of the marsh habitat in the Lagoon and is working hard to ensure that the marsh functions optimally in its role in enhancing water quality in the Lagoon.

In the last ten years, the Refuge has restored 14 impoundments, totaling 1390 acres of marsh habitat. Restoring impoundments that are not actively managed for wildlife helps to improve water quality in the Lagoon by allowing the plants in the marsh to uptake nutrients that might cause algae blooms. Portions of the shorelines in the Mosquito Lagoon, Indian River Lagoon, and Banana River have been returned to their natural elevations and now flood with rising tides.

In addition to the levee removal, the Refuge is working to restore marshes that no longer function due to subsidence and vegetation loss. The T-10-D impoundment is an example of an innovative project to rebuild the marsh surface and clean out a “muck” filled pond that has been a hot topic in the news. Also known as Roach Hole, the marsh has lost the organic layer that supports much of the vegetation around a central pond. The organic material floating around the impoundment, blocks sunlight and the sludge in the pond prevents the growth of aquatic vegetation.

Phase One of the project involved pumping the muck from the pond into restoration plots within the impoundment. This both cleans the pond and rebuilds the marsh surface to an elevation that can support vegetation. After allowing the cells to dry, the experimental plots were planted with native vegetation in March. The Refuge is currently working to expand on the lessons learned in the project. Phase Two will involve a single, larger compartment to minimize issues with the surface area of the perimeter. This second phase of the project should start this fall and will be funded by a grant from NOAA.

The problems facing the Lagoon did not happen overnight and there are no easy solutions. The Refuge is doing its part to enhance the water quality of the Lagoon through marsh management and restoration. Please remember we all impact the Lagoon and even decisions that seem small, like what kind of grass we have in our yard, have a cumulative effect when multiplied by the vast number of people that share this wonderful resource.

*Stan Howarter, MINWR Biologist*



The Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.  
Photo by Al McKinley

*Thank you to our Corporate Sponsors...*

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**Philip Deming**  
**Space Coast Audubon Society**

*For information on Corporate Sponsorships call MIWA at 321-861-2377*



# 2016 Annual Meeting & Silent Auction Fundraiser

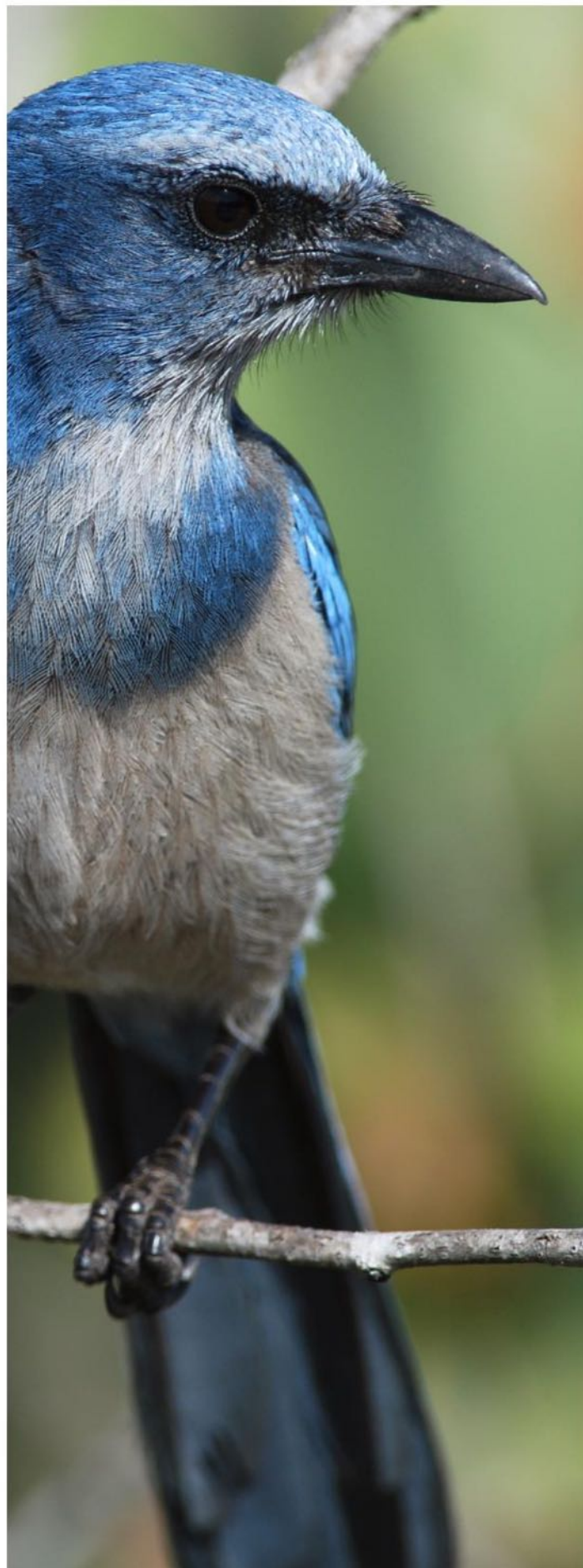
- Friday, October 28, 2016
- 5pm - 9pm
- **The Debus Center**  
*Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex*
- **\$30 per person** (includes dinner)

Keynote Speaker:

**Dr. Duane De Freese**  
*IRL Council Executive Director*

Join us for an evening in support of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The event will include dinner, a silent auction, MIWA and MINWR updates, and a keynote presentation by Dr. Duane De Freese. All proceeds will go to help fund the refuge and refuge projects!

*For more information, to make a silent auction donation or to purchase tickets, please call the MIWA office at 321-861-2377.*





Merritt Island Wildlife Association  
P.O. Box 2683  
Titusville, FL 32781

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# Merritt Island Wildlife Association

Joining is simple. Just fill out this form and mail it to the Merritt Island Wildlife Association at:  
P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781 or join online at [www.merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org](http://www.merrittislandwildlifeassociation.org)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

### Type of Membership:

- Seniors and Students – \$10
- Individual – \$15
- Senior Couples – \$15
- Family Membership – \$20
- Supporting Membership – \$50
- Senior Couple Supporting – \$75
- Life Membership – \$250
- Patron – \$1000

Optional – Donation\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to *MIWA*. For credit card payments please call the MIWA office at **321-861-2377**