

Friends of Rookery Bay

Year in Review

2011-2012



Connecting people with Southwest Florida's dynamic estuarine environment through education, engagement and stewardship by supporting the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Year in Review

Established in 1987, the Friends of Rookery Bay (FORB) is the non-profit citizen support organization that helps provide community support for and involvement in the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. FORB operates a membership program to give individuals and organizations ways to become engaged with Reserve activities. The group also presents the Batfish Bash for the Bay signature fundraising event to raise funds to supplement the state and federal dollars that are budgeted for the Reserve's operation.

FORB supports a variety of research, education and stewardship activities, and the 2011-12 year was a dynamic one filled with a wide range of achievements.



The Reserve's shark research program received the national spotlight when a segment of "Ocean Mysteries with Jeff Corwin" was filmed in the Ten Thousand Islands. The nationally-syndicated program featured fisheries biologist Pat O'Donnell, who provided logistic assistance to two of his research peers from the Georgia and Florida Aquariums investigating stress levels on wild caught sharks for better care in captivity.

The Reserve also received national prominence when it was awarded an



\$815,000 research grant by NOAA's Science Collaborative Grant Program. Results from the planned three-year water use project and allocation study will be used to guide water management efforts and improve water quality in Henderson Creek, the primary source of fresh water for Rookery Bay. Improving water quality and creating healthier environmental conditions directly supports Collier County's economy by sustaining habitats critical for the success of sport fishing, ecotourism and recreational boating.

Managing the land and waters within the 110,000-acre Reserve are an important component of our mission, so staff were pleased to announce that Phase IA of the Fruit Farm Creek restoration project was underway. The project is reestablishing a historic tidal channel adjacent to the Steven's Landing community near Marco Island and ultimately will restore 64 acres of mangrove forests. The project is funded through a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service grant, private donations and in-kind donations from Gulfshore Site Development and Evans Engineering. Partners include Coastal Resources Group, the Ecology Group and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

Going back in time, Reserve staff partnered with the Florida Public Archaeology Network using ground penetrating radar to delineate historic cemetery boundaries and identify additional gravesites within the Reserve. The Little Marco Settlement, which appeared between Naples and Marco Island in the 1880s, was home to pioneering families such as the Kirklands. While several graves at the burial plot had previously been identified and marked with modest shell tabby slabs, several other graves were unmarked. The paddling public applauded when the Isles of Capri Paddlecraft Park

opened, marking the first of its kind in Collier County. Financed by grants from Florida DEP and designed to provide access to outstanding Florida waters typically too shallow for boaters to enjoy, the park is managed by Collier County Parks and Recreation and provides a ramp for non-motorized vessels, a bathroom and covered picnic pavilions as well as overflow parking for boaters from the Collier Boulevard boat ramp.



Greg Munson; Randy McCormick, Rookery Bay Reserve Assistant Manager; Barry Williams, Collier County Director of Parks & Recreation; Donna Fiala, Collier County Commission; Gary Lytton, Rookery Bay Reserve Director; Leo Ochs, Collier County Manager.

Back at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center, visitors were happy to start greeting Samuel, one of two resident gopher tortoises in the new exhibit built along the entrance walkway.



Sponsors & Donors

Friends of Rookery Bay gratefully acknowledges the support received from July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012. Every effort was made to include all supporters. If you note an omission, please contact us at friends@rookerybay.org or 239-417-6310 x409.

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