



PELICAN FLYER

January 2008

Volunteers Needed for the Pelican Island Wildlife Festival

Please consider supporting this special event by helping us on March 8! The claimed success of this annual event is due largely to volunteers. A steering committee of approximately 20 volunteers plan and organize this event and well over 200 additional volunteers are needed to execute the event.

Sign up today by calling Joanna Webb at (772) 562-3909 ext 258 or email Joanna_Webb@fws.gov. All volunteers receive a volunteer t-shirt and are invited to the Annual Refuge Volunteer Appreciation event to be held on March 15, 2008.

Mark Your Calendar!
2008 Refuge Volunteer
Appreciation Event
Saturday, March 15, 2008
Details to come soon.

Volunteers are needed to assist the festival with:

- event planning
- office work
- early riser 5K run
- staffing educational booths
- selling event merchandise
- serving food
- volunteer check-in and hospitality
- exhibitor check-in
- silent auction and raffle
- staffing the photography contest tent
- kayak and boat tours
- kid's activities
- recycling and trash pick-up
- event photography
- wearing costumes
- event greeters
- stage support
- event set-up and break-down
- parking control

Don't miss the PIPS general meeting

Monday, January 28, 2008 – 7:00 p.m.

North County Library

1001 Sebastian Blvd/CR512, Sebastian

The Future of Water

The guest speaker for our January meeting will be David Hornsby, Project Manager for the Water Supply Management Division of the St. Johns Water Management District. The Division is responsible for collecting data on water use and supply that is then used by the District to plan for and manage future demand and supply requirements. The water supply planning program of the St. Johns River Water Management District addresses future water demands, traditional and alternative water sources, and water supply infrastructure improvements required to meet future water supply needs without causing harm to water resources or water dependent natural systems.

Mr. Hornsby will give us an overview of how they do their work and perhaps give us a glimpse at what the future water supply for us looks like in our area. He will also tell us a little about the hydrology and water supply concerns and issues for Indian River and nearby Brevard County.

Joe Michael 1918-2007 - A true conservation hero

We at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge and Pelican Island Preservation Society are saddened to hear of the passing of Joe Michael at his home the morning of 17 Oct. He was born in 1918 in a log cabin in the Community of Buttermilk, near Clayton, GA. His father had rented the cabin for the Michael family of 6 to "get out of the Florida mosquitoes", for the summer.

We in particular are thankful for his protecting Pelican Island and birthing our Audubon chapter. Joe was instrumental in the early 1960's in protecting Pelican Island when the State tried to sell the wetlands around the island to Miami developers. In 1959, Joe learned of the expansion of bulkhead lines near Pelican Island. Joe convinced the State to lease 1600 acres south of Pelican Island (and adjacent to his properties) to the Florida Audubon for 10 years. In June of 1962, Joe and his sister, Jeanette Lier, learned that of even more extensions of the bulkhead line into the Indian River lagoon near Pelican Island. Joe and Jeanette rallied local opposition and convinced the County to reject the proposal. The very next month, Joe established the Indian River Area Preservation League with the main goal of protecting Pelican Island.

Joe convinced the State to conduct an aquatic resource survey and a bird survey for the purpose of establishing the biological importance of the area, so it could allow for expanding the refuge. Joe requested the Fish and Wildlife Service to study the area and recommend boundaries for expansion. In 1963, the FWS recommended expanding the boundary to 4,740 acres. Joe worked closely with Tom Coxon of the Florida Audubon Society and Art Marshall of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to broaden the support across the state and nation. Joe and Robert Amos recruited hundreds of local citizens to the effort, receiving the support of 19 local civic organizations and four statewide environmental organizations. The State refused to lease the 4,740 acres because it included bottomlands they wanted to retain and about 300 acres of wetlands they wanted to sell to developers. Those 300 acres are known today as Pete's and Bird's Impoundments.

Not only would those impoundments have been filled for a housing development, but the shallow lagoon bottoms surrounding Pelican Island would have likely been dredged to provide the fill. Joe spearheaded the opposition in Tallahassee and convinced the State to cancel the sale. This was a landmark decision, because for the first time in Florida, state-owned bottomlands were protected for conservation purposes. Joe later worked with the State to eventually lease those 4,740 acres to the refuge. That land is now protected and open to the public via Pete's and Bird's Impoundment trails and, of course, the Centennial Trail boardwalk and observation tower.

In 1965, Joe established the Town of Orchid, partly as another way of protecting Pelican Island. Because the town boundaries extended into the refuge, bulkhead line approvals and other local matters could be considered by a more conservation-minded town council. Upon successfully protecting Pelican Island, the Indian River Area Preservation League disbanded in 1966 and donated their remaining treasury to the newly formed Pelican Island Audubon Society to continue the work of protecting Pelican Island and the Indian River Lagoon.

Joe's conservation commitment extended into everything he did. As a member of the Indian River Mosquito Control Board, Joe convinced the District to leave one mangrove wetland, near his home, completely unaltered by ditching or impounding. Joe also convinced the District to breach two impoundments near his grove, so they would function more naturally. Those impoundments are called the Deerfield Impoundments, and are also part of the refuge. Joe also wanted to see the Pelican Island Refuge expand on the barrier island and worked with PIPS and the Refuge to acquire his property. He sold his old grove along Jungle Trail to The Conservation Fund for eventual inclusion into the Refuge, because he shared the vision we had of restoring those old groves to natural communities for the benefit of wildlife.

Both Joe and his wife Anne have made major contributions to PIPS and other organizations in the county in ways most people do not know about. As a result of people like Anne and Joe, land is still being set aside to protect our wonderful Indian River County, a place we all love so much. It must have really been an exciting place to see when Anne and Joe first discovered it so many years ago. All new folks here also get to see a little bit of its ancient charm. We gain inspiration from pioneers like Joe and his legacy lives on in our activism.

In honor of Joe Michael, PIPS has begun fund raising to construct a bird observation facility on Pete's Impoundment Trail, one of the areas he fought so hard to protect. The impoundment trail will be renamed the Joe Michael Memorial Trail and the platform will be named Joe's Overlook. The site for the facility, chosen by the birds themselves, will provide a 100-foot boardwalk extension into the salt marsh and culminate at an observation platform to view birds from a closer distance. Thanks to Joe's dedication and conservation efforts, birds and other wildlife are teeming in this refuge impoundment, for which we are truly grateful. Contributions to this project can be sent to PIPS to honor Joe's legacy.

Pelican Island's Birds are Back

After missing for two years, colonies of water birds have returned to spend the winter at Pelican Island. Pelican Island is a natural mangrove island located east of Sebastian in the Indian River Lagoon between the Wabasso Causeway and Sebastian Inlet. The 5.5 acre island was set aside by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds. This was the first time in our country's history that lands were set aside for the sake of wildlife, making Pelican Island the first unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

During a typical winter day, there are hundreds to thousands of water birds flying in to roost at Pelican Island. Some birds, if arriving too late, will be unsuccessful in finding a vacant spot on the famed island. Brown pelicans, white pelicans, cormorants, wood storks, egrets, herons...over 30 different bird species in all...jockey for a position to roost for the night.

Without warning, from November 2005 through February 2006, the huge assemblage of migratory birds never showed up to roost, loaf or forage for food at Pelican Island. Refuge officials don't know for certain the cause, but hypothesize that repeated hurricanes over a two-year period combined with island restoration efforts conducted in early 2006 may have had an influence. The following summer nesting season showed only a few nesting cormorants...no brown pelicans, herons, egrets or endangered wood storks. When the next winter migratory season rolled around, again, the island remained deserted.

In a plan to lure birds back to the island, Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik purchased a couple dozen life-sized wading bird decoys, painted them to look like wood storks and great blue herons and attached them to mangroves on the island in early 2007. The decoys were received well by a dozen pair of brown pelicans and a few cormorants, which successfully nested during the 2007 breeding season, ironically, right next to some wood stork decoys.

A new migratory season is upon us now and a notable number of birds are socializing on Pelican Island, though numbers still aren't back to pre-hurricane figures. Could the decoys be responsible for luring the birds back? Refuge officials think so as dozens of white and brown pelicans, cormorants, great blue herons, great white egrets, and even a few wood storks loaf and forage on and around the island. Bird numbers like this haven't been seen on the island since 2005. And it is hoped that the existing birds will act as a magnet to attract even more birds this winter and lead into a productive nesting season this spring and summer.

Nesting season on Pelican Island begins as early as January with great blue herons. Some of the other heron and egret species follow, while wood storks and brown pelicans dominate as the season gets underway. In all, over sixteen different species of birds nest together on this now 3.2 acre island during the spring and summer.

How can the public view the birds at Pelican Island?

- By foot at The Centennial Trail and observation tower at the Refuge on north Historic Jungle Trail. The trail is ¼ mile and is universally accessible.
- By private or commercially operated boat. Please note stay outside of the closed area signs posted around the island.
- By guided Bird Watching Tour on trails at the Refuge. Every other Saturday through March. The next tour is on January 26.

For more information, please call the refuge office at (772) 562-3909 ext 258 or email us at pelicanisland@fws.gov



Joe Michael with former Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton on the Centennial Trail observation tower on the Centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System, March 14, 2003. Photo: USFWS

REFUGE FUNDING UPDATE by Walt Stieglitz

Funding for operations and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System for Fiscal Year 2008 (started 10/1/07) has finally been established. Refuge O&M funding is set at \$434 million. This represents a \$39 million increase over the previous year's funding level, but falls short of the \$451 million proposed by refuge supporters. While the size of the increase is somewhat disappointing, in view of the tight budget picture I think it should be viewed as a win. The added funds should be adequate to stave off further personnel reductions on refuges, and hopefully, enable the reestablishment of some positions lost in recent years. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you who have worked with us in pushing for increased funding for refuges. Your involvement paid off!

Pelican Island Preservation Society
P.O. Box 1903
Sebastian, FL 32978-1903

More than Just an Island

by Heather Stapleton

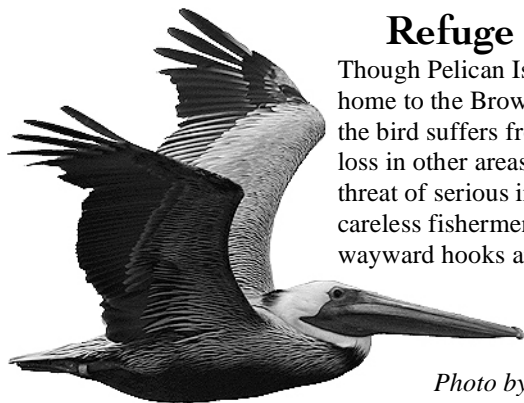
On March 14, 1903, by way of an executive order, President Theodore Roosevelt established the mere 5.5 acres of Pelican Island as our country's first bird reservation. At the time, Congress had already set aside some national parks "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," but there was no similar system in place with the primary purpose of protecting wildlife. Eventually, Roosevelt established a network of 55 bird reservations and national game preserves. These protected lands were the forerunner to the national wildlife refuge system.

Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge (PINWR) is so much more than just a little island in the middle of the Indian River Lagoon. True, in 1903 it all started with just that one island; but, today the refuge itself encompasses over 5,400 acres of protected lands. These lands include parts of the barrier island, mangrove islands in the lagoon, as well as submerged land, yes, even parts of the lagoon fall within the protected boundaries of the refuge.

Just as it was in 1903, Pelican Island proper is still a significant bird rookery. It provides nesting habitat for over sixteen different species of colonial water birds, including critical nesting habitat for the endangered wood stork. Over thirty species of water birds use the island during the winter migratory season. Moreover, over 130 species of birds are found throughout the entire refuge. And after two consecutive lackluster nesting years, the 2007-2008 nesting season is really shaping up!

From its humble beginnings as just a one island rookery, PINWR now has a long list of prestigious designations and recognitions. The refuge is a National Historic Landmark, a National Wilderness Area and Wetland of International Importance. Moreover, Historic Jungle Trail is on the National Historical register and is designated as a state Greenway. The refuge is part of the Indian River Lagoon Scenic Byway. And, The Centennial Trail was recently designated as a National Recreation Trail.

More than just an island in the lagoon. And, more than just a place for the birds, PINWR receives over 150,000 human visitors annually. If you haven't been to Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge this winter, what are you waiting for?



Refuge Wildlife

Though Pelican Island is home to the Brown Pelican, the bird suffers from habitat loss in other areas and the threat of serious injury from careless fishermen with wayward hooks and lures.

Corner

Photo by Bob Montanaro.

Pelican Island Preservation Society **MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Please check one:

- Student (under 18) - \$5/yr.
- Individual - \$10/yr.
- Family (Joint) - \$15/yr.
- Contributing - \$50/yr.
- Corporate / Business - \$100/yr.
- Supporting - \$250/yr.
- Life - \$500

Name(s) _____

Company _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone(Day) _____ (Eve) _____

Email _____

Send completed application & dues to

PIPS Membership

P.O. Box 1903, Sebastian FL 32978-1903