

- 3,546 Loggerhead Sea Turtle Nests on Cape Romain Set New Record
- Building Resilient Landscapes
- Fifth Grade Students Find an Innovative Way to Reduce and Reuse
- Carl Safina and Sally Murphy made Lowcountry Evening for Wildlife Memorable



Dedicated to preserving the ecosystems and wildlife of the South Carolina coast for future generations, we support our national forest and wildlife refuges through our education programs, advocacy work and by engaging citizens in stewardship of these critical resources.

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Front cover photo: loggerhead hatchling at Cape Romain, by Kristen Carpenter.

Back cover photo: Painted Bunting, by Andy Day.

Our thanks to AccuPrint of Mount Pleasant for their support with production of this newsletter.

## From the Director

Dear Friends,

Past, present, and future, it is citizens like you that have confronted the toughest issues and made changes happen. It is the one constant from the beginning of the modern environmental movement to today, and it is one of the few things we can say is sure about tomorrow.

Despite the current challenges and the dire predictions, I am hopeful because I know the power of citizens who care and demand change. And I know, if you are reading this, you are one of them.

Our supporters and volunteers have always been the heart of our work.

This year you have made your voice heard on countless issues impacting our forest and wildlife refuges and our communities (offshore drilling, plastic pollution, and the weakening of environmental laws).

You have supported the dedicated and skilled people managing our national forest and wildlife refuges, and I am inspired by the projects we have highlighted in this edition. Your financial support and the many hours volunteers worked in unrelenting heat this year allowed hundreds of thousands of sea turtle hatchlings, that would not have survived otherwise, make it to the sea. And you even turned out to do the hard work of keeping trash out of our rivers and ocean.

I also see a strong spirit of engagement and activism in our kids. That is because of the experiences you provided. With your support, over 5000 kids had the chance to explore wild places and engage in real stewardship. They learned about everything from how prescribed fire protects communities to why macroinvertebrates matter. Thirty years from now, they will be the ones driving change as city and county council members, parents, teachers, business people, senators, consumers, and even biologists. The experiences they have today will help them make more informed decisions tomorrow.

You have been there with us every step of the way and, given the magnitude of the challenges facing our national forest and wildlife refuges and our communities, **we need you now more than ever**. As you read through this edition, please remember none of this happens without you.

With deepest appreciation,

Grace



## *The Power of Citizen Activism is the One Constant in an Ever-changing World*

**Thirty years ago,** the Lowcountry was recovering from an event that would forever delineate its historical timeline and reshape its landscape - Hurricane Hugo.



Cape Romain's offices and original visitor center at Garris Landing after Hugo.

At the same time, society was being reshaped in equally profound ways by advances in communication. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, a British computer scientist, had just laid out his vision for the World Wide Web. In late 1989 and 1990, CompuServe, Lotus, and Microsoft made some of the first email programs available to the general public. As some of you may recall, they worked through dial-up phone connections. The Nokia 9000 was the most popular cell phone. It had an antenna, cost \$800, and weighed almost one pound (flip phones didn't arrive on the scene until the mid-'90s).

On the environmental front, the Endangered Species Act turned sweet-sixteen. There was no Federal budget sequester taking its toll on our public lands. Research on climate change was just beginning to gain widespread credibility, and lead was just being phased out of gasoline.

The rise of the *modern* environmental movement in America goes back a little further than 30 years, to the 1960s and 1970s, and can be traced back to concern over hydrogen bomb testing, oil spills off of the coast of California, and the use of insecticides and other chemicals (if you haven't read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* you should). In the 1960s, the pollution of the Great Lakes also became a rallying point for environmentalism. Lake Erie and its nearby waterways were so polluted that the Cuyahoga River caught fire.

**Americans rallied, and profound change happened.** The Clean Water Act passed in 1970, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established in 1972. When passed in 1973, the Endangered Species Act was bipartisan legislation (the Senate passed the bill unanimously, and the House passed it 390 to 12). It was then signed into law by Republican President Richard Nixon.

Today, there are 2.5 billion more people on the planet (~7.5 billion total) than there were in 1989. Five billion of us have mobile devices and 2.4 billion of us have Facebook accounts. The world's urban areas have doubled in size. Research released this year has shown we have 2.9 billion fewer breeding birds in the US and Canada than we did in 1970, and one million plant and animal species are at

risk of extinction. Climate change and the fragmentation and loss of habitat are the issues of our time, followed closely by plastic pollution (eight million tons of which end up in our oceans each year).

For the most part, we don't have a political system that allows acknowledgment of profound environmental issues or the bipartisan solutions of the 1970s. In fact, we are seeing an all-out assault on the Endangered Species and Clean Water Acts and the EPA. All of this makes citizens taking action at the local level even more important.

**Despite the challenges, the consequences of not acting today are clear.** Many of the beaches that welcomed record numbers of sea turtles this year will be lost to rising seas and erosion. If we continue our current practices, the amount of plastics in the ocean will exceed the biomass of fish and other sea life. As the oceans continue to warm, more intense hurricanes are likely. As the oceans warm and become more acidic the invertebrates that form the basis of the ocean food chain, and the plankton that produce half of the oxygen we breathe, are at risk. Not acting is not an option.

When I think about what our Lowcountry will look like in 30 years, like all of us, I am more than deeply concerned. I am also optimistic. That optimism comes from our generous supporters who make our work possible every day, the incredible work of our refuge and forest staffs, and the engagement of our students.

In 30 years, the kids you helped us reach today will have the knowledge they need to make choices to protect the resources and way of life we enjoy here in the Lowcountry.

Today we are facing environmental issues that require global solutions. But just like in the 1960s and 70s those solutions begin with each of us doing something that makes a difference and doing something to inspire others to do the same.



Rising seas are carving channels into the Cape Romain salt marsh at the rate of 6.2 feet per year. Over time the resulting fragmentation of the marsh will significantly damage the marsh ecosystem.

## Wildlife and Habitat

## Sea Turtle Conservation

It was a record year for loggerhead sea turtle nesting at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge (and just about everywhere else!). Loggerhead sea turtles laid over 3,500 nests on the refuge this season. That is almost double the five year average of 1,500 nests per year. There were mornings when refuge staff and volunteers arrived on the beaches to find over 50 new nests. Each nest must first be located by tracks left by the nesting turtle and then by gently probing through the sand to find the location of the egg chamber. Depending on the location, the nest is either protected in place or moved to an area safe from high tides.

Removing eggs and digging a new nest by hand is no small task. There is also a limited window of time in which this can be done without compromising the development of the eggs, which means the work begins at dawn and happens seven days a week. And this summer, it happened in unprecedented heat. Because of federal budget cuts, the refuge currently has only two full-time staff members to do this work, which, of course, is impossible.

With your support, Friends of Coastal South Carolina has been honored to contribute to this critical work for over 15 years. We have provided staff, supplies, and managed funding for predator control on nesting islands. This season we provided a full-time intern and funded a portion of a field technician position. The Dewees Island Conservancy is a longtime partner in the project and provided seasonal interns. The Coastal Expedition Foundation also provided field staff support this season. And most importantly, 124 volunteers gave over 7,000 hours of their time.

Protection of loggerhead sea turtles under the Endangered Species Act is most likely the reason for the record nesting this year. This year's breeding adults were quite possibly some of the first hatchlings to benefit from nest protection that began in 1978 (loggerhead sea turtles don't start breeding until about 30 or 35 years of age). A new set of challenges will face the next generation of breeding adults.

Cape Romain will look very different in 2050 when this season's hatchlings return to nest for the first time. Current projections indicate the beaches that welcomed record numbers of sea turtles this year will be lost to rising seas and erosion. Biologists are, and will be, working diligently to ensure suitable habitat remains for turtles and all the other



Friends of Coastal South Carolina's summer turtle intern, Brittany Shelton -Dooley with two loggerhead hatchlings rescued from the dunes.

species that call the Lowcountry home. Current genetics research is providing information about nesting cycles and movement patterns that will be invaluable in guiding future conservation efforts.

#### How you can support Friends of Coastal South Carolina

**Make a monthly recurring gift:.** Go to our donation page at **www.sccoastalfriends.org/support-us** 

Choose your gift amount, then select **monthly** from the gift frequency dropdown menu. A gift of \$10 or \$15 a month (less than the price of a lunch out!) will sustain our work through the entire year.

**Planned Giving and Gifts of Stock.** Planned giving can allow you to create a lasting legacy to support the causes that are most important to you, and ensure that our important work continues long into the future. Our staff would be pleased to discuss planned giving options.

We are also able to accept your gifts of stock.

Please contact executive director Grace Gasper for details on planned giving and gifts of stock (843-697-7535).



## *Building Resilient Landscapes*



## *Restoration Projects on the Francis Marion National Forest*

The Francis Marion is one of the most species-diverse forests in the southeast. It is home to ten threatened or endangered species, including the fifth largest population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, and 72 species which are of conservation concern. Forest Service staff is working diligently to create resilient landscapes that will benefit all species on the forest well into the future.

#### Guerins Salt Marsh Restoration

One of the most significant projects is the restoration of **Guerins Salt Marsh** (pictured above). This project, which is a mitigation project associated with drainage improvement in Charleston, has been ten years in the making. The restoration site was previously an industrial timber site that had been drained and planted with loblolly pine. Through this project, ten acres of historic salt marsh will be restored along with five acres of maritime forest. Both areas are essential not only to wildlife but also to absorbing and filtering stormwater.

#### South Tibwin Impoundment Restoration (pictured right)

When the impoundments and water control structures of former rice fields are lost, critical habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl is lost as well. With funding through a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NACA) grant, a coalition including Ducks Unlimited, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and SC Department of Natural Resources will create prime habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl. Funding will be used to restore breached impoundments and replace rice trunks and other water control structures on South Tibwin Plantation. This area adjoins Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, so it will create additional habitat for species that depend on refuge habitat, which is likely to be lost to rising seas.

#### Did you know...

An acre of wetland can store 1–1.5 million gallons of floodwater. There are 118,000 acres of forested wetlands on the Francis Marion National Forest, which equals about **178 billion gallons of floodwater potentially stored by our forest!** 

Studies done by the Forest Service's experimental forest in the Francis Marion National Forest show that **mature trees store and transpire up to 85% of the water flow in a forest** in the South Carolina coastal plain during a dry period. Trees store and transpire up to 50% of the water flow in a wet year.

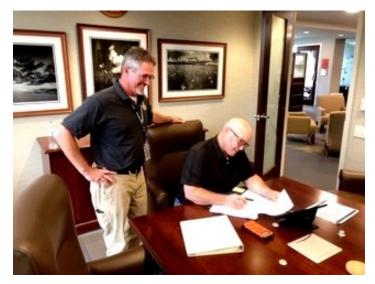


## Innovation Overcomes Adversity at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge

Rigid land acquisition boundaries make it difficult for refuges to take advantage of significant and time-sensitive opportunities to make adaptations. Opportunities to enhance climate resilience by acquiring land that new science suggests will help prepare for the future is limited by the complexity of expanding refuge boundaries when necessary. This has been a frustrating situation for landowners who have ecologically sensitive property they would like to see become part of a refuge.

After years of working on this challenge, Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge Manager, Craig Sasser, and a team of service staff and critical partners developed an innovative proposal to allow refuges to modify rather than expand boundaries. After ten years of arduous work on a Landscape Conservation Design with partners like American Rivers, The Nature Conservancy, and Friends of Coastal SC looking into every option possible, a pilot boundary modification program was approved to move forward. An additional year was spent developing an Environmental Assessment and a Land Protection Plan, and both were recently approved by US Fish and Wildlife Regional Director, Leopoldo Miranda (pictured signing the proposal with Craig Sasser). Waccamaw will be the first refuge to implement this new conservation tool.

Waccamaw's Minor Boundary Modification will remove 6,849 acres of land from the refuge's current boundary that



have not been acquired and no longer offer wildlife habitat or are no longer available for acquisition — at the same time adding back an almost equal amount of acreage that has been identified through scientific modeling to be key areas to promote coastal resilience along with increasing wildlife and recreation management opportunities. This gives the refuge flexibility to continue building a landscape that will be resilient to current conservation challenges, including climate change, and to continue protecting the most critical habitat for native wildlife. As the refuge continues to protect lands vital to ensuring clean drinking water, protection against flooding, and public access to some of the Lowcountry's most treasured landscapes, surrounding communities will benefit as well.



## Congressman Joe Cunningham Visits Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge

We were delighted to have **Congressman Joe Cunningham** visit Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge in October. As you can tell by the photo, we didn't exactly have the perfect day for a tour. Congressman Cunningham got to see first-hand what a work day on a refuge or the forest can



be like (and was a great sport about it!). He met with (pictured left to right) Forest Service Biologist Jestin Clark, Cape Romain Refuge Manager Sarah Dawsey, Grace Gasper, ACE Basin Refuge Manager Mark Purcell (not pictured), and Felicia Sanders of South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

The congressman will be able to take a first-hand account of the impacts climate change, budget cuts, and the challenges of managing wildlife and habitat in a rapidly changing landscape back to the House Natural Resources Committee. In this time of the all-out assault on conservation, we are grateful for all Congressman Cunningham is doing to protect our Lowcountry natural resources.

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# *The Next Generation Finds a New Take on an Old Problem*

Where does a fifth-grader at Waccamaw Intermediate School go when her art box breaks or she needs a super cute top for the weekend?

The answer is easy... to the new Swap Shop!



During the Earth Stewards program at Waccamaw Intermediate School last year, we talked a lot about plastics, trash, and recycling, including how much of what goes into recycling bins does not actually get recycled, and the hefty carbon footprint that comes with recycling. Our discussions led students, and one really great teacher, to propose a new approach to the big problem of trash - embracing reduce and reuse by establishing a **Swap Shop**.

Kids trade-in items they have outgrown, no longer want or no longer need to gain **Swap Shop Bucks**. They can use these bucks to "purchase" items from the shop. Students can even earn Swap Shop Bucks for good behavior during the school day. This creative service project allows students to reduce their carbon footprint by keeping these reusable items out of the landfill and minimizing wasteful packaging that comes with purchasing new things from the store. Most importantly, it's an excellent way for kids to learn the power of positive collective impact through small individual actions.

The impact of the Swap Shop grew far beyond conservation. Teachers were impressed by the selflessness and sense of community that shone through the students as they participated in Swap Shop. Students mostly took advantage of the Shop to get gifts for parents, siblings, and friends. The excitement that surrounded the shopping aspect of Swap Shop surprisingly extended to the donation process as well. Students brought in specific items for classmates in need. Things such as toys, clothing, and shoes became easily accessible, and the negative stigma surrounding secondhand shopping quickly faded away.

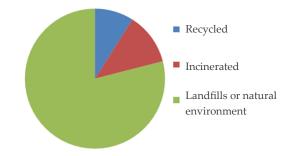
The successful launch of the Swap Shop in 2018 would not have been possible without the commitment of the fifth-grade teachers, especially the coordinator of the shop, Ms. Jennifer Gallup. Now in its second year, the Swap Shop has its very own room! This year's plastics, waste and recycling lesson went over in time because the students were so excited with questions and ideas about Swap Shop. Several students



volunteered their recess time to help run the Shop. Last year's Earth Stewards are even helping train this year's Earth Stewards to run the Shop on their own.

Future plans include expanding the swap shop to include the entire school! From engaging 100 students to engaging 500 (and maybe beyond), that sounds like a real conservation movement, doesn't it?

The fate of all plastic waste since 1950



#### A few of the facts our Earth Stewards learned about trash

- The average person creates 4 POUNDS of trash EACH DAY
- Americans produce 250 million tons of trash each year
- The U.S. produces 40% of the planet's trash
- 99% of what we buy is thrown away within six months
- 65% of all trash is packaging

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The Center for Birds of Prey Returns as an Earth Stewards Partner





We were honored to welcome the Center for Birds of Prey, a valued partner in the Earth Stewards program, back for a second year. The Center has introduced our kids to our native raptor species as well as species from around the world. It's a fantastic opportunity for our

kids to get an up-close look at raptors and learn about species we could possibly see in the field. The center staff has been meeting all our Georgetown County students (and even some of our Charleston County kids) on their very first field studies day.



Intern **Annie Owen** recently graduated from the University of South Carolina with a degree in Marine Science. She is excited about the opportunity to inspire students to take care of the environment and share her passion for the ocean and coastal ecosystems. Annie's favorite part of her internship has been developing her skills as an educator.

*"There's something so satisfying about finishing a lesson or program and feeling like I made a difference in the way a kid understands or appreciates nature."* 

(Annie helped write "*The Next Generation Finds a New Take on an Old Problem*" page 6).





Intern **Alicia Robino** is a graduate from Eastern Connecticut State University with a degree in Biology. Her passion for conservation and the preservation of our planet's wonders has led her to South Carolina's rich ecosystems. Her interest in Friends of Coastal South Carolina was derived from her belief that sharing knowledge with young stewards is the key to a cleaner, kinder future.

*"With the right environmental education, children are the best ambassadors for environmental protection."* 

#### Welcome our Newest Board Members

#### Penny Arnau

Originally from Indiana, Penny moved to South Carolina in 1986 to take a position with the Charleston County School District, where she worked as a



Ph.D. level school psychologist, working with Special Education and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, for 31 years. She continues to consult with the University of South Carolina, working to expand socialemotional learning curricula and mental health services in public schools for children across the Southeast United States. Penny lives in Awendaw, South Carolina with husband Brantley, who is a family practice physician and avid naturalist. When not working, Penny and Brantley are camping in the ACE Basin, sailing or hiking.

"I grew up on a farm in Indiana and long ago realized how important connecting with nature is and more so now in this fast - paced world we live in."



#### **Betsy Brabson**

Betsy, originally from Charlotte, NC, moved to Georgetown in 1990 with husband Bill and children Wylie and Tyler. She is a graduate of St. Mary's College and UNC-Chapel Hill. She has been actively engaged in sea turtle conservation for 27 years. She currently serves as the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources *Project* 

*Coordinator* for DeBordieu, Hobcaw and North Island Marine Turtle Conservation Program. Betsy's business, *Signed, Sealed & Delivered,* creates and prints innovative tshirt designs for outfitters, outdoor retailers and organizations throughout the Lowcountry.

"Being on the Board of the Friends of Coastal SC excites me because the organization is helping introduce the next generation to the great outdoors. They are learning about the diverse ecosystems of our treasured 3 National Wildlife Refuges and National Forest. The hope is to instill the desire to preserve and protect these natural areas for the future."

#### Ken McDowell

Ken and his wife Cindy, raised their two daughters in Texas and then moved to the Lowcountry, where the Isle of Palms has been their fulltime home for the last five years. Ken



worked as an oil and gas exploration geophysicist for 35 years. His avocations have always been outdoor-related, whether fishing, paddling or hiking he enjoys remote places and being part of nature.

Ken is certified as a South Carolina Statewide Master Naturalist and has been an active volunteer environmental educator with Friends of Coastal South Carolina. He has developed programming for the local Boy Scouts, the Charleston Master Naturalist Association and the Bulls Bay Nature Festival. He currently serves as President of the Lowcountry Paddlers Club, which was founded by Charleston County Parks and Recreation over 30 years ago and finds paddling a great way to get an intimate look at nature.

"I have truly been inspired by the cause of environmental education. Conservation starts with awareness."

#### **David Quick**

David is a native of North Carolina and the son of parents who loved "The Great Indoors." Through running and photography, he started developing an appreciation of nature and active, outdoor activities. As a young adult in the 1980s, environmental disasters -



both physical and political - compelled him to join the Sierra Club and follow environmental issues.

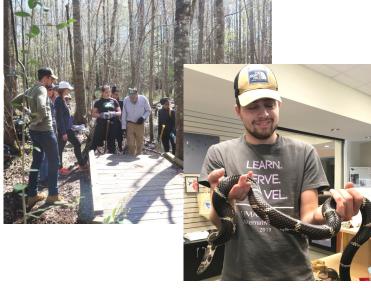
Moving to the Lowcountry in 1988 and being exposed to its wildlife and natural beauty made his love of the Earth and all its intricate diversity and patterns complete. After 30 years of journalism, David left the field to dedicate the rest of his life to conservation endeavors.

### Alternative Spring break anyone?

#### An ethic of service is strong in the next generation:

In March, rather than spending a week on the beach, University of Massachusetts Boston students spent an "Alternative Spring Break" week here with us. They were an incredible group and worked very hard. They helped repair boardwalks on the Francis Marion National Forest, built fences on Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge and did a litter beach sweep on Bulls Island. They got to know our resident reptiles, and yes, they even had time to enjoy some Lowcountry fun and sun.





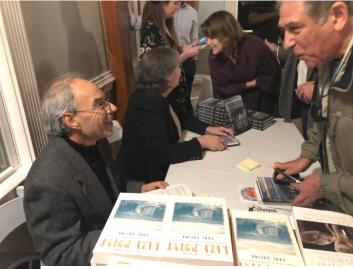
Author and Conservationist Carl Safina and Biologist Sally Murphy Joined Us for Lowcountry Evening for Wildlife March 2019

Supporters filled the Citadel Beach Club for an evening with two conservation heroes. Carl and Sally shared their conservation messages eloquently, signed their latest books (right), and inspired us all. Sincere thanks to all who made the evening possible - our staff, board, and volunteers (especially Mark Alice Monroe and Barb Bergwerf). We were delighted to have so many turtle team members join us, including IOP team coordinator Mary Pringle (with Grace Gasper below right).

We can't say thanks enough to Carl and Sally for believing in our work enough to give so generously of their time.

In addition, 86 local artists and businesses donated generously to make the silent auction spectacular.







## Thank You to Our Donors

#### Without You, Our Work is Not Possible

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## Give the Gift of Conservation for the Holidays

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#### Tribute Giving

U.S. Forest Service, More Kids in the Woods grant program

Funds of the Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina:

Make a donation to Friends of Coastal South Carolina **in honor** of someone special to you, or give a **gift membership**. Your gift makes a lasting impact, and we will send our latest newsletter, a cloth shopping bag and a car decal to the recipient when we acknowledge your thoughtful gift.

Better yet, ask friends and family to honor you with a donation in lieu of a birthday or Christmas gift.

Tribute gifts can be made at www.sccoastalfriends.org/support-us

#### Amazon makes it easy to support!

#### Shop AmazonSmile!

Simply go to <u>smile.amazon.com</u> when you shop, and select Friends of Coastal South Carolina as your charitable organization. Then let your friends and family know about this great way to support us. Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to us.

#### Amazon Wish List

Pick an item from our list of needed program and office supplies on Amazon wish list. Amazon will ship your gift directly to us.

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