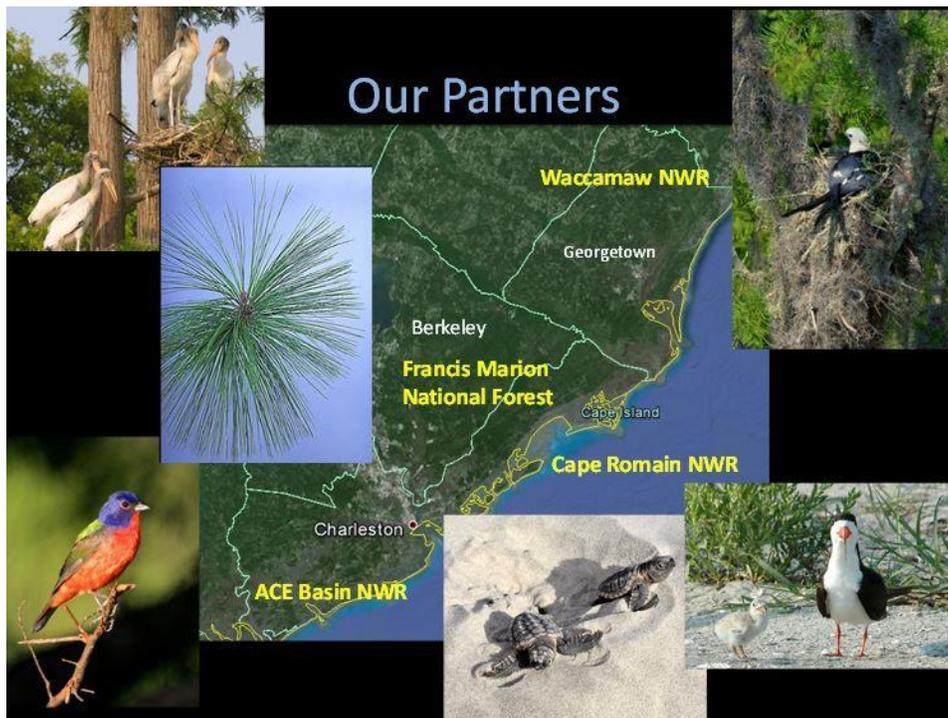


RATIONALE FOR A STRATEGIC PLAN

Since our inception, the South Eastern Wildlife and Environment Education Association's purpose has been to help meet the needs of coastal South Carolina's wildlife refuges and national forest. As the needs and expectations of our constituents have grown, so too have our own organizational capacities and expectations. Increasing demand for our services dictates that we reaffirm our mission and address fundamental questions such as, what objectives should we prioritize to make the best use of our skills and resources, what kind of organizational structure best allows us to fulfill our mission, and how should we best craft our identify and message to maximize understanding, effectiveness and sustainability. To address these core questions, we put forth the following strategic plan to help define who we are and where we are going as an organization. In framing our strategic plan we examine our organizational identify from several aspects. We look at who we are as a function of what our historical roles have been, as well as what present day expectations are. We identify our primary programmatic initiatives and how we anticipate they will evolve. We review the characteristics and needs of the organizations we serve. We examine ways to structure ourselves to better serve our constituents. Finally, we identify key aspects of the Association to enhance in order to meet the increasing needs of the partner organizations we serve.

INTRODUCTION



The SEWEE (South Eastern Wildlife and Environment Education) Association is the *Friends Group* to Cape Romain, Waccamaw and Earnest F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuges and the Francis Marion National Forest, and is proud to be part of a long legacy of citizen commitment to our public lands. The Association was founded in 1996 and is dedicated to conservation of the natural resources along the South Carolina coast. Working in partnership

with our coastal national wildlife refuges and forest we fulfill our conservation mission through supporting projects that benefit the ecosystems and wildlife of these lands, and educating citizens about these resources and their importance.

The concept of public stewardship of our nation's wildlife and habitat has its roots in President Theodore Roosevelt's foresight in setting aside large areas of the public domain for wildlife and public enjoyment. In 1903, he established Pelican Island in Florida as the first national wildlife refuge. Lacking federal funds for staff, the first refuge warden started as a volunteer, thus laying the foundation for citizen commitment to our national wildlife refuges. Today, the US Fish and Wildlife Service manages more than 540 national wildlife refuges covering over 95 million acres and comprising the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands set aside specifically for fish and wildlife. For administration of such large, diverse areas, citizen volunteerism is essential.



540 national wildlife refuges covering over 95 million acres... The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest collection of lands set aside specifically for fish and wildlife. Black-necked stilts. Photo courtesy of Andy Day.

There are currently 230 Friends organizations working in support of refuges across the nation, with 40,000 volunteers contributing 1.3 million hours a year to the Refuge System. In coastal South Carolina, the Association continues the legacy of volunteer commitment to our treasured public lands through citizen stewardship of our coastal resources.

Although many Friends Groups support multiple refuges as we do, the Association is unique in that we also support a national forest. We are one of the only groups supporting lands managed by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture.

The mission of the USDA Forest Service, ***“Caring for the Land and Serving People”***, is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

The Forest Service manages public lands located in 44 States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The lands comprise 8.5 percent of the total land area in the United States or 193 million acres of land, which is an area equivalent to the size of Texas. The natural resources on these lands are some of the Nation's greatest assets and as with our refuges have major economic, environmental, and social significance for all Americans.

The ethic of citizen commitment is strong within the US Forest Service as well. In FY 2010 nearly 100,000 volunteers contributed 4,235,000 hours (valued at \$88,275,000) to our national forests.

The guiding vision of the SEWEE Association is shaped by our dedication to preserving the ecosystems and wildlife of the South Carolina coast for future generations. To that end we support the respective missions of our coastal national wildlife refuges and forest through active participation in programs and projects that enhance these treasured resources. We work to instill a conservation ethic in students and encourage the next generation of scientists through environmental education programs. Using our public lands as classrooms, our programs stimulate students’ interest in science and provide opportunities to participate in environmental stewardship projects. In addition to encouraging stewardship of our public lands through education, the Association also promotes stewardship through volunteer opportunities and advocacy.

Pursuit of our vision to preserve the ecosystem and wildlife of the South Carolina coast and the manifestations of that pursuit are expressed in our mission statement.

The SEWEE Association is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to promoting understanding and appreciation of the natural environments of the Southeast. We work with Francis Marion National Forest, Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, the Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge and other partners in support of the research, biological, historical, educational and interpretive activities of each of these organizations. Through Association initiatives we strive to promote a robust appreciation of all the gifts our protected lands offer.

WHO WE ARE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since its creation in 1996, the Association has grown from a small group of supporters serving Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge to a thriving organization with two full-time staff members and a membership of over 1400. Today, we serve not only Cape Romain, but also Waccamaw and E.F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuges and the Francis Marion National Forest.

The Association’s first endeavor as a newly created Friends Group in 1996 was to begin an environmental education program at the newly constructed Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center, a joint venture

between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Forest Service designed to interpret the unique and valuable ecosystems of the forest and refuge.

Our growth over the years has been driven primarily by the success of, and demand for, our environmental education programs. SEWEE Association programs reach thousands of students along the South Carolina coast each year, sparking students' natural curiosity and reinforcing classroom science and math through hands on scientific investigation on our public lands. In addition to educational opportunities, we also provide opportunities for students to act as stewards of these resources through service projects.

In addition, for over ten years we have provided critical ongoing support for conservation programs such as loggerhead sea turtle recovery efforts, shorebird conservation work and invasive species eradication. We have supported interpretive projects to enhance visitors' understanding of the significance of our refuges and funded teaching lab and auditorium equipment for Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuges Visitor and Educational Center. We have successfully advocated for our refuges on the local and national level, including members of our board of directors testifying before Congress.

Since our inception in 1996, the SEWEE Association's impact has been quantified at over \$1.63 million in financial and in-kind support to our partners. The US Fish and Wildlife Service made recognition of our services in 2010 through presentation to the Association of its Regional Director's Award. We continue to support the South Carolina Lowcountry National Wildlife Refuge Complex and the Francis Marion National Forest in the many ways described in this document.

WHO WE ARE: DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE

In 2013 the SEWEE Association staff and directors, with the participation of our federal partners, began the process of crafting a strategic vision to guide the Association through the next five years. The planning process was catalyzed by a number of factors. Over the last 16 years the Association has grown from serving one national wildlife refuge to serving three refuges within the Lowcountry National Wildlife Refuge Complex, as well as serving the Francis Marion National Forest. In addition to the challenge of meeting the needs of a growing number of partners, our success and the increasing demand for our services have paved the way for significant future growth of the SEWEE Association. Staff and directors wanted a clear blueprint to guide the future growth of the Association in a way that ensures the sustainability and maximum effectiveness of the organization. In addition, the economic climate since 2008 and the federal budget sequester of 2013 have required the Association and our federal partners to reassess our needs, priorities and funding strategies.

Through a series of formal and informal discussions between staff, directors and partners, three key planning areas were identified:

I. Programs

Environmental Education

Species and habitat management support

Citizen Stewardship (*increasing public awareness and enjoyment of, and participation in supporting our public lands*).

II. Organizational Identity and Branding

III. Philanthropy

After distributing requests for proposals and interviewing numerous possible consultants, a team of three consultants was assembled. Joan Patterson, Director of Grassroots Outreach for the National Wildlife Refuge Association, was selected to guide the Programs plan and assist with overall process facilitation; Gil Shuler Graphic Design was chosen to lead the Organizational Identity/Branding efforts; and Cathy Forester was retained to shape Philanthropic/Financial Planning. This team approach brought unique expertise in each of our planning focus areas that no one individual could provide. Consultants worked with staff, directors and partners to plan a visioning workshop that was held in late spring 2013. The results of that process inform this strategic plan and will be used to develop an annual work plan for the Association's board and staff.

WHAT DOES THE ASSOCIATION DO?

Although SEWEE is defined in part by its historical roles and its plans for the future, there are several core competencies that help define our organizational identity. Thus, we are closely defined by what we do best and how we strive to expand and enhance the programs upon which our constituents increasingly rely.

PROGRAMMATIC INITIATIVES

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

PROMOTING CITIZEN STEWARDSHIP THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM AND ADVOCACY

SPECIES AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

The SEWEE Association's plan for program development is interwoven with the needs and goals of our respective partners and those of the ecosystem that they comprise. We work closely with our partners to identify priority areas, consistent with our mission, where our support can be most meaningful, and we request formal input annually. Although each of our partners manage diverse habitat and species with equally diverse needs, and each has varying priorities, we strive to leverage our resources to the benefit of all of our partners. For example, our combined membership base, spanning a large section of the South Carolina coast, gives us a strong voice as advocates for our partners. Each of our program areas is uniquely linked to the other. For example, species management projects we support are used to provide data and scientific investigation lessons in our education programs. Stewardship projects in our education programs benefit the species and habitats our refuges manage and interpretation of these resources. Our education programs and species management projects also provide citizen participation opportunities.



Volunteers assisted Minnie Hughes Elementary School students with building bluebird boxes, which they installed on the refuge, and at their school, as a habitat enhancement project.



Students collect water quality data from the salt marsh near the Shell Ring Trail on the Francis Marion National Forest.

Photo courtesy of Ron Koch

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Environmental education was the primary motivation for founding the SEWEE Association in 1996 and it remains the cornerstone of the Association’s mission today. Although we have come to support other important projects for our partners, and will continue to do so, we have always recognized the need for strong environmental education in our schools. The emphasis on education is rooted in the belief that *the future needs knowledgeable, engaged, and motivated citizens making decisions to continue to protect the valuable ecosystems of our national forest and wildlife refuges.*

OUR PHILOSOPHY

We strive to provide students an exceptional educational experience that will not only reinforce understanding of their science and math requirements, but also stimulate their curiosity and inspire them to ask questions about the world and its inhabitants.

We provide students the opportunity to experience and learn about our coastal ecosystems and appreciate their role in stewardship of these important places.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Although we offer a myriad of programs including one-day excursions and a variety of scientific investigation lessons covering topics ranging from reptiles, red wolves, and swallow-tailed kites to water quality and climate change, for 16 years our Earth Stewards program has been the cornerstone of our environmental education efforts. We believe this in-depth investigation program is one of our most effective educational tools.

Earth Stewards, initially developed in conjunction with US Fish & Wildlife Service, is a ten week, standards-based curriculum which utilizes the plethora of natural resources provided by our national wildlife refuges and national forest to engage elementary and middle school students in real outdoor science investigations. Students begin by getting out of the classroom and onto the refuges and forest to investigate and collect data on freshwater wetlands and the salt marsh. Throughout the year we build on the knowledge gained from the initial investigation with field trips and in-class lessons about the flora and fauna of our local ecosystems. The data students collect (along with data from ongoing research projects on the refuges and forest) is used to give real world connections to the math, science, and critical thinking skills that they are learning in their classrooms.

In a time when society is increasingly disconnected from its natural resources, the experiences our programs provide may be one of the only opportunities many children have to make a meaningful connection with nature. Moreover, with an increased emphasis on math and science education, our programs provide teachers with a host of important tools to augment students' "textbook learning" of math and science. Many of the schools we serve, especially those in the immediate area of our forest and refuges, are part of an underserved, rural community and have low academic achievement test scores. SEWEE's education programs meet community needs by offering unique learning experiences that many schools with severely limited budgets often cannot offer. Our programs are offered free of charge and are available to all public, private and home school groups.

When we began providing education programs about the ecosystems of Cape Romain and the Francis Marion National Forest at the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center in 1997, we reached about 75 students a year in our first two years. Today we reach over 13,000 students a year all along the South Carolina coast and have added Waccamaw and E.F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuges as partners. Our growth has been due to one teacher telling another about our programs. We think this is the best testament to the value of our offerings.

A New Direction and Earth Stewards 2.0

As with nature, we are always striving to adapt; always working to keep our curricula timely and improve our teaching techniques. As the quality of our programs is as important to us as the number of students we reach we have chosen to focus initially on curricula development and incorporating additional refuge and Forest habitat into our field studies. We will also focus on developing new stewardship projects for our students specific to regional issues. Beginning in the 2012-1013 school year we have been adapting and updating many of our lessons: adding new student-led investigations, service learning projects and field excursions, incorporating more technology (blogs, apps, and tablets), and integrating the new Common Core standards introduced this school year and the South Carolina science standards to be implemented next year. As technology, especially electronic data collection and reporting, has become more common in field research, we have incorporated applications such as Google Maps, Project Noah, and Leafsnap to document the biodiversity of a refuge as well as the areas near their schools. Back in the classroom students will use the data they collected to build a thorough understanding of the ecosystems they observed.

Our partnership with Coastal Expedition's South Carolina Outdoors Education Program (SCOEP) in the 2013-2014 school year will give over 250 of our Earth Stewards students the chance to investigate Bulls Island as a conclusion to their field studies program. As a result of this tremendous opportunity, our main theme this year will shift to comparing the biodiversity of the freshwater wetlands of the Francis Marion National Forest and rivers of Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge to the maritime habitats of Cape Romain.



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Throughout the program students will be using multiple scientific field sampling techniques to investigate water quality and document the organisms in these distinct habitats. Students will make food webs out of the photographs they take in the field, learn to calculate the biodiversity, and discover how scientists use biodiversity to assess the health of an ecosystem. Students will also update our new Earth Stewards blog throughout the year with pictures of what they encounter, interesting facts they uncover, and reflections on their experiences.

Students' experiences will reflect the Association's mission to bring science out of the classroom and awaken the innate curiosity for the natural world that resides in us all.



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Responding to changing education standards: Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, we expect to see STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) philosophies playing an even bigger role in the science curriculum standards and testing practices of South Carolina. As teachers respond to this shift in philosophy students will focus more on learning to identify, apply and integrate concepts from the STEM domains in order to understand complex problems and to solve problems using innovative approaches. To that end, there will be a much heavier focus on experiments, modeling, and student investigations as well as increased usage of computers and technology. These science standards will follow the national Common Core standards for language arts and math that were implemented at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

In response to these new standards we will continue updating our curricula (including our Earth Stewards program) to further reflect the new inquiry-based structure that will be utilized in the classroom. We also hope to host a teacher workshop in the summer of 2014 to address some of the teachers' questions and concerns regarding the implementation of the new standards.

PROGRAM GOALS:

Year 1 - Fall 2013 through Spring 2014

GOAL	STRATEGIES	NEEDS
<p>Launch Earth Stewards 2.0 Pilot Program: Shifting the focus to examine the biodiversity of three different habitats of South Carolina (school yard, freshwater wetland/forest, barrier island)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Incorporate field studies trip to Bull Island for 5th grade Earth Stewards students. As a result of this opportunity the theme of the 5th grade lesson will shift from being strictly about freshwater wetlands to focusing on the biodiversity of three distinct areas (urban/suburban – their schoolyard, a forest/wetland, a wilderness area) 2. All lessons will now be student driven (no instructor lectures). For example, our forest ecology lesson was previously a naturalist-led hike. It will now be a dichotomous key worksheet where students have to use clues to identify the common trees of the forest. 3. We will incorporate more technology into the curriculum. Students will be responsible for maintaining a blog about their experiences. We will also use smart phone applications to help us identify organisms in the field and digital cameras to document the organisms we find. 4. We are increasing the critical writing portion of the program to include scientific (essays), persuasive, and creative writing (stories, poems, etc.) in conjunction with the Common Core Standards introduced in Fall 2013. 	<p>Staffing Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Teaching assistant (Intern or Volunteer) at Sewee Center and Waccamaw NWR capable of conducting programs independently and directing volunteers. 2.) Total of six trained volunteers at both sites.

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Incorporate Wilderness into the Earth Stewards program in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act		Funding secured from USFS
Plan Teacher Workshops for Summer 2014 to address teacher needs with regards to the implementation of new Science Standards.	Recruit one to two volunteers with curriculum development experience to assist in developing workshops and overseeing the accreditation process.	2 volunteers with appropriate experience.
Emphasize stewardship component of programs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seek additional partnerships such as “Seeds 2 Shoreline” 2. Work with forest/refuge staff to identify areas of need and possible new projects. 3. Look for ways to incorporate projects into existing programs to encourage increased participation (lack of additional teacher/class time has been a limiting factor in participation). 	
Continue outreach efforts for Waccamaw programs.	Focus on identifying and building key relationships within the school districts, and pursue new partnerships within the community.	

Year 2 – Fall 2014 through spring 2015

GOALS	STRATEGIES	NEEDS
Continue with 5 th grade Earth Stewards 2.0 making adjustments from lessons learned during pilot year	Year-end assessment of student, teacher, staff and partner feedback.	
Incorporate new field study sites (Sandy Island trip for Waccamaw students if Coastal Expeditions capacity and funding allows).	Continue to explore new sources of funding for Waccamaw programs.	
Continue outreach efforts for Waccamaw programs.	<p>Focus on identifying and building key relationships within the school districts, and pursue new partnerships within the community.</p> <p>Continue to build a catalogue of schools and community groups, and churches in the surrounding areas and make personal visits to introduce our programs (develop calendar for visits and follow up).</p>	

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Improve assessment of our program's impacts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look for ways to quantify our impacts on standardized test scores. 2. Incorporate student-written evaluations. 3. Formalize teacher evaluations 4. Develop better ways to informally assess students' knowledge 	Graduate student to assist with development of more formal assessment tools.
Focus on improving and expanding 7 th grade Earth Stewards program.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curriculum development / updates 2.) Develop Outreach plan 	Staffing Support: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Teaching assistant (Intern or Volunteer) at Sewee Center and Waccamaw NWR capable of conducting programs independently and directing volunteers. 2.) Total of six trained volunteers at both sites. 3.) Assistance with curriculum development. 4.) Assess the possibility of paid internship positions at both sites for the 2015-2016 school year.
Continue Summer Teacher Workshops		
Assess the possibility of expanding our ACE basin schools and using Bonnie Hall as a possible study site.		

Year 3 – Fall 2015 through Spring 2016

GOALS	Strategies	Needs
Reflection and Analysis of where we are with regards to Earth Stewards 2.0 (5 th and 7 th grade) programs. Are we capable of expanding to include new schools? new grade level?		

Year 4 – Fall 2016 through Spring 2017

GOAL	STRATEGIES	NEEDS
Continue with 5 th and 7 th grade Earth Stewards and evaluate possible expansion to new schools.	Assess program demand	Staff and funding to conduct additional programs and outreach.
Begin to adopt multi-week program for 3 rd graders (possible plant focus and tie-in with Seeds 2 Shoreline).		Staff and funding to conduct additional programs and outreach.

PROMOTING CITIZEN STEWARDSHIP

A key component of the Association’s mission is promoting citizen stewardship through volunteerism and advocacy.

We begin promoting citizen stewardship within our education programs. At the conclusion of our education programs, students are given the chance to become stewards of the environment through a class service project specific to regional issues, such as habitat enhancement on a refuge or the forest. Our stewardship projects give students the opportunity to apply their knowledge of ecosystems to make a tangible improvement in the environment.

In the broader community, The Association helps organize citizens to meet the tangible needs of that refuge, again, through projects designed to address specific regional issues. Citizens become invested in the well-being of the refuge and take ownership of meeting its needs.



Seeds 2 Shoreline.

*Beginning in the fall (with a trip to harvest *Spartina alterniflora* seeds from the marsh) students spend the year learning about the plant life cycle as they incubate, germinate, and grow marsh grass in their classrooms (and a greenhouse at the Sewee Center). Then, in the spring, students get to “give-back” to the Refuge when they transplant their seedlings to help restore an area of ailing salt marsh.*

Photo courtesy of Allie Kreutzer

OUR STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CITIZEN STEWARDSHIP INCLUDE:

- Continuing to work with the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to enhance and promote volunteer opportunities at the Sewee and Waccamaw Visitor and Environmental Education Centers, and increased volunteer recruitment efforts through community outreach.

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- Continuing to support the Bulls Bay Nature Festival: 2013 was the first year of this community event, which took place on the Francis Marion National Forest and Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. The festival was greeted enthusiastically by the local community and gave local residents of all ages an opportunity to learn about and connect with the refuge and forest resources. This relationship between the community and the public lands is especially important given the development pressures in the area and the fact that residents will ultimately decide how the region grows and thus the impacts to the adjacent public lands. The Association will continue to participate as a partner in this event managing financial transactions and assisting with publicity and event day support.
- Francis Marion National Forest: Enlisting the support of volunteers and looking for opportunities to sponsor events for the forest similar to our Bulls Island tour on Cape Romain NWR. The Forest service has also asked our support in identifying partnerships that could result in funding for enhancing public use opportunities such as trail improvements.
- North Coast: Building citizen stewardship of the refuge in the communities surrounding Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge, especially Georgetown and Conway, is a key area on which we have been asked to focus. Our goal is to build citizen involvement and membership in the North Coast area through planning and conducting community outreach, events, special projects and fundraising for the refuge. Our strategies include establishing a signature regional event and implementing membership retention and outreach strategies with the intent of doubling our regional membership in 2014.

Achieving these goals will depend on further developing a committee within the Association specific to the North Coast area. In 2012 a committee was formed within the Association to focus on the needs of Waccamaw NWR. In 2013 a group of key supporters from the region will be brought together in hopes of staffing that committee. We will orient this committee to the role of Friends Groups and the current work of the Association and involve them in the current planning process. This group will begin working with the Association in planning and conducting community outreach, events, special projects and fundraising for the refuge.

Volunteers install predator guards to protect relocated loggerhead sea turtle nests on Cape Island in Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. Photo courtesy of Kristen Gardner



ADVOCACY

Another aspect of our support for all of our partners is advocacy. Our past advocacy efforts have included support for refuge and forest land acquisition as well as support for funding critical refuge and forest staff positions. We have commented on countless local land use issues potentially impacting our refuges and forest, and sent members to testify before congress on legislation impacting our partners. In addition, our public lands contribute a great deal to the quality of life in our communities. Effectively communicating this value to the public is a key element of our advocacy mission. Increasing public awareness of the human impacts to the ecosystems and species our refuges and forest protect is also a critical component of our advocacy efforts.

OUR CONTINUED SUCCESS IN ADVOCACY EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF OUR PARTNERS AND COASTAL RESOURCES WILL DEPEND UPON:

- Developing regular dialogue with our partners and our colleagues in local and national advocacy efforts.
- Selecting key issues where our efforts will make the greatest impact and developing a strategy for addressing these issues.
- Recruiting board members with advocacy experience both nationally and locally.
- Building stronger relationships with elected officials and their staff.
- Continued growth and engagement of our membership.
- Implementing communications technologies that will also us to communicate effectively and efficiently with our members.
- Respecting the guidelines we work under as a 501(c) 3 organization.



SEWEE Association board member Ed Graham (L) and Mary Harper (of the Friends of Forsythe NWR in New Jersey), stand with Jim Kurth, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, after testifying before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oceans, Wildlife and Insular Affairs. Photo courtesy of National Wildlife Refuge Association

SPECIES AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

The Association's role in species and habitat management offers another view of our organizational identity through the lens of those we serve. The unique characteristics and needs of the Francis Marion National Forest and each refuge we serve are closely defined by their respective species and habitats. The diversity among the partners we support helps reveal the scope and diversity of the Association's mission and the organizational flexibility required to meet multiple constituent needs. As demonstrated in the following descriptions of each of our partners, Association support is dependent upon individual needs of each partner, often entailing such varied activities as direct funding, helping to arrange public-private partnerships and contributing volunteer support.

CAPE ROMAIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

ABOUT THE RESOURCE

Established in 1932 as a migratory bird refuge, Cape Romain NWR encompasses a 22-mile segment of the southeast Atlantic coast. The refuge consists of 66,287 acres that include barrier islands, salt marshes, intricate coastal waterways, long sandy beaches, fresh and brackish water impoundments, and maritime forest. Points of interest include Bulls Island, Cape Island, and Lighthouse Island, where two historic, but no longer operational, lighthouses still stand. The refuge's original objectives were to conserve in public ownership habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and other resident species. In recent years, objectives have expanded to include: managing endangered species, protecting the 29,000-acre Class 1 Wilderness Area, and conserving the Bulls Island and Cape Island forests and associated diverse plant communities. Aiding the recovery of the threatened loggerhead sea turtle is one of the refuge's highest priorities.





Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge is an interwoven, dynamic system where tides ebb and flow through the tidal creeks of a vast expanse of salt marsh; where coastal beaches and marshes meet maritime forests; and where submerged aquatic organisms thrive and provide the foundation for estuarine life. The refuge manages, conserves, and protects these diverse habitats to support a multitude of migratory birds, sea turtles, fish, and other wildlife. The refuge provides a world-class living laboratory to foster excellence in biological and ecological research and enables students to learn and experience the natural world. Visitors can hear songbirds calling in the maritime forest, watch shorebirds feed on the tidal flats and oyster bars, or find solitude by fishing in the tidal creeks bisecting the marshy Class I Wilderness Area. Photos courtesy of Barbara Bergwerf and Grace Gasper

Since the construction of the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center in 1996 one of our primary focuses for Cape Romain and the Francis Marion National Forest has been providing environmental education programs. However, with increasing budget constraints Cape Romain has indicated their greatest need is for support of species management projects. Although our commitment to our environmental education programs remains strong, as outlined in our overall education program goals, we are committed to building additional resources for species management projects.

OUR PRIORITY PROJECTS:

The Need	Our Support	Our Goals and Strategies
<p>Support For loggerhead sea turtle conservation efforts: The beaches along Cape Romain NWR are the most important nesting areas for loggerhead sea turtles north of Florida on the east coast. Isolated leatherback sea turtle nestings have also been documented on the refuge. Cape Romain is also a study site for groundbreaking genetics research involving loggerhead sea turtles. Beach erosion and nest predation are the biggest threats on these nesting grounds. The monitoring and nest relocation and protection efforts conducted on the refuge result in a 75 percent increase in hatching success.</p>	<p>The Association has secured grants and managed funding for predator control, and nest protection and relocation efforts on the refuge. Because these efforts are so critical to nesting success this is one of the refuges highest priority projects needing our support and thus one of our highest priorities for funding.</p>	<p>Goal: Continue to provide financial support for nest protection efforts on the refuge. We will work with the refuge staff to determine needed support.</p> <p>Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek private and public partnerships to establish long term funding for this work. • Contribute direct funding as Association resources allow • Contribute volunteer support as needed
<p>Support for shorebird conservation efforts: Although Cape Romain encompasses only 10% of South Carolina's coast, the refuge supports the majority of shorebirds and seabirds in the state. Cape Romain NWR is 1 of only 20 Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Hemispheric Sites of International Importance in North and South America. The refuge provides habitat for breeding, non-breeding, migrating, and over-wintering species (many of whom are of significant conservation concern) including Wilson's plovers, Piping plovers, American oystercatchers, willets, marbled godwits, black-necked stilts, long-billed curlew, shortbilled dowitcher, red knots and whimbrel. The refuge's undeveloped and undisturbed coastal habitat supports 2/3 of the State's total wintering population of American</p>	<p>The SEWEE Association has worked with the refuge to obtain and manage funding to conduct regular shorebird surveys on the refuge. Monitoring shorebird population trends is a critical component of conservation efforts. Many of the species monitored are in rapid decline and the data collected on the refuge is critical to the refuge and many other agencies and individuals working on shorebird conservation not only on local but also on a global scale.</p>	<p>Goal: Continue to provide financial support for shorebird monitoring efforts.</p> <p>Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek private and public partnerships to establish long term funding for this work. • Contribute direct funding as Association resources allow • Contribute volunteer support as needed

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<p>oystercatcher, and 57% of the State's nesting population. The refuge also supports the largest population of Marbled Godwit on the Atlantic Coast during southbound migration.</p>		
<p>Support for Migratory Waterfowl Management: Installing a cross-dike through Jacks Creek impoundment on Bulls Island, to mitigate for anticipated breach in outer dike next to ocean, is essential to maintaining this important wetland. As one of only a few areas not open for waterfowl hunting in South Carolina, Cape Romain plays an important role in providing safe refuge for wintering waterfowl. The refuge is striving to maintain habitat conditions needed to support peak winter population numbers presently averaging 5,000. Retaining management capabilities in Jacks Creek impoundment on Bulls Island is critical to this effort. With predicted sea level rise, the barrier islands will be greatly reduced in size, and the impoundments on Bulls Island will be more difficult to maintain. Jack's Pond, 500 acres whose dike borders the Atlantic Ocean, is especially susceptible to breaching.</p>		<p>Because of the high cost of this project (over \$700,000.00) it is doubtful that the Association will be able to contribute meaningful direct funding in the next three to five years. Instead we will look for opportunities to build and strengthen partnerships that can lead to large funding sources and increase public awareness of the impacts of sea level rise on these critical habitats.</p>

Historical and Interpretive Projects:

<p>Historic Lighthouse Restoration: Lighthouse Island in Cape Romain is home to a lighthouse constructed in the 1800's. The lighthouse is a significant historic fixture for the surrounding community and a significant potential draw for tourism. Extensive restoration is required.</p>	<p>The Association will collaborate with refuge staff, and other organizations to secure necessary grant funding for the project.</p>
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FRANCIS MARION NATIONAL FOREST

ABOUT THE RESOURCE

The forest was officially designated in 1936 by President Roosevelt in an effort to restore and protect lands that, by the time of the Great Depression, had been stripped of most of their old growth timber and repeatedly burned. The Francis Marion National Forest encompasses more than 260,000 acres along the coastal plain, and is situated adjacent to Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, and only 20 miles north of Charleston. The forest is managed by the USDA Forest Service for multiple uses that include watershed protection and improvement, habitat for wildlife and fish species (including threatened and endangered species), wilderness area management, timber production, and recreation.



In 1980 four federally designated wilderness areas were established on the forest, including Wambaw Creek. Photo courtesy of Kathie Livingston.

A rich variety of wildlife habitat offer excellent opportunities for bird watching, nature study, photography, and fishing. Habitats include upland forest, bottomland/hardwood swamp, maritime forest, salt marsh, and managed wetland impoundments. Nearly 300 species of migratory and non-migratory birds have been documented in the Forest. Due to its significance to resident and migratory birds, both the National Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy have designated the Forest as an Important Birding Area. Notable among the species are the state endangered swallow-tailed kite, the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, and wood stork. The forest is also home to other avian species of high conservation priority such as Swainson's warblers, black-throated green warblers, and prothonotary warblers. Black bear, otters and bobcats also call the forest home.



At the time of hurricane Hugo in 1989 the forest was home to the second largest population of red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) in existence. Despite the devastation of habitat, by the mid 1990's the population had recovered to 75% of its previous level. Today, the Francis Marion functions as a donor population to aid in RCW recovery efforts in other areas.

25 of South Carolina's last remaining 200 Carolina Bays can be found on the forest. More than 1600 species of plants have been documented on the forest, including 32 species of orchids and 12 carnivorous species like the trumpet pitcher plant.

The Francis Marion is a forest literally steeped in history. Revolutionary War soldiers under the command of Francis Marion splashed through the swamps of the present-day national forest, protected only by their enemy's fear of alligators and snakes. Marion, dubbed "Swamp Fox" by the British troops, adapted the fighting techniques of the Cherokee Indians to thwart the British in coastal South Carolina.

Prehistoric Indians occupied the area long before Marion and the British would tangle in its swamps. A 4,000-year-old shell ring near the salt marsh remains as a monument to their culture. It is the northernmost of a number of coastal shell middens along the Southeast coast.

The Forest's current biodiversity is the result of a landscape recovering from the alterations of rice plantations, intense logging of the late 1800s, the building of roads, and in 1989 Hurricane Hugo, which leveled a third of the Forest. Ensuring the continued recovery and future health of a landscape that has seen so much devastation is a top priority in the current process of revising the management plan for the Forest.



Longleaf pine ecosystems are among the most species rich ecosystems in North America. They are also among the most endangered. Only three percent of the 90 million acres of longleaf pine that once dominated the Southeast remains today.

Modeling conducted in 2013 indicates that longleaf pine ecosystems once dominated 56% of the Francis Marion National Forest. Today only 19% of the Forest is dominated by longleaf pine. Lack of prescribed fire is a significant part of this decline. Today the Forest Service is partnering with organizations like The Nature Conservancy to enhance longleaf restoration efforts. The revised management plan for the Forest will set critical goals for future longleaf restoration efforts.

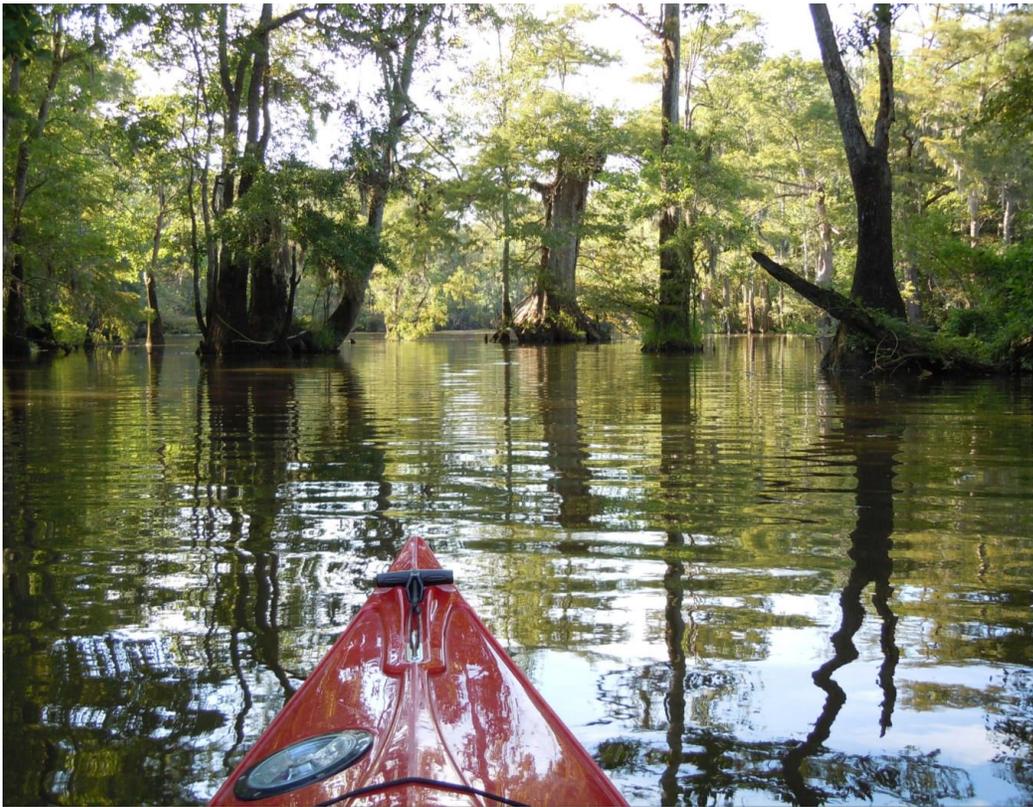
OUR SUPPORT

Currently our primary contribution to species management on the forest has been through education. Fresh water wetland, red-cockaded woodpeckers and swallow-tailed kites are currently incorporated into our education curriculum. We will continue to work with FS biologists to identify needs. Swallow-tailed kites are a likely species for our future support due to the status of the species (state endangered), importance of the habitat the Francis Marion provides, and partnership opportunities with Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge.

In conjunction with Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. We will strive to increase public awareness of the wilderness protected by the refuge and the forest and its benefit to wildlife and to people.

We will actively participate in the current revision process for the Forest's management plan.

WACCAMAW NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge protects one of the most extensive, intact wetland complexes in the southeastern United States and some of the most diverse freshwater wetland systems found in North America today.

ABOUT THE RESOURCE

Waccamaw NWR, founded in 1997, is located in South Carolina's Lowcountry about 60 miles north of Charleston, within Georgetown, Horry and Marion counties. Its 54,000-acre acquisition boundary contains portions of the Great and Little Pee Dee rivers and the Waccamaw River. Sections of the Great Pee Dee River as well as the Little Pee Dee River are designated Type 1 Natural State Scenic Rivers. The refuge was established not only to protect habitat for wildlife but also to provide compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities, including hunting and fishing. Additionally, Waccamaw NWR's wetlands play a critical role in the filtration and storm water retention of the primary drinking water resource for the greater Grand Strand region.

These river systems and associated wetlands comprise a large portion of the Winyah Bay drainage basin, which stands out as one of the most extensive, intact wetland complexes in the southeastern United States. Waccamaw NWR's tidal freshwater wetlands are some of the most diverse freshwater wetland systems found in North America today and include managed wetlands, abandoned and unmanaged tidal rice fields, creeks, and flats.

More than 400 species of animals are supported by the variety of habitats within the refuge, including birds such as the swallow-tailed kite, osprey, wood stork, white ibis, and prothonotary warbler. Acre-for-acre, the managed wetlands of the region winter more ducks than any comparable habitat in South Carolina. In addition to over-

wintering habitats, the Waccamaw River serves as a flight corridor for waterfowl migrating along the coastal wetland wintering grounds. The refuge's forested wetlands, where mature trees are present, provide critical nesting habitat for swallow-tailed kites as well as habitat for wood ducks and hooded mergansers. The refuge is critical to protecting contiguous habitat for the American black bear.

The lands and waters that comprise Waccamaw NWR have a rich history. Humans have used the area's natural resources in various ways since prehistoric times in order to survive. Early Native Americans including the Seewee, Santee, Sampit, Winyah, Pee Dee and Waccamaw Indian tribes lived off the land and waters, and their wildlife and fish resources, for many centuries prior to the arrival of European colonists who settled in the area.

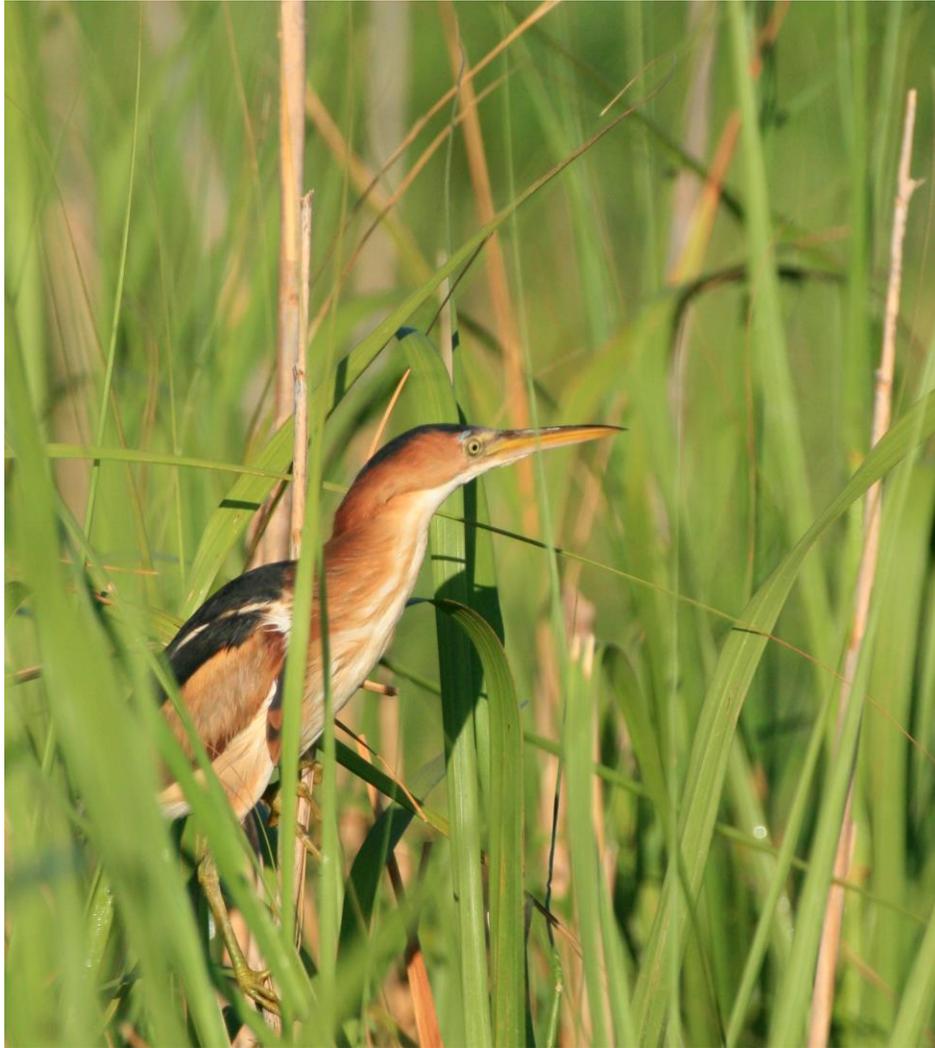


Swallow-tailed kites return to the Southeast US from South America to breed each spring. Waccamaw NWR and the Francis Marion National Forest are critical nesting habitat for this species. These beautiful birds also forage over the marshes of Cape Romain and nest along the rivers of the ACE Basin. Swallow-tailed kites are listed as an endangered species in South Carolina.

OUR SUPPORT

To date we have focused our work on Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge on environmental education. As this continues to be a top priority for the refuge it continues to be a top priority for the Association. Our primary contribution to species management in the next year will be through habitat enhancement and monitoring stewardship projects through our environmental education programs. As our presence, and fundraising ability, in the North Coast region increases we will work with the refuge to identify key species management projects where our support can be most effective in supporting fieldwork and public awareness. Conservation efforts focusing on swallow-tailed kites and red-cockaded woodpeckers offer partnership opportunities as the Francis Marion National Forest is also critical habitat for these species. Other species of concern to the refuge are black-throated green, Swainson's and prothonotary warblers, marsh birds such as king rails, wading birds including wood storks, black bear, and Rafinesque's big-eared bats. Our environmental education programs already include lessons on many of these species.

ERNEST F. HOLLINGS ACE BASIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Least bittern (photo courtesy of Andy Day)

ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge, established on September 20, 1990 to protect critical wetlands, includes 11,815 acres within the 350,000-acre Ashepoo–Combahee–Edisto (ACE) Basin Project. The ACE Basin represents one of the largest undeveloped estuaries on the east coast of the United States and is comprised of diverse habitats including pine and hardwood uplands, forested wetlands, fresh, brackish and salt water tidal marshes, barrier islands and beaches. The basin's unique estuarine system is the largest of its type in the state and provides invaluable habitat for a rich diversity of finfish and shellfish resources. The basin hosts a wealth of wildlife resources, including such endangered and threatened species as bald eagles, wood storks, ospreys, loggerhead sea turtles and shortnose sturgeon.

In the mid-1700s, tidal swamps bordering the basin's rivers were cleared and diked for rice culture. After the rice culture declined in the late 1800s, wealthy sportsmen purchased many of the plantations as hunting retreats. The new owners successfully managed the former rice fields and adjacent upland areas for a wide range of wildlife. This

tradition of land stewardship has continued throughout the 20th century. The enormous natural values found on the refuge today are largely due to the wise resource management practices of these past private landowners. Because of their importance to waterfowl, these former rice fields have been identified for protection under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The ACE Basin also has been designated as a world-class ecosystem under The Nature Conservancy's Last Great Places program.

Much of the historical value of the ACE Basin system has also been protected and preserved. The current refuge office, a former rice plantation house (The Grove) built in 1828, is one of only three antebellum mansions that survived the Civil War in the ACE Basin area. Former owners ensured that it would be preserved by including it on the National Register of Historic Places.



Jehossee Island, ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge. Photo courtesy of Grace Gasper

The ACE Basin Task Force

ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge is part of a conservation initiative that is as significant as the estuary it protects. In 1988, in response to a thousand-home residential resort and marina proposed on the Edisto River, landowners joined with The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina, the Coastal Conservation League, Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and others to defeat the proposed development.

Once the initial development proposal was defeated, many members of this initial group continued working together as the ACE Basin Task force to promote a broader conservation vision for the region and the ACE Basin Project was launched. The mission of the ACE Basin Project was and is to maintain the natural character of the basin by promoting wise resource management on private lands and protecting strategic tracts by conservation agencies. A major goal of the protection efforts is to ensure that traditional uses such as farming, forestry, recreational and commercial fishing and hunting will continue in the area. The project's initial goal was to protect 90,000 acres. To date over 200,000 acres have been protected, of which only 79,000 acres are public lands. The rest is privately owned and includes 140 donated conservation easements. Conservation easements were a new idea at the time, but one by one local landowners joined the conservation effort and not only protected the ACE Basin, but created a national model for private - public partnership in land protection.

OUR SUPPORT

To date we have focused our work in the ACE Basin on environmental education. Our primary contribution to species management in the next year will be through habitat enhancement and monitoring stewardship projects through our environmental education programs. As our presence, and fundraising ability, in the South Coast region increases we will work with the refuge to identify key species management projects where our support can be most effective in supporting fieldwork and public awareness.

RETAIL SALES OPERATIONS

We will continue to operate retail sales stores for the Sewee Visitor Center and Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. As sales are dependent on visitation and center hours we will make merchandising decisions accordingly. We will continue to look for unique merchandise that will educate citizens about the importance of our public lands to people and wildlife, depict the beauty of these lands, and in general encourage conservation. We will strive to provide the highest possible quality logo merchandise for the Association and our partners.

POSITIONING OURSELVES TO MEET INCREASING NEED FOR SERVICE

As the Association transitions to increased roles in support of our partner organizations, we build upon a clear sense of organizational identity and mission. The evolution of our historical roles has yielded several areas of programmatic strengths upon which to build – environmental education, species and habitat management, historical and interpretive projects, promotion of stewardship, and advocacy, among others. We are intimately familiar with our partners and their needs, and feedback from our partners gives us a clear sense of how we should build upon our strengths moving forward in order to help them meet their needs.

We turn our attention now to addressing ways in which we can position ourselves to achieve the successes we know are attainable. The key areas we have identified as providing the greatest leverage points for our current strengths and future potential are: communications, philanthropy and branding. We will also seek to identify our organizational strengths and weaknesses and examine best practices for board development and self-governance. The extent to which we define and achieve goals in these aspects of our organization will determine our future ability to scale our services to meet the increasing needs of our partners.

COMMUNICATIONS

Our public lands contribute a great deal to the quality of life in our communities. Effectively communicating this value to the public is a key element of our mission. We must also effectively communicate the impacts of the Association's work to our members and the community in a compelling way. We communicate a great deal of information to our members about events, volunteer opportunities and advocacy issues. In addition, successful fundraising also depends on communicating donation requests, membership renewal notices and acknowledgements.

GOALS: IMPROVE OUR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS

Strategy:

- Updated website coordinated with new logo (online donations, membership renewals gift memberships)
- Upgrade donor management system
- Upgrade email communication system (possibly part of donor management system)

GOAL: INCREASE VISIBILITY OF THE ASSOCIATION

Strategy:

- Update website content with more compelling text and greater number of photos
- Design rack card for display at visitor centers and events
- Print two banners with new logo for visitor centers and events
- Develop story boards highlighting the Association's work for display at visitor center and events

GOAL: MAKE BETTER USE OF AVAILABLE MEDIA TO COMMUNICATE THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR PUBLIC LANDS AND THE IMPACTS OF OUR WORK.

Strategy:

- Annual newsletter with compelling text and photos (consider doing bi-annually as funding allows or supplement with additional e-newsletters)
- Quarterly member e-mails updating on a specific issue (education, kites, turtles).
- Action alerts to members on advocacy issues as needed
- News media: develop annual plan for press releases, articles, and letters to the editor in coordination with advocacy strategy, events and issues of significance to the association and our partners (i.e. 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act).

PHILANTHROPY

The Association has a history of successfully funding our education programs as well as the current species/habitat management projects we support, including maintaining a funding stream in the challenging economic years since 2008.

In 2006 the Association received a significant grant (over \$300,000.00) that funded species management projects for several years and allowed expansion of our staff. Since that time our funding has been a combination of federal grants, small community foundation grants, an annual fundraising event and member donations. We have maintained a modest cash reserve.

As a direct result of the 2013 federal budget sequester many of the federal grants on which we have depended will no longer be available. In addition, small foundation grants are becoming more and more competitive. We have also been reliant on the Francis P. Bunnelle Foundation for funding of our Georgetown County work. Although we enjoy a strong relationship with the foundation however, loss of that funding would significantly impact our North Coast work.

At the same time as our federal funding sources are diminishing, our partners are experiencing drastic budget cuts of their own. Cuts of up to 14% are reducing refuge budgets to pre-2010 levels. In addition, refuge staff positions left open as a result of staff attrition are either not being filled immediately or being eliminated altogether. This crisis has left our partners looking more and more to the Association for needed support.

This perfect storm of decreased funding coupled with increasing demand for services has made it clear we must significantly increase and diversify our funding stream over the next three to five years. As we have examined our current funding stream and incorporated the recommendations of our fundraising consultant (APPENDIX A), we have developed the following goals and strategies:

INCREASING INCOME:

INCREASE PRIVATE DONATIONS

SEWEE Association Strategic Plan 2014-2018

- Restructure our membership levels
- Increase our membership renewal rate
- Encourage our long time lower level members to increase their membership levels
- Actively recruit new members across the region we serve

DEVELOP A BOARD THAT IS ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH POTENTIAL DONORS

WE MUST SEEK NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOUNDATIONS

- Board member support
- Research support

ACTIVELY SEEK SMALL BUSINESS AND CORPORATE DONORS

CONTINUE OUR VERY SUCCESSFUL *MUSIC AND OYSTERS FOR WILDLIFE* EVENT EACH JANUARY

- Budget projected income conservatively as it may vary significantly from year to year.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AND BRANDING

Current logo:



SEWEE Association, Inc.

Friends Group for the National Wildlife Refuges and Forest of Coastal South Carolina

Since 1996 the SEWEE (South Eastern Wildlife and Environmental Education) Association has grown from a small group of supporters serving Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center to a thriving organization serving not only Cape Romain but also Waccamaw and E.F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuges and the Francis Marion National Forest. Due the expansion of the geographic region we serve, we feel that SEWEE, which has strong identity with the Sewee to Santee region of the South Carolina coast between Awendaw and the Santee River, no longer adequately reflects the Association's work. SEWEE is also not something people in Georgetown and Horry Counties and southern Charleston County relate to easily. In addition, it is difficult to draw a distinction between the SEWEE Association and the Sewee Visitor Center. Finally, Southeastern Wildlife Exposition, a very large event held in Charleston each winter is using the acronym SEWE.

For all these reasons, it became clear to us that developing a new “brand” for our organization was critical to our ongoing success. We enlisted the support of one of the leading graphic design firms in our region, Gil Shuler Graphic Designs, to assist us in this rebranding process by developing a new logo and name unique to our organization and our work.

New brand to be launched in 2014:



FUNDING PRIORITIES

OPERATIONS

The Association has always maintained a minimal budget for operating expenses. Staff salaries were reduced as positions were vacated and refilled in 2012. Our partners provide office space, while the Association provides only supplies, which greatly reduces overhead. Possible increased expenses over the next year include: increased membership management/ fundraising expenses as we strive to increase renewals and recruit new members. New promotional material will need to be developed in conjunction with our new “brand”

Education computers may need to be upgraded/replaced.

PROGRAMS

EDUCATION

As our education programs have been the cornerstone of the Association’s success and are fundamental to our mission and success as an organization, we are committed to maintaining our current funding levels. *In addition,*

we will work with each of our partners to prioritize education program growth and species/habitat management support.

Our primary focus in our education programs will be keeping our curricula cutting edge. When we have the opportunity to expand our outreach, we will focus on additional grade levels in schools we currently serve. We will meet increasing staff needs with volunteer and intern support for at least the next two years. We will not consider adding fulltime paid staff unless reliable long-term funding is in place. As our programs use the refuges and forest as classrooms and teaching tools, there is very little overhead. Our primary costs are staff and minimal supplies.

We will continue to leverage our educational resources to benefit species and their habitats on the refuges and Forest and their habitats through stewardship projects and public education.

SPECIES MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

Our support for conservation of species of concern as identified by our refuges and the Forest is of the highest importance to us as an organization.

Our first goal is to build the necessary financial resources to continue funding our current projects in the absence of future FWS grant and contract funding. Priority projects are sea turtle recovery efforts and shorebird conservation. As private donations will take time to build significantly we will also work to develop partnership and grant opportunities for funding these projects.

We will then work to fund additional projects as identified and prioritized with our partners. We will select projects with the greatest measurable benefit to the species and habitats. As we build our ability to provide direct project support we will continue to build our communication strategy around increasing public awareness of the human impacts to species of concern and our refuges' and forest's role in protecting these species.

HISTORICAL AND INTERPRETIVE PROJECTS

We will work with Cape Romain to secure grant funding for initial restoration of the Cape Romain Lighthouse. In addition, we will include promoting the historical significance of this structure in our communication plan.

GOVERNANCE (BOARD DEVELOPMENT)

Realizing that an engaged and productive board reflective of the Association's needs is critical to reaching our objectives board recruitment is one of our highest priorities. Knowing that this is one of our most challenging tasks we will implement a blue ribbon nominating committee approach in 2013.

SEWEE Association Board Nominating Blue Ribbon Committee

The purpose of this committee is to assist the Association in cultivating the relationships necessary to build a Board of Directors whose composition is reflective of the Association's needs.

We have selected this process because the Association does not have a significant number of relationships with individuals who have non-profit board experience to draw on from within. In order to be successful in our efforts

to build our board we need to expand our pool of candidates. This process also provides us with the opportunity to make leaders in the community more aware of our work.

Following the Association's current bylaws the core nominating committees consists of two current board members and one Association member not currently on the board (Ginny Prevost, Sarah Hartman and George Geer in 2013-2014).

The core committee will bring together a group of leaders in the community, as a blue ribbon committee, for a one-time meeting. We will present the Association's mission, goals and needs and ask attendees to recommend individuals with skills, experience and interest relevant to our needs. We hope attendees may also be interested in working with us but realize that they, as leaders in the conservation community, already have many commitments.

The core committee along with the executive director will then make initial contact with recommended individuals to pursue these relationships.

We plan to have two blue ribbon meetings: one in the Charleston area and one in Georgetown to ensure our board reflects the varied regions we serve.

Our eventual goal is to build a board of 13 to 15 seats (currently nine seats). We anticipate filling at least one expired term in 2014 and hope to add two seats. As our board grows we would also like to build an active committee structure. Depending on how many interested candidates result from this process we would consider initially offering committee positions to these individuals.

Through this process cultivating a board member with the skills and experience to help lead this process in the future and orient new board members will be critical ("Governance Leader" job description attached).

CONCLUSION

The exceptional reputation the Association has built through our environmental education work gives us a strong foundation on which to continue growing our organization. We have the opportunity to make an ever-growing contribution to protecting the natural resources of our coast. The goals outlined in this plan are our first steps down that path. This will not be a rapid or easy journey, but in the end the increased support we will be able to offer our partners and the contribution we can make to protect our coastal resources will be well worth the work.

APPENDIX A

PHILANTHROPY RECOMMENDATIONS

SEWEE Association

Fundraising plan – Cathy Forrester

Recommendations:

- Develop a 3-year strategic plan that will inform your financial needs for that period
 - If necessary, begin populating your plan with “big boulders” – i.e. a goal of funding Cape Romain refuge at \$50,000 per year
 - Additional details can be added later as plans are developed

- Create calendar for the remainder of the year
 - List all events
 - List all big efforts that require staff and/or board member time, i.e. events, dates for large mailings, newsletter production, etc.

- Revise current levels of membership
 - Current levels = Member \$20; Family @ \$30; Supporter @ \$50; Contributor @\$100; Life Member @\$250
 - Visit websites of other organizations to see what their levels are
 - Per our discussion, consider doing away with Family membership unless there are specific benefits to which multiple family members would gain access
 - Reconsider Life Member – perhaps you want to consider something like a threshold of \$10,000 cumulative giving. You are “giving away the farm” by offering Life membership for just \$250!
 - Consider adding opportunities for business gifts and develop strategy for soliciting them
 - Business Membership - \$250 or \$500 for small local businesses
 - Corporate Partner - \$1000 or \$2500+ for larger corporations
 - Consider soliciting Business and Corporate support for the full year rather than just for the event
 - They get PR for supporting the organization for a full year
 - Plan for this now so it can be implemented before January 2014 event

- Re-engage lapsed donors
 - People who have given to your organization before are always your best prospects
 - You currently do 3 mailings per year
 - Spring – before the annual meeting
 - Summer – newsletter
 - Fall – year-end letter
 - Add one lapsed member mailing between now and year-end
 - Create list of members who have lapsed in previous 2-5 years
 - Determine extent lapsed you wish to use based on numbers of donors
 - Print extra newsletters to be used with lapsed donor letters
 - Send lapsed donor “we want you back” letter with newsletter

SEWEE Association Strategic Plan 2014-2018

- Schedule on calendar – consider scheduling this after summer newsletter and before Fall mailing (often immediately after Labor Day is a good time)
 - Consider sending email newsletter to lapsed donors – do this in a way that allows you to communicate the “we want you back” message to this group
- Develop sound and effective membership-related policies
- Create regular schedule for member mailings throughout calendar year
 - Schedule first renewal letters (R1s) to go out 11 months after the donor’s last gift
 - If donor has not given after 3 months of receiving R1, send a second reminder letter
 - Doing these member letters monthly will spread your work on mailings and gift entry and acknowledgement throughout the year, although you will always receive more gifts at year-end
 - Always incorporate into membership renewal letters a request for the member to consider increasing their support
 - Ensure timely gift entry and acknowledgement
 - Gifts should be entered and acknowledgement letters mailed within 3 days of receipt of the gift
- Recruit new members
- Solicit lists of new prospects from your board members, partners and current supporters
 - Develop a new member solicitation letter and add a personal note from the person who suggested them
 - Consider printing additional newsletters that can accompany the letter
 - Determine if email approach with your e-newsletter would be effective
 - Consider testing your method by splitting your list in half and use electronic approach with some and hard copy mail with others and compare results
 - For hard copy mail, try a “lift letter” approach where a current donor, or one of your partners writes a cover letter
 - Develop a plan for small “house parties” that can be hosted by board members or current supporters to recruit new members

APPENDIX B

SEWEE Association Governance Leader Roles and Responsibilities

Purpose: To ensure: a) that the composition of the Board of Directors is reflective of the Association's needs, b) that the Board operates in compliance with the established bylaws, and c) that Board members remain engaged and productive.

Reporting Relationship: Works with Board Chair and Executive Director

Roles and Responsibilities:

Board Composition:

- Lead the assessment of current and anticipated needs related to board composition, determining the knowledge, attributes, skills, abilities, influence, and access to resources the board will need to consider in order to accomplish future work.
- Develop a profile of the Board as it should evolve over time. Identify potential board member candidates exploring their interest and availability for board service.
- Annually seek nominations of individuals to be elected to the board, bringing a proposed slate to the Board for approval and then to the membership for their vote.
- In cooperation with the Executive Director and the Board Chair, contact each board member to assess his or her continuing interest in board membership and term of service.
- Work with each board member to identify the appropriate role he or she might assume on behalf of the organization.

Board Knowledge:

- Design and oversee a process of Board orientation, including providing information prior to election, a session for new board members and other information as needed during the early stages of board service.
- Develops a process to ensure best practices are followed as outlined by SCANPO's *Guiding Principles and Best Practices*

Board Effectiveness:

- Review and update the Board's description of its roles and responsibilities and what is expected of individual Board members, bringing any changes to the Board for approval.
- Provide advice as needed to the Board chair and other board leaders on steps they might take to enhance board effectiveness.
- Review the board's current practices regarding member participation, conflict of interest, confidentiality, etc., and suggest improvements as needed.
- Develop a plan for committee formation within the board over time. Begin by identifying a leader in each key area of need (i.e.: communication, advocacy, finance) and developing annual goals, including other needed skills to bring to the committee.