

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: images available upon request.

Miller to resign as DDWS executive director

Birgie Miller, executive director for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) since April 2012, has tendered notice of her resignation to the board of directors, effective summer 2018.

“I am making a life change and leaving the island,” said Miller. “But because of my commitment and loyalty to the ‘Ding’ family, I felt the responsibility to let them know even before I knew where my future will be taking me.”

“Those of us on the board of directors are only too aware what a great loss Birgie’s departure will be,” said DDWS president Mike Baldwin. “Her accomplishments while serving as executive director have been nothing short of remarkable, achieving tremendous growth within the organization and greatly strengthening our mission to support the refuge.”

The board of directors hired Miller eight years ago as DDWS’ first-ever executive director. She had previously served as a member of the board for three years. A Sanibel Island resident for almost 19 years, Miller brought nearly 20 years of nonprofit experience to “Ding” Darling.

Incessant cutting of refuge system budgets fueled DDWS’ decision to hire an executive director six years ago. “It became abundantly clear to the society board that we needed to take a bold step to support the mission of the refuge in the areas of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, and public education,” said Jim Scott, DDWS president at the time. “The obvious answer was to hire a dynamic executive director to focus on our immediate needs as well as our long-term goals.”

Raising millions of dollars through donations, fundraisers, and grants, Miller has overseen the acquisition of several parcels of new refuge lands and the implementation of more than a dozen new exhibits,

improvement projects, and research studies for the refuge. She worked with the refuge to design and fund the first-ever of the national wildlife refuge system's game apps and an iNature trail that uses QR code technology. She also spearheaded the SanCap Solar Connect program to offer affordable solar conversion to island residents and businesses. To help accomplish all this, Miller grew the DDWS staff from two fulltime and one part-time employees to six fulltime employees and two fulltime interns.

“Birgie has been the brains and muscle behind starting the ‘Ding’ Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament, the ‘Ding’Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photo Contest, Go Wild for ‘Ding’ fundraisers, our seasonal film series, the 45/82 legacy society, and so many more programs,” said Baldwin. “We will miss her sorely, but must begin the process of seeking a successor to fill the position. We have formed a search committee made up of two past presidents and three board members, including myself, to work with a hired search firm to fill the position,” Baldwin said.

“Birgie has transformed the ‘Ding’ Darling Wildlife Society into a powerhouse professional nonprofit that is the envy of refuge support groups across the country,” said Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik. “She will probably best be remembered for her accomplishments in supporting the refuge. Under Birgie's leadership, the society has successfully increased support for educational and research programs and hired a new conservation educator to teach thousands of children the wonders of nature.”

"We jokingly call her 'Red Bull' because of her fierce energy," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "Her crowning achievement, funny as it may seem, was to see the Learning Lavatories project come to fruition last year. She has talked about turning our restrooms into award-winning educational exhibits for years, and we are all proud to say she has certainly achieved that goal."

“The refuge is in much better shape thanks to the support that Birgie has generated, and we will miss her passion, enthusiasm, vision, friendliness, and commitment,” said Tritaik. “On behalf of the refuge staff and volunteers, we are eternally grateful for Birgie's contributions.”

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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