

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: One of the two new water-research stations installed in “Ding” Darling waters along Wildlife Drive

Water-quality researchers install equipment donated by DDWS

As water research equipment that monitors the waters of J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge was about to become obsolete at the end of 2019, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) stepped in to purchase new, updated equipment known as sondes.

The in-water stations measure various factors that help biologists determine the health of the water via logger systems. The new sondes connect to a 4G network and send data to a cloud-based application that refuge staff can access in real time.

“We then report that data each week to the Army Corp of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District in collaboration with the city of Sanibel, Lee County, SCCF [Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation], and Fort Myers Beach,” said senior refuge biologist Jeremy Conrad.

The new refuge sondes also provide collaborative data to the SCCF RECON network. The RECON network employs similar sondes to monitor real-time water quality in Tarpon Bay and throughout San Carlos Pass and the Caloosahatchee River.

In collaboration with the refuge, SCCF staff recently installed the first of the two new sondes. The installation was delayed by the temporary pandemic closure of SCCF’s Marine Lab, which is located on “Ding” Darling property at Tarpon Bay Recreation Area. The second sonde station will be upgraded soon, researchers say. Besides deploying the equipment, SCCF staff also calibrate, maintain, and monitor data.

“Water management from Lake O and the Caloosahatchee is the largest impact to the refuge, and it requires monitoring to better understand how lake releases impact water quality within the refuge boundaries,” said Conrad. “The sondes located in refuge waters measure water-quality parameters

continuously via the logger system and transmit that data to a server that refuge and SCCF staff can monitor from work or home.”

“Clean water is the lifeblood of the refuge and the entire planet,” said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director. “There’s no overstating the importance of understanding how refuge waters are being affected by outside forces. The wildlife society did not hesitate to support the equipment for this crucial research as part of our mission to support refuge studies, wildlife, and education.”

“We are grateful to our friends group for this important show of support and for collaboration from other local organizations,” said acting refuge manager Kevin Godsea. “Partnerships such as this make possible great strides in the progression of water-quality research when staff and resources are otherwise limited.”

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 profits.

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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