



# Protect. Educate. Inspire.

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Melissa Maher heads up the WoW team of mobile educators.

Caption for davidrenderings: Artist renderings of interpretive exhibits in the WoW mobile classroom, set to debut in November.

### **'Ding' Darling hires Urban Education Leader**

Melissa Maher took the position of Urban Education Leader last week for the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. The position, funded by the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), was created to oversee the refuge's education outreach, including the Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile classroom, which deploys next month to schools and venues in underserved areas throughout a five-county region.

Maher comes to the refuge from Beaver Dam, Wisc., with more than 20 years of experience in development and oversight of student-focused strategies and programs. Within the past 15 years, she has held positions as teacher, school program manager, and district career coordinator.

At "Ding" Darling, Maher will lead a team of two bilingual Spanish interpreters, interns, and volunteers to schedule visits with the mobile classroom and facilitate curriculum to benefit teachers and meet Florida education standards.

“I am honored and excited to be able to launch the WoW project,” said Maher, a native of Joliet, Ill. “I will be able to share my passion for nature conservation and wildlife protection with students and community members while they gain a deeper meaning and appreciation for it.”

Museum-quality, hands-on exhibits inside WoW will offer a taste of the refuge and natural science lessons to those who are unable to travel to Sanibel for the full “Ding” Darling experience, in keeping with the national refuge system’s Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership initiative.

Learning stations will interpret mangrove ecosystems, water quality and conservation, pollution and plastic, animal scats and tracks, Florida’s native animals, and wildlife sounds. The education team has developed lesson plans and bilingual activity sheets geared for grades kindergarten through 12.

“I am looking forward to implementing an engaging curriculum for students that will correlate to the real world,” said Maher. “Additionally, I am excited to build positive relationships within the greater community to share the mission of the refuge.”

“Melissa is a results-oriented and high-energy educator,” said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director. “Her work experience and skill sets -- along with her energy, enthusiasm, and true belief in our mission -- are a perfect fit for the refuge and DDWS education and development team in reaching and exceeding our short-term and long-range goals, particularly with WoW.”

“The positivity and passion for the mission of the refuge truly shines through everyone whom I’ve met at ‘Ding’ Darling,” said Maher.

Anyone wishing to help support WoW’s efforts to bring the refuge to schools, libraries, and events throughout the region can contact Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 232. To schedule Wow to appear at your school, venue, or event, email [wow@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:wow@dingdarlingsociety.org). Visit [dingwow.org](http://dingwow.org) for more information.

#### 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](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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