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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Chelle Koster Walton
239-699-4754

ChelleTrav@aol.com

Caption: DDWS Executive Director and DDWS refuge liaison Ranger Toni Westland hold the 2021 Regional Director's Award.

FWS Southeast Region names DDWS 'Friends Group of The Year'

In a recent virtual award ceremony, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) Southeast Region honored the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) with the 2021 Regional Director's Friends Group of the Year award. DDWS is the nonprofit partner to the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island, one of 146 refuges and fish hatcheries within the Southeast region, which encompasses 12 U.S. states and territories.

DDWS was one of only two refuge friends groups out of 49 to receive the award this year.

"This stands as a testimony to the hard work each of you put in to make the Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract acquisition happen," said refuge manager Kevin Godsea in congratulating DDWS. Godsea nominated the group for the award.

In partnership with Lee County Conservation 20/20, DDWS worked to raise \$9.5 million to acquire the largest remaining parcel of undeveloped land on Sanibel Island in 2019. The 68-acre tract was deeded for up to 29 luxury homes. As an important corridor between the refuge and SCCF (Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation) lands, the property originally known as Wulfert Bayous was deemed critical to the refuge's conservation mission.

The refuge now manages the 68 acres as part of the “Ding” Darling complex. The tract soon will be undergoing restoration, thanks to grants DDWS helped facilitate.

“Our amazing staff, donors, and board of directors so deserve this award, but it also could not have happened without our wonderful partnerships with the refuge team and Lee County,” said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. “This is a huge honor, but even more gratifying is knowing what we all achieved in the name of keeping Sanibel a sanctuary island and this property a valuable habitat for wetland and upland species.”

Miller was among the six specific award recipients named, along with immediate past board president Mike Baldwin, current president Sarah Ashton, acquisition project leader John McCabe, and board members Wendy Kindig and Bill Valerian.

The Regional Director’s Honor Award goes out annually to volunteers, partners, and employees who have contributed to the accomplishments of FWS’s mission and vision in the South Atlantic-Gulf and Mississippi Basin Interior Regions.

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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