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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 makes urgent request for matching donation funds toward 8.5-acre acquisition

Because of steeply rising property values and costs, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) is faced with an end-of-January deadline to raise a final \$550,000 on an 8.5-acre Sanibel Island land acquisition it has been working toward for several years. Thanks to island residents Don and Joan Sherman, every dollar donated now will be matched.

Adjacent to current J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge property, the land in question holds a six-acre lake that directly feeds into fragile Tarpon Bay. Its preservation not only means protecting vital wildlife habitat, but also buffering refuge water quality against the catastrophic red tide and blue-green algae events it has experienced in the past.

Some of the documented listed species on this property include the gopher tortoise, little blue heron, and mangrove cuckoo. In addition, small-toothed sawfish, juvenile tarpon, baby sea turtles, and West Indian manatees use the lake, along with bobcats and migratory birds.

“We were very close to purchasing this highly desired island property, and then the pandemic happened, driving real estate prices and demand through the roof,” said Birgie Miller, executive director of the DDWS, the refuge’s nonprofit arm. “It is such critical habitat that even with the increased value and purchase price, we believe it is crucial to protect.”

DDWS has already raised the majority of the purchase price toward the acquisition through donations and pledges, but needs \$550,000 to reach the final asking price. The friends group would own and manage an existing home on the property, while the refuge would manage the surrounding land and lake for conservation purposes.

“Local support in helping us acquire the Woodring Homestead in 2013, and again in 2019 for acquiring the Lee Anne Tauck Conservation Tract, was instrumental in our success. We are hopeful donors will consider supporting this acquisition as well,” said Miller. “This is a unique opportunity to double the impact of contributions through a generous matching donation. Land can’t be replaced and we are working hard to protect this vital piece of Sanibel Island. All gifts large and small are appreciated and make a difference.”

To support the urgent land acquisition, contact Miller at director@dingdarlingsociety.org or 239-292-0566.

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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