



# Protect. Educate. Inspire.

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: The Roost will welcome visitors with a mix of spaces for groups small and large and programming that appeals to a variety of ages and interests.

### **DDWS reveals The Roost plans at ‘Ding’ Darling**

Final designs are in the works for a new \$1 million-plus project that will greet visitors to the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge with outdoor flex space for a broad spectrum of educational purposes. The “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) plans to break ground on The Roost – an accessible, inclusive, safe, and welcoming pavilion adjacent to the entrance ramp to the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center – by late summer 2022.

“Ever since COVID hit, open-air space for refuge programming has become a top priority,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. “We have raised most of the funds to get started on the project, but we are still looking for at least another \$100,000 to bring The Roost up to the highest standards of green construction and operation and to support its programming.”

The 4,670-square-foot pavilion, designed by Sanibel Island architect Amy Nowacki, will be constructed of innovative earth-friendly materials with solar panels that will provide electricity for its lighting and paddle fans and a battery backup for other refuge buildings. Incorporating design elements from nature, it will serve as an outdoor classroom for visiting school and other groups. DDWS also foresees creative new

uses that reflect the refuge's arts legacy and experiential mission, including music and art events, puppet shows, lectures, mindfulness classes, and culture-driven programs.

The larger of the two covered, open-sided spaces will measure 1,900 square feet with removeable seating. A separate, 350-square-foot area will contain three separate spaces for small-group gatherings and places for visitors to gather and rest on their own while they explore the refuge.

"Its name, The Roost, alludes to the pavilion's welcoming appeal," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who led the design and programmatic plans along with DDWS Associate Executive Director Sierra Hoisington. "Like the refuge's rookery islands, it invites in individuals of all types in a safe, easily accessible place to rest, soak up nature, and relax in the intrinsic beauty of the setting. It makes a perfect transition from the parking lot to the indoor Visitor & Education Center."

As part of the project, the entryway kiosk will undergo a refresh, and DDWS is exploring opportunities for electric-vehicle solar recharge stations. Interpretation will educate visitors about solar energy and other alternative energy sources.

"Our Visitor & Education Center is a fabulous resource, but The Roost allows visitors to extend their time in the open, fresh air while taking advantage of free programming," said Miller. "Anyone interested in supporting the eco-friendly facility and its future educational mission can contact me directly at 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](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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