

2006 Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards

OFFICIAL NOMINATION

For:

Carteret County Wildlife Club

P.O. Box 1123

Morehead City, NC 28557

Background and History

The Carteret County Wildlife Club received its charter from the NC Wildlife Federation in 1955 and is probably the oldest club of its type in continuous existence in North Carolina. The club began with an emphasis on shooting and fishing, but over the years, its focus has evolved to a wider range of interests. The club's monthly meetings feature a covered dish meal and an educational speaker. Fish-fries, oyster roasts, and the Fantastic Annual Seafood and Game Holiday Feast are part of the benefits of a \$10 annual membership. Outings include canoe trips, camp-outs, hikes and bird watching trips. Trail work is an important activity that involves most of our members and even recruits new ones. All activities are open to the public

If the club could be identified for a single hallmark accomplishment from its 50+ years of existence, it would have to be for its conception, construction, maintenance, enhancement and promotion of the 22-mile Neusiok Hiking Trail. In the late 1960's the club realized that there was an absence of hiking trails in this part of the state. Consequently, in cooperation with the US Forest Service, it conceived a trail that would span the Croatan National Forest between the Neuse and Newport Rivers, allowing hikers to experience coastal habitats ranging from swamp-forest to pocosin and long-leaf pine savanna. Club members did the layout and most of the clearing by hand, beginning in 1971 and continuing for about 20 years, donating countless man-hours, quarts of blood, and using masses of liniment and ibuprofen in the process.

Once the entire track had been cleared, the club moved into trail maintenance and enhancement during the 1990's. With assistance from the Marines (whose helicopters dropped lumber to inaccessible sites), as well as the Forest Service and Boy Scouts, five major wooden bridges were constructed over swamps that not only represented serious impediments to hikers, but which were sensitive to damage by foot traffic. Furthermore, bridges allowed the hiker to contemplate the beauty of his surroundings rather than to concentrate on keeping himself from sinking to his knees in muck.

In the 1990's the club also constructed three shelters spaced along the length of the trail for overnight hikers. Each three-sided shelter has a tin roof, a floor and a fire-ring. They have generated numerous favorable comments. (The club tested one shelter on a winter camp-out last February and found it to be a very pleasant experience.)

When the Mountains-to-the-Sea trail was conceived, the Neusiok Trail was included in its path. The Wildlife Club was designated as a Taskforce Leader by the FMST (Friends of the Mountains to the Sea Trail) in 1998. Subsequently, the Club has received support from the FMST both in the form of a grant and as a source of workers for building trail boardwalks. In return, the Club has supported the FMST by sponsoring an annual National Trails Day event each June.

Now the Club has undertaken the construction of a second trail in the western region of the Croatan Forest. The club has scoped out the path and is awaiting environmental and archeological approval from the

US Forest Service. When completed, the trail will provide hikers with an 11-mile loop off highway 58 through scenic swales and hardwood forests.

Recent emphasis on Education has involved:

- Annually donating \$400 scholarships for an undergraduate attending NCSU wildlife camp
- Providing a workshop on building birdhouses
- Donating \$350 to the Cape Lookout Environmental Education Center
- Giving a presentation on trails and hiking at the Boy Scout “Order of the Arrow” ceremony at Blount’s Creek near Chocowinity.
- Working with Boy Scouts for Eagle Scout projects involving trail improvements and mapping.
- Working with the town of Morehead City to locate a nature trail on Sugarloaf Island near Fort Macon.
- Providing educational booths at local festivals promoting the hiking trails in Carteret County.
- Sponsoring wildflower and bird watching walks in the Croatan
- Hosting educational speakers at monthly club meetings (always open to the public) on topics ranging from salt water fishing licenses to wilderness camping.
- Publishing a monthly newsletter outlining current issues of environmental concern as well as club activities.
- Providing members to speak to other organizations.
- An annual Herring Fry on Brice Creek. Although this is also a “fun” event, it reflects the coastal Carolina tradition of cooking freshly caught herring on the creek bank during the spring run. The club outing chairman recounts this tradition and has appropriate readings during the event.
- The annual National Trails Day celebration to which US Forest Service staff, County Commissioners, State and Federal representatives are invited
- Donations of conservation-related books to the county library in memory of members or their families who have passed away.

Recent Conservation activities include:

- Maintaining 40 acres of wetlands and woods on North River as a wildlife preserve. The club has constructed an elevated observation platform on the property which is available for bird watchers. The secretive black rail can be seen here.
- Providing comments on Forest Management plans and proposed land trades by the USFS
- Donation of \$300 toward the Coastal Land Trust’s acquisition of Sea Gate Woods, an excellent example of a non-riverine hardwood swamp forest.
- Construction of a 2-mile birding trail in Sea Gate Woods for the Coastal Land Trust.
- Assisting the Neuse River Foundation with removing trash from a section of the Neuse R.
- Advocating increased funding and staffing for the Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge
- Submitting articles in the local newspaper on conservation-related issues
- Pestering and cajoling the local government over a period of 4 years to extend the pier on the north side of the Morehead-Beaufort bridge to produce a functional fishing pier. Success finally came this winter with the announcement from Morehead City Parks and Recreation that the contract for construction has been let and the CAMA permit is in the works.
- Petitioning our representative in support of acquiring land for public use in Eastern NC when such acquisition is needed to preserve valuable habitat from uncontrolled development.

- Advocating retention of ocean fishing piers on Bogue Banks through letters to the governor and state representatives.
- Advocating other issues of concern, such as outstanding resource waters, the proper use of personal watercraft, sewage disposal etc.
- Supporting oyster shell recycling to improve spawning habitat for the shellfish.

Affiliations:

- NC Wildlife Federation
- NC Coastal Federation
- Neuse River Foundation
- American Hiking Society
- Friends of the Mountains to the Sea Trail

Past recognition received

- 1975 Governor's Conservation Achievement Award – from NC Wildlife Federation
- 1976 President's Award – Conservation Service Citation - from the National Wildlife Federation
- 1985 Certificate of Appreciation - from Carteret County 4-H Clubs
- 1990 Recognition of the Carteret County Wildlife Club's protection of the North River Marshes as a Natural Heritage Area - from NC Dept of Environment, Health and Natural Resources
- 1995 Certificate of Appreciation for “the hard work and dedication demonstrated for trail maintenance and bridge construction on the Neusiok Hiking Trail” - from the US Forest Service
- 2000 Recognition for the Wildlife Club's achievement by designating the Neusiok Trail as a component of the NC Trails System -from NC Dept. Environment Health & Natural Resources
- 2002 Certificate of Appreciation for Efforts in the Field of Conservation – NC Wildlife Federation
- 2003 Chief's National Award for Outstanding Sponsored Service Volunteer - US Forest Service
- 2003 Special Recognition for Outstanding Volunteer Service from The Hon. Walter B. Jones.
- 2005 Best Local Conservation Group - from The Sun Journal, New Bern, NC
- 2006 Exceptional Service by a non-profit conservation group - from the Coastal Land Trust

Wildlife Club Milestones for 2006

The primary achievement of the Wildlife club in 2006 was applying for, receiving, and fulfilling three grants that totaled nearly \$9,000 for maintenance of the Neusiok Trail. We received \$600 from FMST that was earmarked for a short stretch of boardwalk over a wet section of trail. Buoyed by that success, the club applied for, and received, a grant from the American Hiking Society for \$3,300 to construct boardwalks and to purchase a pole-saw trimmer to cut overhanging brush. Finally the club applied for and received a third grant for \$5,000 from the NC DENR Adopt-A-Trail program to build another 700 feet of wooden walkways. Most of the money has been spent and nearly a quarter mile of boardwalks was completed in a single day this November by mounting a massive media blitz and worker recruiting campaign with regional conservation organizations. As a result, about 55 workers put in a strenuous 8-hour day, and 6 workers added 4 hours of labor the next day. The remaining work will be done before April 30, 2007, the deadline for the DENR grant.

Another successful trail-related effort was construction of 2 miles of birding trail on the Sea Gate woods property belonging to the Coastal Land Trust. This involved hacking a trail through dense underbrush and construction of 8 short bridges over ditches. The trail was built in time for a major CLT birding trip in May.

This year the Wildlife Club tried overnight camping. The first was a 24-hour winter campout on the Croatan Forest at one of our shelters. Boat access was provided for those unable to hike a mile to the site. The enthusiasm of the participants, some of whom had never camped before, encouraged our Outings Chairman to organize a two-night campout and canoe trip on the James River in Virginia in July. About 20 members participated, and this experience was hugely successful. Similar activities are planned for 2007.

A summary of activities in 2006 includes:

Speakers at meetings:

- Larry Thompson, NCWF on goals and new directions for the organization
- Frank Tursi, NC Coastal Federation on wetlands restoration at Smyrna farms,
- Amy Andrews, Craven Co Extension Agent on building bridle trails in the Croatan;
- Randy Gregory, NC Div Marine fisheries on life histories of recreational fish
- Al Fox, local chapter of the Izaak Walton League on the goals of the organization
- Leza Mundt on possible routes for NC railroad between Morehead City and Havelock

Outings:

- Hosted annual New Year's Day Beach Walk near Fort Macon
- Winter camp-out and cook-out in the Croatan Forest
- Hiked the 11-mile trail planned for the western Croatan.
- Kayak trip on Calico Creek
- Canoe trip on Contentnea Creek.
- Second canoe trip on lower portion of Contentnea Creek
- 2-day camp-out and canoe trip on James River, Virginia

Work sessions

- Straightened and re-anchored bridges on Neusiok Trail washed out by hurricane Ophelia.
- Dissassembled and relocated a donated dock for use in board-walks
- Built birdhouses for fund-raising
- Built floors in the two trail shelters that lacked floors
- Built 2-mile loop trail for Coastal Land Trust
- Held a two-day board-walk building session on Neusiok Trail, over 800ft was completed
- Replaced washed-out bridge on trail near Pine cliff recreation area

Publicity:

- Submitted articles (or provided interviews) to local newspaper on: Club's grants received; requests for trail workers; National Trail Day cookout; hiking in Carteret County; views on Sunday hunting.
- Gave a presentation to the local Izaak Walton League chapter on the Wildlife Club.
- Manned a booth describing the club and the Neusiok trail at the NC Seafood Festival and passed out brochures
- Purchased 200 custom-made "trail" patches to sell to hikers using the Neusiok trail.

Cook-outs and feeds:

- Camp cooking in Croatan Forest
- Herring Fry on shore of Brices Creek

- National Trail Day barbecue for the club, US Forest Service staff, and local elected representatives (state senator Pete Bland attended)
- Pork barbecue
- Mullet roast
- Oyster Roast
- Holiday Fish and Game Banquet

Education:

- Donated \$400 for undergraduate to attend NCSU Wildlife Camp
- Assisted a Boy Scout to organize the building of a small boardwalk as part of an Eagle Scout project

Miscellaneous:

- The continued pressure applied by the club for 4 years on Morehead City officials asking that they lengthen the pier at the foot of the Morehead-Beaufort bridge finally bore fruit. A new pier that will be useable as a fishing pier will be constructed in 2007.
- Financially supported our District Director's attendance at meetings of the NCWF
- Sent representatives to state public hearing seeking views on changing Sunday hunting laws
- Wrote letters to the Governor and state legislators requesting that public piers be maintained on Bogue banks
- Wrote letters to representatives to oppose sale of any portion of the Croatan forest as proposed by the Federal Administration
- Wrote letters to representatives requesting that the HH Bates' property near Island Creek Walk in Jones County be purchased to preserve this beautiful tract of hardwood forest from development.
- Nominated long-time member, Bob Simpson, for induction into the "Order of the Long-leaf Pine" (the State's highest recognition for civilians). After nomination was approved, the club organized the ceremony and prepared a luncheon in his honor, with over 100 invited legislators and friends of Bob.
- Sent representatives to Coastal Land Trust annual banquet meeting in Wilmington where club received an award for "exceptional service by a non-profit conservation group"