

Volunteering and Donating Make Tremendous Impacts on Wildlife Refuge Projects

With all National Wildlife Refuges budgets being drastically cut over the past few years many projects and activities have had to be severely reduced or even eliminated. Our own Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR has not been exempt from such cuts. There are redemptive factors that can go a long way in saving many of the activities and projects ongoing and planned at our refuge. First is the excellent coordination and planning being done by the current reduced staff led by Project Leader Dr. Steve Reagan. They continue to find ways to do with less yet maintaining their objectives.

The second and most critical redemptive factor at this time is the service that volunteers provide. In a recent Friends of Noxubee Refuge meeting Dr. Reagan reported on the impact a volunteer coordinator and volunteers have had on such activities and projects. Four key statements from his remarks are as follows:

1. Since January of this year (the last 4 months), the volunteer coordinator has worked on 38 projects involving 438 volunteers who provided 4,260 hours of work. The Friends provided \$7,800 to fund the position over this time period and the volunteer hours generated equate to almost \$200,000 of full-time employee value. Projects completed include biological monitoring (e.g., RCW and point counts), maintenance, prescribed fire, visitor center operations and other park ranger duties, and operation of special events (e.g., youth fishing derby). Volunteers are being used to address refuge priorities by fill staffing vacancies and augment existing staff duties.

2. Through the direct efforts of the volunteer coordinator the refuge's resident volunteer RV camper program has volunteers working at the refuge during all seasons. Their recruitment efforts were essential to getting our first summer volunteers this year. The refuge has four RV pads and we continue to building this program.

3. The GS-5 volunteer coordinator cost \$31,944 each year. Existing staff does not have the time to focus on volunteers and without the coordinator the program would need to be severely downsized.

4. With a coordinator our volunteer program potential could be limitless. In August we have the opportunity to host 600 or more volunteers during a single event. Any event such as this takes resources but the most important resource is a person to organize and coordinate the people.

The third redemptive factor is individual donations that can be used to supplement the reduced budget. The Friends of Noxubee Refuge was able to provide funding to hire the volunteer coordinator for a short time but can only continue if funding is available. I hope these few comments will give you some insight on the importance of volunteers and donations to the continued success of our refuge and inspire you to volunteer and/or make contributions individually, group or as an organization to support these efforts. To volunteer contact the volunteer coordinator at Margaret_Kenna@fws.gov. Donations can be made to Friends of Noxubee Refuge (FONR) and mailed to Friends of Noxubee Refuge, Attention Donation Chair, 2970 Bluff Lake Road, Brooksville, MS 39739, Telephone: 662-323-3672

by Wayne Wells, Friends of Noxubee Refuge, board member