

# Wings

Newsletter for Alligator River and Pea Island National Wildlife Refuges Vol. XIII No. 2 April 2007



There is a friendly new face at the Pea Island Visitor Center these days! Abbey Reibel of Manteo came on board last fall as the new bookstore manager and things have been movin' and shakin' ever since. A stay-at-home mom for nine years, Abbey decided to join the Refuge and apply her incredible organizational skills to improving the refuge Visitor Center. She has lived in the area for over 20 years and wanted to make a difference at one of her favorite places in eastern North Carolina. She regularly rides her horse, Phoenix, on Alligator River Refuge and comes to the Pea Island Refuge beaches each summer with her daughter. "Waverly knows the Pea Island beach as the 'slice of heaven' beach because we don't think it can get any better than this!" she says.

Abbey not only manages the bookstore, but also helps support other Refuge programs, especially the volunteer program. Since joining the refuge family in September, Abbey has recruited a number of Visitor Center volunteers and resident (workcamper) volunteers. Her warm smile and infectious laugh make this little lady hard to say "no" to! Abbey says her favorite thing about the job is the "social aspect." "I enjoy being a part of something I feel is important- conservation," she explains.

Abbey has a creative side that she's also put to use for the Refuge. She created "Under the Sea" floats for the Manteo and Stumpy Point Christmas parades this year, and she's coordinating Wildfest to be held this fall. Abbey will also be representing the Fish and Wildlife Service at the Land of Beginnings festival (a cultural festival that made its debut in March). Abbey has channeled her creativity and love for children into the development of the festival's "Children's Faire."

Abbey also spends a lot of her personal time with volunteers- because she is one! She has been heavily involved with the PTA at her daughter's school for several years, and now serves as the vice president. "I love to do anything with children," she explains. "And being involved with the school keeps me involved with the community."

What new adventures does she see on the horizon? Abbey looks forward to improving the native plant garden at the Pea Island Visitor Center; advocating for the Fish and Wildlife Service on behalf of the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society; and recruiting more local volunteers to the Visitor Center staff. "I've only just begun!" she says enthusiastically.



## Join Today!

Become a member of the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society. Send a check with your annual membership; or volunteer today to receive a complimentary membership!

Regular -	\$10
Wildlife -	\$50
Donor -	\$200
Corporate -	\$500

Please make checks payable to CWRS and mail to:  
Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society  
PO Box 1808  
Manteo, NC 27954

## **Fighting Fire Far and Wide**

The fire crew at Alligator River Refuge spent a large portion of last year traveling throughout the country to fight fires. Greg Suszek assisted as helicopter manager in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area of Minnesota; Cory Waters assisted as a helicopter manager in the Western Great Basin (in Montana, Utah, Nevada and Wyoming); and Eric Meekins was in a large muck fire on the Appalachicola National Forest in Florida. Tom Crews, Fire Management Officer at Alligator River, was sent out as a Division Supervisor on two fires in Nevada- one at Desert National Wildlife Refuge and the other on Bureau of Land Management lands 100 miles north of Las Vegas, between Death Valley National Park.



For his leadership success on the Hurricane Katrina Response Team, Fire Management Officer Tom Crews received the Southeast Region's All Risk Management Program Award.

There was plenty of fire fighting action to be had in eastern North Carolina and southwestern Virginia as well. Many regional fires occurred in heavy timber blow-down areas resulting from Hurricane Isabel three years ago. Heavy timber, combined with unseasonably dry conditions and very wet and fragile soils, created extremely difficult conditions in which to fight fire. Great Dismal Swamp Refuge Manager Suzanne Baird gave refuge staff her utmost appreciation, "The refuge staff from North Carolina were key elements in the successful containment of the fires, especially with the unique flextracked tractors and well-trained operators." Tim Craig, Fire Management Officer for Great Dismal Swamp added, "Without the lightweight, powerful flextracks and skillful tractor operators, we could never have held these three fires to the less than 600 acre total area in which they were contained."

## **Field Biologists Find Red Wolf Pups**

The primary social structure of red wolves is simply defined as an extended family unit or "pack". A typical pack consists of five to eight members, which includes a breeding adult pair and offspring of different years. The pack is a very close-knit social group. In fact, older offspring will often assist the breeding pair in pup rearing. After a year or two, young wolves leave the pack to establish their own family unit. Approximately 18-22 packs exist in the recovery zone, which includes Dare, Hyde, Tyrell, Beaufort and Washington counties.



FWS Photo

Red wolves tend to form pair-bonds for life and mate once a year in February. Pups are born about 63 days later in April or May in well-hidden dens that can be located in hollow trees, stream banks and sand knolls. Dens have also been found in holes dug in the ground near downed logs or forest debris piles. In 2006, more than 40 pups were found and successfully examined by biologists in the five-county Red Wolf Recovery Zone.

## **Red Wolves Travel Far**

The Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Red Wolf Recovery Program held two "Far Traveler" teacher workshops in 2006. The classes were filled to capacity with formal and non-formal educators who teach at sites throughout North Carolina. These workshops can be used towards North Carolina Environmental Education certification requirements.

The agenda includes activities from the "Far Traveler" curriculum. With a little imagination and ingenuity, many of the lessons can be tailored to fit audiences of all ages. The afternoon "track casting" field trip with a red wolf biologist is what participants always refer to as the highlight of the workshop. The Far Traveler curriculum can be found on-line at <http://www.fws.gov/alligatorriver/red%20wolf/rwee.html>.

## It's Raining Ducks!



FWS Photo

Northern Pintails are one of many species that have shown up at eastern North Carolina Refuges in large numbers this winter.

Although ducks may not have been raining from the sky, they certainly were popping up in record numbers this winter. Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge reported large numbers of Northern Pintail and Green Winged Teal, while Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge saw record numbers of American Coot this winter. Also present in record numbers at Pea Island were the American White Pelicans, which were up from a previous high of 41 in 2004 to 110 individuals recorded on the Christmas Bird Count. Refuge Biologist Dennis Stewart reported, "Pintail, Redhead, and [American] Coot are species occurring during the winter of 06/07 at higher numbers than in previous years AND it has been a really great year for waterfowl in general."

Wendy Stanton, Refuge Biologist at Pocosin Lakes, saw large numbers of Snow Geese, Tundra Swan, and Ring-Necked Duck during a aerial flyover of Pungo Lake in mid-December. "Not only did we record the highest numbers this early in the season, but those numbers remained high for a longer period of time than in previous years," she reported.

All in all, it's an exciting time to watch birds in eastern North Carolina. Waterfowl typically stick around until late March before retuning north to their breeding grounds. For more ideas on where to bird watch, check out the recently-completed Coastal Plain component of the North Carolina Birding Trail on-line at [www.ncbirdingtrail.org](http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org).

Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge also offers free guided birding tours to the public every Friday morning at 8:00 a.m. For more information on the tours, please call Specialist Ann Marie Chapman at (252) 987-1118.

## CAUTION: Road Work Ahead

It might be hard to believe today, but in the early 1990s, refuge staff couldn't drive to the Refuge Operations Center on a rainy day because the roads on Alligator River Refuge were in such bad shape. Today, much of the refuge is accessible to the public through an extensive network of well-maintained roads. Refuge maintenance staff spend countless hours grading roads throughout Alligator River to ensure that visitors have access to the refuge for a variety of recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, environmental education, interpretation, wildlife observation and photography. The hard work of the refuge's unsung heroes has not gone unnoticed.

The Federal Highways Administration awarded the Refuge funds to repair roads damaged by hurricanes in 1999 and 2003. The first phase of the project (completed in 2001- 2002) restored approximately 28 miles of roads to pre-storm conditions. The second phase of this project will restore 45 miles of roads and is slated to begin in September of this year. Once this project is completed, all the major roads for public access and management purposes will be truly all-weather roads. The refuge will continue to maintain dirt roads annually, but the vast majority of the roads will be gravel.



Ann Marie Chapman

Equipment operator Bobby Govan picks apart an abandoned crane that needs to be removed to facilitate a future road improvement project funded by the Federal Highways Administration.

### **Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society Board Of Directors**

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## People Profile

“You name it, we’ve done it.” Eric Craddock sums up his work at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge with his straightforward motto. A man of few words, Eric is an equipment operator with an impressive set of skills who is always ready to get the job done.

He got his start running equipment for a logging company when he was 18 years old - hauling Atlantic white cedar out of what is today Alligator River. In 1993, Eric joined the fire crew at Alligator River, and he has been movin’ and shakin’ ever since! He’s moved equipment from North Carolina all over the east coast, including a harrowing trip to Arkansas, when he and a co-worker got some heavy equipment up and over a mountain on a narrow road with steep sides. Thankfully, he lived to tell the tale!



Ann Marie Chapman

When asked about his favorite thing on the job, Eric doesn’t hesitate to give his answer: “People. Maintenance is not a one-person job. Even when you change a light bulb, you need someone to hold the ladder!”



Bruce Creef

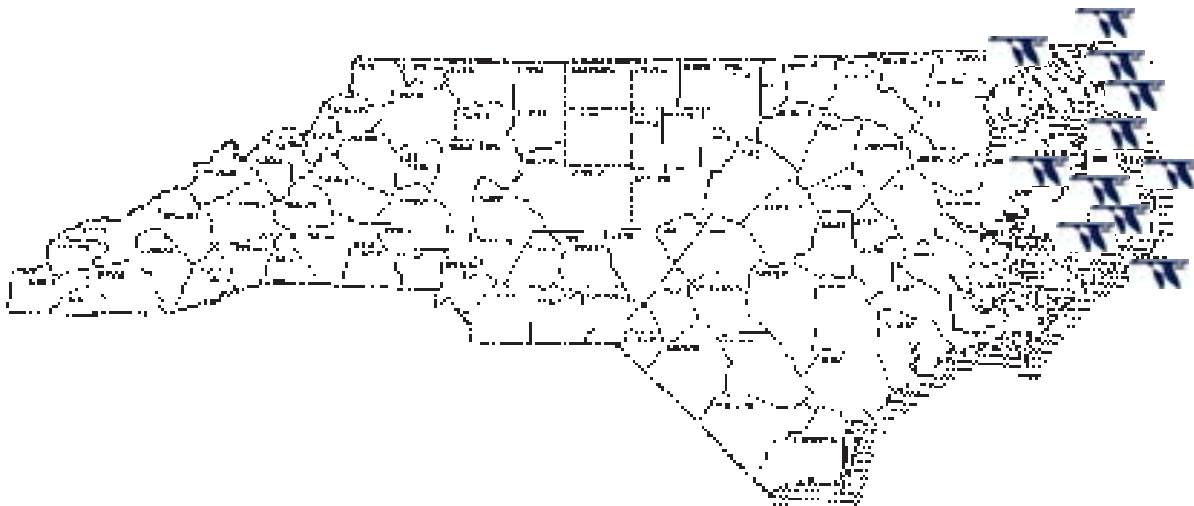
Eric’s favorite hobby is fishing, and frequently the Alligator River crew comes into work to find fried rockfish fillets from his more successful ventures. He has lived in the Manns Harbor community for 47 years, and raised a son who is a brick mason and a daughter who is studying to be a nurse. He also spoils a six year old grandchild at home.

“I never thought I’d end up close to home working in the same place where I started out,” Eric says wistfully with a smile. He may be pleased with his job at Alligator River, but he’s definitely not the only one. Based on the camaraderie between him and his Refuge co-workers, there are quite a few people that are glad he ended up where he did!



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