

TERN TRACKS

Newsletter of The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) ~ www.tern.homestead.com

Summer 2016

Escape to North Georgia this Fall with TERN!

This October, join the TERN board of directors for a weekend getaway in the beautiful Blue Ridge, Georgia mountains! The Comfort Inn and Suites in Blue Ridge is our host accommodations and is offering a group rate with breakfast included until August 19. Please contact www.ComfortInnofBlueRidge.com to make reservations, and ask for the TERN group rate.

The adventure begins on Thursday, October 20 when the group will meet at the Blue Ridge Scenic Railway depot (<http://www.brscenic.com/>) to ride along the beautiful Toccoa River to McCaysville/Copperhill for lunch and shopping or a side trip to the Ducktown Copper Mine Museum.

Retired Fernbank Science Center Geologist, Dr. Bill Witherspoon will be offering two presentations. On Thursday afternoon at 5:00 p.m., Dr. Witherspoon's talk highlights the geologic history of Georgia's Blue Ridge. This presentation will take place at the library in downtown Blue Ridge and will be open to the public. On Friday morning at the Comfort Inn and Suites, Dr. Witherspoon's talk will cover the geology of Fort Mountain. For those interested in traveling to Fort Mountain State Park, Dr. Witherspoon is offering a guided walk at the Park.

To register for this spectacular fall getaway with fellow TERN members, contact Wanda Granitz for complete weekend details and reservation information: wandagranitz@windstream.net or 478-361-8144



Loggerhead Recovery Hits Nesting Benchmark

NEWS UPDATE: As of July 25, the Georgia Sea Turtle Cooperative documented more than 3,100 nests!

Loggerhead sea turtles have crawled their way to a conservation milestone in Georgia.

As of July 12, the hard-shell giants with log-sized heads had laid more than 2,800 nests on the state's barrier island beaches this year, according to GDNR. A key recovery goal for loggerheads, listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, is 2,800 nests annually in Georgia.

And while nesting season winds down in mid-July, it's far from over.

DNR Sea Turtle Program Coordinator Mark Dodd expects 3,000-plus nests, about a third more than last year's 2,335 nests, the previous high since comprehensive surveys of Georgia beaches began in 1989.

"When you think about the fact that for many years we averaged about 1,000 nests and this year we may be beyond 3,000 ... it suggests an exponential increase," Dodd said.



For complete details on the 2016 sea turtle nesting season on Georgia's beaches, visit: <http://www.georgiawildlife.com/node/4219>

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T.E.R.N.

The Environmental Resources Network

Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) is the official friends group of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Nongame Conservation Section. Contributions made to TERN go directly to help fund important nongame plant and animal projects conducted in Georgia.

www.tern.homestead.com

Twenty NCS Projects Funded at Annual Membership Meeting

by Bob Sargent, NCS program manager

The annual TERN membership and board meeting was held at the beautiful Person's River Cabin in Forsyth, Georgia on Saturday, May 14th. The membership voted to fund 20 projects totaling **\$69,918**. Thank you, TERN, for your devoted and consistent generosity in behalf of nongame wildlife conservation in Georgia. With your help, TERN has given over **\$1,210,000** to fund nongame wildlife projects across Georgia since 1992.

Additional Transmitters for the project Determination of Range and Potential Habitat for Cave-Dwelling Bat Species in North Georgia (\$4,445)

Funds would support a study that is designed to conduct large-scale surveys to document the distribution and habitat associations of cave-roosting/hibernating bats (species susceptible to White Nose Syndrome) in north Georgia. The specific objectives are to 1) delineate distributions of cave-roosting/hibernating bats; 2) determine landscape-level factors that influence cave-roosting/hibernating bat distributions; and 3) develop landscape-scale habitat models to predict cave-roosting/hibernating bat presence across the study area. A fourth alternative objective will be to characterize Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat and little brown bat roosting habitat and develop predictive models to identify potential roosting habitat across the



landscape. The data collected by bats captured and fitted with transmitters will be used to refine potential range maps and revise the required survey areas for GDOT. Telemetry results may also yield new information about roost site preferences that can better help to define potential habitat in the state. If sufficient netting efforts and call analysis across an area yield no target species captures, those areas could be subject to removal from range maps currently maintained by USFWS, reducing GDOT's burden to provide project-specific bat surveys. Additionally, with increased knowledge of Myotis' range and habitat preferences, GDOT can build the necessary knowledge base needed to draft a statewide programmatic agreement with USFWS.

Summer 2017 Camp ACE (Adventures in Conservation Education) (\$8,000)

These funds will help reduce registration costs to just \$100 per middle school student to attend an advanced wildlife conservation camp about nongame species of Georgia. Twenty participants will be accepted based on submitted applications reviewed by GDNR staff. Students spend five days immersed in Georgia wildlife education via hands-on activities and day trips. Students will experience outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing, and birding as well as learn basic conservation biology techniques used by nongame DNR biologists. They will also participate in activities based on Project WILD and WILD Aquatic curriculum that will enhance their understanding of ecological systems. Students

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will be required to maintain a written journal of data collected and terms learned while on day trips. Students will have an introduction to numerous field biology careers, develop practical skills for future biology courses in high school and college, and enhance their understanding of Georgia wildlife conservation. For more information, contact Rusty Garrison at rusty.garrison@dnr.ga.gov.

Camp TALON 2016 (\$3,000) - These funds will help to reduce registration costs for students to attend Camp TALON (Teen Adventures Learning Ornithology and Nature), a six-day camp for teens designed to educate them about birds, conservation, and the coastal ecology of Georgia. Camp TALON includes advanced ornithology and ecology classes -- in the field and in the classroom. The camp is based at Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island and travels to Little St. Simons Island, Okefenokee NWR, Andrews Island, Harris Neck NWR, Sapelo Island, Altamaha WMA, and Jekyll Island. Classes are taught by biologists, retired professors, island naturalists, and ornithologists from GDNR, the Georgia Ornithological Society, The Nature Conservancy, the USFWS, the staff of Little St. Simons Island, and two of Georgia's universities. Up to 16 participants learn about specific bird habitats, bird species and management practices, avian biology, bird songs and flight, migration, beach ecology, census techniques, conservation issues, island history, career opportunities, journaling, and nature photography. The goal of the camp goes beyond teaching teenagers how to birdwatch; instead, the camp is designed to teach young people about research, how science and management are performed, and about how they can contribute to conservation. For more information, contact Bob Sargent at bob.sargent@dnr.ga.gov.

Christmas Bird Count (2016) for Young Birders (\$1,640) - These funds will make possible the creation and implementation of a Christmas Bird Count for Young Birders (Youth CBC) ages 8-16. This project will involve the creation of a one-day CBC for up to 50 kids and their parents to be held at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center (CEWC) on Saturday, December 10, 2016. The event will begin with an orientation designed to introduce kids to the use of binoculars and field guides, and would explain the basics of bird identification. The kids will be divided into 10 teams of five birders accompanied by parents and an experienced WRD or volunteer birder. All of the kids will have binoculars, and each team will have at least five field guides, checklists, and a map depicting a 100-acre section of CEWC to which they will be assigned to survey for birds during a two-hour period. The teams will be transported to their survey areas by walking or by carpooling. At the conclusion of the birding, the teams will gather for lunch and warm drinks at the CEWC dining hall. Teams will tally their data and select a leader to present a summary of their count results to all of the teams. WRD staff will also provide an educational program to them about bird biology and ecology. For more information, contact Bob Sargent at bob.sargent@dnr.ga.gov.



Nongame Conservation Section (NCS) Ecoburner Support (\$1,000) - NCS helps lead prescribed burns on high priority State Parks that support rare species habitat. To achieve our annual prescribed fire goals, we cannot spend as much time at each site as we would like to in order to prep, manage fire operations, mop up, and patrol. We rely heavily on onsite help to prepare the firebreaks and protect valuables within the fire unit. We often have to leave the site before the fire is "dead" and park staff and volunteers must continue to monitor the burn for any additional mop up needs. Funds would be used to buy a small cache of fireline tools to engage park staff and volunteers in fire support activities. Fire hand tools will be distributed to high priority parks to promote assistance in firebreak prep, allowing seasonal fire crews to focus their energy on getting fire on the ground. Rain gauges onsite at each park will lead to better information about fuels and soil moisture, and will engage people onsite to take an interest in the appropriate conditions for burning. Fireline tools will help in the preparation of firebreaks as well as in the post burn monitoring.

Automated Recorders ("Frog Loggers") for Anuran Survey and Monitoring (\$4,500) - Automated recording devices have proven to be extremely useful for detecting the distinctive vocalizations of targeted anurans, especially

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at remote sites that cannot be frequently visited at night when calling activity is greatest. Known as “frog loggers,” these waterproof devices can be programmed to start and stop recording at set intervals and for selected duration. Recordings can be listened to or run through sound recognition software to determine the frog species present at particular breeding sites. The gopher frog, a particularly secretive and rare species, is the focal species for the initial use of this technology. These funds will be used to purchase five recording devices. Frog loggers will be placed at sites where gopher frog habitat exists but for which the species has not been detected by traditional methods, or it has been detected in uplands but the exact breeding ponds have not been identified. Frog loggers will also be used to monitor all anuran activity at both natural and created wetlands at Fall Line Sandhills WMA (FLSWMA). The deployment of frog loggers at sites suspected of potentially harboring rare anurans will allow us to confirm their presence (and an index of abundance) or absence without having to be present at the sites during the brief breeding seasons. Monitoring presence/absence and relative abundance over time at FLSWMA will allow us to evaluate population trends and adjust habitat management accordingly.

27th Annual Give Wildlife a Chance Poster Contest (\$2,600) - The annual Give Wildlife a Chance Poster Contest is a conservation art competition that is open to all kindergarten through 5th grade students in public schools, private schools and homeschool groups in the state of Georgia. The participants enter the contest at the local school level (December-February) with artistic drawings and paintings that depict their observations of Georgia’s native nongame animals and plants. The top first-place, school-wide winning posters in each of four divisions (kindergarten, 1st/2nd grade, 3rd/4th grade and 5th grade) proceed to the state-level contest at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in Athens (March-April). The state winners will be picked based on close correlation to the theme, quality of art, originality and visual impact. Their artwork will be on display at the State Botanical Garden in Athens, GA. One parent and the sponsoring teacher of each winner will be offered a free wildlife license plate courtesy of TERN. Each student winner will receive a front ‘GO WILD’ tag and an “Exploring Georgia Wildlife” coloring book. These funds will be used to pay for award certificates, ribbons, and GWAC calendars or other promo/recognition items (e.g., tote bags) that feature the winners’ art work and wildlife conservation messages. For more information, contact Linda May at linda.may@dnr.ga.gov.

Hellbender Informational Signage & Education/Outreach Poster (\$1,890) - These funds will be used to pay for signage and outreach posters designed to educate the public about the hellbender – its ecology, biology, and conservation needs. Anglers occasionally snag and injure or kill hellbenders, falsely believing that the species is prone to bite and venomous, and campers and rafters often injure these animals or damage their habitat when they move large flat rocks to build check dams or runs. Signs will be posted on various kiosks across the Chattahoochee National Forest including Georgia State Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, U.S. Forest Service offices, recreation sites, campgrounds, and points along trails near hellbender streams. These signs will be highly visible and will provide basic natural history and information aimed at informing campers, anglers, and other recreationalists that movement of rocks in hellbender streams is detrimental and informing anglers how to reduce harm to hellbenders that are caught while fishing. Outreach posters featuring pictures of the hellbender, a distribution map, and points of contact to report hellbender sightings will be distributed opportunistically during outreach events and will be posted at locations such as Vogel State Park.



Manatee Satellite Telemetry (\$6,100) - These funds will be used to purchase a Telonics satellite transmitter, batteries, belt, and tether in support of an ongoing 3-4-year telemetry study of manatee movements along the Georgia and Florida coasts. Five manatees were captured and tagged in 2015, and we expect to capture and tag five more during the summers of 2016 and 2017. This is the first manatee telemetry project conducted in Georgia using high-accuracy GPS-linked tags. Data will be used to examine fine-scale movement of manatees around NSB Kings Bay and other locations in coastal GA. Such data are needed to identify migratory corridors and high-use sites, and to better understand manatee movement and migratory behavior in coastal GA and FL. This will enhance state and federal wildlife managers' ability to protect manatee habitat and mitigate watercraft collisions, which is the primary human-related cause of death in this endangered species. Rules promulgated under the Georgia Coastal Marshlands Protection Act require that DNR consider manatee travel corridors and high-use sites when evaluating permit applications for marinas and other similar projects.

DNR Nongame Festival Booth Activities (\$1,150) - DNR staff regularly sets up booths at festivals to educate the public about Georgia's rich natural heritage, inspiring them to conserve native wildlife and their habitats. While live animals draw the public into our booth and serve as effective teaching aids, they are not always available, could be redundant (other exhibitors have the same species), or may not be appropriate at every venue. To encourage educational interactions, fun activities should be added to DNR nongame booth displays. These funds will be used to buy a wildlife-oriented cornhole set and spinning trivia wheel. The cornhole set would include boards painted to look like gopher tortoise mounds and burrows, and the bean bags would feature pictures of the 300+ species known to inhabit tortoise burrows. The graphics and questions associated with the spinning wheel would be based on messages developed by the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Education and Communications teams, and they could easily be adapted to ensure relevance to the event theme and ecoregion in which a particular festival is located.

TERN Outstanding Teacher Award (\$1,250) -

According to the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), the third grade life science curriculum focuses on: 1) Habitat differentiation and dependence of organisms on their habitat; and 2) Conservation of these organisms and other forms of natural resources. This award seeks to assist teachers of projects that fulfill these objectives with a focus on nongame animals and Georgia plant species and their habitats. There are many teachers that may need some financial assistance to start a special project that conveys knowledge using unconventional methods and outside activities. Such projects can have a significant academic benefit to their students and awaken an appreciation of nongame species that might otherwise be dormant. It is also hoped that this award will facilitate networking with these teachers and help others to learn from their approaches through presentations at the annual Environmental Educational Alliance (EEA) conference. These funds will be used to pay the registration cost for one outstanding teacher to attend the EEA conference, as well as to pay for a plaque to be presented to the teacher. One thousand dollars from the grant will be presented to the selected teacher for use in supporting purchases for her/his educational project. For more information, contact Anna Yellin at anna.yellin@dnr.ga.gov.



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OWLS (Outdoor Wildlife Leadership School) 2017 (\$7,800) - Funds will be used to reduce registration costs down to \$50 per person for educators to attend the Outdoor Wildlife Leadership School (OWLS). Twenty-four educators will spend five days immersed in Georgia wildlife education via hands-on activities and day trips. They will experience outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing, birding, and canoeing while learning basic conservation biology concepts and field techniques that can be used with their students. Classes will be taught by staff and biologists from CEWC, Fisheries Section, Game Management Section and Nongame Conservation Section, as well as biologists and educators from UGA and other agencies. Participants will also become Project WILD, Flying WILD, and WILD

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Aquatic facilitators and be given curriculum guides to use in their classrooms. Educators will obtain an in-depth understanding of conservation biology and its role in environmental education. They will enhance their ability to teach environmental education in their classrooms as well as outdoors. Not only will educators benefit from OWLS, but the hundreds of students that these educators reach will also benefit from improved environmental education classes. For more information, contact Rusty Garrison at rusty.garrison@dnr.ga.gov.

Radford's Mint Habitat Restoration (\$805) - DNR staff are working to restore one of only two known locations of the rare Radford's mint (*Dicerandra radfordiana*) in the world. One is on the Barrington Hunt Club property and one is on the Townsend WMA. The Townsend WMA site is an 8-acre area that was previously planted in invasive sand pine (*Pinus clausa*). Most of the surrounding 11,000 + acres planted in sand pine have been timbered and are planted in longleaf pine. The Radford's mint area was left in sand pine due to the sensitivity of this rare species. The remaining pines around the mint have been thinned by hand over the last few years using volunteer and staff labor. The objective is to remove the last remaining mature sand pine trees and transition the canopy back into the historic overstory composition of longleaf pine. This project will entail clearcutting the remaining seven acres of sand pine. Funds will be used only to purchase 4,235 longleaf pine seedlings (605 per acre) that will be planted on the acreage where the mint is found.

RCW Management Equipment Request (\$575) - Tree cavities can be a limiting resource for Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers (RCW) due to the time it takes the birds to excavate them. Biologists use a chainsaw and climbing equipment to install artificial cavity inserts, supplementing the number of cavities available for this endangered species. Nongame biologists install cavity inserts on public and private lands in southwest Georgia, where they have been instrumental in the establishment and increase of RCW populations. Currently, only one chainsaw is available for this work. Funds would be used to buy a backup saw so that work is not interrupted if the primary saw has mechanical problems, and so that two biologists can simultaneously install inserts.

Revitalize Big Hammock Nature Trail (\$7,200) - Big Hammock Natural Area is outstanding for its geologic features and natural community diversity. The area is dominated by an isolated sand ridge rising nearly 100 feet from the expansive Altamaha River floodplain. The ridge supports the largest known population of state-endemic Georgia plume (*Elliottia racemosa*) and the largest population of myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*) known in the interior of Georgia. Big Hammock is also a National Natural Landmark Site on the register of the National Park Service, dedicated in 1976. A self-guided interpretive trail was constructed at the site in 2006, but the wooden signs are badly decayed, and there is no entrance sign to guide the public to the natural area. This funding would be used to design and construct 30 custom steel trail markers, two entryway signs, and 500 brochures describing the unique features of the site.

The Impacts of Extreme High Tide Events on Sea Turtle Nesting (\$4,800)

- The effects of global warming including storm surges, erosion, flooding, and high tide events are expected to have significant effects on the quality of sea turtle nesting habitat. An increase in the frequency of extreme high tides may affect the nest site selection and reproductive success of loggerheads by forcing them to nest at higher dune elevations. This change in sea turtle behavior could have effects on nest success and alter hatchling sex ratios. This proposed study will help to predict the impact of extreme high tide events on the beaches of Georgia's barrier islands, where sea turtles, particularly loggerheads, lay their eggs. The objectives of this study are to: 1) Quantify changes in the frequency of extreme high tide events in recent years compared to historical data along the Georgia coast; 2) Determine if sea turtle nesting behavior is



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influenced by extreme high tide events; and 3) Assess hatchling and nesting success in the presence of extreme high tide events. Predictions from this study may be broadly applied to nesting sea turtles and beaches across the globe that may be affected by extreme tide events. Funds will be used to rent a survey-grade GPS unit with a base station that is capable of collecting elevation data for sea turtle nests with an accuracy of ± 2 cm.

License Plate Promotion: Tag Office Contest (\$3,000) - Our biggest source of funds for nongame is the wildlife tag. Our biggest sellers of wildlife tags are county tag offices. The objective of this project is to start some friendly competition between the offices and offer some prizes for tag offices that increase sales/sell the most tags. Tax commissioners indicate that the number one request for a prize is food - either a breakfast or lunch for the office. Offices will compete against with the number of tags they sold in 2015. If they have the biggest increase over what they sold (based on number and percentage), then they will get a prize. So, there will be two winners for each place: one would be the tag office with the biggest numerical increase over their sales in 2015 and the other would be the one with the biggest percentage increase over their county's sales in 2015. Funds from this grant would be used to buy food prizes for first and second place in this competition. For the winners, breakfast or lunch would be purchased for the entire office. For second place, a sweet treat such as donuts would be bought for the entire office.



Teacher Conservation Workshop 2016 (\$2,000) - This workshop will provide formal and informal educators with a one week in-depth study in Georgia forestry, wildlife management, and water ecology. Each year 30 participants are given hands on training in lessons about forestry, wetlands ecology and wildlife conservation and management. During their stay educators visit various forestry operations, as well as wildlife management areas, national wildlife refuges and private lands. The hands-on methods of study fit the GPS standards for the state and are brought back into classroom situations to further the conservation and wise management of forest habitats. Educators also obtain curricula and resources from Project WILD, WET, and Learning Tree that they will take back to the classroom for their students to teach a wide variety of subject matter. These study methods and activities easily correlate with the GPS standards for the state and enable students to become wise stewards of conservation and management of our forest and wildlife resources. Participants build and maintain relationships with top educators, biologists, and resource professionals from all across the state. Funds from TERN, when combined with other contributions, will reduce the cost of the workshop to just \$50 per educator. For more information, contact Rusty Garrison at rusty.garrison@dnr.ga.gov.

Youth Birding Competition 2017 (\$7,400) - This 11-year-old event is a 24-hour competitive birding competition in which 90-130 students compete against others their age to identify as many bird species as they can in Georgia. DNR helps teams to find mentors to prepare for the event, and provides birds walks and other opportunities for students to learn bird identification. DNR puts students in touch with local bird clubs and Audubon chapters. The YBC culminates in a banquet, live animal program, and awards ceremony. DNR, thanks to various contributors, gives away binoculars, field guides, bird feeders and other prizes designed to encourage each student's interest in birds, wildlife and the outdoors. Many participants have returned for five or more years. Funds from TERN allow students to participate free of charge. This has allowed a truly diverse group of kids to participate, including some from several inner city Atlanta schools. Because of the success of this program in Georgia, Richard Crossley, Connie Campanella, and DNR's Tim Keyes have started a non-profit foundation called Race4Birds that will use the YBC as a model and try to promote similar events around the country. For more information, contact Tim Keyes at tim.keyes@dnr.ga.gov.

Forsyth NCS Office Porch Furniture Upgrade (\$763) - The Forsyth Nongame Office is currently undergoing extensive and much-needed repairs and improvements. The first thing that visitors see when they arrive at the front door of this rustic, forest-enclosed office is the stained, worn-out furniture on the porch. The building's broad front porch is not just an attractive entranceway to the office; it is also a deck from which people view wildlife in the nearby display garden during business hours and on weekends, and a comfortable setting for enjoying a bagged lunch or for meetings for people who want to escape the sounds of ringing phones and talking people within the building. The existing plastic porch furniture needs to be replaced. Funds from TERN would be used to pay for this upgrade.

TERN Tracks
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Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

TERN is a 501 (C)(3) corporation. All donations to TERN are 100% tax-deductible.

Backyard Wildlife Questions?

We've got the answer for you!

TERN Executive Director Terry Johnson has recently created a blog called The Backyard Wildlife Connection, a site designed to provide Georgians with the best possible information regarding anything nature-related in Georgia backyards.

Sponsored by TERN, this blog is dedicated to those Georgians that feel there is nothing more beautiful and exciting than stepping outside into a breath-taking backyard teeming with wildlife.

It is a treasure trove of information about attracting and enhancing your yard for your wildlife neighbors, as well as a storehouse of tips on how you can more fully enjoy watching these amazing animals.

Be sure to visit **backyardwildlifeconnection.com** today!