



Friends of The National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island

2003 Annual Report

Mission: *Friends of the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island is a nonprofit association devoted to the conservation and development of needed healthy habitat for flora and fauna at the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island and the provision of a safe accessible ecological experience for visitors. The association promotes the benefits of the refuges and the National Wildlife Refuge System to the local community through public education and interpretation, and supports the refuge staff through projects designed to accomplish the goals of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for all the refuges in Rhode Island.*

Our organization has become much stronger over the past year. We continued our support of piping plover recovery; our third annual photo contest was again a great success; visitors to Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge have an opportunity to enjoy the wild abundance of the Rhode Island refuges through the music video; our sales operation at Sachuest Point is thriving; and, our newsletter is once again in print. Internally, our operations as an organization have stabilized. The board members all contribute generously in helping to coordinate the various endeavors of the Friends. Thanks in great measure to everyone's efforts, the Friends is a healthy organization.

We continue to support our five refuges within the confines of our mission and our means. Advocacy efforts by the Friends will hopefully result in increased fiscal appropriations for Sachuest Point and the new refuge complex headquarters now under construction at Kettle Pond. We also sought funds for additional land acquisition, as called for in our Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). In these times of tight budget appropriations in Congress, however, we may experience limitations in the implementation of the CCP, as will be true throughout the refuge system.

Recently Completed Projects

Music Video of the National Wildlife Refuges of Rhode Island

Gerry Krausse produced a beautifully artistic video illustrating many of the seasonal changes of the refuges. This video is shown upon request at the Sachuest Point Visitor Center and is available for sale in the Friends gift shop there.

On-going Projects

Off Refuge Piping Plover Restoration and Education Project

This project has two dimensions: the biological aspects of resource protection of the piping plover, and the broader educational needs of resource protection. Since 1998 the Friends have raised almost \$160,000 in private donations, grants and goods and services for the program.

Biological

- Provided various supplies as they were requested.
- Supported a seasonal biotech on the beaches.

Educational

- Grant monies have expired for expanding our outreach in support of the off-refuge piping plover project. Future plans include increased efforts in solicitation of funds to support the plover recovery program.

Special Projects and Events

Photo contest

Marcia West and Lynda Boghdan were joined by refuge staff member Kimberly Hayes to form the photo contest committee again this year. Entries came from people who frequent one or another of the refuges, but also from others who had not known of the existence of the refuges until they saw notice of the contest. The prizes were even more generous, thanks to several sponsoring businesses. The Board has already authorized the fourth annual photo contest for this coming fall.

Behind-the-scenes Friends-only refuge walks

We initiated a series of special walks, open only to members of the Friends, to areas of the refuges not generally open to the public. Refuge manager Charlie Vandemoer helped us kick off this series with a delightful behind-the-scene tour of the John Chafee refuge. The next walk will be on April 24, 2004, on the Ninigret refuge.

Organizational Growth

Newsletter

The Friends newsletter has been dormant for several months. That has changed, however. In 2003 we planned to devote the next several issues to the various refuges, in turn, starting with Ninigret. Thanks in great measure to Dave Monk, who assumed the role of editor, that newsletter was just published. Many Friends members contributed substantially to that issue.

Membership

Our membership is stable. The board is currently developing plans for a membership drive. Stay tuned for future developments.

Sales Operation

Now that the Sachuest Point renovation project is complete, our sales operation is in full swing. Board member and vice chairperson Margaret Bellucci has stepped into the role of coordinating sales at Sachuest and getting things set up for operation in the new refuge headquarters in Charlestown, expected to open late in 2004. Initially, revenue from sales will go toward merchandise acquisition; in time, however, we expect it to be a regular source of funding for the Friends.

More than ever this year, our organization's success is a result of the teamwork of our board of directors, members of the Friends who help on various projects, and the refuge staff with whom we partner. Everyone has worked hard, and it shows in what we have been able to accomplish. Also, we appreciate just as much those of you whose support of the organization is primarily financial, for we would not be able to accomplish what we do without the money to do it. In just a few short years we have begun to make a difference at the RI National Wildlife Refuges for the habitat, the wildlife and those who visit our refuges. We remain hopeful that we can continue to build on our momentum through 2004.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura Landen".

Laura Landen
Chair, Board of Directors
March 2004