A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

2019 has been another great year for the CREW Trust and it has been a pleasure to work with its many dedicated partners, volunteers, staff and friends.

Our new trails at Flint Pen Strand in Bonita Springs are developing nicely thanks to the Water Management District and the hard work of our awesome volunteers. There’s always something new to see there as the vegetation continues to mature and the land heals itself. My wife Lori and I see deer there on every visit and the number and variety of wading birds is amazing. Our dog Yogi has a good time exploring there too!

Bird Rookery Swamp continues to be extremely popular with hikers and bikers alike. It’s also very popular for a wide variety of wildlife! Alligators, otters, bear, deer... everything you can imagine and more frequent the old logging trams and the swamps adjacent to it. It is an exciting and beautifully wild place and everyone at CREW works hard to maintain and protect it.

And at the CREW Marsh trails this year we were proud to honor our friend and longtime supporter of the CREW Trust, Ellen Lindblad, by placing a plaque dedicated to her at one of her favorite spots on the trail. Ellen has been with the CREW Trust since its inception and even though she retired and moved from the area, I know that CREW will always be as close to her heart, as she is to ours.

So, many thanks to all our governmental partners, the members, our volunteers, Brenda and her staff for a great year! Here's to 2020! Whether it's at Bird Rookery Swamp Marsh Trails, Cypress Dome Trails or Flint Pen Strand in Bonita Springs-I hope to see you on the trails!

BEN NELSON
CHAIRMAN

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Volunteers
CREW Trust volunteers have been hard at work expanding the trails at Flint Pen Strand, as well as maintaining our other three trail systems. Volunteers donated a total of 4,554 hours total through their various chosen roles! Some volunteer groups have made significant contributions to trail maintenance and expansion. Others served as trail stewards and guides which helped to increase the number of programs we offered. Some volunteers have chosen to share their knowledge with the next generation through field trips and outreach events. Our volunteers are crucial to the continued success of the CREW Trust and we can’t thank them enough!

Environmental Education
There are so many available opportunities for people to visit the CREW trails, whether by attending one of our many programs or by venturing out on their own. During this past year, 54,159 people visited the trails, which was an increase from the previous year. This increase is in part due to the opening of the newest CREW trail system, Flint Pen Strand. Of the 54,159 people that visited the trails, 6,459 participated in one of our environmental education programs. Participation in our education programs was up by nearly 500 from the previous year.

2019 Total Participants

SAVANNAH KUSHER
EDUCATION COORDINATOR

ANNE REED & ALLISON VINCENT
COMMUNICATIONS
A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

We celebrated the CREW Trust’s 30th anniversary this year! This milestone shows that our mission to preserve and protect our 60,000-acre watershed is still going strong. We continue to support land acquisition within the CREW Project and are very proud that nearly 55,000 acres are being preserved and protected. We’re getting close to our goal of 60,000 acres and committed to making this happen.

The collaborative approach to the CREW Project is what has made these past 30 years such a success. I’ve always been impressed by how well our partners work together, including the SFWMD, FWC, Lee and Collier counties and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Our collective vision continues to drive us forward as we strive to protect this invaluable watershed.

BREND A BROOKS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LAND MANAGEMENT

Prescribed Fire
It was a banner year for prescribed burning at CREW with 2048 acres burned. Fire was applied in Corkscrew Marsh, Flint Pen Strand, and Bird Rookery Swamp. This included areas that had not burned in over 10 years. Although we have prescribed burned in each of the last 14 months, much of the burning was done during the summer, which is typically when natural fires would happen, thus increasing ecological benefits. The National Wild Turkey Federation funded approximately 80 acres of vegetation shredding in Corkscrew Marsh uplands. This mimics natural fire which reduces mid-story shrubs and encourages herbaceous (weeds and grasses) growth. This benefits a whole suite of species including wild turkey, bobwhite quail, songbirds and gopher tortoises.

Recreation Facilities
Phase 3 of the Bird Rookery Swamp boardwalk restoration was completed in Spring 2019 adding another 300’ of new plastic-based decking material (AZEK). We should be able to complete the boardwalk next year. Two additional recreational parking lots were opened in Flint Pen Strand last fall. Wood railing fencing along with signage was also installed. Hiking and equestrian trails will have now opened and continue to expand.

Exotic Plant Control
Treatments to control exotic plants continued throughout CREW with contract applicators treating 1572 acres during the last fiscal year. The FGCU mitigation site, Critical CREW (southern Flint Pen Strand) and Bird Rookery Swamp received treatments. We continue to receive funding from FWC’s invasive plant management section for exotic pant control treatments.

J O E B O Z Z O
SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
CREW PROJECT DIRECTOR
FUNDS AND LAND ACQUISITION

Total Revenue
$313,639

- Contributions 29%
- SFWMD Contract 53%
- Interest 3%
- Membership Dues 15%

Total Expenses
$256,912

- Employment 73%
- Taxes & Insurance 6%
- Public Awareness 5%
- Other 9%
- Professional Fees 4%
- Office Expenses 3%

Net Income $56,727

Assets $1,474,082

- Unrestricted
- Temp. Restricted
- Perm. Restricted

How was your $1 used?

- Programs, 89%
- Administration, 3%
- Fundraising, 8%

Total Acres in Preservation 54,529 acres

Lands held by CREW Trust
In Lee County: 50 acres
In Collier County: 1,006

*Includes 367 acres in partnership with Collier County

CREW Project Partners
- South Florida Water Management District
- Lee County
- Lee County 20/20
- Collier County
- Conservation Collier
- National Audubon Society (CSS)
- CREW Land & Water Trust
FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Sparrow Mist Netting and Banding Surveys
From November 2018 through March 2019, FWC assisted with and coordinated the third year of sparrow mist netting and banding surveys led by SFWMD volunteer and bird expert, Bob Altman. In addition, the participation of many dedicated volunteers makes this project possible.

Capture and banding surveys were conducted in 260 acres of pasture recently leased to the SFWMD (Gargiulo Property) by the State of Florida. Target species include the Grasshopper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrow. Although this subspecies of Grasshopper Sparrow is not listed in Florida, it is Threatened or Endangered in other northeastern U.S. states where it migrates to breed.

During the 31 survey mornings, a total of 364 sparrows were captured (including recaptures). Two-year (2017-18 and 2018-19) annual return rates were 27.9% for Grasshopper Sparrows and 21.6% for Savannah Sparrows. Only one Swamp Sparrow returned. Of the 40 Grasshopper Sparrows captured in those two years, 75% returned to the same net lane from their last capture the previous year and their first capture in 2016-17, indicating high site and area fidelity.

Half the netting locations in South Gargiulo were treated with prescribed fire in June 2018. Capture rates of Grasshopper sparrows and Savannah Sparrows in the burned areas increased by 51% and 78%, respectively, from the previous year. This increase was not a result of birds moving from the unburned area into the burned area, but it was a result of newly arriving unbanded birds choosing burned areas over unburned.

These recapture rates suggest that Grasshopper Sparrows and Savannah Sparrows return to these overwintering grounds at higher rates than comparative studies. High site fidelity for grasshopper Sparrows suggest limited movement within the site and some degree of winter territoriality. An estimated 350 Grasshopper Sparrows overwinter on the south Gargiulo Property, and new arrivals to the population preferred burned area.

Additional wildlife monitoring surveys included bat acoustical monitoring; wading bird nesting, foraging, and roost surveys; breeding bird surveys; acoustical frog surveys (Frog Watch); passive frog call monitoring data analysis; assisted with Big Cypress fox squirrel population assessment. Habitat management projects included carolina willow reduction in the CREW marsh, bi-annual photo monitoring, and assistance with prescribed burning.

KATHLEEN SMITH & LAUREN PLUSSA
FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION BIOLOGISTS
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