A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The year 2020. Yep. I can hear everyone groan from here. It has been just awful for many and will likely elicit that same groan for a long time to come.

However, because of our partners, dedicated volunteers and staff, the CREW Trust has fulfilled our commitment to the land, to our mission and to the people that we serve despite the pandemic. We are so proud of everyone involved for the hard work, coordination and cooperation that it took to maintain a sense of normality, while striving to be sure that everyone stayed as safe as possible.

The trails remained open for all but a few weeks this year, to a public hungry for safe, outdoor experiences, or to simply get out of the house for a while. Going forward, social distancing and other precautions will likely continue well into the new year, but like the rest of you, we look forward to a time when we can all get together and celebrate safely again. So yes, let’s talk about the future!

New trails are being created at CREW Flint Pen Strand in Bonita Springs, thanks to awesome volunteers. We will even have a trail connecting Bird Rookery Swamp and Flint Pen Strand! Something that many of us have dreamed of for a long time!

To facilitate the expansion of our trail system and our other missions at CREW, our board and volunteers are creating trail sponsorship opportunities that will allow us to raise funds without our usual concerts and activities.

So, everyone stay safe and let’s all continue to work together to take care of the place that continues to take such good care of us all, mentally and physically… the CREW Trails!

Hope to see you on the trails!

BEN NELSON
CHAIRMAN

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EDUCATION & RECREATION

Volunteers
CREW Trust volunteers, both new and experienced, have been instrumental with pre-Covid fundraising success and Covid onset challenges. Significant strides have been made to continue the purple trail connection between CREW Flint Pen Strand (FPS) and CREW Bird Rookery Swamp (BRS). With their support, we were able to install infographics at all 4 kiosks at FPS as well as update the kiosks at the CREW Marsh Trails (CMT) and CREW Cypress Dome Trails. We will also have a BRS kiosk infographic update coming in 2021. In addition to these trailhead projects, volunteers have taken on the role of installing additional trail markers at FPS and beginning the process to convert the CMT trails from names to colors. After the onset of Covid, mid-March season events were cancelled and trails closed for most of April leaving volunteers restricted to shelter in place. When trails reopened, they were critical to ensuring the safety of our user groups with a thorough check on the trails, trail maintenance, and even collaborating with the Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) students on trail work. CREW Trust Volunteers donated a total of 4,959 hours from home, in the office and at the trails. FGCU students contributed another 740 hours to this effort with in-person trail maintenance. This coming year, volunteers will be crucial to ensuring trail and program readiness for the 2020-2021 season in a pandemic. We cannot thank them enough for continuing to offer themselves and their talents to the CREW Trust. We truly could not do it without them!

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, 97,628 people visited the trails, which is an increase of over 78% from the previous year. This significant rise in visitation is due to a combination of factors, including the first full year of FPS being open, coupled with the desire for people to get outside after sheltering in place and the closure of businesses and other parks and trails. Of the 97,628 people that visited the trails, 7,563 participated in one of our environmental education programs. Participation in our education programs is up two years in a row.

2020 Total Participants

SAVANNAH KUSHNER, JAYNE JOHNSTON & JULIE MOTKOWICZ
EDUCATION COORDINATORS

ALLISON VINCENT
COMMUNICATIONS & VOLUNTEER DIRECTOR
A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

2020 - Adaptability and resilience describe this past year for the CREW Trust. What started as a ‘normal’ year quickly took an abrupt turn and instead of being two steps ahead, it felt as though we were one step behind. However, we adapted and so did the partners that we work with. Even though field trips were cancelled and all four CREW hiking trail systems were closed for a time, we worked hard to keep you connected to CREW. Zoom became our new connection tool and by taking simple safety measures, we were able to get back out on the trails again.

A benefit of this new reality was that I had more time to be out of the office and on the trails. I was thrilled to see many of you out there enjoying the tranquility and wildness that CREW offers. Nature’s resilience became the lesson we had to learn this year. We all used our time on the trails to heal, reflect and connect as we settled into our new ‘normal’. We’ll continue to work with you, our community and our partners, to ensure that the trails and our programs are available for you. I thank each of you for your adaptability during this time and for supporting the efforts of the CREW Land & Water Trust as we look forward to our 32nd year.

BRENDAN BROOKS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LAND MANAGEMENT

Prescribed Fire
The District, with significant assistance from FWC, was able to prescribe burn 1128 acres within CREW during the last year. Twenty-four prescribed burns were distributed in all units of the CREW Management Area. This included areas that had not burned in over 15 years. Although we have prescribed burned in each of the last 28 months, much of the burning was done during the summer, which is typically when natural fires would happen, which increases ecological benefits. We also had 2 wildfires in July that burned a total of 26 acres. FWC funded a 50-acre shredding project in an old farm field in Bird Rookery Swamp. This mimics natural fire which reduces mid-story shrubs and encourages herbaceous (weeds and grasses) growth. The shredding was followed up by herbicide treatments to reduce undesirable vegetative species. This benefits a whole suite of species including wild turkey, bobwhite quail, songbirds and caracaras.

Exotic Plant Control
Treatments to control exotic plants continued throughout CREW with contract applicators treating 1586 acres during the last year. Applicators spent most of their resources on Lygodium (652 acres treated), torpedo grass (145 acres treated) and Brazilian pepper (621 acres treated). 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 plant control treatments. We are planning to expand our treatments in Flint Pen Strand this upcoming year.

Recreation Facilities
Volunteers and staff continued maintenance on boardwalks including the Bird Rookery Swamp boardwalk. The Bird Rookery Swamp boardwalk deck replacement project was completed in Spring 2020 adding another 300' of new plastic-based decking material (AZEK). Improvements were made to the roadway that accesses the Lakes Parking lot in Flint Pen Strand. Improvements included adding 688 tons of fill material, compaction and grading.

JOE BOZZO
SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
CREW PROJECT DIRECTOR
**Funds and Land Acquisition**

**Total Revenue**
$303,816

- Contributions 29%
- SFWMD Contract 52%
- Interest 3%
- Membership Dues 16%

**Total Expenses**
$237,727

- Employment 81%
- Other 19%

**Net Income**
$66,089

**Total Net Assets** $1,594,106

- Unrestricted
- Temp. Restricted
- Perm. Restricted

**How was your $1 used?**

- Administration 5%
- Programs 94%
- Fundraising 1%

**Total Acres in Preservation:** 54,579 acres

- Lee County: 50
- Collier County: 998

**Land (acres) held by CREW Trust**

- In Lee County: 21,741
- In Collier County: 16,145
- CSS: 13,515
- Pepper Ranch: 2,500
- Other: 678

*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

Bat Acoustical Surveys
The FWC biologists have been collecting bat acoustical data in the Bird Rookery Swamp unit of CREW as part of FWC’s long-term statewide bat monitoring project. The project goal is to collect long-term monitoring data to observe trends in species presence, bat health, and abundance over time. The project is patterned after the NABat Program (North American Bat Monitoring Protocol) where data are collected using standardized techniques, and thus, data are comparable over time to other regions of North America.

Acoustical detectors were placed at three stationary locations in or around the Bird Rookery Swamp unit. Data were collected for nine consecutive nights four times per year. Surveys were conducted in August 2019, October/November 2019, January 2020 and May 2020.

Between July 01, 2019 and June 30, 2020, data were collected from 108 survey nights and 17,277 bat files were recorded.

Files were analyzed primarily by auto-identification with manually vetting for target species, such as the Florida bonneted bat and Rafinesque’s big-eared bat. Eight species were recorded: Rafinesque’s big-eared bat, evening bat, Seminole bat, tricolored bat, northern yellow bat, big brown bat, Brazilian free-tailed bat, and the southeastern myotis. Evening bats were the most abundant species recorded (n = 5,922 files), and the Rafinesque’s big-ear bat was the least recorded (n=1 file). No Florida bonneted bat calls were recorded in 2019-2020. Data are uploaded to the NABat website for comparison across regions, states, and countries. Surveys are planned to continue in perpetuity.

Additional wildlife monitoring surveys included wading bird nesting, foraging, and roost surveys; swallow-tailed kite nest monitoring; breeding bird surveys; sparrow mist netting and banding surveys; acoustical frog surveys (Frog Watch), passive frog call monitoring data analysis; and game camera monitoring. Habitat management projects included removing and replacing wood duck boxes, trail maintenance, upland shredding of exotic plants such as Peruvian primrose willow, bi-annual photo monitoring, and assistance with prescribed burning.

![Photo credit: Kathleen Smith]

**Figure 2:** Number of bat passes collected from CREW WEA in August 2019, October/November 2019, January 2020 and May 2020. Bat passes are defined as one audio file containing a sequence of echolocation calls from one or multiple bat species. "Low frequency bats" consist of Northern Yellow bats and Big Brown bats. Low frequency calls are being manuallyvetted to distinguish between the two species. Location abbreviations correspond to survey location names in Figure 1.

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