



St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc.

Annual Report

FY 2014-2015



FY 2014-2015 Highlights

Membership is over 400 and our Membership dues revenue has increased 14.9%. The Nature Store's gross receipts increased 17.7% over last year and exceeded \$100,000 for the first time. And our Endowment Fund grew 12.6%.

President's Perch

The view from our President, Betty Hamilton



I hope you enjoy our first ever Annual Report. The organization you have known as the St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc. has decided it's time to start this tradition of formally summarizing what we've done in the previous year. It will serve as an historical record, and also an opportunity to look back and celebrate our accomplishments. And, it's been a busy year!

To start with, at the recent Annual Meeting the Membership approved the Board's recommendation that we begin doing business as ("dba") Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge. That is the name you will start to see over coming months, appearing on printed materials, on our website, and in most other places. The Corporation's name will remain the St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc., and that name is what will appear on certain legal documents.

Acquisition of the St. Marks Lighthouse by the Refuge has placed new demands on your Association. We have provided funds, derived from years of small donations to the Lighthouse, to make urgent repairs and pay for a feasibility study, and some Board Members have been serving on various Lighthouse-related committees, in addition to their regular duties! When an organization like ours adds some big project to their normal operation, they sometimes find that the basic functions of the group suffer. Thus we must be careful to manage the Lighthouse project without negatively impacting the normal operation of the Association and its support of the Refuge.

The members of our Association should be proud of what you've enabled us to accomplish. Thank you for being a key part of the Refuge we all love.

Betty Hamilton

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

It's been a good year for the Association's membership. A goal to improve communication with our members led to creation of the monthly *SMRA Update*, which is sent electronically. Several new member-only events were held, including three kayak trips on the refuge and an ice cream social. The Association's Annual Meeting drew more attendees than in the past, with food from Sonny's BBQ and desserts provided by Board members. There were also door prizes for the first time. The event ended with an excellent presentation on endangered species work, given by new Refuge biologist, Jon Chandler.

Two important items were approved at the Annual Meeting. First, the car decal is coming back! The new design, which displays a pair of eagles, was chosen by members attending the meeting. And second, the membership approved a Board recommendation that we begin doing business as (dba) *Friends of St. Marks Wildlife Refuge*. Replacing Association with Friends better conveys the supportive purpose of the group, and is consistent with the name of comparable support groups.

The size of our membership has experienced a slow but steady increase. The number of Life Members is hovering just below 100. (Who will have the distinction of becoming the 100th Life Member!!) The Refuge still sells itself, in our opinion, but we often encounter people who love the Refuge and are regular visitors, but who don't even know the Refuge has a Friends group, and so are not members. Important goals for the coming year are to increase awareness of the Friends group



through new membership brochures and by expanding member activities. In addition to increasing opportunities for the membership to enjoy the Refuge and meet fellow members, these activities will increase the visibility of the Refuge and its Friends group across Big Bend communities.



DEVELOPMENT

Donation of 160-acre Byrd Tract protects nationally-recognized archeological site and caps a busy year

In mid-May the Association received a 160-acre gift that protects a major archeological site, Byrd Hammock, and expands the Refuge's wetlands

between 100 and 1,000 AD. It became a National Historic Place in 1972, and is in the process of being nominated for elevation to National Historic Landmark.

The Byrd Hammock is among the most important of our nation's prehistoric sites.

Dr. Mike Russo, Southeast Archeological Center

and forest. The Rev. Lila Byrd Brown and her sister are glad for the Byrd Tract to be returned to the people, since it came from the people as a land grant to their ancestor, Robert Byrd, in 1858. Dr. Mike Russo, from the Southeast Archeological Center, says that Byrd Hammock is among the most important of our nation's prehistoric sites. People lived there during two Woodland Period cultures,

We also received a gift of about \$2,000 from Dr. Bud Bailey to cover the costs of restoring 9 acres of longleaf pine habitat on the Refuge. Later this year, Refuge staff and volunteers will be planting 17,000 longleaf pine seedlings on the Bailey site, as well as at other locations on the Refuge. We hope to expand the help we provide to the Refuge's longleaf pine restoration effort in the future.

We were fortunate to again receive \$10,000 from Dr. Ed and Hilda Carney to support four student interns to work on wildlife conservation projects, supervised by Refuge biologists. It's been a pleasure to see these interns being so effectively involved in various projects all across the Refuge, and we look forward to a continued relationship with the Carneys.

Finally, the Development Committee spent several months this year planning an estate bequest program. It will be launched this Fall and a presentation by a local attorney will be scheduled next year for Association members on wills and trusts. The Friends group can accept both cash

gifts and real property. Please email development@stmarksrefuge.org for information on bequests or other forms of planned giving. All discussions are kept confidential.



LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT

This has been an eventful year in our efforts to preserve and protect the historic St. Marks Lighthouse. Using funds from one of two Florida Lighthouse Association grants, the remarkable Fresnel Lens was carefully removed from our lighthouse, crated, and transported to the Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse Museum, where experienced conservators cleaned and repaired the lens and metalwork. Once returned, a special lens unveiling ceremony was held on April 17th in the Visitors Center. A second public unveiling and background lecture were held on April 18th. The restored lens is on display in the Visitors Center until it can be returned to the lighthouse.

While not as visibly dramatic as the lens repair, your association commissioned a Capital Campaign Feasibility Study this year. Twenty-eight knowledgeable and influential community leaders were interviewed by Stansbury Consulting LLC of Tallahassee. The feasibility study also opened doors for corporate and government support. As a result of this work, a campaign slogan was developed and adopted – *Bring the Past to Light, Preserving the St. Marks Lighthouse.*

As a result of the feasibility study, State Senator Bill Montford and State Representative Halsey Beshears sponsored an appropriation request for \$250,000 for repair of the lighthouse. While the lighthouse made it into the final appropriations bill, ultimately the governor vetoed all historic preservation projects. Yet the groundwork has been laid for future appropriation efforts and the lighthouse received significant media coverage, raising awareness of our preservation efforts.

So far in 2015, funding proposals have been submitted to the Duke Energy Foundation, the U.S. Lighthouse Society, the Florida Division of Historical Resources (DHR) Small Matching Grant Program, and the Florida DHR Special Category Grant Program, for a total of \$580,000 requested. These proposals focused on the repair needs of the cast-iron lantern room, and on the major internal structural repairs needed in the lighthouse and keeper's quarters. The results of these proposals will be known in 2016.

The Lighthouse Operations Committee has developed plans for the structures once preserved, including restrooms and museum displays. Artist sketches of the completed lighthouse, museum and grounds have been developed, along with cost estimates. All these are needed for the fundraising effort and to communicate a vision to the public.



CORE REFUGE PROJECTS

Wildlife and Habitat Conservation

Refuge projects focus primarily on threatened and endangered species, including habitat restoration. The species involved include Red Cockaded Woodpeckers, Whooping Cranes, Bald Eagles, Marsh Voles, Gopher Tortoises, Flatwoods Salamanders, Monarch Butterflies and Longleaf Pine.

Thanks to generous support from Dr. Ed and Hilda Carney, SMRA supported four interns. Most recently, the Carney interns supported Refuge biologists by assessing potential habitats for reintroduction of red-cockaded woodpeckers into the St. Marks Unit; conducting surveys of critically endangered frosted flatwood salamanders; and identifying and mapping invasive plant species. The generosity of members has enabled purchase of a burrow scope for use in mapping gopher tortoises, and a peeper cam for monitoring Red Cockaded Woodpecker nests. Funds were also provided to train refuge staff in banding red-cockaded woodpeckers.



Environmental Education

The Association continued to provide support for the Refuge's renowned environmental education programs, including Tots on Trails, Families in Nature, and school-year and summer programs, including Junior Ranger Camp. In addition to buying needed supplies and equipment, the Association funded scholarships for schools that would otherwise be unable to transport children to programs on the refuge. We also supported the environmental educator's attendance at educational conferences and meetings.

Visitor Services

Member contributions provided funds for printing of *The Eagle's Eye*, the Refuge's newsletter, and some special brochures. Members also provided volunteer and financial support for public festivals such as the Monarch Festival and the Wildlife, Heritage and Outdoors Festival (WHO), which were attended by thousands. The Association also supported smaller events like the ceremony marking the transfer of the St. Marks Lighthouse from the U.S. Coast Guard to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the public unveiling of the lighthouse's restored Fresnel lens. And the Association partnered with Refuge staff to support volunteer training and recognition activities.

On-going Refuge Support

Association members were an invaluable asset in seeking out, writing and administering grants that support Refuge and Association activities. We also covered the cost of satellite internet access in the room at the Visitors Center that the Association uses for business functions, and of cable internet access at the residential trailer used by interns. Finally, Association members serve as volunteers for activities all across the Refuge.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2014-2015

Summary of Expenditures

In Fiscal Year 2014-15, SMRA allocated \$96,166 to projects benefiting the Refuge. The breakdown by project area is as follows:

Wildlife & Habitat Conservation

\$21,544

Visitor Services

\$17,786

Environmental Education

\$12,855

Lighthouse Stabilization/Preservation

\$43,981

Total Refuge Project Support

\$96,166

Note: The amount expended for specific project areas may vary substantially from year to year. Typically there is a base amount contributed to the first three project areas, coming from Nature Store profits, and Membership Dues and Donations. Additional funds may be expended for a project area from grants, restricted gifts, and carry-over from previous fiscal years.

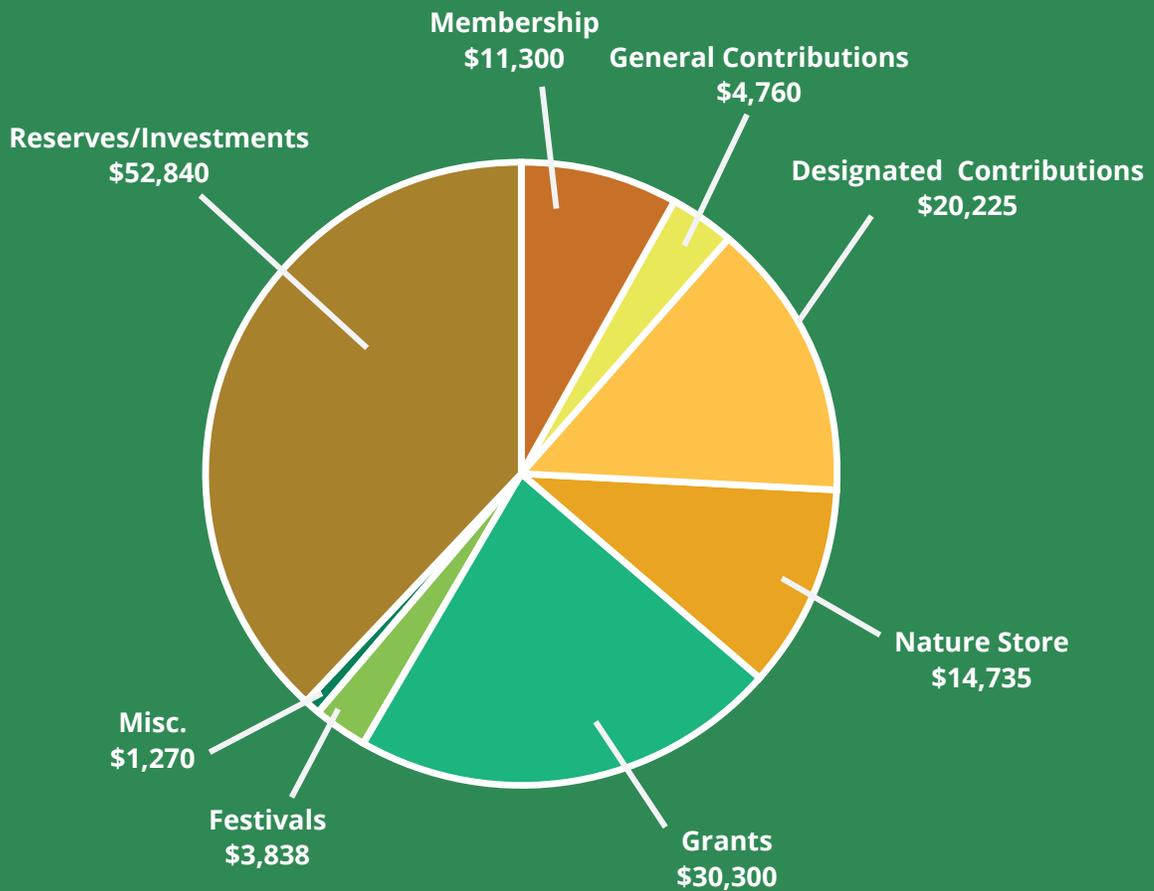
Highlights

- Successful completion of two Florida Lighthouse Association Grants
- Board begins Lighthouse Campaign and creates Campaign Account
- Continuation of Carney Internships for Wildlife Conservation
- Acquisition of the Byrd Tract – 160 acres (significant archaeological site)
- Membership revenue growth of 14.9%
- Nature Store sales growth of 17.7%
- Endowment growth of 12.6% (Current balance: \$36,817)
- Expansion of Red Cockaded Woodpecker Project
- Initiation of Aerial Eagle Nest Survey



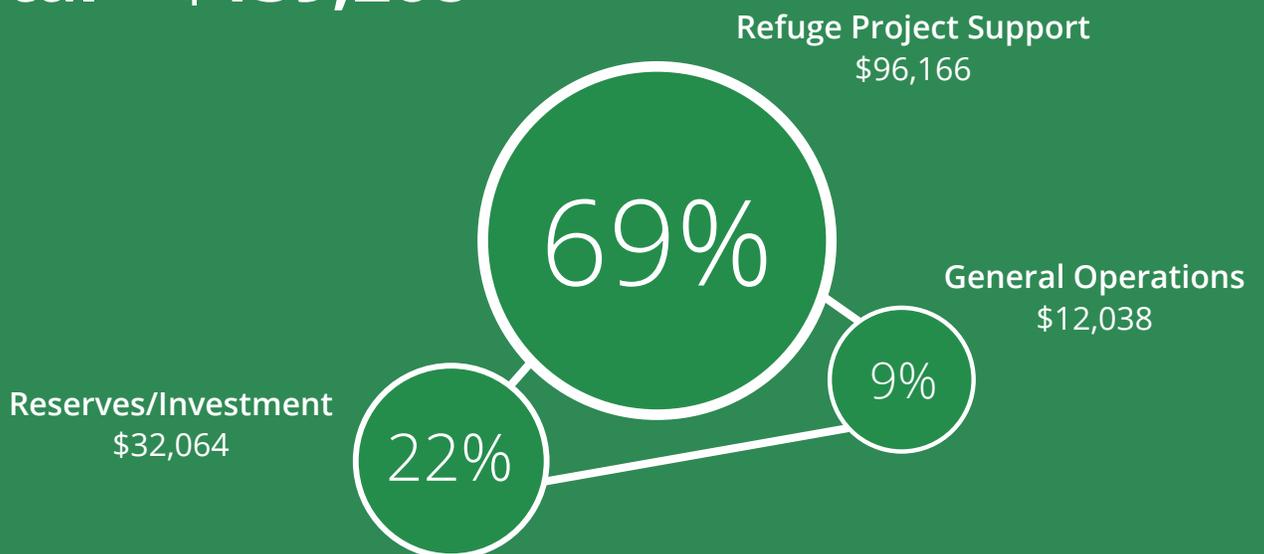
SMRA Revenue FY 2014-2015

Total = \$139,268



SMRA Expenses 2014-2015

Total = \$139,268



ENDOWMENT FUND

The Endowment Fund of the St. Marks Refuge Association was established in 2012 to provide support, in perpetuity, for educational programs, research, wildlife habitat restoration, cultural resource protection, and other needs of the Refuge. The principal amount of an endowment fund is never touched, but earnings may be withdrawn to provide a stable income source for Refuge programs. Since its inception our Endowment Fund has grown to over \$36,000.

Our Endowment

Our Endowment is professionally managed by the Community Foundation of North Florida (CFNF) to ensure the funds remain strong over time. Anyone can contribute to the Endowment Fund, in any amount or at any time. Gifts may be made by cash, check, credit card, appreciated stock, real estate, retirement plan assets, charitable trusts, annuities or insurance. CFNF also provides professional gift planning assistance to our donors, and facilitates immediate and deferred gifts of all types.

THE BOARD

Directors

Officers

- President - Betty Hamilton
- Vice-President - Mary Smallwood
- Secretary - Melissa Jacoby
- Treasurer - John Haines

At Large

- Darren Allen
- David Bailey
- Tom Baird
- Susan Cason
- Betsy Kellenberger
- Eric Mason
- Nicole Zampieri

Note: For further information about members of the Board and its committees, visit. www.stmarksrefuge.org/boardinfo.htm

Bylaws

Our Bylaws are available for viewing at:
www.stmarksrefuge.org/PDF/bylaws.pdf

Standing Committees

Membership - recruit and maintain active membership, maintain database, produce SMRA Update, organize member-only events

Development - solicit major gifts, and encourage estate bequests, endowment contributions, and other donations

Communications - website, social media, management of branding, coordinate publicity

Lighthouse - planning, preservation, fundraising

Board Support - recruit and nominate new Directors, nominate officers, plan board development activities

Note: The Photo Club is no longer an Association committee, but will continue to serve the Refuge as a volunteer club under the auspices of Visitor Services.





WE WANT TO SAY **THANK YOU**

The conservation projects and refuge program growth described in this Report are possible only because of the generous donations of time, talent and treasure from our members, friends, and volunteers. Thank you all for making a difference.

We also want to give a special thank you to the following caring individuals and companies for helping us help the refuge we all love:

Secretary of State Ken Detzner
Florida Senator Bill Montford
Florida Representative Halsey Beshears
Dr. Ed and Hilda Carney
Kim Williams
Dr. Richard Chichetti
Chuck and Pam Shields
Rev. Lila Byrd Brown and family
John Roberts
Dr. Bud Bailey
Michael Cusick
Ralph Haben
Benjamin Bush, JD
Shane Lambert Construction
Ring Power
Capelouto Pest Control
Wakulla Signs
Harvest Printing
Florida Lighthouse Association
Ponce De Leon Inlet Lighthouse Museum



Registered in the State of Florida as a non-profit corporation and approved by the IRS as a 501.c.3 tax-exempt organization, since 1987.