

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption for SARASTAR: Conservation educator Sara Hallas will spend a year with refuge staff.

Caption for SARAGUADELOUPE: Sara Hallas (green shirt) leads a summer kids group on a refuge tour.

DDWS hires teacher to help with refuge education staffing shortages

Due to the federal budget crisis, J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island has been unable to fill its vacancy since February for an education specialist.

“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), however, was able to hire a full-time conservation educator to work with refuge staff for a period of at least one year. The funding was made possible by a dollar-for-dollar match grant from an anonymous donor for \$20,000 and matching donations for another \$20,000 from various refuge supporters.

Sara Hallas, who served as the refuge’s Summer Teachers Assisting Refuges (STAR) teacher for two months this summer, has accepted the conservation educator position. Previously, she worked as an environmental science teacher for the Lee County School District and, before that, a second-grade teacher at River Hall Elementary in Alva, Fla.

“We welcome Sara into the fold with open arms,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “The budget crisis has been a real hardship for us in trying to keep up with our mission to make future conservation stewards through student busing programs. Sara has been such an asset this summer. We are so grateful to the wildlife society for making it possible to keep her on.”

Hallas will oversee a seasonal staff of two education interns and two resident volunteers to schedule visits for more than a thousand Lee County School District students in the coming school year. She has been supervising field trip visits and free summer programs already throughout the summer and was in charge of estuary field trips for the school district last school year.

The new conservation educator will also be helping the refuge and DDWS with events, Westland said. Her STAR stint ended July 28, and her new position begins Aug. 7.

“I love being outdoors and educating students about wildlife and their habitats, sharing the passion and love for all of the organisms that make that wonderful habitat so amazing and unique,” said Hallas. “I feel honored to have this opportunity to be a part of this community, learning and sharing that knowledge with all who visit.”

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566, 239-472-1100 ext. 4, or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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