

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Chelle Koster Walton

239-699-4754

ChelleTrav@aol.com

Caption: On August 24, refuge staff planted about 9,500 plugs of native marsh cordgrass (spartina) in preparation for the reopening. The public is invited to the next planting on Sept. 7.

‘Ding’ Darling opens Bailey Tract, Tarpon Bay ramp

The J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island announced this week that it has reopened both Bailey Tract and the boat ramp at the Tarpon Bay Recreation Area.

The trails at Bailey Tract reopen to hikers and bicyclists following a three-month Bailey Tract Restoration Project. Because of the tract’s popularity, the refuge had opted to do the work during the slower summer months, but has now reopened it for full, free public use.

The project included hydrologic enhancements that benefit all wildlife that inhabits the tract. Species such as secretive marsh birds and others dependent on spartina marsh habitats will thrive as a result, officials say.

The project partially restored the historic hydrology and original marsh habitat of the Bailey Tract, a branch refuge campus on Tarpon Bay Road. Volunteers can help out at the next scheduled spartina grass planting on Friday, Sept. 7, starting at 8 a.m. at the Bailey Tract. An RSVP is required to assist in the planting; please call 239-472-1100 ext. 237.

At the Tarpon Bay Recreation Area, non-motorized (\$7 fee) and motorized (\$10 fee) boat launching is again available through Tarpon Bay Explorers, the refuge’s recreation concession.

The ramp had been closed for nearly two years because the construction of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) marine lab restricted parking at Tarpon Bay Explorers. The lab, a partnership between the refuge and SCCF to enhance water quality monitoring in the refuge and beyond, was completed in August.

SCCF has occupied a marine lab on the federal property since 1996. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service provided use of the land and a grant for the basic building, while SCCF funded the labs and their furnishings and equipment. The “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) has also provided funding for water monitoring equipment in Tarpon Bay.

“We began planning for the new marine lab around 2009, when we replaced the roof on the old building and discovered multiple deficiencies during a condition assessment,” said Refuge Manager Tritaik. “I believe that continuing a partnership with SCCF on a shared marine lab will benefit the refuge by ensuring scientific support for the refuge's marine resources long-term. We benefit from SCCF's water quality monitoring and testing, seagrass monitoring, oyster restoration and other scientific studies conducted in the refuge.”

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 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

###