

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption for trailer: An example of the type of rig the refuge will be developing for its WoW outreach.

Caption for TURTLEEX: Like the refuge's Visitor & Education Center, the WoW trailer will hold hands-on educational exhibits.

'Ding' Darling receives grant toward Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) outreach

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) recently received a \$100,000 grant from a private family foundation toward designing, building, staffing, and implementing into educational outreach programming a Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile hands-on exhibit. To complete the project, DDWS is seeking additional donations equaling \$155,000 to cover the cost of a heavy duty pick-up truck to haul the trailer plus design, equipment, supplies, and an educator.

"The family asked us to 'think outside the classroom' to fund a conservation education initiative for the J.N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge," said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. "We, along with the refuge team, are currently in the research and imagining stage of this exciting, innovative project."

WoW will be scheduled to visit schools, libraries, senior facilities, conservation-minded events, and economically challenged and minority communities in the five-county area to teach about water quality, the ecosystem, wildlife, and other topics that meet the refuge's mission.

As part of the remaining \$155,000 cost of the project, DDWS needs a new or used four-wheel-drive pickup truck to pull the WoW trailer. In lieu of cash to purchase the vehicle, it will accept a donation of a new or used truck.

In addition, DDWS hopes to hire a bilingual educator, who, along with volunteers and interns, will staff the museum-quality, hands-on exhibits inside WoW to maximize their inspirational learning potential. Funding is also needed for learning stations that would interpret mangrove ecosystems, water quality, water conservation, pollution and plastic, animal scats and tracks, Florida's native animals, and wildlife

sounds. Staff will draw on knowledge gained in the classroom and design programs to complement Florida educational requirements.

“Refuge staff has been wishing for a mobile education facility for many years, but has not been able to further the project due to staff and funding shortages,” said Miller. “Now that the society has found support to bolster the refuge education team, the time is right to spread the refuge message to those who are unable to visit ‘Ding’ Darling on their own and to schools too far away to bring here by bus.”

The WoW project is part of the refuge’s 20-month 75th anniversary celebration ongoing now through Dec. 1, 2020. DDWS hopes to have the mobile learning experience on the road by March 2020.

Anyone interested in making a tax-deductible donation to the WoW project can contact Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 232, 239-292-0566, or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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 profits.

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.

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