

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: An artist's rendering of WoW's design

New grant challenges people to donate to 'Ding' Darling's Wildlife on Wheels (WoW)

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) recently received an anonymous challenge grant to help raise support to bring the refuge's Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) project to fabrication. The grant will match donations made by Dec. 31, 2019, dollar for dollar up to \$50,000.

"If the challenge is met, and we raise the additional \$100,000, we will have nearly reached our goal of \$255,000 for making WoW a reality and bringing it into underserved communities in a five-county area," said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. "For children of all ages, as well as adults, this 'traveling refuge' will drive to distant schools, libraries, after-school programs, and so many other places to teach and inspire about saving and protecting our land, water, and the wildlife who need that habitat to survive. We are seeking donations and pledges of any size."

The educational WoW project began with an anonymous \$100,000 family grant; since then, donations have brought the total raised to \$125,000.

"Both major donor foundations believe in education as the key component to making a difference in protecting what is left in our world for the wildlife and the people who depend on it," said supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland.. "We are always looking for new and creative ways to engage people of all ages in conservation. We are so excited about the possibilities of teaching and inspiring through the WoW in hard-to-reach communities."

"We are currently in the research and planning stage of this exciting, innovative project, with the goal of unveiling WoW in March of 2020, if the money is raised by the end of December," added Miller.

DDWS hopes to hire a bilingual educator, who, along with volunteers and interns, will staff the museum-quality, hands-on exhibits inside and outside of WoW to maximize their inspirational learning potential.

Donations will fund learning stations that interpret mangrove ecosystems, water quality, water conservation, pollution and plastic, animal scats and tracks, Florida's native animals, wildlife sounds, and other topics that meet the refuge's mission.

Refuge staff, Lee County teachers, and a team of volunteers will draw on knowledge gained in the classroom to design interpretative exhibits and programs that complement Florida educational requirements.

"The refuge will continue bringing schools here by bus -- nearly 5,000 students annually," said Westland. "But our WoW mobile educational outreach rig will allow refuge staff to reach thousands more kids and their families who are otherwise unable to experience the outdoors at the refuge."

Anyone interested in making a tax-deductible donation that will double the impact in support of the WoW project can contact Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 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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