



# Protect. Educate. Inspire.

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Kevin Godsea takes over management of “Ding” Darling as project leader of a newly formed Southwest Florida refuge complex.

### **Godsea appointed to lead Southwest Florida refuge complex**

Having filled the role of acting refuge manager at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island since April 2019, Kevin Godsea now steps up to the position of permanent project leader managing the new Southwest Florida National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex. The complex also includes Florida Panther, Ten Thousand Islands, Pine Island, Matlacha Pass, Island Bay, and Caloosahatchee NWRs. Godsea has been serving as refuge manager for Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWRs for the past 10 years.

A 22-year veteran of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Godsea began his relationship with “Ding” Darling in 2000 as an education specialist and then supervisory refuge ranger. Following that, he served as refuge manager at Cape Romain NWR in South Carolina for two years before moving back to Southwest Florida and taking on the western Everglades-area refuges. During his time there, Godsea earned the coveted National Refuge Manager of the Year (Paul Kroegel) Award and graduated from USFWS’ Advanced Leadership Development Program.

"Management positions at places like ‘Ding’ Darling only become available every so often. So, when I left Sanibel in 2008, I never really thought I would have the opportunity to come back and become the refuge manager," said Godsea. "I couldn't be more excited to lead our team here at ‘Ding’ Darling and continue our landscape conservation efforts at the refuges in Collier County. The diversity of wildlife,

habitats, and conservation issues are plentiful in Southwest Florida, and I look forward to continue to work with our partners and forge new relationships to further the conservation mission of the USFWS."

"Given his deep familiarity with 'Ding' and his strong leadership abilities, Kevin is a most welcome and obviously qualified person to lead our local refuges through the upcoming challenges of budget cuts and water quality issues," said Sarah Ashton, president of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge.

"This has been and remains to be a long transition period for both Florida Panther and 'Ding' Darling as both refuges have had major staff reductions and changes in supervisors over the past couple of years," said Godsea. "Florida Panther is now operating at 35 percent and 'Ding' Darling at 48 percent of what the regional workforce plan prescribed three years ago. Thus, our efforts in the short term will be to rebuild the staffs at both stations. However, I find reason for optimism that we will have the opportunity to build a dynamic team with new personnel that will bring in new energy, skills, and passions, which will inevitably refuel our own energy and passions for the work we do."

#### 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](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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