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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Urban Ranger Janet Sokoloski supports the refuge mission to take its conservation and education message beyond its borders.

Urban Ranger joins 'Ding' Darling staff

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island welcomed Urban Ranger Janet Sokoloski late last month as part of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Urban Outreach initiative to expand the mission of national wildlife refuges into the community, especially to low-income neighborhoods that don't typically have the resources to interact with refuge wildlife and conservation ethics.

"At 'Ding' Darling, we have led the FWS movement for urban outreach through various programs, most notably our WoW, Wildlife on Wheels interactive mobile classroom," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who heads up the refuge's outreach efforts. "WoW has received rave reviews and lots of love from our local Title 1 schools such as Tice Elementary, where we have recently concentrated efforts. Federal budget cuts have taxed staff in keeping WoW vital, but the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society has helped make it possible by funding the construction of WoW and its staffing. With Janet now coming aboard as a federally supported member of the team, it's a huge relief and asset to our mission."

Sokolowski comes to Sanibel from Fort Benning, Ga, where she worked as an operations and resource manager, scheduling federal land and airspace to train and test weapons from .22 caliber up to .50 caliber rifles and machine guns, missiles, drones, radio equipment, and unmanned vehicles.

A veteran of the war in the Middle East, she taught marksmanship to allies in Afghanistan. Born in Massachusetts to Dominican Republic parents, she is fluent in Spanish and is one of the few females in the U.S. Army awarded the President's Hundred Tab and Excellence-in-Competition Gold Distinguished Badge for competing in national marksmanship competitions.

"We hired Janet based on her skill set, passion, organizational skills, lengthy 20 years' experience teaching diverse audiences, and eagerness to learn," said Westland.

"I am interested in everything about 'Ding,' especially the rescuing of animals, control burns, the maintenance of the water to free it from fishing lines and trash, necropsy, boat and tram tours, WoW, and canoeing," said Sokoloski, a native of North Miami Beach, Fla.

She looks forward to showing and educating people who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to discover the joys of being outdoors and finding peace. She moved to Southwest Florida with her husband a retiree from the Army after 22 years of service, and two dogs – a yorkie and Australian shepherd. Her husband, Adam, just completed his CDL (Commercial Driver's License) and HVAC training in the Army to be certified for a civilian career, and her two children are in college.

Sokoloski is already loving her new home and job and Sanibel Island. "It is a sense of security, where people are genuinely looking out after you and your children, a community that is tightknit," she said. "The refuge is like a tropical island somewhere far away, but it is in really our own backyard."

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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