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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption:

Refuge unveils Mindfulness Trail with chamber ribbon cutting

On Feb. 7, as the kickoff to its Wellness Week: Mind. Body. Heart., the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island unveiled its new, self-guided Mindfulness Trail with a Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting and live, pop-up interpretation by the Wellness Week team.

The Mindfulness Trail, a meditative nature experience, features five stations with QR codes that connect hikers to podcasts with guided meditations on nature and wellbeing. The 0.35-mile trail runs around the perimeter of Ani Marsh, a popular wildlife-spotting area at Bailey Tract

The podcasts start with an introduction to the Health Benefits of Nature by Dr. Joe Blanda, a recently retired orthopedic surgeon who promoted mindfulness and nature exposure to his recovering patients. He continues to help people with wellbeing and connectivity outdoors.

In his introduction to the trail, Dr. Blanda talks about the wellneww benefits of being outside – ranging from lowering blood pressure to preventing obesity and diabetes.

“Best of all, it’s easily accessible, free, and there are no bad side effects,” Dr. Blanda says. “Most importantly, it’s proven by science that it works. More than one thousand studies confirm the health benefits of being outdoors.” He concludes with a quote from Hippocrates: “Nature is the best physician.”

Four other calming podcasts guide trail-users on the topics of grounding and mindful listening, viewing, and feeling. Each podcast runs about four minutes, easily available through smartphone technology.

“We are excited to debut the Mindfulness Trail, which has evolved from an activity the refuge began in 2020 in response to the impact the pandemic was having on people’s mental state and refuge programming,” said Jessica Barry, DDWS development and outreach assistant, who worked on the project with the refuge. “The guided Mindfulness Walks became such a popular activity, the refuge decided to take them a step further.”

“We are grateful for Jess and others for encouraging us to enhance the work at the Refuge in the area of true mindfulness in nature,” said supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland, project leader. “It has resulted in this wonderful Bailey Tract trail so hikers can self-guide their mindful journey.”

The refuge also continues to offer guided Mindfulness Meditation Walks along the trail on select dates throughout the winter season. Check the DingDarling.Eventbrite.com for times and to pre-register.

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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