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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Refuge and DDWS staff and board members celebrate the acquisition: DDWS executive director Birgie Miller, board treasurer Bill Valerian, board member Bill Harkey, board vice president Wendy Kindig, emeritus board members Mike and Theresa Baldwin, board member Phyllis Gresham, and Refuge Manager Kevin Godsea.

DDWS closes on 8.5-acre acquisition

After more than six years in the making, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) closed on an 8.5-acre land addition to the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island Jan. 21. The DDWS board of directors, under the leadership of past president and emeritus board member John McCabe, began work on the acquisition in 2014 upon initial conversations with property owner John Boone.

“So much has happened between that time and now, but the end result is that another piece of important Sanibel land is being protected, which the refuge will work with DDWS in restoring and managing,” said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. “It’s hard to believe this purchase finally happened, but it is testament to the power of conservation-minded people and the difference their support can make.”

Late last year, DDWS put out an urgent plea to raise additional funds for the purchase after steeply rising property values and costs put the property out of the reach of funds already collected for the acquisition. With an end-of-January deadline, the additional \$550,000 shortfall was reached within weeks of the

November 2021 call for donations. Island residents Don and Joan Sherman supported the effort with matching donations for both the acquisition and needs for future restoration.

Adjacent to current refuge property, the land holds a six-acre lake that directly feeds into fragile Tarpon Bay. Its preservation not only means protecting vital wildlife habitat, but also buffering refuge water quality against the catastrophic red tide and blue-green algae events it has experienced in the past.

Some of the documented listed species on this property include gopher tortoise, little blue heron, and mangrove cuckoo. In addition, small-toothed sawfish, juvenile tarpon, baby sea turtles, and West Indian manatees use the lake, along with bobcats and migratory birds.

“It was such critical habitat that even with the increased value and purchase price, we believed it is crucial to protect,” said Miller. “We are highly grateful to our generous donors and hardworking board, all of whom brought this effort to fruition.”

The friends group will own and manage an existing home on the property, while the refuge will manage the surrounding land and lake for conservation purposes. To support the restoration and management of the parcel, contact Miller at director@dingdarlingsociety.org or 239-292-0566.

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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