
NEMOURS GAZETTE

A publication of the Nemours Wildlife Foundation

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FALL - WINTER 2019

The ACE Basin Project: 30 Years and 300,000 Acres

By Michele Barker

Several hundred folks gathered at Willtown Plantation December 8th to celebrate a monumental achievement – the 30th Anniversary of the ACE Basin Project and 301,000 acres of conserved Lowcountry.

Yet, one does not have to be invited to a party to acknowledge this milestone. A simple drive up or down US Highway 17 through the ACE Basin between Beaufort and Charleston is enough to make anyone's day. No resorts or huge cookie cutter neighborhoods. Just forests, marshes and rivers for the most part.

When groups visit us here at Nemours, one of our tour stops is along a dike which borders a former rice field, now a managed tidal impoundment. On one side of the dike is that impoundment, the glamorously named Snipe Bog. On the other side are wild marsh and the Combahee River. After discussing what creatures are present, explaining the features of the managed impoundment versus the marsh, and answering questions, our director, Dr. Ernie Wiggers, always tells our guests that there is one other thing he really wants them to notice on the marsh side. "What do you see?" he'll ask.

Usually there is silence until some bold soul says "Nothing?", and Dr. Wiggers will say they are correct. Nothing but marsh grasses, pluff mud and trees just beyond the river off in the distance. No condos or houses, no hotels or massive development.

(See "ACE" Page 7)



Photo by Micha Ashford



From the President:

The Stewardship Plan for Nemours Plantation

For the past 20 years, we have taken our responsibility as land stewards very seriously and have tried to make management decisions based upon what most benefits our wildlife, wetland, and forest resources. This approach has worked well but like any good organization there comes a time when you need to take a step back to review and evaluate what you have been doing, critically assess the results, and examine how you could be more efficient and effective. With the urging of the Foundation’s Board we did an internal, self-evaluation this year and developed a multi-year management plan that will take us into the future. We hired Gillie Croft, one of our graduate students who recently completed his Master of Science degree in wildlife biology, to lead and coordinate this project.

The management plan states: “The principal goal for the property is to promote quality habitat and best management practices for the entire suite of wildlife species we might encounter in the Lowcountry of South Carolina.” This is a broad goal when you consider Nemours encompasses some 9,500 acres of very diverse habitats. Specifically, Nemours is made up of 1,002 acres of long leaf pine, 2,747 acres of other pine forest (primarily loblolly), 2,963 acres of mixed hardwoods, 511 acres of open lands and fallow fields, and 2,261 acres of fresh and brackish water wetlands.

The task becomes even more daunting when you consider the infrastructure needed to access all parts of this landscape. While measuring various infrastructure resources, Gillie uncovered some truly overwhelming statistics (at least for me) including 77 miles of roads, 95 miles of firebreaks, 22 miles of dikes, 34 individual wetland impoundments, and 48 water control structures. Although 48 water control structures sounds adequate, our self-evaluation resulted in our wanting to add to this count significantly over the next five years.

(See “From the President, Page 4)

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Second Reintroduction of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers Adds Six More Birds to Nemours

Photo and Story by Pete Laurie

Six additional red-cockaded woodpeckers were released in early November at Nemours Plantation to supplement the original reintroduction of the endangered birds in 2014.

Biologists with the Longleaf Alliance, funded through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, captured the birds in the Francis Marion National Forest north of Charleston.

The birds were captured at their roost trees at night, transported to Nemours and placed into artificial cavities in mature pines with screens placed over the entrance holes to keep the birds in the cavities overnight. At dawn the next morning, the screens were removed, and the birds flew free with the hope that they will remain in the area and use the artificial cavities for roosting and nesting in subsequent years.

Two weeks prior to the reintroduction, independent contractor Larry Wood (see photo at right) installed the artificial cavities about 20 feet above the ground in each of four or five nearby pines at three separate locations.

The only woodpecker to excavate cavities in living trees, a process that takes two or more years, red-cockaded woodpeckers can use the artificial cavities for roosting and nest immediately while they start excavating natural cavities.

Only one of the original four red-cockaded woodpeckers remains at Nemours. One flew to Cheeha-Combahee Plantation on the lower Combahee River. The fate of the other two birds is unknown.

Once common throughout the longleaf pine forests of the Southeast, these woodpeckers declined dramatically with the loss of old growth pine habitat. They disappeared from the ACE Basin decades ago due to excessive timber harvest.



(See "RCW Release" on Page 4)

(“RCW Release” continued)

In 2014, Nemours became one of the first private landowners to welcome the reintroduction of these birds. Through educational efforts by the Nemours Wildlife Foundation and others, along with the establishment of the Safe Harbor Program, additional landowners within the basin have now accepted the endangered birds on their property. Some 175 landowners have enrolled more than 350,000 acres in the Safe Harbor Program and approximately 92 red-cockaded woodpeckers have been reintroduced on four properties within the ACE Basin.

Considered a "keystone" species, red-cockaded woodpeckers contribute to the overall species richness in pine forests. The cavities they construct also support "secondary" cavity users, those not capable of excavating their own cavities. Secondary users include 27 species of vertebrates including other birds, snakes, lizards, squirrels and frogs.

(“From the President” continued)

As a good colleague, Dean Harrigal, once told me “you need good plumbing to be a good manager of wetlands” and in our case we need more water-control structures to get better water movement across some wetland units.

The real value of this plan is it allows our staff to know a year or more in advance the management actions they need to complete. Thus, fire breaks can be plowed weeks in advance when the ground is dry because we know where we will be burning in the coming months. This will also provide more efficient deployment of our large equipment. As an example, in 2020 we plan to build and install four small spillway boxes and four full-size rice trunks. We also hope to re-top 6,000+ feet of dikes and excavate 8,500 feet of existing old canals to improve water diversion and stormwater management.

Our prescribed burn plan is similarly laid out. We have stands of pine savannas and longleaf pine that we try to burn annually. Other stands of pine will be burned on a 2-year or 3-year rotation. Mixed-pine and hardwood stands we will burn on a 4 or 5-year rotation. When we set this in motion, 880 and 950 acres are scheduled to be burned in 2020 and 2021, but as we look forward 1,850+ acres are scheduled to be prescribed burned in 2022, 2024, and 2025. So, three out of every five years will tax our ability to accomplish our prescribed burning goals. For these years, advanced planning will be especially critical. But we know that now and hopefully will be prepared and ready when these busy years roll around.

When visitors see Nemours for the first time, they always tell me what a spectacular place it is and how much they appreciate knowing places like this exist for wildlife conservation. These comments are very gratifying, and I try to share them with all the staff. I know the staff collectively take great pride in their role as stewards, and it is rewarding to see they are continuously searching for new ways to improve how they go about their work. Beyond Nemours, I have been on many properties along our coastline and I have been amazed at the great work other land stewards are doing. I feel good about the future and our collective efforts to keep the ACE Basin one of the last Great Places on the Earth.

Friends of the Nemours Wildlife Foundation Fall Gathering



It was a chilly, soggy Saturday for our Friends, colleagues and guests October 19th at Nemours Plantation. But this is a hardy group, so they braved the elements to come hear our speaker, Carlton Owen (**left**), and join us for a wonderful meal. The most surprising part of the day? No one got stuck in the extremely muddy drive leaving that afternoon!

Unless otherwise noted, photos by Susan DeLoach.



More than 140 guests joined us for our annual fall event. This was the first time in 12 years that weather was an issue, so we're not complaining!



Left, Gigi McShane and Yeti at the fall gathering. Photo by Pete Laurie



Right, Elouise, daughter of Clay Folk and Natalia Davila, proves you're never too young to become interested in wildlife conservation.



Carlton Owen Awarded Gifford Pinchot Medal

Our speaker for the Fall Gathering of the Friends of Nemours Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities President and CEO Carlton Owen, is the 2019 recipient of the Gifford Pinchot Medal for his lifetime contribution to the forest sector. The award, presented by the Society of American Foresters (SAF) in November, recognizes outstanding contributions by a forestry professional in the administration, practice, and professional development of forestry in North America.

Gifford Pinchot is widely credited as being America's first forester and the father of the conservation movement in North America. In addition to establishing the U.S. Forest Service, Pinchot founded SAF in 1900, where he served as president from 1900-1908 and again from 1910-1911.

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Clemson University	The Nature Conservancy	Yawkey Wildlife Center
Clemson University's	Sea Pines Resort, LLC, Community	
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Edisto Island Land Trust	S. C. Department of	assistance and
The Flyway Foundation	Natural Resources	much appreciated
Folk Land Management	South Carolina Waterfowl	cooperation.
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(“ACE” continued)

At the anniversary celebration, South Carolina State Senator Chip Campsen stated that the ACE Basin initiative began as, and continues to be, a refusal to destroy one of the most magnificent places. Quoting his father, he said it is a place where people can spend time “hugging Mother Nature”. He also quoted Archibald Rutledge, South Carolina’s first poet laureate, from Rutledge’s 1956 book “Santee Paradise”: “Man has entered nature’s sanctuary, but his entry has been an incursion not a conquest.” Campsen said that while mankind has a long-standing presence in the ACE Basin, fortunately for us and generations to follow, that presence has made only a mark on the land, not destroyed or “conquered” this place entirely.

Ironically, our presence, our “incursion”, in this case has saved it from destruction.

While nature abounds in the ACE Basin, its preservation is not something that just naturally happened over time. It has taken, and will continue to take, a great deal of dedication, hard work and collaboration among organizations, private landowners and government entities.

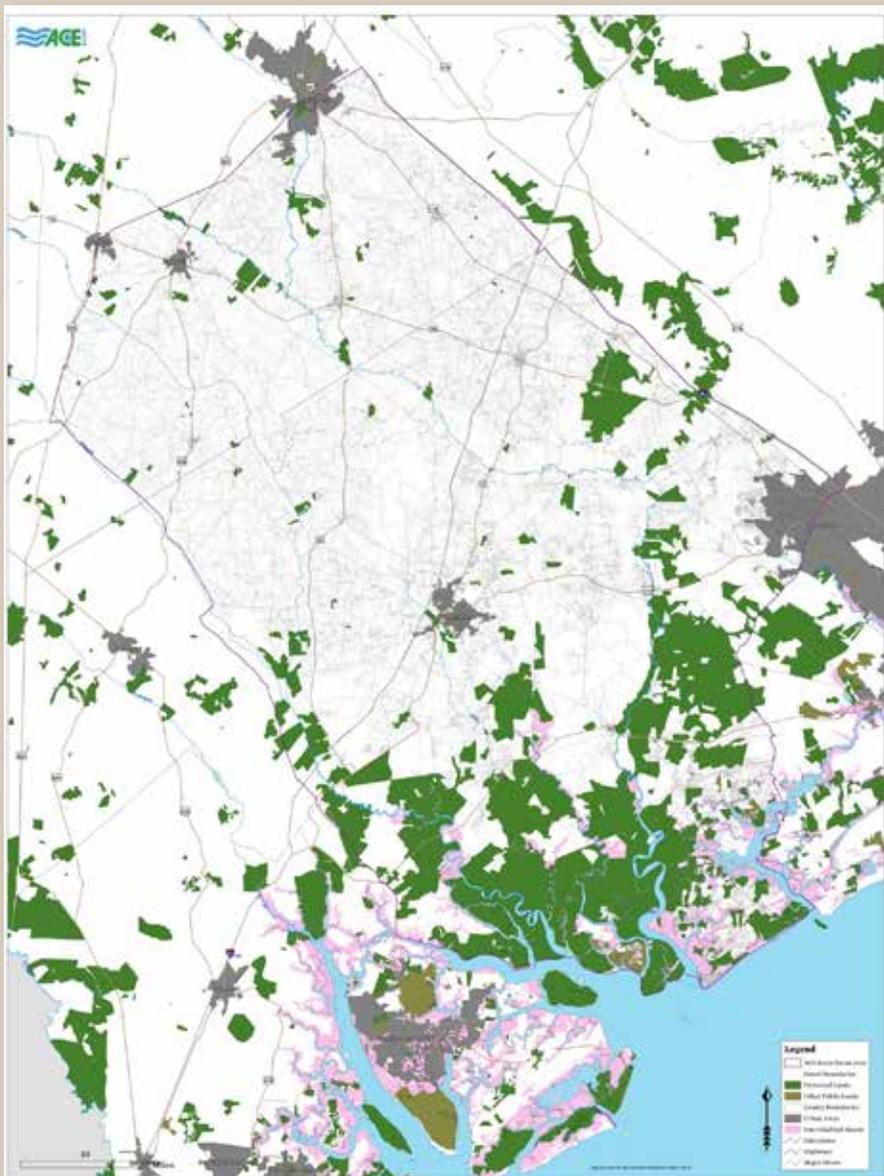
So, the next time you’re in the area, rejoice in the splendor, hug Mother Nature, and consider how blessed we are to still have a place to do so. Happy Anniversary Ace Basin Project and here’s to many more (acres preserved)!

While the map at right is of course best viewed on a larger scale, hopefully it will provide an idea of just how much land is being conserved within the ACE Basin.

All the acreage in green is preserved land

For reference, Walterboro is the gray mass in the center of the map. Beaufort and Port Royal are at the bottom center and Charleston is the large gray mass at the middle of the right edge.

Map created by Melissa Strickland



News & Notes...



Dr. Greg Yarrow's **Applied Wildlife Habitat Management** class from Clemson University visited Nemours in July for some time in the field with our biologist Beau Bauer. Photos by Dr. Yarrow.



Lila Arnold of **Lowcountry Raptors** introduced her birds to a class of nearly 60 kindergarten students from Shanklin Elementary in November at Nemours. **Above left**, she talks about burrowing owls like the tiny, but full grown, "Digger". **Above right**, "Breezy" the barred owl patiently waits his turn to meet the students. We were also joined by Al Segars, recently retired from SCDNR, who spoke with the students about sea creatures and our director, Dr. Ernie Wiggers, with biologist Beau Bauer, took the students on a walk in the woods to see a huge eagle's nest on the property. Photos by Michele Barker.



Right, (left to right) Gillie Croft, Anje, Beau and Dr. Thomas Rainwater, Research Scientist with Clemson University's Baruch Institute and Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center subdue an alligator so measurements can be taken and the transmitter attached.

Photos by Pete Laurie

The **Urban Alligator Study** by Clemson graduate student Anje Kidd-Weaver continues with additional alligators captured, tagged and fitted with transmitters in October. At **left**, Nemours biologist Beau Bauer injects a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag into an alligator's jaw muscle while Anje records information and technician Jelsie Kerr helps hold the alligator still. PIT tags are similar to the chip veterinarians put in pets. We use them as a back-up marker to identify alligators that have previously been caught.



SCORE

A Community-based
Oyster Restoration Program

SCORE: <http://score.dnr.sc.gov>

Recycling:
[http://saltwaterfishing.sc.gov/
oyster.html](http://saltwaterfishing.sc.gov/oyster.html)

Email: score@dnr.sc.gov

We always hope our visitors learn something when they come to Nemours, but sometimes we learn from them! Susan Fogleman (**left**) an account executive with the Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce and a member of the **Leadership Beaufort Class of 2019**, made a case for **oyster shell recycling** during the group's November field trip to Nemours.

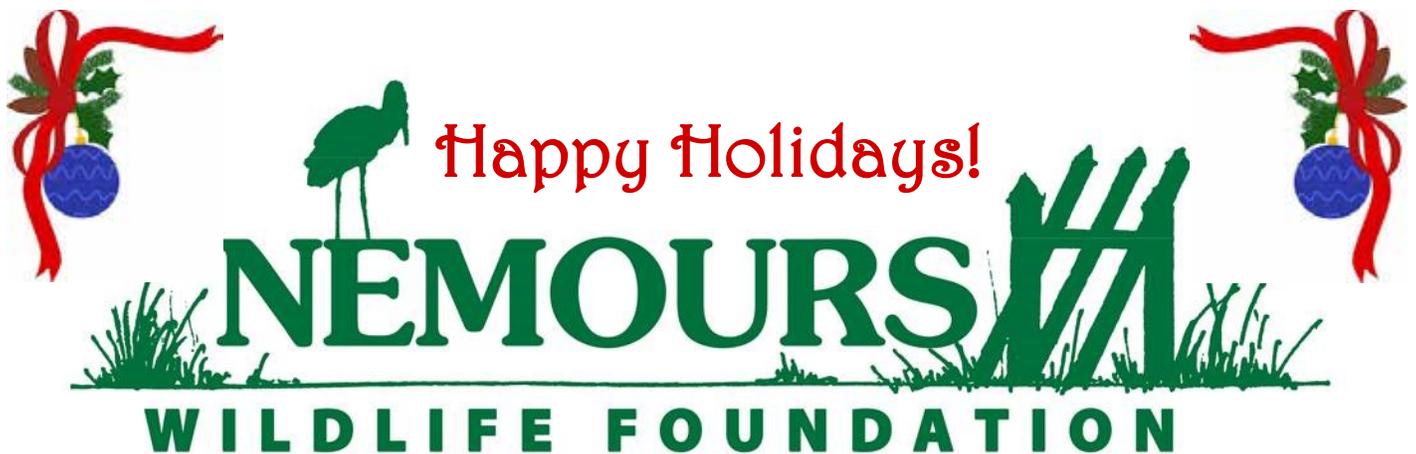
Among the reasons for recycling the shells, she said, are that one adult oyster filters up to 50 gallons of water daily, improving water quality in the process, and only 10 percent of the oysters harvested are recycled. Her presentation centered around the SCORE program operated by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. The South Carolina Oyster Restoration and Enhancement program provides collection sites for the shells and, with program volunteers, rebuilds oyster reefs and monitors water quality near the reefs. For more information about the SCORE program, please see the information at left.

Photo by Michele Barker

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