



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PELICAN ISLAND WILDLIFE FESTIVAL UNITES

PEOPLE AND NATURE

This Festival is for the Birds – and People

SEBASTIAN, FLORIDA

On Saturday, March 14, from 9am to 4pm, the Pelican Island Preservation Society, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the City of Sebastian will host the Pelican Island Wildlife Festival at Riverview Park.

Now in its seventeenth year, the Pelican Island Wildlife Festival has grown to be one of Florida's most popular wildlife festivals. The event is free to the public and focuses on inspiring families to better understand nature through environmental education, children activities, outdoor recreation activities, and just old-fashioned relaxation and fun! Held in Sebastian's beautiful Riverview Park alongside the Indian River Lagoon, the event attracts over 8000 people who come to see over 80 environmental exhibitors, including live wildlife exhibitors, local environmental and historical organizations, live bands, art & craft vendors, and food vendors.

A release of a rehabilitated brown pelican kicks off the festival, followed throughout the day by guided kayaking activities and pontoon boat tours to view the famed Pelican Island. Exhibits include native wildlife shows, featuring birds of prey and reptiles presented by the Treasure Coast Wildlife Hospital, the Avian Reconditioning Center and the Treasure Coast Herpetological Society.

About this annual event, Joanna Webb, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge Ranger, states, "One of the main goals is to raise the community's awareness about the refuge and to get them to come out and enjoy it." She adds, "If we lose the ability to connect with nature, we lose a piece of ourselves."

All exhibits and activities are free except for the pontoon boat tours to Pelican Island and the kayaking activities, both offered at reduced rates. All water activity funds collected during the event will be donated to the Pelican Island Preservation Society to construct a new wildlife observation facility at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge.

The proposed wildlife observation facility will be constructed on the current Pete's

Impoundment Trail and renamed the Joe Michael Memorial Trail in honor of Mr. Michael's lifetime commitment to conserving lands around Pelican Island and the Indian River Lagoon. The Pelican Island Preservation Society has already raised \$9000 in matching funds through donations from the annual Volvo for Life Awards from Bonnie Swanson, the Sebastian Fishin' Chics and the Joe Michael Memorial Fund.

The Pelican Island Wildlife Festival is coordinated by a dedicated group of over 20 volunteers and one U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service employee. The committee meets monthly beginning in late summer each year to coordinate the event activities. Well over 250 volunteers are needed on event day to execute the festival.

Festival website: www.pelicanislandfriends.org.

Festival email: info@pelicanislandfriends.org

Festival Info & Volunteering: (772) 562-3909 ext 275

Exhibitor Information: (772) 323-4550

Kayak Race Sign-up: (772) 794-9900

FIRST SIDEBAR:

Today, 548 national wildlife refuges protect nearly 100 million acres of habitat across America. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only system of lands for wildlife in America and the largest system of lands for wildlife in the world. From bison to butterflies, and salmon to Sandhill Cranes, national wildlife refuges conserve land for more than 1,000 species of fish and wildlife. Refuges provide unparalleled recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation. More than 35 million people visit national wildlife refuges each year to enjoy and learn about the wonders of

nature.

And it all began modestly on March 14, 1903 when President Teddy Roosevelt signed an executive order to set aside a small mangrove island across from Sebastian as our nation's first wildlife refuge. The annual Pelican Island Wildlife Festival celebrates this birth of America's National Wildlife Refuge System with the creation of this first wildlife refuge.

SECOND SIDEBAR:

Pelican Island Wildlife Festival Events

- 9:00 am: kayak poker run; \$25/person w/rental, \$15/person w/out rental
- 9:30 am: opening ceremonies and release of a rehabilitated brown pelican
- 10:00 am to 4:00 pm: pontoon boat tours to Pelican Island every 45 min; \$5/person
- 10:00 am to Sunset: guided kayak trips; \$10/adult, \$5/child
- 10:00 am to 3:00 pm: back-to-back stage shows of birds of prey and live reptiles
- 10:00 am to 4:00 pm: variety of bands playing live music
- 3:00 pm: photography contest awards and kayak raffle drawings
- Teddy Roosevelt reprisor as Emcee