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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland peers through the new scope that the refuge will unveil that day.

Caption: Artist in Residence Rachel Pierce will be painting plein-air along Wildlife Drive, where admission is free all day.

Save the Date: Great American Outdoors Day at the refuge

August 4 marks the first celebration of Great American Outdoors Day across federal lands. It is now one of six fee-free days the government has designated throughout the year. J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island also celebrates with the unveiling of a spotting scope engineered specifically for colorblind viewers, and with other free onsite activities.

Among the 560 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System, "Ding" Darling will be the first to expand its accessibility initiatives to include a colorblind-friendly spotting scope. Specially manufactured by SeeCoast Manufacturing using EnChroma's patented lens technology for color blindness, the scope will be mounted at the Wildlife Drive observation tower.

Besides the scope unveiling and free admission to Wildlife Drive from 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., the Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile classroom will be available to tour for free at the observation tower on Wildlife Drive 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

“Accessibility and urban interaction are two of our main goals in 2021,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “Visitors will be able to experience our wheelchair-accessible WoW classroom, one of our proudest achievements toward community outreach. It has been visiting schools and summer camps throughout the region since it debuted in January, reaching more than 6,000 visitors already.”

Also, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 2021 Artist in Residence Rachel Pierce will be doing a pop-up plein-air painting demonstration along Wildlife Drive to illustrate the difference between colorblind and normal vision. Visitors will have the opportunity to watch her paint and meet the artist, whose year-long “residency” will culminate in an exhibition of her refuge-inspired and other works starting October 1.

“We have invited individuals living with color-blindness to the unveiling— at a time to be announced – to try the scope for the first time and share their reactions,” said Westland, who led the project to get the scope in place. “This follows on the heels of numerous facilities and services -- such as the observation tower’s accessible ramp, a lift for the Visitor & Education Center, and wheelchair accessibility on the Tarpon Bay Explorers tram tours – to make visitor services at the refuge available to the greater public.”

For more information about Great American Outdoors Day at the refuge, call 239-472-1100 ext. 237.

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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