

Bitter Lake News

Summer 2023

A Twist of Events – Great Earth Day Event

Our annual spring planting on the refuge Butterfly Trail was slated to coincide with Earth Day, Saturday, April 22, 2023. The Roswell Rotary Club had 10 foreign exchange students and some adult supervisors that were looking for a community service project. Planting wildflowers on the Butterfly Trail was a perfect fit. Because they were unable to attend the event on Saturday, the Rotary Club volunteers came on Friday instead. To top it off and to make things even better, the Rotary Club donated funds to purchase more wildflowers for planting that day.



Early on Friday morning, 10 students and about 5 adults showed up at the Butterfly Trail. Eager to work, the crew was handed shovels, planting spades, wheelbarrows, and other tools to plant wildflowers on the trail. A safety talk about our local diamondback rattlesnakes was given and the students set off on the foot path to plant wildflowers in several plots along the trail.

Working together and having fun, the teenagers came from all parts of the globe, some from Germany, Sweden, and other countries within Asia. The students learned about wildlife conservation and about Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge. As they planted nectar-producing wildflowers, the teens enjoyed knowing that they were helping butterflies and hummingbirds survive in this harsh environment. The refuge staff would like to give a special thanks to all the students and chaperones as well as to the Roswell Rotary Club for donating the funds to purchase the additional wildflowers.



On Saturday April 22, 2023, the morning was cold and windy as the refuge staff waited patiently for volunteers to arrive. Cub Scouts, refuge staff, volunteers, and members of an ACE (American Conservation Experience) Crew. Cub Scouts, a couple Girl Scouts, and volunteers worked on the cactus garden located on the Butterfly Trail. The volunteers worked hard to remove excess dead vegetation and weeds. Members of the ACE Crew worked along the southside of the visitor center weeding and removing dead shrubs from the area, which provided more space for future live native shrubs like apache plume. For safety reasons concerning rattlesnakes, the ACE Crew reduced the amount of vegetation adjacent to the visitor center walkway. The Earth Day

event ended well with many new friends and supporters for the refuge. Special thanks to the ACE Crew for doing an awesome job clearing out all the brush. Also, thanks to the Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, helpers, volunteers, and the refuge staff. Bitter Lake NWR appreciates all the volunteers who help us keep our refuge a beautiful and exciting place to visit. If you would like to help us water the flowers this summer and weed the flowerbeds, please give the refuge a call at 575-244-6256.

President's Corner by Merideth Hildreth, President

Summer is fast approaching in the Pecos Valley. Butterflies, dragonflies, and birds are on the wing. **The Friends Summer General Membership Meeting will be held at the Refuge Visitor's Center at high noon on Saturday, June 10. Bring your favorite side dish or dessert.** Remember to visit the Nature Store for beautiful t-shirts, gifts, and books Monday – Friday 9 AM to 4 PM. This is the perfect time to renew your Friends membership!

At the end of April, Jana Burch (Nature Store Manager and board member), Steve Alvarez, Visitor Services Manager, and I attended the Friends of National Wildlife Refuges training conference at the Fish and Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia. We met Friends and Refuge staff from across the nation. Representatives from Bosque del Apache NWR and Valle de Oro NWR also attended from New Mexico. FWS Chief Cynthia Martinez (raised in New Mexico) gave an inspirational keynote address. The conference gave us a deeper appreciation for the valuable contributions the Friends groups and volunteers make in the conservation and education mission of FWS refuges and fish hatcheries.

I'm calling to action the Friends of Bitter Lake NWR to engage in a membership and volunteer drive to increase our numbers committed to conservation, education, and outreach. Check your email for upcoming monthly Conservation Conversations to be held at Stellar Coffee.

Dragonfly Festival will be held on Saturday, September 9. Check the refuge website for more information for the 2023 Dragonfly Festival!



Friends of Bitter Lake NWR Summer General Membership Meeting Saturday, June 10, 2023 at 12:00

Please join us for the summer general meeting with Friends members and refuge staff on Saturday, June 10, 2023. The potluck will start at 12:00 p.m., please bring your favorite side dish or dessert. There will be a presentation by local ornithologist, Patrick Collins, talking all about birds!

Heavy Equipment Training Held at Refuge

Bitter Lake NWR hosted 30 people for regional heavy equipment training in April. Attendees were mostly new U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service employees with a few from Bureau of Land Management (BLM), NWR Association seasonal employees, as well as a couple long-term volunteers. The instructors and attendees came from New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. During the Tier 1 training, attendees learned how to operate agricultural tractors, backhoes, and skid steer. They were able to practice operating the equipment and learn how to load and unload the equipment onto a trailer. Also included was UTV and ATV training. Tier 2 training is excavator, road grader, and scoop loader, or other specialty tracked equipment. The FWS certifications are a requirement, with refreshers on an annual basis. Generally, refuges are remote from conveniences, and the attendees enjoyed the convenience of lodging and restaurant options in Roswell. As a result, the training committee has requested Bitter Lake NWR for future training.



Bird migrations: A time for change by Carl Jacobsen, Wildlife Biologist

One thing I've noticed in my first eight months as Refuge Biologist for Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge is that change is constant. As the hot summer sun beats down, the water is depleted, evaporating and moving on to other parts of the world. But as the late summer monsoons come, water returns, and the wetlands are replenished, swelling in size. These rains change the color of the refuge from golden-brown to bright green and yellow as plants soak up the moisture, allowing Pecos sunflower and goldenrod flowers to bloom. As the temperatures cool and dry conditions return, the refuge returns to golden-brown, though the wetlands remain full due to water flowing from our numerous springs. Other changes are seen through the migration of birds using our wetlands as vital wintering or stopover habitat during their journey south.



Yellow-rumped Warbler chasing a dragonfly by Carl Jacobsen

In the fall, Lesser Sandhill Cranes arrive by the thousands in an awe-inspiring display of abundance. Their loud, cacophonous calls are heard throughout the town of Roswell as they move from their roosts on the refuge at sunrise to feed in the surrounding fields and farms throughout the day. In October of this year, Bitter Lake NWR witnessed a record-breaking number of 34,018 cranes. Most didn't stay long and continued further south to escape the approaching winter. Though crane numbers lowered after the October peak, our wetlands were far from empty. Coming in behind the cranes were tens of thousands of Ross's and Snow geese that dotted the wetlands with their wintery white plumage. Duck drakes of many species showed off their splendid colorations as they fed and courted mates.

More changes are in store as spring arrives. The remaining cranes and geese will return to their arctic nesting areas. Our wetlands will draw down, exposing the mudflats as they shrink in size. However, other bird species will return from their tropical winter retreats to the refuge and utilize this changing habitat. Wading birds such as Snowy Plovers, Interior Least Terns, Western Sandpipers, American Avocets, and Black-necked Stilts stay and raise their young during the summer. Our wetlands are a vital resource for wildlife; regardless of the time of year, or how full or shallow they are, they provide a home (or a hotel) for birds as they move across the Americas. Warblers also pass through the refuge as they migrate north from South and Central America, adding to the changing bird community during the springtime.



Male and female Northern Shoveler flying together by Carl Jacobsen

We are privileged to witness a changing bird community as different species come and go during their migratory journey. Birds, such as the Sandhill Crane, see many changes as they travel from the American Southwest and northern Mexico back to Alaska and the Siberian Peninsula to breed and raise their young.

As springtime arrives in Roswell, look around. What changes do you see?

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation Grant

Bitter Lake NWR was approved for a \$68,000 grant through the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to support two American Conservation Experience (ACE) young adult crews to complete habitat and fencing projects at the refuge. In April, the ACE division from Utah, provided a 6-person crew to help finish a 3-year fencing project to replace old 5 strand barbed wire to make a 4-strand pronghorn friendly fence on the west side of the refuge on the Middle Tract (where the Visitor Center is located). The fencing project culminates 11 miles of special fencing that enables pronghorn to crawl underneath. In May, another ACE crew focused on brushcutting invasive phragmites (tall common reed grass) and treating the cut patches and phragmites and cattail patches on the Hondo River on the South Tract and Wetland Unit 7, where a prescribed burn occurred this past spring. The herbicide treatment of phragmites focused on the control of the vegetation in the water and will improve habitat for threatened and endangered fish and water invertebrates.



ACE crew and refuge staff work to install new fence.

NFWF builds partnerships between many corporations, agencies and individuals who drive conservation efforts across the US. They award funds contributed by Apache Corporation, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Occidental, Shell USA, and XTO Energy to projects across a wide range of landscapes and priority species. One project is within the Pecos River watershed through the Pecos Valley Conservation Initiative, extending from eastern New Mexico through West Texas. The initiative strengthens the health of existing habitats along the Pecos River and its tributaries, protects and enhances some of the last populations of native fish and other aquatic species found only in the Chihuahuan Desert, improves native grasslands, and addresses water quality issues and scarcity concerns for wildlife and agricultural uses. Some of their priority species include pronghorn, Pecos pupfish (fish), Pecos gambusia (fish), Bell's vireo (bird), chestnut-collared longspur (bird), and the Rio Grande river cooter (turtle), among others.



Tightening barbed wire line on a corner brace in Hunter Marsh.

Friends of Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge



Membership Form

- Individual Family
 Student Business

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Mail to:

Friends of Bitter Lake NWR
 4200 E. Pine Lodge Rd.
 Roswell, NM 88201

Friends of Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge
 Membership Form Instructions



Just two easy steps to join:

1. Complete the form on the left side of the sheet and mail it with your dues to the Refuge.
2. Complete the Membership Card below and keep it for your records.

*Membership includes 10% discount at
 Nature Store

(Fold Here)



Friends of Bitter Lake
 Membership Card

www.friendsofbitterlake.org
 (575) 244-6256

Name: _____

Date: _____

*Membership expires 1 year from above date.

Friends of Bitter Lake NWR
4200 East Pine Lodge Road
Roswell, NM 88201