



the Swamp Scene

friends of great swamp national wildlife refuge

ISSUE SIXTY FOUR
NOVEMBER 2020

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*Deadline for March 2021 Issue
March 1, 2021
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PUBLIC LANDS PRIMER—2020

By Kathy Woodward, Friends Board Member

HERE'S A QUIZ: *What do your local playground, Round Valley State Park, the Statue of Liberty, Yellowstone National Park and Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge have in common?*

ANSWER: *Right! They are all public lands.*



Great Swamp NWR: Dorota Jansiewicz

September 26, 2020 (the fourth Saturday in September, annually), was Public Lands Day. Virtually every American has visited public lands and/or waters preserved and protected by local, state or federal government but many of us don't realize how unique these places are or how many benefits we receive.

Local public lands vary greatly from pocket parks in urban areas, to golf courses, ski areas (!), picnic pavilions, historic buildings and community gardens. There are over 10,000 state parks to choose from across the country, with a variety of amenities.

Federal public lands are generally managed by the Department of Interior through three agencies, each with different missions.

The National Park Service administers 61 national parks and more than 300 other units such as National Rivers, National Historic Sites, and National Trails. In addition to conserving natural

features, these areas also highlight cultural sites and historic battlefields. Because the National Park System focuses on preservation and visitation by the public, there are often more facilities, staff, and regulations.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for over 245 million acres—1/10th of the land area of the United States. BLM lands are managed for "multiple use", including grazing, mineral extraction, and timber harvesting as well as recreation and preservation. Camping, hunting, fishing, boating, as well as riding off-road vehicles are permitted on BLM land.

Continued on page 4

FRIENDS BOARD HOLDS VIRTUAL JOINT PLANNING MEETING WITH REFUGE STAFF

Each year, the Friends Board has an opportunity to meet with Project Leader Mike Horne and his staff for a Joint Planning Meeting. We review funding proposals from the refuge as well as project ideas from the board. It's also a good opportunity for some updates and insight into refuge priorities and future plans.

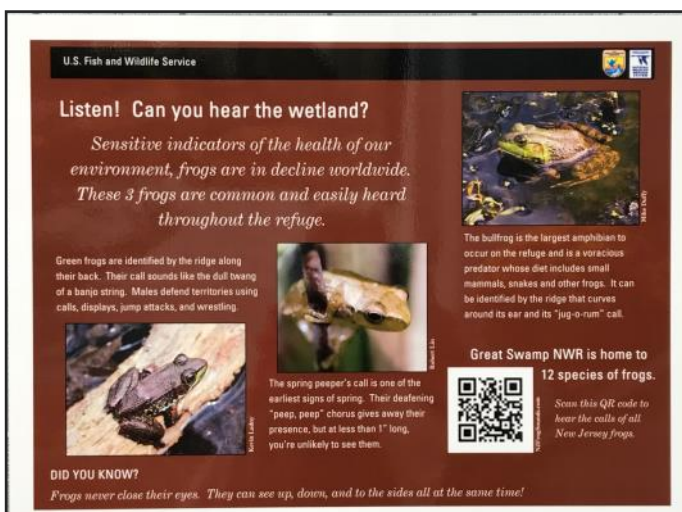
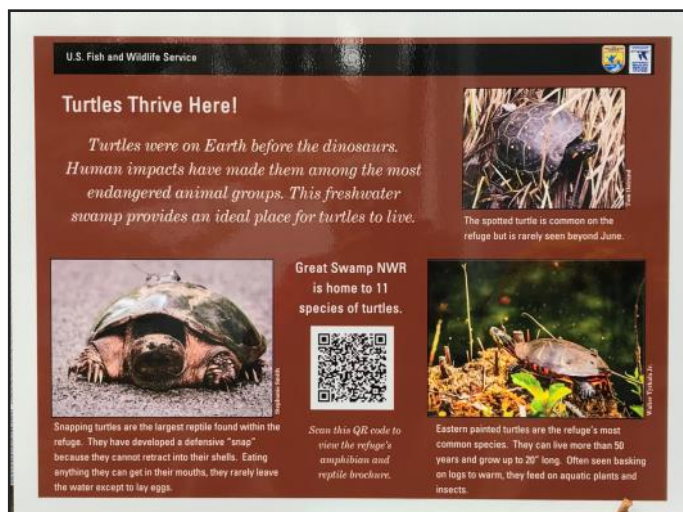
This year, as with so many other events, the meeting was held virtually on October 14. Due to the pandemic, many projects from last year were not completed—many not even begun! We reviewed the outstanding projects and discussed the funding requests from the refuge. Mike Horne left us with a couple of messages for the coming year. Friends should continue to do the good work we've done together. And he

challenged us to look at opportunities to reach the public in new and different ways, with a goal to educate new visitors and continue to support the regulars and repeat visitors. As for the refuge, habitat management is the top priority for 2021 which includes invasive species control, mowing fields, and brushland mowing. Staff will also begin working on control measures to slow the spread of the Spotted Lanternfly on the refuge.

At the November 11 Board meeting, the Friends approved the FY2021 budget of \$101,800. Here are some of the projects from the budget:

- Head-start Turtle Research Support including partial funding for the development of a new Survey123 turtle management database.

- Replacement split rails for North Gate turnaround and Bluebird Parking Lot.
- Removal of some dead and declining ash trees at the Visitor Center; part of a long-term effort to remove the trees and plant new species.
- Interpretive signs and maps for the Wildlife Observation Center.
- Development of an "Agents of Discovery" app to engage young people.
- Invasive species control and habitat restoration: support for the Great Swamp Strike Team, other invasive species control work, purchase of native seed for restoration.
- Maintenance of the Visitor Center exterior.
- Boardwalk and trail maintenance at the Wildlife Observation Center.



Two new signs were developed by the Wildlife Observation Center Interpretive Redesign Team, a group of Friends volunteers led by Great Swamp biologist Marilyn Kitchell. They highlight two of our most iconic types of wildlife—Turtles and Frogs. The photos are from the Friends Photo Contest Library—thank you photographers! The signs are dedicated to long-time volunteer George Helmke, who spent hours at the Wildlife Observation Center showing visitors the wildlife up close through his spotting scope. The plaques read: *In Appreciation For Sharing Nature With So Many Of Us—George Helmke, 1919–2019*. The signs will be placed on the boardwalk leading to the Sportsmen's Blind in early spring 2021. New signs are also being developed for the Chandler S. Robbins Memorial Viewing Platform. Stay tuned!



HEAD-START TURTLE PROGRAM 2020—COPING WITH COVID

Despite the impacts and restrictions caused by Covid-19, the 2020 head-start turtle program was a successful one thanks to a lot of help, flexibility and creativity on the part of refuge staff, volunteers, biotechs, Bristol County Agricultural High School, and of course Dr. Kurt Buhlmann.

Project Leader Mike Horne picked up 18 head-starts in Massachusetts over Memorial Day weekend. Kurt Buhlmann and our seasonal biotechs measured, weighed, and released the head-starts. In August, the 2020 hatchlings began to emerge from their nests and were captured by biotechs, Ryan Rimple and Jim Angley.



In September, Dr. Buhlmann drove 31 tiny hatchlings (photo left) to their winter home in Massachusetts. Teacher Brian

Bastarache and his team will feed and care for them until the students return to the classroom. Our wood turtles will have company as Blandings turtle hatchlings from Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge are also being head-started at the high school. Stay tuned for a spring update. The goal of this program is to restore a self-sustaining, viable population of the state threatened wood turtle at Great Swamp NWR. We are getting closer to that goal every year. Thank you to **everyone** who helped make the 2020 season a success in spite of Covid-19.



Setting up the tanks for the winter at Bristol County Agricultural High School, Dighton, MA

STAFF MEMBER MARILYN KITCHELL IS MOVING ON



We are sorry to say good-bye to Wildlife Biologist Marilyn Kitchell. She is leaving Great Swamp NWR, but not the Fish and Wildlife Service. Her new position is Public Affairs Specialist: White-nose syndrome. In this position Marilyn will be working in External Affairs in the North Atlantic-Appalachian Region and will be leading the national communications effort on white nose syndrome and bat conservation. The Friends wish Marilyn all the best in her new job. As she will be teleworking, we fully expect to see her around the refuge now and again.

BOBCAT SIGHTING CONFIRMED—WE'VE GOT IT ON TAPE!

November 10, 2020 . . . It was a short email from Carrie Springer, Manager of the Somerset County Park Commission's Environmental Education Center (EEC)—but it sure generated a lot of excitement among the Great Swamp partners and in the Great Swamp area.

"Exciting news! We have our first video footage of a bobcat on-site. The bobcat is jumping across the Passaic from the refuge property to EEC property just north of the Great Brook merge."

Check out the video at <<https://youtu.be/nR2UuGXFvMo>> and keep a sharp eye out!



PUBLIC LAND PRIMER *(continued from page 1)*



The Fish and Wildlife Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System. With 568 units, including Great Swamp NWR, across the United

States and territories, refuges include more acreage than national parks, albeit, much of it in Alaska. Originally established to help preserve migrating waterfowl, wildlife conservation drives everything on national wildlife refuges, from the purposes for each refuge, to the recreational activities allowed, to the resource management tools used.

There are two outliers. The U.S. Forest Service, part of the Department of Agriculture, manages national forests which accommodate multiple uses: timber harvesting is as much a goal as outdoor recreation. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), an agency of the Department of Commerce, protects specially designated areas of the nation's oceans and Great Lakes for conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, archeological, scientific, and educational qualities. The federal agencies also administer Wilderness Areas, designated by acts of Congress, and national monuments, created by Presidents under the authority of the Antiquities Act.

The cumulative benefits of these public lands are enormous!

RECREATION AND HEALTH

Visitors take part in activities ranging from hunting and fishing, hiking, paddling to birding, wildlife viewing or nature photography. Whether solo, with a family or as part of group, people get a chance to relax and reconnect with their natural surroundings. Not surprisingly, visitation has increased during the current pandemic.



Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska (Photo: NPS.gov)

CLEANER AIR AND WATER AND A BUFFER FROM SEVERE FLOODING

Wetlands and swamps absorb huge amounts of excess water during floods, which reduces property damage to nearby towns and farms. Coastal wetlands create barriers for the impact of storms, hurricanes and rising sea levels. Trees and other plant life improve air quality and reduce ambient noise.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Public lands help local economies including jobs and tourist spending. Wildlife refuges alone pump \$3.2 billion per year into regions and support more than 41,000 jobs. Land values of homes near public lands are usually significantly greater.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND DIVERSITY

Plants and animals evolved together and the sizable parcels of public lands allow for portions of ecosystems to continue to function. Conservation of threatened and endangered species is a major objective the Refuge System's management program.

PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

People were always drawn to areas of natural richness and public lands protect the places and stories of our country's past.

LIVING CLASSROOM

Children and adults are fascinated by nature. Wildlife observation and interpretation, research, birdwatching, photography, citizen science are compatible uses on many public lands.

(continued on page 5)



Photo: Carole Wilmot

PUBLIC LANDS PRIMER *(continued from page 4)*

Public lands can also be confusing and controversial.

- People frequently don't understand the difference between the intended purposes of different land management systems and assume, for example, that picnicking is available on all public lands.
- When governments have to prioritize funding, budgets are often reduced. Staff are cut, maintenance backlogs grow and useful management programs are discontinued. Lands can appear abandoned and invite vandalism.
- There is unequal access to public lands. Different groups feel entitled to specific lands, like hunters or anglers, while other groups feel unwelcome. Many public lands are not accessible by public transportation.
- Many public lands are threatened by being "loved to death". People crammed on public beaches, or long lines of cars and camper trailers snaking through valleys in Yellowstone happen with greater frequency.
- Entrepreneurs see open space and want to monetize the resources. Balancing commercial businesses, logging, grazing, and drilling with conservation needs is complicated.
- Politically motivated groups, some well-financed and occasionally violent, work to break up federal lands and ostensibly return them to state, local, or private control.
- Climate change and invasive species add to the threats facing public lands.



Round Valley State Park, Clinton Township NJ (Photo: NJDEP)

What can we do to celebrate and protect our public lands?

- ✓ Learn about and visit public lands and follow the rules.
- ✓ Volunteer with an organization that supports public lands, like Friends of Great Swamp NWR.
- ✓ Donate to organizations that support wise policies for public lands, such as the National Wildlife Refuge Association at < www.refugeassociation.org>.
- ✓ Elect officials at the local, state, and federal levels who support maintaining and expanding public lands.

**ONE MORE WAY YOU CAN HELP SUPPORT PUBLIC LANDS
BUY A FEDERAL DUCK STAMP!**



Federal Duck Stamps are conservation revenue stamps; 98 percent of the purchase price goes directly to help acquire and protect wetland habitat and purchase conservation easements for the National Wildlife Refuge System. What a great way to help ensure these public lands thrive and endure for future generations.

Some post offices sell the stamp, or you can send a check for \$25 for each stamp to Friends of Great Swamp NWR, 32 Pleasant Plains Road, Basking Ridge NJ 07920 with a stamped self-addressed envelope. Did we mention the Federal Duck Stamp serves as an annual pass to national wildlife refuges that charge a fee?

Put your stamp on conservation today!

VOLUNTEERING RESUMES ... SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND MASKS BECOME THE NORM

The refuge essentially shut down in mid-March 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic picked up speed. Volunteers were prohibited from doing any volunteer work on the refuge and only staff deemed essential were on site. It was a long few months and our dedicated volunteers were eager to get back to “work”.

In mid-June, with well-defined safety protocols, the first volunteers began to return. It was a slow process, with each volunteer team leader required to document their safety procedures and requirements. All were outdoors and many were solitary volunteer jobs, or activities with a small number of participants. Masks were required, tools were not shared, volunteers drove their own vehicles to work sites, everyone brought their own water and snacks. But volunteers returned eagerly to pick up and continue the many important activities that the refuge depends on including mowing, trimming, trail maintenance and more. Here are some photos from 2020...



Leo Hollein inspects and cleans wood duck boxes. The bluebird nest box monitoring resumed half-way through the season. Duck banding also continued.



The Strike Team volunteers worked as much as two mornings a week to try to catch up with the invasives, which were not bothered by the pandemic.



Look at this lovely native Witch Hazel, one of two planted by volunteers around the Visitor Center. This shrub begins blooming in November!!

VOLUNTEERING RESUMES ... WELCOMING VISITORS & MORE

Volunteering at the Wildlife Observation Center (WOC) has always been a great experience but this fall has been different. We wear masks and put out cones so we can social distance. We have not been able to put out brochures or the “dead things” touch table. But the most outstanding difference is that we have had a record number of visitors. Many were here for the first time and they loved what they found. We also noticed more families and young people. We heard thanks for being here and received more donations than ever. The wildlife did a great job. The frogs and turtles were out. The eagles and ducks were spotted from the Robbins Memorial Viewing Platform, and, of course, the barred owl showed off. It has been a different but good fall season at WOC. *By Judy Schmidt, Friends Volunteer*



The Pervasive Invasive Team killed a lot of invasive plants but had time for habitat restoration work as well. Here they are seeding the Turkey Mound with a native plant seed mix.



The Construction Team went to work on repairing the bridge on the Blue Trail which had been closed for several months due to safety concerns. Lumber was lugged a long distance!



In November, the GardenKeepers finished up an abbreviated season having done a lot of weeding and spread a lot of mulch. In spite of everything, the flowers were beautiful.



We celebrated National Wildlife Refuge Week with a socially distanced “Big Sit” on October 11 at the Overlook, logging 81 species!

TWO KINDS OF HOLLY ARE FOUND AT Great Swamp NWR

Story and Photos by Leo Hollein, Volunteer



American holly branch



Winterberry holly branch

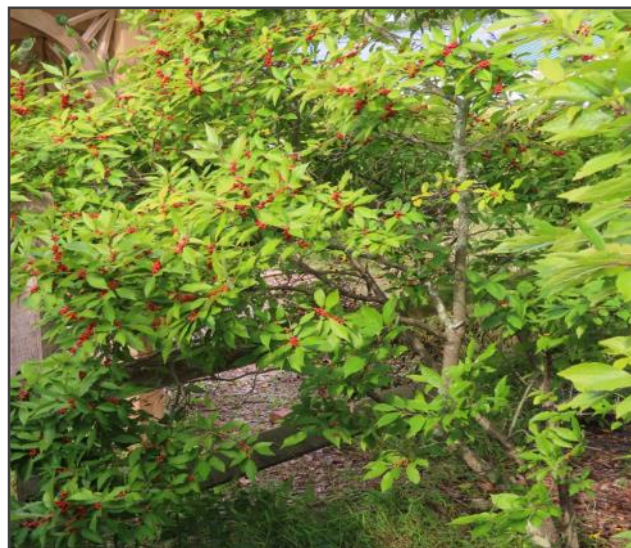
The American holly (*Ilex opaca*) and the Winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*) are native flora that grow in the Refuge. They have some common traits but also differ in significant ways. Both are dioecious which means there are separate male and female plants. Only fertilized female plants will produce green fruit that ripens to bright red berries. It is necessary that there be at least one male plant in the area to allow for cross-pollination by insects. The red berries are eaten by a variety of birds but usually in mid-winter after the berries have been softened by repeated freezing and thawing. They are a valuable food source for birds during the bleak winter months. The berries can last all winter provided they are not consumed.

The American holly, also known as the Christmas holly, is an evergreen tree that grows slowly to about 50 feet tall. It typically grows in the understory in moist forests of the east-central, southeastern, and south-central United States. It is found in sparse numbers in northern New Jersey and is not common on the Refuge, although it does grow well on the White Oak Trail. It is abundant further south on the Gulf and Atlan-

tic lowlands. American hollies are common in the Forsythe NWR (Brigantine) next to Atlantic City in Southern NJ. Its leathery leaves, 2 to 4 inches long, maintain their green color year-round, and are sharply tipped on the margins. The bark is light gray.

The Winterberry holly is a deciduous shrub that loses its leaves every autumn. Winterberry is slow growing with a rounded upright growth habit. It typically grows 3 to 15 feet tall and readily suckers to form large thickets. The leaves are dark green and elliptical, about 2 to 3 inches long. It is common in the Refuge. Winterberry holly is a native over a huge swath of North America from eastern Canada all the way through the southern U.S. and as far west as Texas. In nature winterberries are found in wetland habitats. They are quite shade tolerant, but in very dark conditions,

flowering and fruiting can be significantly diminished, or may not occur at all. White tail deer will browse on the winterberry leaves but do not eat the berries. Berries are not edible for humans but are eaten by overwintering birds such as bluebirds, American robins, mockingbirds and cedar waxwings.



The photo above was taken in the garden adjacent to the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center. Across the path from the female winterberry with its bright red berries is the plain, fruitless male plant. On your next visit to the Visitor Center look for the winterberry holly in the garden.

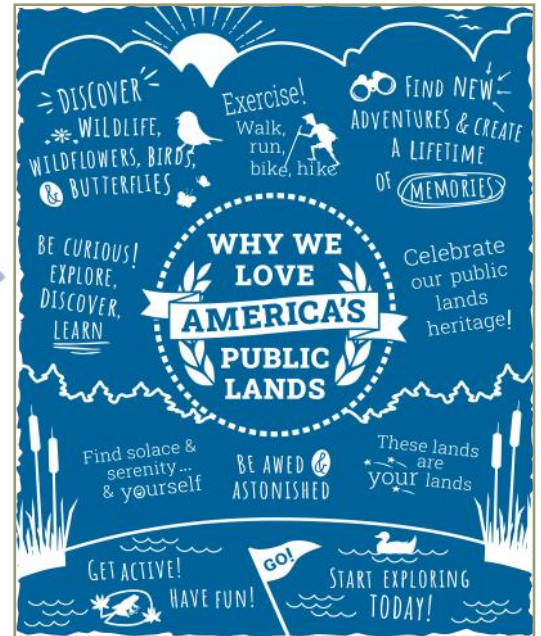
WHY DO WE LOVE OUR PUBLIC LANDS? ASK A VOLUNTEER TO TURN AROUND!

The theme of our 2020 Fall Festival, scheduled for September 26, was “Celebrating Public Lands”. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to cancel, but we decided to celebrate regardless! Volunteers received a tee-shirt designed by our own Friends Board member Jane Bell. Take a look at the original and motivational design from the back of the shirt.



“We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune.”

~Teddy Roosevelt



SAVE VANISHING SPECIES WHEN YOU PURCHASE THIS STAMP

First issued in 2011, this stamp is the first in the history of the U.S. Postal Service to raise funds for conservation. Informally known as the Tiger Stamp, a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the Save Vanishing Species Stamp goes directly to conserving endangered species around the world, including tigers, great apes, sea turtles, rhinoceros, and elephants.

Friends use this stamp on our membership correspondence and other mailings. The stamps are available online from the U.S. Postal Service and the Tiger Stamp is a first class, forever stamp.



THANK YOU SO MUCH!

We gratefully acknowledge donations made to Friends of Great Swamp NWR between July 1 and October 31, 2020.

Your Donations are used to fund a variety of projects and programs which benefit

Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, its wildlife, and its visitors.

MEMORIAL GIFTS

In Memory of Frank and Elizabeth (Betty) Walker

- Thomas J. Curran
- Christopher Curran
- Thomas Gibbons
- Kelley Beahan
- Tom Scarillo
- Kyra and John Hoffmann
- Susanne Kesper
- L. Patrick Dacey
- Susan McCabe

In Memory of John Guibert

- Joseph Novak
- Arthur H. Riker

In Memory of Vincent Clarke

- Melanie Clarke

In Memory of Bill Aiello

- Konni Shier

TRIBUTE GIFTS

Betsy Boles on her birthday

- Andrew B. Boles and Family

INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS

- Phillip Grigg
- Ellen T. Kirch
- Ryan Windess
- Robert and Linda Loveland

CORPORATE DONATIONS

- Johnson & Johnson
- Brother International Corporation
- Active Citizens for Responsible Sustainability (ACRES)



FRIENDS GREAT SWAMP PHOTO CONTEST—A LITTLE DIFFERENT THIS YEAR BUT A GREAT SUCCESS

It takes more than a global pandemic to discourage our dedicated photographers as shown by this year's photo contest. Thank you to the 35 photographers who entered 135 photos in six categories plus one for youth. It was challenging for our three judges to pick the winners from all these entries, but here they are.

You can see all of the Photo Contest entries on the Friends YouTube Channel. Check it out—and be a subscriber.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2oc-gZdOsE>

Get a head start on the 2021 Photo Contest! Rules and entry forms will be available early next year.

What are you waiting for? ***Start Snapping!***



Elena Caravela, 1st Place Plants and Fungi: "Design"

YOUTH: Elisabeth Walker

RAPTORS

- 1st Place: Jim Mulvey
- 2nd Place: Joshua Pelta-Heller
- 3rd Place: Kent Stuart

BIRDS OTHER THAN RAPTORS

- 1st Place: Chuck Hantis
- 2nd Place: Spencer Duncan
- 3rd Place: Robert Lin

POLLINATORS AND OTHER INSECTS

- 1st Place: Jim Duffy
- 2nd Place: Susan Neufeld
- 3rd Place: Karen Kelsey

WILDLIFE

- 1st Place: Chuck Hantis
- 2nd Place: Jim Mulvey
- 3rd Place: Maureen Duffy

PLANTS AND FUNGI

- 1st Place: Elena Caravela
- 2nd Place: Judy Saunders
- 3rd Place: Mike Duffy

LANDSCAPES

- 1st Place: Tom Gula
- 2nd Place: Meredith Martin
- 3rd Place: Elena Caravela



“In November, the trees are standing all sticks and bones.

Without their leaves, how lovely they are, spreading their arms like dancers.

They know it is time to be still.”

Cynthia Rylant, *In November*; Photo Bill Emmanuel, 2019 Photo Contest

FRIENDS OF GREAT SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Friends of Great Swamp is an independent, non-profit organization organized in 1999. Our operations and activities are managed by an all-volunteer Board of Directors. As our mission statement indicates, our focus is Refuge-centric — we support the goals, projects, and mission of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

To become a member of the Friends of Great Swamp, fill out the information on this form, and mail with your check to:

Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
32 Pleasant Plains Road, Basking Ridge, New Jersey 07920

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ **EASTERN BLUEBIRD—\$15-\$49**

☐ **PAINTED TURTLE—\$50-\$99**

☐ **RIVER OTTER—\$100-\$249**

☐ **MONARCH BUTTERFLY—\$250-\$499**

☐ **WOOD DUCK—\$500 +**

☐ **New Member?**

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

You may also join online at www.friendsofgreatswamp.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

E-Mail Address _____

Gift Membership From: _____

(If this is a gift, please include your full name on the line above so we may notify the recipient)

We need more Friends ...

**Become a Friend Today—or,
Give a gift membership to a friend.**

Thank you



Memberships help support the projects and programs at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Membership Benefits

- The Swamp Scene Newsletter.
- A 10% discount in Friends Nature Shop .
- Notifications of upcoming events.
- Satisfaction in knowing you are helping protect wildlife and wild places while safeguarding a national treasure for future generations.

Gift Memberships will include a coupon redeemable at the Friends Nature Shop for a free Great Swamp pin or Great Swamp patch.

Friends of Great Swamp NWR
32 Pleasant Plains Road
Basking Ridge NJ 07920

Non-Profit Org.
PrSrt Std.
US Postage Paid
Permit No. 407
Chester NJ 07930



A HOLIDAY GIFT IDEA

If you are looking for a unique and very personal gift for the holiday season, how about an engraved commemorative brick to be placed on the patio at the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center?

Check out the Friends website for more information and an order form.



Friends of Great Swamp
National Wildlife Refuge

THE SWAMP SCENE NOVEMBER 2020

Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
Is an independent, volunteer, non-profit organization
dedicated to

Promoting stewardship of the natural resources of the Refuge,

Inspiring an appreciation of nature through education and outreach,

Engaging in partnership activities that support and enhance the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System.