In just six months, our members have volunteered over 1,167 hours at a dollar value exceeding $21,239. We Master naturalists have reached more than 3876 people at our various venues and presentations. In my humble opinion we have far exceeded even our own expectations. Awesome.

(Continued on page 3)

It’s hard to believe that it has only been a year since our first “listening session” and a mere 6 months since your officers have been elected.

During that brief period, with a tremendous amount of assistance and guidance from Ken Gioeli, our County Natural Resources Agent at the University of Florida’s IFAS Extension, we now have a quarterly newsletter and our own Facebook page. Our members have become involved in a number of local environmental efforts to include:

- National Estuaries Day
- Lakewatch water sampling at PSL Botanical Gardens
- Lady Beetle education and the release of over 2 gallons of beetles.
- Feral Hog Research to be published in local and state journals.
- Additional training to capture and remove invasive snakes and lizards
- Preparation of a Wildflower Resolution for the County Commission
- Formal presentations at the Manatee Observation and Education Center.
- Formal presentations at the Martin Co Environmental Ed. Center.

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Lagoon Babies

Lagoon Babies, an FMNP Coastal Module 2012 final project, has been rewritten and transformed into a summer camp presentation by Mary White, one of the original project participants, assisted by instructor Wren Underwood.

Lagoon Babies is an interactive activity designed to match up photo fact sheets of juvenile species with photos of the adult species has been incorporated into the program. Lagoon Babies combined with a program on Lionfish by Bill Benton, was recently presented to the Martin County Environmental Studies Center on Indian River Drive in Jensen Beach. Over a two-day period, Mary, Wren Underwood, Marcia Kopp and Bill Benton met with 130 summer campers ages 7 through 13. Marine coloring books and two lionfish handouts were provided to all campers. The campers had lots of questions and enjoyed the interactive activity. Camp administrator, Dianne Pierce has already extended an invitation for us to return to the camp in 2013.

Lesley Vincent-Ryder has invited us to present the Lagoon Babies program at the Manatee Center. We will be working with their campers until mid-August.

"-Mary White, Vice President St Lucie Co Chapter of the Florida Master Naturalists

Sea Turtle Window Clings

The St Lucie Co Extension office in conjunction with UF/IFAS Graphic Arts, St Lucie Co Mosquito Control and Coastal Management and FK Sweet is pleased to make “Sea Turtles Have More Fun in the Dark” window clings available on a first come-first served basis.

Stop the Extension office to pick one up.

Our Mission...

As Master Naturalists, our mission is to act as stewards for our environment, protecting what is critical to the survival of all species including our own. Our mission is to propagate this awareness through the use of research-based information and through teaching events, nature walks, and community activities. Master Naturalists will also engage with others who are striving to protect and nurture our natural resources. The Master Naturalists are affiliated with the University of Florida / IFAS St Lucie County Cooperative Extension and partner organizations including the Oxbow Eco-center, Savannas Preserve, Manatee Observation and Education Center and Wrensong Science & Environment Education.
If you want to get involved in your community, this is clearly a great way to do it.

And now for some personal comments.

From our training, we not only learned the subject matter of our various course modules but equally as important, the ability to evaluate a potential audience and tailor the science to that audience by using our "interpretive skills". These concepts are some of the cornerstones of Master Naturalists and while some of us took the courses for personal development or job-related reasons, it's clear that a good percentage of our members intend to use their training to further the mission statement of our group.

Now the challenge has been issued to those Master Naturalists that want to use their knowledge and skills to involve themselves in the stewardship and protection of the environment and especially to pass on the knowledge gleaned from the study and hard work required to become certified as advocates of the natural world around us.

Will you become an active Master Naturalist? Look at what we've already done as a small group that acting locally and:

Please...
Respond to the Challenge
Bill Benton
President
St Lucie Co Chapter of the Florida Master Naturalists

Great Job Mary, Marcia, Bill, Lesley and Wren!

FMNP Lagoon Babies Team
Feral Hogs and Their Impacts on Aquatic Ecosystems

By K.T. Gioeli and J. Huffman

Florida’s population of feral hogs may now exceed 500,000 animals. They occur in every county in Florida. Some of the highest hog population densities in Florida can be found north and west of Lake Okeechobee in areas with large forested tracts, dense understory vegetation, and limited public access.

It is believed that hogs were first brought to Florida in 1539 when Hernando de Soto brought swine to provision a settlement established at Charlotte Harbor in Lee County. However, it is possible that hogs had been brought to the same site in 1521 by Ponce de Leon. Over the next four centuries, explorers and settlers brought pigs with them as they traveled throughout Florida. Many of these animals escaped from captivity and established feral populations.

Hog wallowing is of particular concern for aquatics managers. Feral hogs will wallow along the shoreline to help cool off in Florida’s warm environment. They also wallow to rid themselves of pests such as fleas, ticks and other parasites. If you are managing ponds, lakes, canals and other bodies of freshwater in Florida, chances are you have seen the damage they can cause. Literally overnight, feral swine can destroy shoreline vegetation and littoral plantings you’ve cared for over the years.

What can be done?

Adaptive management is the key because no one method of feral hog management is 100% effective. You will need to devise a site-specific plan for managing feral hogs.

Mississippi State University published a report in 2011 indicating that hunting (including hunting with dogs) as the sole management technique is not effective for significant reduction of large populations of feral hogs. Instead, they stated that rigorous culling is the most effective method of culling large groups of feral hogs. Pre-baiting the corrals a period of several days will help lure hogs into the trap. Hogs will eventually rise to this strategy making the corral effective.

If culling is not feasible on your site, then adaptive management comes into play. Basically, you will need to do whatever it takes to get the job done while complying with the law and local site restrictions. For example, leg snares and other strategies may be illegal without special permits. Also, the use of firearms and dogs may be prohibited on the site you are managing. Some sites may require a hunting license if you use firearms or archery. However, feral hogs are often considered nuisance wildlife which does not require a license. Check with your local and state authorities.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services requires feral hog trappers to have a Feral Swine Dealer’s ID Card when (1) moving hogs to slaughter; (2) moving hogs to a game reserve; and (3) moving hogs to an approved feral swine holding facility. The ID card is not required if the feral hog is slaughtered on site.

The UF/IFAS St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension Office conducted a survey of public and private natural area managers as well as feral hog trappers to determine what practices are being undertaken for feral hog management. Piggy-seven land managers and 32 trappers and hunters responded to the survey.

Of land managers, 82% were managing properties larger than 200 acres. The majority of respondents were managing public lands. 100% indicated that most of the hog damage was to the major hog damage, followed by wallowing (79%). In addition, 67% of respondents indicated that the practices they currently used were only marginally effective while 25% of them indicated total failure.

There is an obvious need for increased education to help land managers adopt an adaptive management strategy to improve feral hog control.

For additional information and references, please contact Ken Gioeli, UF/IFAS Natural Resource Extension Agent for St. Lucie County, at ktgioeli@ufl.edu

The following publications are available in while they last for official Florida Master Naturalist-related activities.

- Feral Hogs and Their Impacts on Aquatic Ecosystems
- Florida Wildflowers & Butterflies (on order)
- Guide to the Mangroves of Florida
- Florida’s Venomous Snakes
- Florida’s Nonvenomous Snakes
- Turtle Tracks
- Venomous Snakes of the Southeast (Poster)
- Sea Turtle Window Clings

Please contact Ken at ktgioeli@ufl.edu if you need a supply of these publications.

*Indicates quantities of more than 50 are available first come, first served.