



# SUMMER UPDATE

## From the Sanctuary Director

Summer greetings to you from Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary! I hope this update finds you well and enjoying long awaited time with family and friends. We closed the door on our fiscal year on June 30 and I write this update to you full of reflections on a year that (I trust) will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The challenges were endless this past year, but I am so proud of our team's accomplishments at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary amidst a global pandemic.

In addition to being proud of this team, I am also deeply humbled by the generosity of the people who love this special place. Just six months ago we were forecasting a deficit of \$520,000 and were facing the reality of depleting a significant amount from Audubon's reserves. I'm grateful to report that we ended the year within budget. Philanthropy from devoted folks like you,

better-than-expected admissions revenue in the late spring, and strategic cost-saving efforts helped us achieve this incredible feat. I now look toward this new fiscal year with optimism and rejuvenation. **Thank you** for standing by our side and investing in the future of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. I hope you'll enjoy the highlights below of our greatest accomplishments this year because of your partnership. I look forward to celebrating many conservation successes with you in the year ahead.

In gratitude and friendship,

*Lisa*

Lisa Korte, PhD  
Sanctuary Director

# WETLAND EDUCATION

While time spent away from the boardwalk during the pandemic was difficult for people, the respite for wildlife seems to have had a lasting impact as there have been some incredible sightings this past year, including multiple sightings of panthers. What we missed were the sounds of school children chattering with awe and excitement and the enriching voices of our volunteers and program leaders. We are optimistic that field trips will resume in the upcoming school year and are cautiously planning with teachers. The health and safety of our treasured volunteers will always be our top priority and while all public-facing volunteer roles have been on hold since the pandemic, we are looking forward to reinstating those activities and programs as conditions continue to improve.



Boardwalk Repairs

As part of our cost-saving efforts this year, we have been operating without our usual fleet of five to six part-time admissions and sales associates. I am grateful to our public engagement staff for seamlessly pivoting their day-to-day work to support staffing of the admissions desk. Additionally, many other staff members have stepped up to the plate to give us the ability to be open seven days a week. As we continue on our road to financial recovery from the impacts of the pandemic, we will look to increase admissions staffing as funding allows. A few achievements this year included:

**24%** ◀ Increase in combined total revenue in May and June over revenue during the same time frame in 2019 (pre-pandemic). This performance is attributed to a strategic increase in admissions price by \$3 as well as our new online reservation system's ability to facilitate and inspire visitors to purchase a field guide booklet in advance of their visit.

**930 sq. ft.**



◀ Of critical repairs made to our beloved boardwalk. Thanks to our hardworking staff and volunteers, who donated 520 hours of service, the boardwalk received some much needed "TLC." Our sights are now set on a long-term maintenance plan and the best materials to use in the damp environment of the swamp.

In exciting news, the Sanctuary team completed its multi-year Corkscrew Hydrologic Modeling Project, which identified downstream drainage from canals as the greatest cause for lower water levels at the Sanctuary (compared to agriculture and residential use, as well as changes in regional vegetation). We are now working to collect additional data to develop a mitigation plan to restore the Sanctuary’s hydrology. Research Director Shawn Clem, PhD, and Policy Associate Brad Cornell presented these results widely, including to the South Florida Water Management District Big Cypress Basin Board, Collier Board of County Commissioners, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, CREW Land & Water Trust, Audubon Florida Board of Directors, American Water Resources Association, and Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration Conference. In addition, this news was covered by multiple media outlets.



Wood Storks, Lorraine Minnis/  
Audubon Photography Awards

Other accomplishments included:

The research department added a restoration technician to the team, thanks to the Vincent J. Coates Foundation. Jacob Zetzer is leading ecological monitoring and assisting with land management of marsh and prairie restoration sites. An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), also known as a drone, was added to the research team’s toolbox and is proving to be extremely valuable for mapping and monitoring restoration sites.

**64th** ◀ Consecutive year of monitoring the historic Corkscrew Wood Stork colony was completed this year, which saw successful nesting AND fledged chicks! **This is the longest-running continuous data set on Wood Storks in the world.**

The Sanctuary continues to make significant progress toward the restoration of our marsh and prairie wetlands to highly productive and biologically diverse wetland systems. Our goals are to reclaim habitat for wildlife and in the long term, to reestablish the native plant communities that enable natural water functions such as storing and cleaning water. The three-step restoration process includes mechanical removal of willow and other woody shrubs; herbicide spot treatment; and finally, prescribed fire. From May 19 to June 13, the land management team completed vegetation shredding on 207 acres of wetlands that had become overgrown with woody vegetation. With this accomplishment, the marsh and prairie restoration project now stands at:



◀ 867 acres currently under restoration. Our milestone of shredding 1,000 out of approximately 1,800 acres by year 2022 is clearly in sight.

**45** ◀ Are now restored – these acres have completed the restoration cycle, which culminates with a successful prescribed burn.  
**Total acres**

## A \$1.2M grant

Recently awarded by Publix will elevate our restoration work and is enabling us to take on the challenge of the central marsh – an area that presents many obstacles due to soil composition and accessibility for heavy equipment. This critical funding will help us develop an innovative approach in the coming year.