

Stimulus Funds Provide Range of Assistance to Refuges in Carolinas

The children who attended one of the summer camps at North Carolina's Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge this summer knew a lot about how to work a microwave and how to beat a video game. But they didn't know much about black bears, Sherryreed Moore learned.

"We brought in some volunteers from Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge to teach a program on black bears, and the kids loved it," said Moore. "A lot of these kids don't get outside much. Their exposure to nature is sometimes very limited. They were amazed, for example, at how much bears have to eat to store up for the winter."

When they weren't learning about the dining habits of bears, the lucky youngsters in and around Columbia, N.C., where Pocosin Lakes is headquartered, went canoeing, caught fish and crabs, went hiking on trails and learned about the flora and fauna they encountered along the way, used digital cameras to take photos of nature, and even studied how GPS devices worked to help them on a geocaching scavenger hunt.

Sherryreed Moore, who coordinated three camps over the summer, is one of 103 workers in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region's Student Temporary Employment (STEP) program who were funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The STEP workers, who were spread across wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries in 10 Southeastern states, received \$785,500 from ARRA, popularly known as stimulus funds.

STEP students are usually college students, undergraduate and graduate. "It's a good way to introduce people to what we do in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," said Steve Seibert, Southeast Region Refuge STEP Coordinator. "The

program is designed to reach out to young people and show them what the opportunities are working for the Service. The ARRA funding allowed us to reach out to students who don't necessarily come from a background of study in natural resources."

That describes Moore, who spent more than 20 years as a hair stylist, then decided it was time for a mid-career change, and went to college to become a middle school teacher. To get information for a paper she was writing about invasive species, she stopped in at her local wildlife refuge headquarters, Pocosin Lakes in Henderson, N.C. The staff there liked what they saw and encouraged her to apply for the ARRA position so she could help with educational outreach for local students.

"I put together our summer program for the camps, with help from the staff," Moore said. "Then I went all over town, publicizing the camps by putting up flyers. We realized we didn't seem to have too many Hispanic parents who knew about the camp, so I went to some small Hispanic grocery stores, circulating the flyers so everyone knew about the program."

With summer camp over, Moore is now visiting Head Start programs and public schools in Tyrrell and Washington counties in North Carolina, teaching children about wildlife-related issues.

The work of ARRA-funded STEP students varies widely, Seibert says, depending on the needs of the location and the interests of the students. Some perform wildlife surveys, or do maintenance on trails to keep them in good shape for public use. Some workers at beach refuges help with the crucial job of inventorying sea turtle nests.

Sea turtle nests were one of the main assignments for Amy Gutierrez, who has a Masters Degree in Environmental Studies from the College of Charleston. She worked at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge for portions of the summers of 2009 and 2010 as a STEP student, paid partly by ARRA funds.

"I never expected this path," says Gutierrez. "When I went to college, I planned on going to veterinarian school. But I decided I didn't want to spend all my time

working with sick animals.” Getting her Master’s in Environmental Studies pushed her toward helping the environment.

“It’s been such a great experience,” she says. So much so that once she stops being paid to work at Cape Romain, she will continue to work there as a volunteer. “I just love it out here.”

The Recovery Act provides \$280 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which includes \$115 million for construction, repair and energy efficiency retrofit projects at Service facilities, and \$165 million for habitat restoration, deferred maintenance and capital improvement projects. Projects help create local jobs in the communities where they are located and around the United States, while stimulating long-term employment and economic opportunities for the American public. Recovery Act projects address long-standing priority needs identified by the Service through its capital planning process. The agency worked through a rigorous merit-based process to identify and prioritize investments meeting the criteria put forth in the Recovery Act: namely, that a project addresses the Department’s highest priority mission needs; generates the largest number of jobs in the shortest period of time; and creates lasting value for the American public.

For a full list of funded projects nationwide, go to the Department’s Recovery web site at <http://recovery.doi.gov/>. For a list of Service projects, click on the Service’s logo at the bottom of the page or visit <http://recovery.doi.gov/press/bureaus/us-fish-and-wildlife-service>. The public will be able to follow the progress of each project on the recovery web site, which includes an interactive map that allows the public to track where and how the Department’s recovery dollars are being spent. In addition, the public can submit questions, comments or concerns at recoveryact@fws.gov.

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