

[From Spring 2000]

## **Elderhostel Helps Refuge**

At least twice a year an enthusiastic crew of "volunteers" congregates on the refuge to help with a variety of projects from constructing a trail overlook to planting young hardwood trees in the areas damaged by southern pine beetle infestations. These merry men and women are the service elderhostelers, or 'hostile elders', as they often jokingly call themselves.

These hostelers participate in a week-long program which provides an opportunity for retired and semiretired seniors to perform hands-on service projects at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. This program began in the fall of 1997 when crews began work on surfacing portions of the Marsh and Lighthouse trails with gravel. Programs continued in the spring and fall months that followed with projects such as clearing portions of the new environmental education trail, removing abandoned fence lines throughout the refuge, returning the natural flow of water in a portion of Snow Goose Pool by removing a section of the Marsh trail dike and building an elevated boardwalk in its place, planting trees, building information kiosks for new interpretive panels, replacing the Woodland Trail overlook, trimming low hanging limbs along refuge roads and trails, as well as a variety of other projects.

This spring, Elderhostel crews will tackle jobs such as repairing the boardwalk and remodeling the comfort station at the Visitor Center, maintaining tree protectors on the newly planted hardwoods, removing low hanging limbs and winter storm debris along the service road, posting refuge boundary signs, repainting the environmental education wetlab, maintaining pony fence, and removing sand fence that was destroyed by hurricanes and winter storms.

The amount of work accomplished in a week's time by these hard working elderhostelers is amazing and their non-stop enthusiasm results in the accomplishment of many projects which might have otherwise gone undone. As is the case on many refuges, there's always a lot more work to be done than time or staff to do it. The help of crews, such as service elderhostel, are sincerely appreciated by everyone at the refuge.

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