

[From Winter 2004-2005]

## **EE Trail to Get a Face Lift**

Since the Educational and Administrative Center opened, school groups have been pouring onto the refuge to supplement their classroom material with hands-on field studies. The visual appeal of the Bateman Center has renewed the interest of local schools in using the refuge as an outdoor classroom. And the Center's facilities and staff have surely added a touch of class and professionalism to the refuge's programs.

Although many of the educational programs take place outdoors, the schools receive a formal introduction in the auditorium. Providing an orientation to the group ensures that the teachers and students are aware of the goals and themes of the day's activities as well as the mission of the refuge system. With a clear message at the beginning of the field trip, students are able to grasp not only the purpose of their educational field trip but also the purpose of the refuge itself.

The goal of the Visitor Services staff has been to establish an indoor/outdoor learning facility, affording teachers and students an all-inclusive package to learn, experience, and appreciate the natural resources of a barrier island ecosystem. In order to accomplish this goal, the Environmental Education Trail, an area on the refuge reserved solely for organized education groups, needs a face lift to meet the standards that the Bateman Center created. With the help of a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and matching funds from the CNHA, this dream is coming to fruition.

First planned is the placement of an outdoor laboratory/wildlife viewing pavilion on the trail. The screened-in structure will have tables and benches and allow students the opportunity to conduct observations and investigations from their field study - without the nuisance of biting-insects! The pavilion will be tucked into the landscape with minimal disturbance to the habitat (thanks to a wind storm that took down three large pine trees on the trail!). Future plans include the creation of educational signs to reflect the themes highlighted in the exhibit area of the Bateman Center, and learning stations complete with signage and equipment storage lock boxes. Providing a comprehensive and meaningful experience for the educational groups that visit the refuge will better prepare our students to become the stewards of our natural resources in the future.

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