

2013 Public Lands Transportation Scholar Program

Fish and Wildlife Service Application

If there are any questions, please call the TRIPTAC helpline @ (877) 704-5292, or

E-mail helpdesk@triptac.org

Project Information

Project Title: Sustainable Transportation Program for Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

Project Abstract (150 word limit):

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) covers 140,000 acres and is located along Florida's east central coast about 60 miles east of the city of Orlando, FL. The refuge was established in 1963 as an overlay of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) John F. Kennedy Space Center (KSC). The refuge receives over 1 million visitors each year. Visitor facilities include 10 miles of foot trails, a 7-mile Wildlife Drive, over 30 miles of secondary public roads and 4 boat ramps. Merritt Island co-manages 34,000 acres with the NPS's Canaveral National Seashore and share common access roads. The FWS would like to develop a sustainable transportation program with federal, state and local partners that will promote mass transit and non-motorized transportation access opportunities to the Refuge and Seashore.

Project Description (250 word limit):

Please describe the need for a Transportation Scholar at your refuge or hatchery. Carefully describe the project on which the Transportation Scholar would work.

MINWR receives over 1 million visitors per year. Over 80% of refuge visitors utilize motorized vehicles to access the refuge with the remainder using mostly watercraft. In 2011, the Refuge's friends group, the Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA), and the Refuge cost-shared the purchase of a 14-passenger bus. This bus is used 2-3 times a week from November-April to pick up visitors at the visitor center and provide guided interpretive tours of Black Point Wildlife Drive. The Refuge recognizes the potential to use the bus to improve connectivity and access between the City of Titusville and Refuge. By adding such tours, the Refuge can increase access and service for lower income groups, and people with mobility limitations, including the elderly. Additionally, the local transportation planning organization (TPO) and state DOT are conducting a Planning Design & Engineering study for a 15-mile bike path through the refuge that will connect the cities of Titusville and Edgewater. The Transportation Scholar would work with the refuge and local governments to help develop a small sustainable transit program utilizing the refuge bus. The scholar will explore potential partnerships with local established mass transit programs to determine if their buses or trolleys could be utilized to provide increased access to the refuge to a broader group of citizens and tourists. Additionally, the Transportation Scholar will work with local and state agencies to address increased safe access to the refuge to bicyclists by assisting with planning efforts to connect the refuge to regional bike paths as well as developing print, broadcast, and digital materials promoting Refuge access by transit and bicycle.

Project Products and Benefits (250 word limit):

Please describe the potential products you would like to have produced from a scholar. Please describe how unit resources and/or visitors will benefit from this transportation product.

The scholar will develop the following products: 1) route/schedule plan for 14-passenger refuge bus; 2) evaluation of additional transit options for long-term use of existing bus and potential inclusion of new vehicles; 3) analysis of available vehicles, including the 14-passenger refuge bus, lease or purchase of additional small transit vehicles, or use of local mass transit buses on non-scheduled days; 4) evaluation of local target audiences, such as elderly, disabled, or underserved residents, that do not have transportation to the refuge; 5) financial planning for a sustainable funding source for transit service (including long-term cost estimates for various routes and levels of service); 5) evaluation of current planned non-motorized trail projects on and adjacent to the refuge; and 6) financial planning for development of bike/pedestrian trails to and through the refuge. Increased visitor use of mass transit and bicycles (?) will decrease congestion along Black Point Wildlife Drive and other public roads, increasing the quality of the visitor's experience and decreasing safety concerns and wildlife disturbance. Improved mass transit opportunities will increase the level of visitation by local underserved communities (disabled, low income, disadvantage, elderly). In July 2012, a bicyclist was killed by a motor vehicle on the refuge. Currently there are no bike paths on the refuge. Planned bike paths/trails on the refuge could connect up to over 200 miles of adjacent established and planned trails, providing safe opportunities for bicyclists to enjoy the refuge and adjacent National Seashore, while reducing motorized traffic and related environmental impacts to area natural resources.

Project Contributions:

Please describe how the scholar's work will continue to the unit's transportation goals and objectives.

The MINWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) was completed in 2008. This 15-year plan includes a goal of the development of bike paths that reduce wildlife disturbance and promote wildlife viewing. The plan also addresses the benefit of the potential use of concession-operated tram tours on the refuge. The scholar's work will support these long-term goals and assist the refuge as it evaluates the use and cost-effectiveness of maintaining over 30 miles of secondary roads for public use. The use of mass transit could decrease the level of vehicle use refuge public roads, thereby reducing recurring maintenance costs. Increased availability of bike paths could also reduce motorized traffic on the refuge. These projects would address the refuge's transportation goals of improving visitor experience by improving transportation opportunities while reducing impacts to wildlife and adjacent habitat.

Project Partners: Partners include the City of Titusville, National Park Service, NASA, Florida Department of Transportation, Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization, Volusia County Transportation Planning Organization, Space Coast Transit Authority, Titusville Area Chamber of Commerce.

Project Requirements:

Please identify any issues the complex, refuge or hatchery would have in meeting the program requirements listed below

Scholar Program Requirements:

Housing: Host Field Units are responsible for providing housing, office space, any specialized gear, equipment, supplies or materials, including technology needs, to carry out the projects successfully.

Field Unit Contact: A contact from the FWS Unit should be designated to work with the TRIPTAC . This individual will act as a liaison with the TRIPTAC on all aspects of this program and will be responsible for supervising/working with the Scholar while he or she is on the FWS Unit

Housing: Host FWS Unites are required to provide housing or Transportation Scholars. (Some Scholars are professionals with families and/or pets. In the application, indicate the station's ability to accommodate families and/or pets in your housing options. Though housing is required, limits on housing options will not be a factor in the FWS Unit selection process, but will help the Scholar review committee match the appropriate Scholar once FWS Units are selected.)

Office Space: Host FWS Units must provide Transportation Scholars with office space and any supplementary equipment, gear, supplies and materials needed for projects, including technology needs.

Public Outreach: All FWS Units that receive a Scholar will be required to work with the TRIPTAC to produce and distribute a press release regarding the program and the work the Scholar will be doing.

Report: A brief narrative report highlighting the benefits and challenges of the program will be required at the end of project including press clippings, photos, quotes from staff, and any other appropriate supplementary material.

Site Visits: FWS Units may be asked to host on---site visits by representatives from the TRIPTAC

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Housing Availability

Please describe in detail the housing that will be made available to the scholar.

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Will you provide housing on-site or will a stipend be given for the scholar to obtain their own housing off-site?

Housing is available on site. The refuge has a 4-bedroom bunkhouse.

If the housing is on-site, is the housing shared, and if so, what is the turnover rate for the tenants residing in the dwelling

The bunkhouse is utilized by interns and researchers. Interns normally stay 6 months to 1 year. Researchers normally stay 2-4 weeks.

If a stipend will be given, will the stipend be given before the first of the month or will it be given as a reimbursement?

NA

Car Usage and Availability

Will a car be required for transportation to and from the unit and the available housing?

The bunkhouse is ¼ mile from the office.

If the scholar does not own a car, will a car be provided for work related activities?

A car will be provided for work-related activities.

If the scholar does not own a car, can a car be provided for non-work related activities? i.e. going to the grocery store and airport

There is no car available for non-work activities.