Turtle Cove Environmental Research Station

Institutional Effectiveness Report: Calendar Year 2018:

Special (Annual) Report Section Highlights (1/1-18 – 12/31/18)



OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM RESOURCES and I.E. TIME-FRAME

The Turtle Cove Environmental Research Station (ERS) had, by far, it’s most productive year of operation in terms of overall use and productivity and self-generated funding activities in Calendar Year 2018--its 33rd year of operation as a program supporting environmental research, university education and public outreach activities for Southeastern Louisiana University and the surrounding regional community it serves. The station is a member of the multi-national Organization of Biological Field Stations (OBFS), and is a primary means of access to the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Estuarine System via two primary sites: (1) the Boatshed/Classroom/Parking Lot Facility on Galva Canal in Manchac (built by Southeastern in May of 2005), and (2) the main Guest House Field Station/Boardwalk/Caretaker Residence on the south-shore of Pass Manchac on the Manchac Wildlife Management Area (WMA) - accessible only via a 20-minute boat ride from the Galva Boatshed. The historic guest house was originally built in 1908 by Mr. Edward Schlieder, a businessman from New Orleans. The guest house, bulkhead, wharfs, boardwalk and Caretaker Residence all underwent a $6 million FEMA-funded restoration after Hurricane’s Katrina and Rita in 2005. Southeastern has a 99-year lease with a 25-year option with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) to operate Turtle Cove, starting in 1985.

Turtle Cove “resources” for purposes of annual Institutional Effectiveness (I.E.) reporting includes: the two facility sites and related infrastructure; staff (2 full-time positions and two part-time GA positions); fleet of boats, motors and trailers (including 10 skiffs and mud-boats of all sizes, and a 40-ft pontoon boat that can transport 35 passengers), and other equipment and supplies (i.e., 20 canoes/pirogues, water quality probes/kits/dip-nets/field-guides/microscopes, computers, satellite-internet service at both sites, and other tangible field research and educational items), all of which supports the stakeholders and users of Turtle Cove. Physical exhibits (at both Turtle Cove and in the Sims Memorial Library on the Southeastern campus), as well as a new video documentary, help showcase to the broader Southeastern community both the history of Turtle Cove and the history of the Manchac Swamp Ecosystem in which it resides.

HIGHLIGHTS OF USE DATA

Overall use of Turtle Cove resources for research, university education and public outreach activities in Calendar Year 2018 made it the most productive year in the history of the station, primarily due to unprecedented use for public outreach activities. The total number of different individuals to use Turtle Cove resources, as well as the number of user-days of activity, both surpassed the 3,000 milestone for the first time. For CY 2018, use of Turtle Cove resources for **research** was 436 user-days of activity (a 17.42% decrease from the previous year and now the 14th highest year on record). **University education** use (821 user-days) for CY 2018 decreased 8.27% from the previous year, but is still the third highest year on record. The **public outreach** component increased a dramatic 67% over the previous year to 2,124 user-days of activity, by far the most in the history of the station. Overall **total** user-days of activity for all categories totaled 3,381, a 25.5% increase over the previous year.

In summary for CY 2018, Turtle Cove resources supported 127 different and distinct groups of users (up 18.69% from CY 2017), totaling 3,028 different individuals (up 30.35% from CY 2017) and 3,381 user-days of activity (up 25.45% from CY 2017). The n*umber of different groups*, *number of* *different individuals*, and *number of user-days*, respectively, were as follows: RESEARCH (*24, 265, 436*); UNIVERSITY EDUCATION *(31, 718, 821*); and PUBLIC OUTREACH (*67, 2045, 2124*). The history of use of Turtle Cove, starting in FY 1984/85 (fiscal years originall used for data collection), is presented in Figure 1 below, in “user-day” format.

Note: Hurricane’s Katrina/Rita (2005), Gustav/Ike (2008) and Isaac (2012) resulted in long term closures of the station while under repair, although activities with boats continued as available.

The breakdown of use among categories over the entire 33-year operating history of Turtle Cove is presented in Figure 2 below:

SATISFACTION SURVEY

Our annual year-end “satisfaction survey” was again overwhelmingly positive in that 28 out of 30 respondents gave us a score of 5 out of 5 possible points (scale of 1-5, with 5 being VERY SATISFIED) for “overall satisfaction with Turtle Cove resources” (two of the 30 answered “4”). These figures are comparable to all prior year’s annual survey results which started in 2012.

SELF-GENERATING FUNDS and MANCHAC/TURTLE COVE ARTIFACTS EXHIBIT

More than ever, Turtle Cove continues to emphasize generating funds from sources external to the university’s annual operating budget, and even though CY 2018 did not include a “formal fundraiser” event, it still produced the largest self-generated funding in the history of the station at $30,201.50 (slightly more than the previous record set in 2017 which did include a formal fundraiser event). This surprisingly high dollar figure was due in large part to two substantial contributions (one for $10,000 and another for $2,000) made by donors who were inspired to do so after viewing the newly released documentary video “Troubled Waters: History of the Manchac Swamp Ecosystem and Turtle Cove” and from the work done by the station in general. The video was produced by Turtle Cove staff and the Southeastern Channel at a cost of $1,500 to document – and further illustrate --the “Manchac/Turtle Cove Artifacts Exhibit” that was produced the previous year. The video also concludes with a passive theme of fundraising support for the station and its programs, which is obviously having a positive impact!

Non-fundraiser donations and other activities that allow for on-going self-generation of funds continue to be an ever-increasingly important pillar of support to the total Turtle Cove funding structure. Amounts of funds generated in 2018 include: gas and facility-use donations for researcher use of Turtle Cove equipment and facilities ($6,400); donations received from field trip activities for university education activities ($2,140), and individuals like the donors mentioned above as well as K-12 school groups and other general outreach groups that are able to provide support for their field trip experiences ($20,018), and; sales of Turtle Cove-specific logo merchandise ($350). Finally, since 2014, annual transfers are made from three Turtle Cove-specified endowments managed by the Southeastern Foundation that totaled approximately $1,293.50 last year. Figure 3 below is a graph that represents Self-Generated funding at Turtle Cove over the past 11-year period from all sources outside of the annual operating budget.

BOATING SAFETY

Finally, and as always most importantly, another year of work was conducted in a water based-environment at Turtle Cove without incident in terms of health and safety issues (i.e., “boating safety”) for all users of Turtle Cove resources, including university faculty, staff and students, as well as others from the surrounding communities who participated in our programs.

STATUS/NEEDS/CONCLUSION

Turtle Cove has steadily increased its productivity over time and has become an efficient and sustainable entity given a time of on-going state-wide budget constraints that started during the 2008 recession. Three positive purchases from 2018 included the first boat motor in 8 years, a new water well at the main guest house, and substantial repairs to the fleet– all extremely important for the viability of the station. Major needs in the short-term include continual repairs to the aging fleet and all facilities. New outboard motors for the Pontoon Boat (2) and at least two skiffs will be needed in the coming years (approx. $10,000 per motor). And a recently discovered need we may need to address sooner rather than later is the now 10-year old steel bulkhead at Turtle Cove from salt-water corrosion. Overall, Turtle Cove is perhaps best described now as being a very sustainable program. The holistic operation (facilities, staffing, funding, productivity, etc.) is at or near peak efficiency and sustainability levels, and we look forward to many years of continued service for all of our stakeholders. The staff of Turtle Cove considers itself stewards of this well-known “gem of Southeastern” – a facility steeped in history, rich in community pride, and now, more than ever, an on-going staple of environmental research and education in our region. Visit our website at: www.southeastern.edu/turtlecove.