

# CONNECTING YOUTH AND NATURE

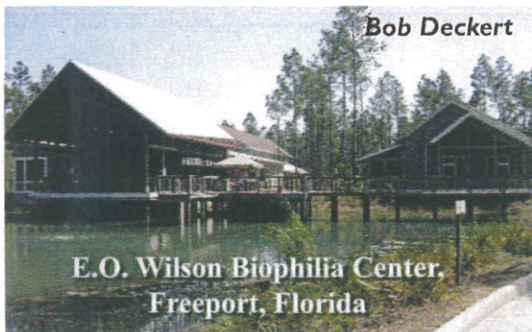
By Tom Daniel

*On average, 140 students from five public school systems attend classes at the Wilson Biophilia Center every school day...*



Nancy James

Longleaf Trail hiker checking out local residence in hollow tree. The resident "a lizard" was inside checking out the hiker.



Bob Deckert

E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, Freeport, Florida

On April 9th we were blessed with perfect spring weather and over 20 Choctawhatchee chapter volunteers for the E. O. Wilson Biophilia Center Open House. Led by Bob Deckert, FTA volunteers performed multiple duties but took primary responsibility for leading nature-based interpretive hikes on the Center's trails.

In the past, the Center has been closed to the public except for open house events. However, beginning

in June it will be open for limited hours Friday-Sunday. It is a world class facility that offers interpretive exhibits, hands on contact with animals, ecosystem-based video presentations, as well as a trail system through areas undergoing restoration. It provides a nature-oriented educational learning facility to schools. On average, 140 students from five public school systems attend classes at the Center every school day. FTA has repeatedly provided volunteer labor for landscaping, development of the Center's nature trail system and open houses.



Bob Decker

Longleaf Trail Hikers



Before ground was broken for the building, FTA and the USDA Forest Service recognized they shared the Center's goals of educating youth about the natural world and began a partnership with the Center and Nokuse Plantation to promote these values. The Center is located on the 49,000-acre Nokuse Plantation in south Walton County near Freeport. The Plantation's long term goal is to restore the longleaf pine/wiregrass ecosystem. A significant part of this process has been the relocation of large numbers of gopher tortoises and the restoration of habitat for black bears. The only public access to the Nokuse Plantation is the 25-mile section of the Florida National Scenic Trail which traverses the Plantation between the Choctawhatchee River and Eglin Air Force Base.



www.wholeo.net

Center Turtle Trail Hikers

Hikers gather for the day's first Longleaf Trail hike