



# TURTLE TRACKS

FALL 2020

## ***ESC Teacher Transition***

by Michelle Fowler

The end of the 19-20 school year left our community with uncertainty regarding the opening of the 20-21 school year. Preparing for potential closures, ESC teachers devised plans on bringing our authentic curriculum to the schools. We thought if they could not come to us, we could go to them. We even planned how we could teach our lessons at ESC to face to face students following district safety guidelines and to remote learners through Zoom.

Within a few weeks of our summer, ESC teachers were told the Center would remain closed until further notice. ESC teachers would temporarily be placed at Port Salerno Elementary as intervention teachers. During these unprecedented times, we had no choice but help PSE.

Our 20-21 school year began with a warm welcome from PSE administrators, teachers, and staff. As intervention teachers, we support our assigned fifth grade teacher and class by facilitating and teaching lessons, monitoring Zoom sessions, and working with small groups

of students. Throughout our day, we visit second and fourth grade classes to teach science and math lessons and help as needed. During that time, we are grateful to be able to teach our ESC lessons, which is a high point of our day.

Late September we received exciting news from our school district. Starting in November, we will be going to schools throughout the county to teach our program. Each ESC teacher will teach a full day of ESC instruction to a class in the same grade level. This also allows the team of classroom teachers to have time to meet and plan together. We are extremely thankful for the opportunity to take our dynamic program to our schools and know the students will be excited too.

Our community is anxiously waiting for the Environmental Studies Center to open its doors again. Hopefully, by the time you are reading this or at least in the near future, our ESC teachers will have returned to the Center to teach our awesome curriculum to our students, who are stewards of our environment thanks to ESC.

## **Congratulations to Marilyn Gavitt on her retirement!**

**Marilyn Gavitt came to the ESC as its administrator in 2014. She began her career in Martin County as a teacher at JD Parker. She moved to Hobe Sound Elementary and then to Felix A. Williams Elementary before working in the Martin County School District's technology department. Marilyn entered the doors of the ESC with a vision and 6 years later retired with her goals for the Center accomplished.**

**From new carpeting, newly painted walls, new furniture and a more organized space, the front office, staff room and media room were all given a fresh new look. That look continued into the classrooms, and with staff input, new and exciting hands-on learning activities and displays were added. Teachers love the reaction of the students as they enter these rooms to learn more about the environment.**

**Thanks to Marilyn and her staff, the Wet Lab now hosts a new mangrove display, new tanks, and a new filtration system. Students and visitors will now be able to identify plants and trees on campus with the new, durable signage. Joey, the alligator, now has a home surrounded by engraved bricks. Marilyn brought her technology knowledge and experience to the Center and the staff and students now enjoy up-to-date equipment and programs. There are not many places to look on campus where you don't see Marilyn's creative touch.**

**Marilyn worked tirelessly with the staff, the Council, the Martin County School Board, and the community to see her dreams for the Center come to fruition. The Council applauds her for her efforts and wishes her a happy retirement!**



***Please consider leaving a legacy by naming the Environmental Studies Council in your estate plans.***



## The Environmental Studies Council, Inc.

2900 NE Indian River Drive  
Jensen Beach, FL 34957  
Council Office: (772) 219-1887 x 121  
Center Office: (772) 219-1887

### Mission Statement

To protect and enhance the education programs of the Environmental Studies Center and to promote and extend environmental awareness through community education.

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## From the desk of the President

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Recently, I was sent a video montage of summer days at Camp WET by one of Camp WET's past teachers. The video features summer camp at its finest: seining, trips to the beach searching for sand fleas, snorkeling at Bathtub Beach, yo yo fishing off the dock at the House of Refuge, and so much more.

The montage was sent to a group of us past Camp WET counselors. Some I knew well from my days at the ESC, but others were my successors, counselors during summers where I had already graduated. We're all bonded by our experiences at the ESC, as are most students in Martin County, regardless if they're past camper, counselor, or student on a field trip. The ESC has that lasting effect. The memories made and lessons learned through time spent at the Center are some of the most prolific memories for anyone that has walked its sea creature painted halls.

The Center is currently still closed due to the coronavirus, though we're hopeful for a reopening soon. Just because the Center is closed, however, doesn't mean that there isn't anything going on! In this issue of Turtle Tracks, we hear from the teachers themselves some of the improvements and new additions that have been made to the Center. Ms. Fowler also shares what the teachers are doing while they're not at the Center.

I hope you enjoy this issue. Perhaps it will serve as a reminder that, despite all that is going on in the world, the Center is still here with its walls chocked full of memories and, with the community support, will be here long into the future.

Best wishes,  
Kara Muzia

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## MEET PITTMAN

by Heather Arnold

Ever wonder what baby alligators do after they are born? Well we have a young alligator in the Red Door here at the Center. Pittman is a Florida alligator that was born almost a year ago. We have a tank in the Red Door room and this is where our young alligator, Pittman, lives. When students eventually come back to the Center, for their yearly field trip, they will get to see how young alligators swim among the roots of trees that are growing in the water. Pittman is a very feisty alligator who makes his presence known the moment you walk in the door of the Red Room. He swims right over to the side of the tank and expects to be fed. Sometimes if you are quiet when you walk in you may catch him resting on a branch of the tree warming himself under the heat lamp. But the best thing is that you can observe Pittman swimming among the roots and resting on the bottom of the tank. There are also times that the students will see how alligators float in the water. Most of Pittman's body hangs in the water while his eyes and nostrils stick up out of the water. Pittman is anxiously waiting for the students to come back to the Center to visit him!

# ***New tank updates for Pittman the Alligator***

by Brook Bullock

**T**he filtration and the lighting in Pittman's tank are highly specialized for the health of the inhabitants. BUT, there's more to it! It's also an educational tool for our students.

Let's start with the lighting. He has two specialty light bulbs that operate on a timer. Pittman needs normal lighting, just as if he was in the wild.

One is a 28 watt 5.0 UVB lamp. The other is a 150-watt heavy duty, slash proof, halogen basking bulb. These bulbs give Pittman the UV energy that he would receive if he were out in the wild! In addition to the bulbs that supply the correct UV rays and keep him warm, there is an 800-watt titanium heater with a digital thermostat controller to ensure he's never cold.

Super cool for our students is the filter for the tank. There is an overflow box in the back which allows water to flow down to the filter. Water is filtered through various mediums BUT there is also a section, visible and lit, with living plants and organisms. This section replicates a natural filtration system in nature. Students are able to observe this when visiting Pittman.

So bottom line, Pittman lives a life of luxury and our students observe many life science standards when visiting the ESC! Win, win for everyone!



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## **BIO CORNER**

by Kara Muzia

It's snook season here in Florida. Many of our local anglers have been awaiting this moment for months.

I like to call snook the true Florida fish, even though they're not just found here. Why? Because snook, like many of us Floridians, really can't handle the cold. In fact, their season opens and closes based on two things: their breeding habits and winter.

Snook season runs September 1 through December 14 and then again February 1 through May 31. The gap December through February is to give snook a break during some of the colder parts of our winters. If the water temperature dips below 60°F, they are more susceptible to cold stuns and may not survive. Personally, I know many Floridians (myself included) that are breaking out the winter parkas below 60°F. Snook don't have this option!

Many anglers wonder why regulations state they may only keep fish that are 28-32 inches. The answer lies in their interesting breeding cycle. Snook are protandrous hermaphrodites, meaning the majority of snook are in fact born male and, as they grow and age, will eventually transition to female. Though not all males will transition to females, most do. They're not alone in this transition; other marine creatures will make the flip including clownfish and even oysters! The slot size ensures that bigger, breeding females remain in the spawning population with their smaller, male counterparts.

Next time you are out on our local waterways, keep an eye out for this truly Florida fish!

Populations of all three species of turtles have increased over the last thirty years due to remarkable conservation efforts. Sea turtles still have a long way to go and conservation efforts need to continue to ensure the survival of these extraordinary creatures.

**S**tay up to date!

*We may not be hosting in person events at the moment, but please check [www.escmc.org](http://www.escmc.org) regularly and follow us on Facebook "Environmental Studies Council" to stay up to date on the latest news and events. And as always, you can donate online to support the Environmental Studies Center in Martin County. We hope to see you all soon!*

FALL 2020

Environmental Studies Council, Inc.  
2900 NE Indian River Drive  
Jensen Beach, FL 34957

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## Wish List

The Environmental Studies Center needs your support! The Center has a current need for:

- *Scholarships for students to attend Camp*
- *Critter food for our residents*
- *Enjoyment books are on sale now! You can purchase them at the Center for only \$35 to benefit our programs*

If you are interested in supporting any of the above opportunities, please contact us at [info@escmc.org](mailto:info@escmc.org) or by calling 772-219-1887 x121. Or stop by the Center - we'd love to see you!

## ***Make a Difference, Join Us!***

**E**ach and every child can make a difference in the world if we educate them. The Environmental Studies Center can be one of the vehicles to accomplish this. The wonders of nature fascinate children from their earliest days. They learn how to treat their surroundings, animals, plants and people gently and lovingly. It is truly a learned skill. Our Council, a not-for-profit corporation in support of the Martin County School District's Environmental Studies Center, does just that. We are here to preserve and enhance the environmental education of all Martin County schoolchildren. Join us in our efforts to educate, a membership envelope is enclosed in this issue of Turtle Tracks. Check out our website for more information on how you can get involved, together we can make a difference!

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## ***Did Your Membership Expire?***

**H**ave you renewed your membership to the Environmental Studies Council? We need your support!

**To sign up, log on to [www.escmc.org](http://www.escmc.org) or call (772) 219-1887 x 121**

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