

PEACE RIVER WILDLIFE CENTER
STRATEGIC PLAN-----FISCAL YEAR 2015-2016

MISSION

The mission of the Peace River Wildlife Center (PRWC, the Center) is to treat and rehabilitate injured and orphaned Florida native wildlife with the exception of venomous snakes. Although the primary goal is to return creatures to their native habitats, there are always a few that are unable to be released due to physical limitations. PRWC provides a permanent home for these birds and mammals. The Center also seeks to create, through education and outreach, an environment where people and native Florida wildlife may co-exist.

BACKGROUND

The Peace River Wildlife Center is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization dedicated to the rehabilitation of injured and orphaned native wildlife, including birds, reptiles and land-dwelling mammals. The Center has been serving Charlotte County and the surrounding jurisdictions since 1982. The Center offers a high level of skilled care provided by a veterinarian and trained wildlife rehabilitation specialists with years of experience in wildlife diseases and trauma. The primary goal of the Center is to return rehabilitated wildlife back to their native habitats and to increase public awareness so that wildlife may flourish in a safe environment.

Most rehabilitated wildlife are able to be returned to their environs. Those who are unable to be released are cared for at the Center for the remainder of their lives. These creatures, which number approximately 125, are displayed at the Center and are used to educate students and visitors about the importance of protecting Florida wildlife.

The Center facilities include a hospital/administration building, a surgical/isolation ward, a laundry and storage building, a gift shop, landscaped habitats for our resident wildlife and a spacious open air compound for our brown and white pelicans, Sandhill cranes and cormorants.

Although rehabilitation is the priority, education is vital to the Center's mission. The Center is open every day of the year for visitors and tours. Elementary school students, individuals, civic associations, private groups, and organizations are taught about conservation and Southwest Florida wildlife by trained volunteer guides, many of whom are certified Florida Master Naturalists. PRWC also participates in local festivals and events at which presentations often include one of our wildlife ambassadors. The goal at these events is to help participants enjoy, appreciate and nurture our precious resources and wildlife.

The Center also promotes tourism for the City of Punta Gorda and Charlotte County. It is rated the number one tourist attraction by Trip Advisor and has been featured in Florida Weekly as a destination “Must Do.” Over 65% of our visitors travel from outside the area to visit the Center. PRWC was the recipient of the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce “Not for Profit Business of the Year” award in 2013.

Although the footprint of the Center has not expanded, there have many ongoing improvements to the facility. New and larger water features for the shore birds and pelican habitats, enhanced landscaping, and an updated gift shop are among some of the upgrades.

The Center employs an Executive Director/Veterinarian, Operations Manager, a part-time secretary and four rehabilitation specialists. The administrative costs are less than 20% of the total operating expenses.

The Center benefits significantly from a dedicated group of volunteers whose numbers increase from 70 to 100 during the season. Volunteer opportunities include habitat cleaners, hospital assistants, tour guides, maintenance workers, office helpers, gardeners, education and outreach specialists, greeters and gift shop attendants.

The updated gift shop continues to improve in quality and selection and offers a museum-like atmosphere. Items are reasonably priced and appeal to all age ranges. The gift shop proceeds, together with donations from visitors, have greatly contributed to the Center’s financial stability.

The Center markets itself and its services through “local knowledge” (PRWC has been established in Punta Gorda for over 30 years), advertising, social media, television broadcasts and printed media. Targeted advertising includes publications at the local airport, popular magazines, inserts, and weekly newspapers. In addition, the Center has enjoyed national and international exposure from visitors who travel from outside of Florida, both inside and outside of the United States, to vacation in Southwest Florida. The rescue, rehabilitation and release of a bald eagle, which was named Phoenix, brought the Center national exposure.

The Center currently has nine Board members with diverse backgrounds. Recently, an attorney and CPA were added to the Board. Other members include a naturalist, an individual with 23 years of experience leadership positions in not-for-profit agencies, a human resource specialist, a grant writer and a bank executive. The Board was also strengthened by including its Executive Director as a non-voting member. In addition to donating their time, a number of Board members also make financial contributions to the Center.

MANAGEMENT SUCCESSION PLAN

The Center employs two individuals that are management level. These include the Executive Director and the Office Manager. These individuals have been cross trained and have strong knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of both positions. In the likelihood that one or both positions become vacant, the Board has experienced members that are capable of filling these roles until replacements are hired. The Board President has 23 years of experience as a Director at three not-for-profit agencies. Her past

responsibilities include supervision of staff, budgets, programmatic and policy compliance, grant writing and administrative duties.

In addition, the Board has members with backgrounds in human resources and finance that are poised to ensure that daily administrative operations continue through any position vacancy transition.

GOING FORWARD

Challenges:

The PRWC was advised in early 2014 that it was located on a private developer's property. The Center has occupied this space for almost 20 years and has been leasing it from the City of Punta Gorda. Neither the Center nor the City were aware of this. During the past 15 months, the Board has explored numerous properties for the purpose of relocating the Center; however, these options were found unsuitable for various reasons. Some of the properties were difficult and costly to develop; others were either in isolated areas or were not zoned to meet the Center's needs.

During this period the Board has retained the pro-bono services of a prominent law firm in Punta Gorda. Through its attorneys, the Board hopes to negotiate the purchase of the property it now occupies. Concurrently, the Board has continued to meet and work with City officials who are poised to relocate the Center in Ponce de Leon Park where it is currently located. At this time, the Board is confident that the Center will either remain at its current location or move within the Park.

Based on these factors, the Board plans to mount a capital campaign in the fall of 2015. The cost to replicate the current footprint is estimated to be \$500,000 to \$1,000,000. If the Board is able to purchase the property, the cost is estimated to be \$475,000. This amount represents the purchase price of the property and construction of a 2500 square foot structure. This structure will contain an educational center, larger hospital and surgical wards, office space, break room, Board/meeting room, laundry and storage room and a gift shop.

FUNDRAISING PLAN

Continuity of Operation Plan

The Center will continue to pursue an aggressive marketing campaign to ensure visibility in targeted geographic areas. As a base, it will continue to rely on visitor donations and purchases in the gift shop. These two sources have historically supported the operation of the Center. However, it will also explore ongoing support from private, public and corporate grants to augment this revenue stream. The Center will continue its annual fundraising events separate from any capital campaign activities. Upon the advice of the Executive Director, the Board has voted to establish a separate account which contains one year's operating expenses.

Capital Campaign

The Center's capital campaign will incorporate social media, television ads, printed media, aggressive campaign ads in popular magazines, weekly circulars and grant writing. There are numerous organizations poised to assist PRWC and it is hopeful that Giving Partners will contribute to this endeavor. Among the organizations expressing their financial or marketing support are: Team Punta Gorda, Charlotte Community Foundation, Rotary Club, Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce, the Parrotheads, civic organizations, local businesses and private donors.

Grants

Specific Board members will investigate corporate, governmental, and private foundation grants that support the Center's mission and its facility's rehabilitation/relocation goals. Application timeframes, eligibility criteria, funding goals, data requirements and budgetary information will be collected and analyzed.

Social Media

Staff will work with the Center's webpage consultant to create a social media profile that will have universal appeal. This will include photos and a short video that will be marketed to Fan pages, friends, Facebook groups, Tag fans and other appropriate venues.

Media

The Center will include information about its capital campaign in local and surrounding newspapers, popular magazines, newspaper inserts and local businesses. Staff will also use the Center's current and past donor lists for this purpose.

Civic Groups and Organizations

Once a rendering of the Center's new facility is completed, a marketing campaign will be designed to include presentations to large and small civic associations and organizations within and outside of the Punta Gorda area. We will employ the assistance of the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce and Team Punta Gorda to identify new and potential large donors.