



ANNUAL REPORT

2017

hello

Rhinos, cheetahs and okapi, and the places they live in the world, are facing serious threats — often suffering at the hand of humans. A year is simply not enough time to completely turn the tide to ensure their safe future, but I am proud to say that in 2017 the White Oak team has once again stepped up to the challenge.

From the expansion of our property to more than 16,000 acres to doubling summer camp capacity and protecting greater numbers of endangered wildlife, our work in 2017 reflects our commitment to the mission of White Oak: saving endangered wildlife and habitats through sustainable conservation breeding, education and land stewardship.

Throughout 2017, the White Oak team has showcased our commitment. We believe that every member of the White Oak Team, whether working in wildlife, hospitality, education, maintenance, or administration, can impact conservation. This core belief extends beyond White Oak, as we believe that every individual, regardless of age, career, or interests can make daily decisions to help protect wildlife and wild places.

As you read our 2017 Annual Report, I hope you are inspired to infuse conservation into your own life. Conservation is about people, and it is our goal to engage you toward conservation action as you visit White Oak and follow and support our work. We invite you to join together with us as we continue to create a better outlook for wild animals and the environment.

— **STEVE SHURTER**

Executive Director

White Oak Conservation Foundation



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acting locally while thinking globally



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connecting people to conservation



18

saving species for future generations



24

white oak conservation foundation



*acting
locally while
thinking globally*

MAKING A DIFFERENCE AT HOME AND ABROAD

White Oak's mission is to save endangered wildlife and habitats through sustainable conservation breeding, education, and responsible land stewardship. This is a theme that runs throughout White Oak's history, beginning with the founding of White Oak Conservation by the Gilman family, the development of the wildlife center in the late 1970's and today under the Walter family. Across the decades, White Oak has conserved endangered species and habitats in places like Florida, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia. Whether it's a 5,000 lb. rhinoceros or a one-ounce sparrow, our mission is to conserve them for the next generation.

In the following pages of White Oak's 2017 Annual Report, you will learn how White Oak has worked to achieve its conservation mission. We feature highlights from our conservation teams, including significant births, education achievements, and sustainability practices. We also dive into the past and showcase how we got to where we are today.

We hope that you consider joining us in our conservation efforts at White Oak and beyond!



16,750
WHITE OAK'S
CURRENT LAND
HOLDINGS



the ever-changing landscape of white oak

White Oak has acquired more than 5,000 acres of land bringing the current amount of White Oak holdings to 16,750 acres, or just over 26 square miles, including several miles along the beautiful St. Marys River.

With vast landscapes comes great responsibility, and White Oak is dedicated to responsible stewardship of natural areas in northeast Florida. Our land conservation efforts include the use of prescribed fire to help improve biodiversity and reduce wildfire risk. Since Florida is the lightning strike capital of the United States, fires have occurred naturally here for millennia, and many plant and animal species depend on regular fire to maintain a healthy habitat.

White Oak is also committed to responsible land stewardship on our golf course, which is home to many native Florida species! The golf course at White Oak uses innovative methods of turf care while maintaining the course to standards expected by our conservation-minded players. Adherence to Best Management Practices (BMPs) and consultation with experts in turf care and sustainability helps ensure we responsibly manage the golf course with Florida's natural resources in mind.

WHITE OAK CURRENTLY PRACTICES THESE BMPs

- ◆ Limited blanket chemical applications by using spot treatments
- ◆ Use of slow-release fertilizers which reduces application frequency and runoff
- ◆ Natural growth buffers along lake banks creating habitats for native birds and insects
- ◆ Reduced amount of turf areas
- ◆ Enhanced native plantings in natural areas
- ◆ Water reclamation for turf irrigation.



white oak goes batty

White Oak has gone to the bats! There have always been bats living in White Oak. Over the years, we have found them in attics, barns and small bat houses provided for them around the property. We welcome these bats because they are one of nature's best insect controllers. The little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), a common species throughout North America, is known to eat a wide variety of insects, including mosquitoes, moths, and beetles. Scientists have discovered some bats can catch more than 4,000 insects in a night!

So, when we discovered a massive colony of bats taking up residence in one of our storage buildings, we decided to upgrade their living situation and brought in a BIG bat house. The house, designed by the renowned bat conservationist, Merlin Tuttle, was placed near the building where the bats were living. The new 'digs' can house up to 4,000 bats. That's a lot of bats. And those bats eat a lot of insects every night. You do the math. Here's hoping the new bat house will meet the bats' approval and they will thrive in their new surroundings and keep on being the best insect control at White Oak.



SCIENTISTS
HAVE DISCOVERED
SOME BATS CAN
CATCH MORE THAN
4,000
INSECTS IN A
NIGHT!



1,953
POUNDS OF
ELECTRONICS
RECYCLED

42%
DECREASED
PRINTING
ACROSS ALL
DEPARTMENTS

SUSTAINABILITY — DOING OUR PART

As responsible stewards of the environment, White Oak is committed to lowering our impact through sustainable practices. Here are some of the ways we achieved that goal in 2017:

- ◆ The Golf Course continued to meet and, in many circumstances, exceed the Best Management Practices given by the University of Florida.
- ◆ In early 2017, we implemented purchasing guidelines for food, cleaning and office supplies, and electronics. An average of 37% of White Oak's purchases was considered sustainable.
- ◆ We harvested 1,756 pounds of food from

White Oak's garden. The garden also produced flowers for decorations and centerpieces.

- ◆ We decreased printing by 42% across all departments.
- ◆ We recycled 1,953 pounds of electronics.
- ◆ A program was implemented to replace plastic water bottles with water dispensers and asking guests to bring refillable bottles. Water bottles were removed from the golf course clubhouse and dining areas in October and replaced with a water dispenser. These efforts produced a 22% decrease in plastic water bottle usage in 2017 from 2016 and nearly a 40% decrease since 2015.

*connecting people
to conservation*

RHINO

Did you know
a white rhino
can weigh over
5,000 lbs?



960
EVENT
GUESTS

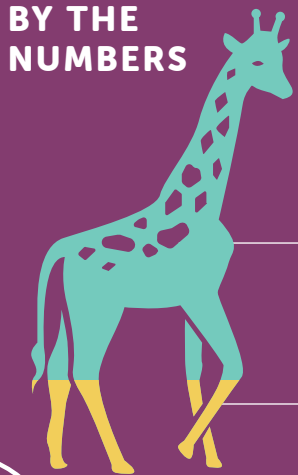
1,400
GUESTS AT
OUTREACH
EVENTS

4,960
TOUR
GUESTS

BY THE NUMBERS

GIRAFFE

Did you know a
male giraffe can
reach a height
of 20 ft?



1,050
K-12
STUDENTS

147
SUMMER
CAMPER

BATS

Did you know
there are over 1100
species of bats
in the world?



28,800
SOCIAL MEDIA
FOLLOWERS

partnership schools – making an impact



The partnership we have with White Oak provides our students with opportunities to connect with conservation experts and insight to the conservation efforts that are happening around the world. The White Oak staff provides our teachers with a wealth of resources that enhance our students' learning experience. We appreciate the enthusiasm the White Oak staff brings to this truly collaborative partnership. — KORRI ZAHARI (Teacher, The Discovery School)



Students learn how to test for water quality along the banks of the St. Marys river.



Cheetah Conservation Botswana receives a donation from Camden County Elementary School

1,000+
STUDENTS AT 16
SCHOOLS PARTICIPATED
IN OUR PROBLEM-BASED
STEM CONSERVATION
CURRICULUM.

In 2017, we continued our important work with our local K-12 partner schools to bring conservation into the classroom - and to bring students to White Oak to see conservation in action. More than 1,000 students at 16 schools participated in our problem-based STEM Conservation Curriculum.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

Camden County, GA Elementary School 4th graders researched human-cheetah interactions and worked to develop solutions to cheetah conservation. During their field experience to White Oak, the children had the opportunity to meet the team from Cheetah Conservation Botswana and present them with proceeds from their philanthropy project!

Students at The Discovery School focused their time on curassow conservation. The students created and shared videos with a school in Colombia, South America in Spanish that shared information about saving these critically endangered birds!

emerging wildlife conservation leaders

The Emerging Wildlife Conservation Leaders (EWCL) held the first training session of the seventh class at White Oak in March 2017. The 2017/2018 EWCL class is comprised of twenty-four participants from a diverse group of professionals in the not-for-profit sector, private organizations, and government agencies who have shown themselves to be up-and-coming leaders in wildlife conservation. In addition to twenty participants from U.S.-based institutions, the group includes conservationists from Honduras, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia. The two-year EWCL program provides them with

three in-person training sessions led by highly respected professionals in the field, and the hands-on development, implementation, and evaluation of their group conservation projects.

During their 2017 training session, the class separated into four teams which each selected an imperiled species campaign for which they will develop, implement and evaluate on-the-ground conservation projects, over the two-year program. The current EWCL class is working on projects to conserve Graur's gorillas, grizzly bears, North American amphibians and helmeted hornbills.



summer camp continues to grow

White Oak’s Conservation Summer Camps hosted 147 young conservationists in 2017. That is an increase of 44% from 2016! That’s 44% more young people learning about conservation and what they can do to help our planet.

Here are just a few of the highlights from last summer:

- ◆ The 2017 Summer Camp programs exceeded enrollment for all previous camps.
- ◆ We doubled our camp capacity and had two camps running consecutively for the first time.
- ◆ We hosted three day camps and twelve residential camps.
- ◆ Save the Frogs shared a presentation on the importance of amphibians and we did a swamp walk to find frogs.
- ◆ Eastern Diamondback Conservation Foundation brought non-venomous snakes for the kids to see and discussed the difference between venomous and non-venomous snakes.
- ◆ We expanded our reach from mainly the Southeast US to include campers from the Northeast, Midwest, and West. White Oak camp alumni now reach from coast to coast!



44%
MORE YOUNG PEOPLE
LEARNING ABOUT
CONSERVATION
AND WHAT THEY
CAN DO TO HELP
OUR PLANET



AN ‘EVENT-FULL’ YEAR

2017 saw new public events and experiences added to our ever-growing list of opportunities to visit White Oak. In April we hosted our first “Swing into Spring” event which featured a tour, dinner and live music at our riverside Pavilion. Our first-ever “Rise and Shine” morning event included a tour of the conservation areas and brunch.

White Oak also offered “Safari from the Saddle” and “Conservation Caretaker” as popular new experiences. Safari from the Saddle features the opportunity to see the conservation areas from horseback. Conservation Caretaker participants walk in the shoes of our wildlife team as they work side-by-side with animal care specialists, feeding animals, cleaning areas, and preparing diets. Proceeds from the Conservation Caretaker go towards the conservation of species worldwide.

In April, White Oak hosted our first Earth Day, and it was a hit! We celebrated by hosting and providing lunch for 400 volunteers from the St. Marys River Clean-Up, an annual event organized by the St. Marys Riverkeeper to clean up the river. We are pleased to celebrate our local community who care about the environment as much as we do here at White Oak.

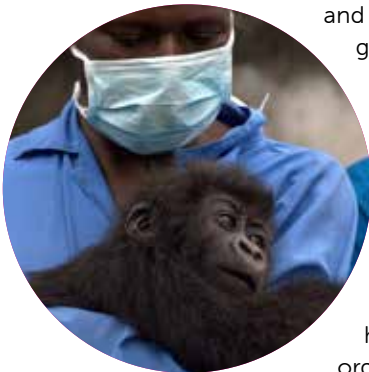
a creative retreat

White Oak sponsored 14 meetings and retreats in 2017 as part of our commitment to help conservation and education partners. From local school district strategic planning sessions to international conservation meetings, organizations with local and global impact received our support to hold their important meetings.

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MEETINGS AND
RETREATS

GORILLAS, RED WOLVES, ELEPHANTS

White Oak supports conservation around the globe by sponsoring conferences for wildlife partners like Gorilla Doctors, a non-profit dedicated to conserving wild mountain and eastern lowland gorillas. The Wildlife Conservation Society Board of Directors held their annual retreat at White Oak, and the Conservation Measures Partnership retreat focused on helping conservation organizations find better ways to design, manage and measure their actions. By utilizing the creative environment and meeting space at White Oak, we assist other organizations to advance their conservation missions for more significant impact.



THE SONTAG FOUNDATION

In February 2017, The Sontag Foundation Board hosted their annual scientific retreat at White Oak bringing together recipients of the Distinguished Scientist Award (DSA). During the retreat, current and former DSA grantee, and The Sontag Foundation leadership engaged in collaborative conversations to drive science in the field of brain cancer and improve the lives of brain cancer patients.

conservation through the ages

1768

The British Governor of Florida grants what is now White Oak to his deputy surveyor of lands, Andrew Way. Three years later Jermyn Wright acquires the property to establish the southernmost rice plantation on the Atlantic coast. Wright's abandoned rice paddies remain visible today.

1977

White Oak establishes its first conservation breeding program for the Grevy's zebra. White Oak supports the Il Ngwesi community in Kenya who share their Masai tribal pastoral land to protect zebras, gerenuk, giraffes, elephants and other African wildlife. 89 Grevy's zebra foals have been born at White Oak as of 2017.

1981

Charles Gilman's son, Howard, takes over the family business and creates the Howard Gilman Foundation to support medical, social, educational, environmental, and artistic causes.

1938

Charles Gilman acquires the property. Founded in 1884, the family's Gilman Paper Company, located in St. Marys, GA, grows to become the largest privately held paper company in the US at the time.

1987

The Okapi Conservation Project is established as a nonprofit seeking to conserve the okapi, a rare flagship species in the Democratic Republic of Congo. White Oak's breeding program has produced over 45 okapi calves.

1989

White Oak partners with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to begin a rehabilitation and release program for the Florida panther. 20 panthers have been released back into the wild as of 2017.

1992

The International Rhino Foundation, based at White Oak at the time, initiates a project to relocate black rhinos from Zimbabwe under threat from poaching.

1993

The Howard Gilman Foundation begins hosting a variety of national and international conferences and seminars at White Oak directly related to its three fields of interest: conservation and the environment, arts and culture, and public policy.

1982

Howard's improvements at White Oak include a 600-acre conservation center and formal programs are developed to help save iconic wildlife. The first white rhinos and cheetahs arrive at White Oak in 1985.

1993

The animal hospital at White Oak is built, which also provides housing for students in conservation medicine and wildlife care. More than 200 interns have stayed here during their training.

1994

White Oak partners with the Mississippi Sandhill Crane Recovery Program to repopulate the Mississippi sandhill crane in the wild, with more than 80 cranes being released to date.

1998

Howard Gilman passes away, entrusting his legacy and wildlife conservation programs to the Howard Gilman Foundation.

2013

White Oak was acquired by longstanding conservationists Mark and Kimbra Walter, who pledge to transform it into one of the world's premier wildlife conservation facilities and establish the White Oak Conservation Foundation.

2014

White Oak works with conservation partners to import six white rhinos to save them from poaching. Since then, White Oak has imported 13 additional rhinos for the same reason. Rhino poaching is estimated at about 1,000 animals per year.

2014

White Oak launches its K-12 Conservation Education Program, allowing students to explore and learn about conservation at White Oak for the first time.

2017

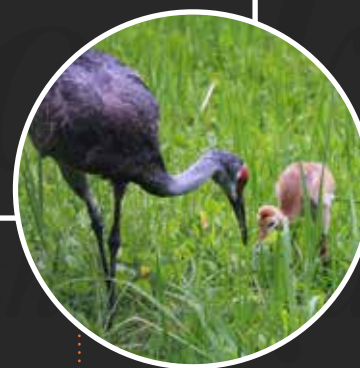
White Oak acquires additional timberland and expands its contiguous conservation land holdings to 16,000 acres.

2016

The US Fish and Wildlife Service captures Florida grasshopper sparrows to initiate an emergency breeding project at White Oak to save the species. The first Florida grasshopper sparrow chicks hatch at White Oak in 2017.

2017

The first pair of whooping cranes arrives at White Oak, who is responsible for pairing and breeding them so they can be released as part of a national recovery program.



White Oak continues to lead the way with its conservation breeding programs, focusing on endangered species from around the world. 2017 saw the births of several antelope species, rhinos and cheetahs among others.

TOTAL
SPECIES

37

BIRTHS +
HATCHES

140

TOTAL
INDIVIDUAL
ANIMALS

413

*saving species
for future
generations*

making room for more

White Oak had many additions to its 'family' in 2017, and even though each birth or hatch is significant, there was one that stood out from the rest. On Mother's Day, a female okapi was born, bringing the population at White Oak to 15 individuals. This was not only the 46th okapi born at White Oak; it was the first calf born to the new male brought to White Oak from the UK. The significance? The male represents a new bloodline for White Oak and the US okapi population, the first time that this has happened in over 20 years!

To safely and comfortably house and care for this new calf and all the okapi at White Oak, in 2017 we expanded the okapi habitats to include four more large forested enclosures with two new barns.



46
OKAPI HAVE
BEEN BORN AT
WHITE OAK



cheetah cub births

In August, seven cheetah cubs were born to two mothers at White Oak. One female gave birth to four cubs - the other to three. The litters were born less than a day apart, and their births bring the total of cheetahs born at White Oak up to 51 litters representing 181 cubs. replace with: White Oak is one of the leading cheetah breeding facilities in the country, and the cubs are a welcome addition to our continued efforts to preserve this endangered species.



birds take flight

The Bird Team was kept hopping this past year. Some of the more notable events were the hatching of two wattled crane chicks produced through artificial insemination along with one produced by natural breeding. White Oak sent one egg to Jacksonville Zoo where it was hatched and reared by the zoo's pair of adult wattled cranes. The other two eggs were hatched and raised by wattled cranes at White Oak. This type of collaboration with other Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facilities is essential to the survival of endangered species like the wattled cranes.





— **DR. JESS EMERSON**
Associate Veterinarian



— **DR. JUSTIN ROSENBERG**
Resident Veterinarian



— **DR. SCOTT CITINO**
Senior Veterinarian

keeping everyone healthy

The Veterinary Team at White Oak has their hands full keeping the growing population of animals healthy. In 2017 we welcomed Associate Veterinarian Dr. Jess Emerson to help with that task. Jess is a familiar face as she served as Resident Vet here in July 2013 - July 2014. Jess graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor's in Zoology and a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Degree and is a Diplomate of the American College of Zoological Medicine. Yeah, she's pretty smart. Jess says, "I'm very excited to be back! The family atmosphere, dedication to conservation, and unique working environment were all reasons that I wanted to come back. I am looking forward to continuing the White Oak legacy of excellence!" Welcome back, Jess!

Our current Resident Veterinarian, Dr. Justin Rosenberg, attended the annual American Association of Zoo Veterinarians in September of 2017 and won First Place in the Morris Animal Foundation Post-Graduate Manuscript Award for his presentation at AAZV titled: "Diagnostic performance of readily available analytes in the diagnosis of inflammation in gopher tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*)."

Senior Veterinarian Dr. Scott Citino also found time to present and publish papers when he wasn't looking out for the animals under his care. He collaborated on 11 publications in 2017, including "Thyroid and Recurrent Laryngeal Nerve Anatomy in an Indian Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), *World J. Surg.* 2017". And if that wasn't enough, he also found time to travel to Indonesia, to work in collaboration with the International Rhino Foundation and Yayasan Badak Indonesia to assist with the training and capacity building of the Indonesian veterinarians stationed at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary. Yeah, he's smart too.



RESEARCH

Our research partners at South-East Zoo Alliance for Reproduction & Conservation (SEZARC) had a very busy year. Here are some of the projects they worked on with the White Oak team.

RELATEDNESS AND GENETIC DIVERSITY IN SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS

As rhino poaching escalates in southern Africa, human-managed white rhino populations are becoming increasingly vital to the species' survival. However, when conservationists import white rhinos to North America, many do not have known pedigrees, which can pose a challenge for conservation breeding efforts. For White Oak to reduce the chances of inbreeding due to the unknown ancestry of our rhinos, this project used DNA sequencing to understand their family trees better. The analysis revealed many of the imported rhinos were indeed unrelated but also identified a pair of siblings and a pair of cousins. Projects like this illustrate how research can serve to enhance and improve the conservation breeding of endangered species like the rhino.

In 2017, White Oak also participated in these important investigations:

- ◆ Cryopreservation of greater one-horned and white rhino semen for genome resource banking
- ◆ Investigation of a new protein for pregnancy diagnosis in white rhinos
- ◆ Detection of feline morbillivirus and *Cytauxzoon felis* in cheetah and tiger
- ◆ Studying the impact of infectious disease on Florida grasshopper sparrows

White Oak's research program, in collaboration with SEZARC, was noted to be a point of particular achievement during the 2017 inspection for re-accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums!



WHITE OAK CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

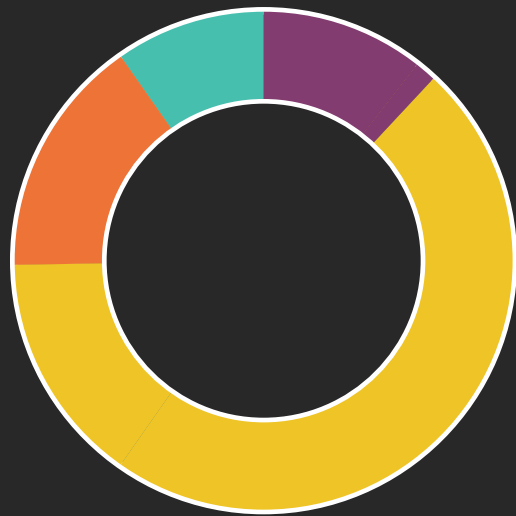
White Oak Conservation Foundation is committed to protecting endangered species and habitats. In 2017, we expanded our education programs that teach and inspire conservation action through hands-on learning. We also continued to grow our animal sustainability programs to provide conservation options for the species that need them most.

The funds raised by the Foundation support these crucial projects. We are thankful for your support and look forward to growing our programs even more in the future.

*white oak
conservation
foundation*

support

The White Oak Conservation Foundation provides support to these pillars of its mission to protect endangered species and habitats.



- Education & Training
- Animal Care & Conservation
- Veterinary Medicine
- Operations



white oak in the community

White Oak made its presence felt in the local community through several different avenues in 2017. We understand that being a good steward of the land also means being a good neighbor.

- White Oak Culinary Team participated in the Taste of Amelia fundraiser, helping to raise funds for the Volunteer Center of Nassau County. As a bonus, our team's dish won the award for Best Dish of the night!
- More than 25 local, regional and national nonprofits benefited from in-kind donations that supported their fundraising efforts.
- White Oak Leadership Team members serve on the board of several local nonprofits, including St. Marys Riverkeeper and Nassau Education Foundation.
- Through a community service project with a corporate retreat, nearly 200 meals were donated and packaged for the local food pantry, just in time for the holidays.








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WHITE OAK
CONSERVATION