

## **We Give A Hoot!**

### **Coast Guard Participates in 13<sup>th</sup> Annual National Wildlife Refuge Celebration**

*Story by PA1 Tasha Tully, PADET St. Petersburg, Fla.*

YANKEETOWN, Fla. -- Crewmembers from Coast Guard Station Yankeetown, Fla., along with Coast Guard Auxiliary members from Flotillas 51-1, in Crystal River, Fla., and 51-4, in Yankeetown, participated in the annual Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge “Refuge Day” Celebration in Crystal River Oct. 13.



CRYSTAL RIVER, Fla. - George Dooris, a member from Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 51-4 in Yankeetown, Fla., stands ready to assist the public during the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Celebration in Crystal River October 13. Coast Guard photograph by PA1 Tasha Tully.

The event began at 9:30 a.m. with a Cherokee Indian smudging ceremony. Smudging is a sacred smoke blessing for the cleansing and purification of the physical and spiritual bodies.

Immediately following the blessing, the public was invited for free boating tours of the refuge while representatives from numerous local, state and federal environmental organizations manned booths offering information and advice to interested attendees.

“We’re basically here to answer questions from boaters pertaining to manatee zones, safety concerns and boating regulations,” said George Dooris, a member of Flotilla 15-4. “Many of today’s questions are from locals who are already aware of manatee laws and are concerned with the enforcement of those laws.”

Wildlife and conservation education exhibits, hands-on displays, environmental education games, a children’s activity area and live music were offered free of charge to the public throughout the day.

“The event is designed to raise public awareness for the protection of endangered and threatened species such as manatee, sea turtles and bald eagles,” said Refuge Officer Stan Garner. “The Coast Guard is a major influence in this area, especially with patrolling the manatee zones, and we appreciate their participation and support.”

**USCG**