



Wekiva Wilderness Trust – Newsletter

May, 2022

Events

National I Love State Parks Week

May 8-15 has been designated National I Love State Parks week and it provides a great opportunity for all of us to showcase all our fabulous award-winning state parks in Florida and especially Wekiwa Springs, Lower Wekiva and Rock Springs.

The week-long series of events and activities is the inspiration of the National Association of State Parks Foundations (NASPF), which advocates for the nation’s 8,500 state parks and the army of volunteers and Friends groups that help care for them.

The Wekiva Wilderness Trust is a member of the Florida State Parks Foundation, and the Florida group was instrumental in setting up the NASPF three years ago to give state parks a national voice.

The objectives of “I Love My State Parks Week” are to increase the visibility of state parks, attract new visitors and introduce programs that appeal to more diverse audiences.

A different aspect of state parks will be featured each day of the event which aims to become an annual fixture. Sunday’s theme will be cherished memories, encouraging people to spent time together in the parks and recreate those memories.

Monday will focus on the rich history and culture that state parks preserve. Tuesday is ‘appreciation day’, an opportunity to thank park staff and volunteers for all they do. Wednesday is ‘anticipation day’, a time to plan your next park adventure, and Thursday is a day for exploring nature.

Friday promotes the health and wellness benefits of visiting state parks and being outdoors. Saturday’s theme is ‘Experiences’ asking people to relive favorite park experiences whether it be camping, hiking or a family picnic. Finally, Sunday is ‘Call to Action’ day, urging people to support state parks by visiting more often, volunteering or donating.

Ethel

If you haven’t downloaded the free e-book about the fascinating history of Ethel, you really should. Ethel was a thriving township in what is now the heart of Rock Springs Run State Reserve. It was established after the Civil War and at its height, had a population of over 200 with its own school, store, railway station and cemetery. Almost nothing remains of Ethel today, except the small fenced-off cemetery with three headstones; but all that is about to change.

After more than 10 years of research and collaboration with local historians, we now know that Rock Springs was the site of the Delk Plantation, the first large plantation in Central Florida before the Civil War and after the war, was home to a bustling township called Ethel. It was also the home of Anthony Frazier, a former plantation slave who fought in the Union Army during the Civil War, returned to the area afterwards and bought and sold land and became a respected member of the community. In 1880, he was appointed an Orange County Commissioner for Roads, a remarkable achievement at that time for a former slave.

Plans are now under way to bring Ethel back to life with the Ethel Commemorative Trail. Using interpretive panels, markers, maps and self-guiding walk brochures, visitors will be able to follow a path through the former township. Markers will identify the location of the school, store, railroad station, small cemetery, and other points of interest. Interpretive panels will tell the story of the Delk Plantation and the life of Anthony Frazier and his wife Mary, the local midwife, who delivered many of the babies born in Ethel.

There are also plans for guided walks for visitors, including local school groups who want to learn more about the history of the area.

Nature News

Little Blue Heron

Which of these birds is a Little Blue Heron?



Trick question, because the answer is “all of the above.”

Little Blue Herons are frequently seen on the Wekiva River, and right now (April to June) they’re making the transition from white to blue.

Solid white after hatching in spring or summer, they remain white through their first winter. This works to their advantage, as they are often seen with White Ibises, which tend to forage in groups. It is speculated that the white birds wouldn’t tolerate a dark bird as well. As adult Little Blue Herons tend to be solitary, the young aren’t welcome to hang out with them after fledging; indeed, sometimes an adult will chase off a juvenile who infringes on their hunting space.

They eat small fish, amphibians, and insects such as dragonflies and butterflies. Their nests are made of sticks in trees near or over the water.

Due to loss of habitat and other factors, their numbers have been in decline and according to FWC they are listed as a Threatened Species.

Look for Little Blue Herons in the emergent vegetation across from Canoe Beach at the park, and along the river and Rock Springs Run. They're a beautiful bird at any phase and we're fortunate to have a good population of them sharing our Wild and Scenic Wekiva River.

Flower of the Month

Lizard's Tail (*Saururus cernuus*)

Lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*) is a common perennial evergreen wetland plant which grows in freshwater marshes and swamps throughout nearly all of Florida. Plants often form extensive colonies from rhizomes. The roots of the plant are generally under water or in mucky soil. Its erect stem rises above the surface of the water. The stem is hairy, reddish and up to 3 feet tall. The leaves are about 1 ½ inches wide and 3 to 4 inches long. They can be either arrow-shaped or heart-shaped, are on stalks, and alternate on the stem. The margins of the leaves are entire (smooth with no teeth).

Lizard's tail has a bottlebrush spike of white flowers which arches above the leaves of the plant. The flower spike is typically 6 to 8 inches long but can be longer. The flowers are tiny, numerous, and fragrant. After maturity, the flowers become a string of nutlets (small, dry, one-seeded fruits that do not open to release the seed). Both the common and scientific genus names refer to the lizard-like shape of the drooping flower spike and the string of nutlets which form after the flower matures.



This plant is an important food source for wildlife.

Seeds are eaten by wood ducks and other foraging birds. It is a nectar plant for hairstreak butterflies and other insects, especially bees and flies; however, it is apparently mostly wind pollinated.

While hiking, look for lizard's tail along the trail from Sand Lake to Big Buck Camp, on the blue flag trail where it crosses Mill Creek between trail markers #32 and #33, in the swamp below the boardwalk on the wet to dry trail, and other wet habitats. There are several colonies in shallow water along Rock Springs Run which can be observed from a kayak or canoe.