



Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter

May, 2023

News

District 3 Volunteer Awards

Congratulations to the great volunteers at Wekiwa Springs State Park. At the recent District 3 Volunteer Recognition Awards at Washington Oaks Garden State Park, several Wekiwa volunteers were recognized as statewide award winners.

Excellence in Volunteer Management

Our own **Ranger Val Hahn** was also deservedly recognized, winning the 2022 District 3 Award for Excellence in Volunteer Management of the year. Val commented, “Thank you to those that support me endlessly. And thank you to my Manager, Robert Brooks (peeping through the bushes in the back) for his guidance, direction, and support of my sometimes, “wild” ideas.”



Adult Volunteer in Resource Management

Don Philpott in special recognition for his efforts with the Ethel project and his contributions of decades worth of written history. He also received an award recognizing his 25+ years of service.



Long Project: Resource-Based Recreation

Dennis Bryant in special recognition for sharing his welding talents by repairing our bear proof dumpsters, saving the park money and the lives of many Florida Black Bears.



Special Event Award for the Greener Initiative

Wekiwa Girl Scouts Love State Parks Event recognizing Volunteers **Karen Hale, Valerie Nieves, Ronnie Yarbrough, Don Philpott, Caleigh Gilfillan and Colleen Ryan.**



Girl Scouts during their visit to Wekiwa Springs State Park

Award to the Volunteer Team of 3+--Greener Initiative

The **Nieves Family** in special recognition for their involvement in park events and community engagement.



Statewide Award for Adult Volunteer—Administration

Deborah Lafreniere in special recognition for her role in ensuring complete volunteer coverage of our Nature Center.



Statewide Award for Adult Volunteer—Protection

Elaine Fisher in special recognition for serving as volunteer emergency personnel in situations such as prescribed fires and offering her services statewide during natural disasters.

Junior Rangers Club

The Junior Rangers Club continues to grow from strength to strength – thank you Val and the volunteers who assist him. 21 Junior Rangers (5 new Junior Rangers), 14 adults, and 4 volunteers came together to learn more about and celebrate our spiders.

| | WOLF SPIDERS | SPINY ORB-WEAVER | ORCHARD ORBWEAVER | OTHER |
|--------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|-------|
| UNDER PICNIC TABLE | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| CORNER OF PAVILION | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| ON SOIL | | | ✓ | |
| ON CONCRETE | | | | |
| TOTAL | | | | |

RECORD WITH TALLY MARKS HOW MANY OF EACH SPECIES THAT YOU FIND. USE THESE OBSERVATIONS TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ON THE NEXT PAGE.

FLORIDA STATE PARKS

WEKIWA JUNIOR RANGER CLUB

“A few months ago, one of the Junior Ranger moms told me that her child has a huge fear of spiders. So, I decided we needed a spider program and I looked at the calendar and it was fate, there was a spider appreciation week! Today, that child stood up and told everyone about their favorite spider. I had someone once tell me that we won’t make a difference unless we care about every level of nature. Don’t forget to take time to slow down and observe the spiders,” said Val.

“In teams, we investigated in the day use area and recorded our observations of different spiders and their locations,” he said.

The program, as always, was followed with a litter pick up, but this time with extra care to clean the homes of our new spider friends.



2023 Legislative Assembly

With the 2023 Florida Legislative Session in its final days, members of the Florida State Park Foundation met with legislators in Tallahassee to urge adoption of the Governor's \$50 million budget proposal for Florida State Parks.



State Parks Greener Initiative

The Florida State Parks Foundation officially unveiled its *Greener Initiative* during a press conference at Wekiwa Springs State Park in April.

The *Greener Initiative*, funded in part through sales of the Foundation's "Explore our State Parks" specialty license plate, is a multitiered campaign that will plan, develop, fund and install projects that increase environmental sustainability, reduce waste and lower utility costs within Florida's award-winning state parks.

During the event, the Foundation shared plans to install new, energy-efficient LED lighting at five "pilot" parks: Blue Spring State Park (Orange City), Highlands Hammock State Park (Sebring), Dr. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island State Park, Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park (White Springs) and Wekiwa Springs State Park (Apopka).

New lighting will replace more than 700 outdated fixtures in campgrounds, office buildings, restrooms and other park facilities. The project will cost approximately \$39,000 and comes with a projected payback period of just 1.43 years, upon which it will save an estimated \$27,000 and 132,052 kilowatt hours per year.

In 10 years, the updated lighting at these parks will have saved an estimated \$311,000 in energy and maintenance costs.



Robert Yero, District 3 Bureau Chief; Tammy Gustafson, Florida State Parks Foundation President; Sharon Arroyo, Duke Energy Florida Vice President of Government and Community Relations; and Jennifer Roberts, District 3 Assistant Bureau Chief.

Duke Energy Florida conducted energy audits at each park to help inform implementation strategies. Audits are in progress for the next wave of parks, which is expected to include Rainbow Springs State Park (Dunnellon), Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, Lake Kissimmee State Park (Lake Wales), Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park (Gainesville) and Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park.

“In addition to their amazing beauty and outstanding recreational opportunities, our state parks play a crucial role in the preservation of Florida’s unique native ecosystems and landscapes,” said Tammy Gustafson, president of the Florida State Parks Foundation. “It’s only natural that the Foundation would support our parks’ efforts to be as environmentally friendly as possible, and we are excited to launch an initiative that will do just that.”

The *Greener Initiative* is a direct result of the “Explore Our State Parks” specialty license plate, which debuted in March 2022. In a little more than a year of availability, the plate has sold nearly 8,000 units and ranks in the top half of all specialty license plates in Florida.

Each plate sold contributes \$25 to the Florida State Parks Foundation.

Plate sales helped fund the unofficial first stage of the *Greener Initiative* late last year, when the Foundation partnered with Duke Energy Florida to purchase and install 121 water bottle refilling stations in 85 state parks and trails from the Florida Panhandle to the Keys.

The stations are designed to decrease the use of single-use plastics in state parks and encourage visitors to think of ways to make small, environmentally minded changes at home. Many stations are equipped with digital counters which tally the number of bottles saved. In only a few months, the stations have already saved nearly 100,000 single-use plastic bottles that might otherwise have ended up in a landfill.

“Duke Energy Florida is proud to collaborate with organizations like the Florida State Parks Foundation as we move ahead in pursuit of building a cleaner, more resilient energy future for our state,” said Sharon Arroyo, Duke Energy Florida Vice President of Government and Community Relations. “Duke Energy Florida is grateful to be part of the *Greener Initiative* and the Florida State Parks Foundation’s efforts to preserve and protect Florida’s natural resources.”

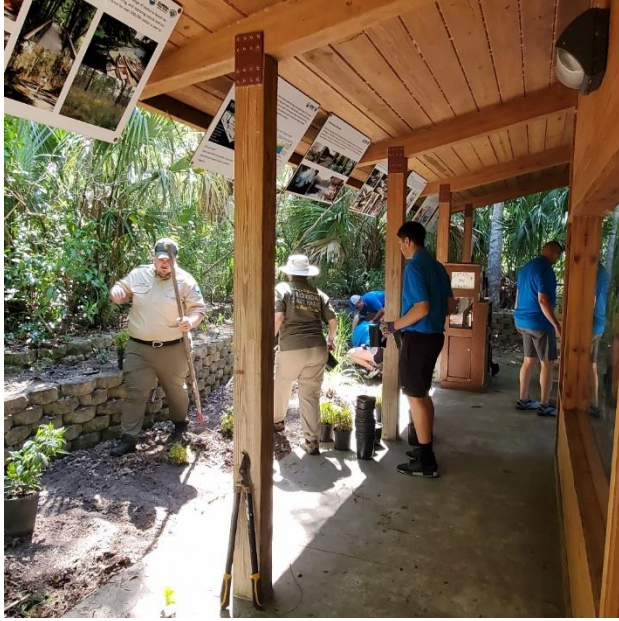
In recent years, the Foundation has also created the Plant a Pine program, which for every \$1 received, plants one native longleaf pine in a state park, as well as debuted an electric, accessible glass-bottom boat at Silver Springs State Park and a fleet of electric, accessible trams at parks across the state.

“We have seen amazing results from our water bottle refilling stations, and we can’t wait to see the positive effects of these new LED lights,” said Julia Gill Woodward, CEO of the Florida State Parks Foundation. “The Foundation is committed to making our parks even greener and ensuring they remain as beautiful, natural spaces for future generations.”

Nature Center Planting

Thanks to volunteers from Subaru North Orlando for donating Florida native plants to beautify the area behind the nature center, and thanks to Val and our wildflower expert Noreen for supervising the work.





Nature News

Wood Duck



“They don’t even look real!” is the frequent exclamation by someone seeing a male wood duck in spectacular breeding plumage. The wood duck is one of the most beautiful species of duck, and one of the few that nests in Florida. At the beginning of the 20th century, they were hunted almost to extinction. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 helped bring them back, and now they are often seen on Florida’s rivers and lakes.

Wood ducks eat mostly plants, with an occasional

spider or snail or other small creature in the mix. Duck weed, tubers, seeds, rushes, and grasses are all part of their diet.

Wood ducks are cavity nesters, often using the readily available pileated woodpeckers’ abandoned nests. The woodpeckers excavate a new nest each season. Wood ducks also make use of a manmade nest box if it is well placed near the water, and preferably not in sight of another nest box. If you’d like to build a nest box, directions are found at <https://myfwc.com/media/3187/wood-duck-box.pdf>.

The mating season begins in winter, and pairing begins in early spring. The female returns to where she was hatched, and the male follows her, even though he may have hatched in Florida and she may be leading him many miles away to another state. They remain together during incubation, although the female typically incubates. The male then leaves and their time together is ended.



The female lays 10-15 eggs; incubation begins when the last egg is laid, and hatching is in about 30 days.



Mother and ducklings leave the nest as soon as they're all hatched. The ducklings fall to the ground. The nest can be anywhere from a few feet to very high in a tree, but the well-insulated downy ducklings hit the ground unharmed. Although able to find food and feed themselves immediately, they stay with the mother duck until they're almost ready to fly. Because they are preyed upon by everything from hawks, great blue herons, bass, snapping turtles, and so forth, mortality is high among these ducklings, with only 3 or 4 usually surviving to finally take flight.

Flower of the Month

Manyflower Beardtongue (*Penstemon multiflorus*)

The beautiful and stately Manyflower Beardtongue (*Penstemon multiflorus*) is a long-lived perennial plant that blooms from May to August. It is almost endemic to Florida, with only a few populations in south Alabama and Georgia.

It grows in full sun to minimal shade in sandhills, flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods and disturbed areas including areas that are maintained by prescribed fire.

Showy white to light lavender flowers grow in large clusters at the top of tall, 1.5 to 4 feet, flower stalks. Each flower is 5-lobed, 2-lipped and tube shaped. The upper lip has 2 lobes; the lower lip has 3 lobes. The stems are erect, reddish in color and emerge from a basal rosette of large, grayish-green leaves. Stem leaves are attached directly to the stalk with no leaf stem. The leaf margins are smooth or slightly toothed.

The flowers attract pollinators, including hummingbirds, and is a host plant for the Baltimore checkerspot (*Euphydryas phaeton*).





The species epithet, *multiflorus*, is from the Latin *multus* or many, and *florus*, or flower, and refers to the many flowers born on each flower stalk. The common name “beardtongue” refers to the tendency of blooms with the Penstemon genus to have a long, often hairy filament that protrudes from the mouth of the flower, giving the appearance of a fuzzy tongue.

Manyflower beardtongues are easy to find in Wekiwa Springs State Park. After entering the park, turn left at the fork and begin looking for groups of the tall, easily seen flowers on the south side of the main park road.

May WWT Events

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|---------|---------------------------------|---|
| May 4: | Hike with a Ranger | To register go to Meetup.com and join the Wekiva Wilderness Trust—Family Hike and Outdoor Discovery Group |
| May 10: | Junior Rangers Club—Black Bears | |
| May 11: | Hike with a Ranger | |
| May 13: | Ethel Walk at Rock Springs | |
| May 18: | Hike with a Ranger | |
| May 25: | Hike with a Ranger | |
| May 28: | Ethel Walk at Rock Springs | |

Happy May Hiking Everyone!