



## Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter November, 2023

### News

#### Open House

We had a very busy Open House on September 29 with about 30 people stopping by to learn more about volunteer opportunities. Channel 13 also dropped in and interviewed Debbie with an appeal going out on their 10 pm news program.



One of the photos Channel 13 showed on their 10pm news program.

This was the story they broadcast and put on their website.

“Before the pandemic, the Wekiva Springs State Park, through the Wekiva Wilderness Trust, had more than 600 volunteers”. Currently, officials say there are about 150.

For more than a decade Debbie Lafreniere has volunteered more than 10,000 hours at the Wekiwa Springs State Park. When Lafreniere is at the park, she can be found caring for turtles and snakes at the nature center — making sure animals are fed and their areas are operating properly. She also can be found educating park goers on some of the state park's native residents.

“I like pointing visitors in the right direction,” Lafreniere said holding a turtle. “We don’t have a visitor center, so this kind of is used as one.”

Now, the park officials say they need more people like Lafreniere, who have time and a trade to bring. They say state parks rely on organizations like the Wekiva Wilderness Trust to stay operational and functioning.

“Park volunteers put in about 1.2 million hours a year across the state,” Wekiva Wilderness Trust president Don Philpott said. “The state recognizes that at about a \$22-per-hour value. So, you are looking at about a \$25 million dollar value volunteers bring to the state park.”

Officials say the 42,000-acre park could use help across the board — from trail clearers and mechanics to plumbers and guides.

“It’s something we need to all help share in maintaining,” Lafreniere said. “Because they are really understaffed.”

Anyone interested in volunteering can [contact the Wekiva Wilderness Trust at the organization’s website.](#)”

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We will have to see how many people who attended the Open House follow up and fill out the volunteer application form.

A lot of people in the past have expressed difficulty in locating the volunteer application form on the Florida Park Service’s website. Now, you can easily access it visiting the WWT website and clicking on the ‘volunteer’ link.

## **Ethel**

The Ethel Project continues to gather momentum. Guided walks are held twice a month and continue to be popular. We even have some unusual visitors i.e., the wild pig photographed below that gatecrashed one of our events.

The 12 interpretive panels to be located along the 1.5-mile Historic Ethel Trail have been approved and are now in production. They tell the story of Ethel and what life was like in the township. While guided walks will continue, we hope that people will also come to walk the trail by themselves. The panels should help them get a better understanding about Ethel.

We also hope that schools will also take advantage of our invitation to come and learn about Ethel. A 20’ x 36’ pavilion is



being erected near the restrooms and will act as the start of the Ethel trail. It will also provide a place for visitors and school groups to shelter from the sun while they eat their lunches and so on.

An official opening of the Historic Ethel Trail is planned for early in the New Year.

### **Panther Screening**

A packed audience, including elected officials and a Florida Supreme Court Justice, gathered for the screening of the marvelous ‘Path of the Panther’ documentary at Wekiwa Springs on October 5. The event was hosted by the park and sponsored by the Florida State Parks Foundation and Live Wild. After the 90-minute showing, there was a panel discussion moderated by Tammy Gustafson, President of the Foundation.

The panel discussed the Florida Wildlife Corridor, the significance of land conservation in central Florida and how Florida’s award-winning state parks play a crucial role in providing habitat and safe passage for the state’s imperiled wildlife.

Panelists included conservation photographer and film producer, Carlton Ward Jr., and director Eric Bendick, as well as Live Wildly CEO Lisa Shipley, Foundation, WWT board member Don Philpott, and Dr. Daniel Smith of the University of Central Florida’s Department of Biology.



“‘Path of the Panther’ has inspired millions of people to learn and act so that our wild areas and the wildlife that call them home are preserved for future generations. And, of course, having Carlton and Eric on-hand to share their perspectives and answer questions really made for an enriching experience,” said Shipley.

Wekiwa Springs is one of 75 Florida State Parks to fall within the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

## Tram Tour

Before the Panther screening, a group of VIPs enjoyed a tour of the park aboard the new wheelchair accessible tram. Special guest of honor was Paula Russo, of Florida State Parks Foundation Services, after whom the tram is named. It was the tram's inaugural trip. We hope that tram tours accommodating wheelchair visitors can be conducted regularly.



## Survival Class

Another successful survival class was held at Rock Springs Run State Reserve on October 14. Participants learned basic survival skills, how to forage for food and water, how to braid rope and make baskets from natural materials, fire lighting skills, basic wilderness first aid, and how to navigate without a compass. As usual, the class was split into small groups, and they had one hour to build a shelter. (see picture below).



## REI

REI in Winter Park have started in-store talks and programs. Don Philpott is presenting Edible Florida and Survival 101 classes, and if you have an appropriate program you would like to present let us know and we will pass your name on to REI.

## Florida State Parks' Interp Chair Meeting, Silver Springs State Park

Kathleen Brennan, President-elect of the Florida State Parks Foundation and Don Philpott, Foundation Board Member and WWT President, presented at this three-day meeting attended by the park leadership and all the rangers responsible for interpretation training and programs in their respective state parks. It was a fabulous and informative three days and one of the best sessions was on the Authority of the Resource.



Authority of the Resource is a technique that once learned, can be used in almost any circumstances to calmly diffuse potentially difficult situations. As volunteers in the park, and especially those who work at the nature center, we interface with visitors a lot and sometimes there are situations when visitors are angry or doing things that they shouldn't be doing. The Authority of the Resource is a technique you can use to calm them and explain why what they are doing is wrong. Don Philpott would like to arrange a training session at Wekiwa Springs State Park for interested volunteers and am working with park leadership to arrange this. More on this later.

## National Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day

October 7 was National Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day, which is sponsored by the International Mountain Biking Association or IMBA. It is an effort to get kids outdoors and on bikes to enjoy our wonderful public lands.



WWT Board member Mitchell D. Greenberg PA-C, said, “We had a great turnout this year with over 40 kids. The NHSA gave away 41 helmets to kids. We took the children on a guided tour of the Markham Woods property and then cooked out. Several local bike shops participated along with SORBA Orlando, to make this a great day for all. Kona Ice came out and we had a brief stop over from local fire station 38. Thank you to Wekiva Springs State Park and Seminole County for letting us be part of a beautiful piece of land. See ya on the trails.”



## 2023 Engagement with Parks Report

Since 2016, the Research Team of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has conducted a yearly survey to better understand how people connect with parks and recreation across the United States. The survey results form the basis of NRPA's annual *Engagement with Parks* reports. The report series provides park and recreation professionals, advocates, policymakers, and other key stakeholders with insights into how local parks and recreation facilities impact the lives of everyone in our nation.

More than 280 million people in the United States visited a local park or recreation facility at least once during the past year.

**7 in 10** U.S. residents have at least one local park, playground, open space or recreation center within walking distance of their homes.

**84%** of U.S. adults seek nearby high-quality parks and recreation when choosing a place to live.

**9 in 10** people agree that parks and recreation is an important service provided by their local government.

Visitors who find their parks and recreational facilities to be inclusive visit nearly **2x as often** than do those who do not hold this view.

**88%** of U.S. adults agree it is vital for their local park and recreation agencies to engage with every member of their communities to ensure offerings meet their needs.

## Main findings:

Local parks and recreation is a staple in communities across the country. These facilities provide a wide variety of opportunities for residents. From offering spaces for families and friends to come together, to providing moments of peace in an otherwise busy life, to playing a vital role in healthy ecosystems and endeavoring to make those facilities inclusive to and accessible by all people, local parks and recreation offers something for everyone.

Thanks to diverse offerings, low- or no-cost programming, and the sheer number of sites from which to choose, local parks and recreation continues to play an integral role in the lives of the typical U.S. resident each year. Eighty-four percent of survey respondents — the equivalent of more than 280 million people in the United States — visited a local park or recreation facility at least once during the 12 months ending in May 2023.

Sixty-two percent of survey respondents visited their local park and/or recreation facility at least once within the past month of completing this survey, including 38 percent who visited a park and/or recreation amenity at least once within the prior week. Ten percent of survey respondents enjoyed a park and/or recreation amenity within the past two to three months of completing the survey. Seven percent of respondents indicate that their most recent visit was between four and six months, and five percent report their most recent visit was between seven and 12 months before completing the survey.

The number of options local park and recreation agencies offer their residents resulted in more than 280 million visitors during the past year. Some users opted for a more passive, relaxing visit, while others sought active participation. Nearly three in five U.S. adults have personally participated — or have a member of their household who has participated — in a park and recreation offering in the past year. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents who report they have personally participated or have a member of their household who has participated in a park and recreation program or offering within the past year did so within the past three months (February 2023 to May 2023).

Millennials and those respondents who identify as Hispanic are most likely to indicate that they have personally participated or have a member of their household who has participated in a park and recreation program or offering within the past three months (92 percent). Following close behind are parents (91 percent), those identifying as very active (90 percent), Gen Zers and those living in the Northeast (both 89 percent).

Feeling welcome at parks and recreation facilities drives one's usage of those areas. People who experience safe, accessible, and inclusive parks and recreation facilities visit those places far more often than do others who do not share the same experiences. U.S. adults who find that their local parks and recreation facilities are inclusive to those with all abilities visited those locations, on average, 25 times during the past year — nearly twice as often as did those who did not find these facilities to be inclusive (less than 14 times).

Park and recreation agencies provide low- and no-cost opportunities to every member of the communities they serve. Funding sources for park and recreation operations vary greatly by agency; however, support from the local jurisdiction's general fund tax base is most common. Sufficient and sustainable funding from local and state governments is critical to ensure parks, facilities and programming provided by parks and recreation remain ubiquitous, accessible and affordable.

Nine in 10 adults agree that their local and state governments must sufficiently fund local park and recreation agencies to ensure every community member has access to the amenities, infrastructure and programming offered. Nearly three-quarters of these adults say this funding is “extremely” or “very” important.

Parks and recreation provide families and friends with areas to meet, offer spaces for improved physical and mental health, and presents opportunities for those of all ages to learn and flourish. As with all things, areas of growth exist for parks and recreation. Continued work must be done so every community member feels included, safe and welcome in park and recreation spaces.

Encouraging open dialogue from residents can strengthen trust in a community. Professionals who turn that resident feedback into results can create and nurture life-long passionate park and recreation advocates. But to be able to make those requests a reality, attaining sufficient and sustainable park and recreation funding is critical.

## Nature News

### Flower of the Month

#### Slender Flattop Goldenrod (*Euthamia caroliniana*)



Slender Flat-top Goldenrod, *Euthamia caroliniana*, is a fall-flowering herbaceous perennial plant. It is not a true goldenrod species, but it was once classified in the same genus as the commonly known goldenrod (*Solidago*) species. Its flowers are similar to the flowers of the typical goldenrod. The small yellow flowers have a more elegant and ethereal form than a typical goldenrod. It often forms large colonies and, when in bloom, September through November, presents a beautiful yellow fluffy addition to the landscape. The tiny grass-like leaves give the stalk a feathery appearance.

Slender flat-top goldenrod grows to approximately 3 feet in height. Plants spread by both seed and a creeping rhizome root system. Leaves are alternate, extremely narrow, and similar in width and length to the leaves of dogfennel. Leaves are often shed during flowering, except near the top of the plant. Flat-top goldenrod appears as a single stem when it emerges in the spring, but the stem begins to branch as early as mid- to late

May. The branches grow to produce a flat-topped appearance. The flat-topped inflorescence consists of many yellow ray and disk flowers. The flowers are attractive to bees, butterflies and other pollinators.



Compare the flowers of Chapman's goldenrod on the left with flat-top goldenrod on the right.



**Chapman's Goldenrod (*Solidago odora*)**



**Slender Flattop Goldenrod (*Euthamia caroliniana*)**

Flattop Goldenrod is widespread in coastal eastern North America, and occurs as far north as the coastal plains of Nova Scotia, Canada. It grows in wet flatwoods, wetland depressions and disturbed sites, such as pastures where it is a common weed.



**A colony of slender flattop goldenrod blooming in Rock Springs Run State Reserve east of the horse corral.**

Look for *Euthamia caroliniana* next to the south side of the main road in Wekiwa Springs State Park. Rock Springs Run State Reserve and Lower Wekiwa State Park have large colonies growing in wet depressed areas.