



## Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter

### February, 2024

### News

#### Volunteers Needed

##### 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Real Florida 5K-10K race and fun walk

As always we need all hands on deck for our 37<sup>th</sup> annual Real Florida 5K-10K race on Friday afternoon, February 23, to get everything ready, and on race day, Saturday, February 24. Unfortunately, Apopka High School, which for the last few years has provided 20 or more volunteers, isn't able to come this year. So, if you can volunteer, bring as many family and friends as you can.,

##### 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Wekiva Paint Out

We also need volunteers for our 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Wekiva Paint Out. The artists will arrive on Sunday, February 25 and Paint Out will run until March 2. This is our major fund raising event of the year and we really do need help to man the gallery at Wekiva Island where the artists' painting are exhibited and sold. If you can spare a couple of hours during the week, please let us know at [info@wwt-cso.com](mailto:info@wwt-cso.com).

#### Junior Rangers Club

Brent, our Park Services Specialist, is doing a great job. The Junior Rangers Club is up and running again. January's meeting was [Searching With The Senses](#). The Junior Rangers learned how to discover natural treasures using their senses. At the end of the program, they earned a Natural Resources stamp





February's meeting, on Monday, February 12, will feature Camp Fire Cooking.

### Florida Arbor Day

Florida Arbor Day was celebrated on Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, with more than 100 volunteers and rangers participating. The event, organized by Brent, is part of a beautification scheme to restore areas back to their natural habitats. These included the Sandhill parking lots and around the nature center. Altogether 120 native trees were planted (longleaf pine, slash pine, turkey oak, rhododendron, and yaupon holly), as well as pollinator plants and a lot of native seeds (coontie, garberia, partridge pea, love grass, summer farewell, and Indian lopsided grass collected by University of Maryland students the week before).

Junior rangers received two stamps for their hard work- for Natural Resources and Service Hours - and all were rewarded for their efforts afterwards with a pizza lunch, courtesy of the WWT.



Planting near the Nature Center



Brent Briefing the Tree Planters

## Ethel

As always, there is lots happening with the Ethel Project, and the big news is the Heritage Festival and Official Opening of the Historic Ethel Trail on Saturday, March 9.

The East Lake Historical Society has agreed to move their 10th Annual Heritage Festival to Rock Springs Run State Reserve this year to coincide with the official launch of the Historic Ethel Trail.

The combined free event will include exhibitors with displays from local organizations and crafters, children's activities, historical memorabilia, as well as food and music. The Historic Ethel Trail will be officially opened with a VIP-studded ribbon-cutting ceremony followed by guided walks along the 1.5-mile wheelchair-accessible loop and tram rides for the mobility impaired.

The Historic Ethel Trail winds through the heart of what was once a sprawling post-Civil War township at Rock Springs Run State Reserve with a station, store, post office, cemetery, and one-room school. Twelve interpretive panels along the way describe the history of Ethel and what life was like back then.

## First Day Hike

Ethel was also the location for the First Day Hike, an event sponsored by the Florida Park Service, to get people to get out and recreate on New Year's Day. Those attending learned about Ethel and its history and also, thanks to Brent, about the trees and habitats of Rock Springs Run State Reserve.



## Katie Moncrieff



**Katie and Russ Moncrieff in the Wekiva River that they loved and protected**

Katie Moncrieff, a tireless champion of the Wekiva River, died on January 10 at the age of 98. A celebration of life will be held on Feb. 2 at Katie's Landing, named after her.

She and her husband Russ were largely responsible for establishing the Friends of the Wekiva River which then campaigned successfully to have it designated as a federally protected wild and scenic river.

In 1974, she and Russ bought a six-acre, bait-and-beer fish camp on the east side of the river off Wekiva Park Drive north of State Road 46 in Seminole County. Later to be called Katie's Landing, it was the only place on the river where you could rent a canoe for the day. They operated Katie's Landing for 27 years.

In 1982, they established the Friends of the Wekiva River, a watchdog for threats and lobbyist for solutions. In 2000, after a long campaign, the Wekiva River was designated as a national Wild and Scenic River, an honor accorded to only one other in Florida, the Loxahatchee.

A year later, the Moncrieff's sold their canoe outpost to the state Department of Environmental Protection and Seminole County. It is now Katie's Landing in Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park.

## Fort Mose Historic State Park

Fort Mose was established by the Spanish in 1738 on the northern outskirts of St. Augustine. It was the first free black settlement in what is now the United States. Slaves, fleeing from the English colonies in the Carolinas, headed south to Spanish-controlled Florida and freedom if they converted to Catholicism and agreed to serve in the militia. Fort Mose was built as a buffer between the English to the north and the Spanish settlements to the



**The groundbreaking for Fort Mose, Friday, January 19, 2024**



south. It protected St. Augustine for almost 30 years until Spain ceded Florida to England in 1763. Rather than be enslaved again, the Fort Mose soldiers, and their families made their way to Spanish Cuba. The abandoned fort was swallowed by the marshes, and it wasn't until the 1980s that the original site was unearthed during an archaeological dig. It became a state park in 1989, and the importance of the site was then recognized. In 1994 it was designated a US National Historic Landmark.

The Fort Mose Historical Society set a goal to reconstruct a representation of the original fort and thanks to support from the Florida State Parks Foundation and many other donors, that goal became a reality on January 19<sup>th</sup> when the groundbreaking ceremony for the fort took place. The fort is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

## Great photos

Ranger Val Hahn, who is now with the Nature Conservancy snapped these two photos recently and I thought they were so dramatic that we should display them in the newsletter.



Osprey with large fish



Tree swallow about to catch a dragonfly

## Nature News

### OLD FLINTHEAD

Also known as Ironhead, Gourdhead, and other names, this stately bird is a Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*), and although listed as threatened, we are fortunate to see them frequently on the Wekiva River.

With a wingspan of around 60 inches, this bird is a lovely sight when seen soaring, much like a vulture, with neck outstretched and legs trailing. The head is featherless and scaly, the feathers on the body pure white and fluffy as a summer cloud. The tail, wingtips, and edges of the wing are black, but often appear deep green.



They feed on small aquatic prey, in shallow water no more than a foot deep, with the bill submerged and swinging back and forth, and the pink feet stirring up the water and stream bed. Because they must find prey for themselves and their young in shallow water, their nesting season will suffer if Florida's usually dry springtime has excessive rain.



Wood Storks nest in large colonies, in mangroves and in cypress domes. There will be two to four eggs laid in a nest of sticks. In central Florida, a great place to observe them is from the boardwalk at Orlando Wetlands, in March and April.



## Flower of the month

### Four-petal St. John's-Wort *Hypericum tetrapetalum*

Four-petal St. John's-Wort is considered a near-endemic species as it occurs only in Florida and limited parts of southern Georgia. It is an evergreen perennial herb or shrub which grows up to 39 inches (1 m) tall. Its growth habit may be prostrate or spreading.

The striking flowers have four bright lemon-yellow petals and four sepals. The prominent ovary at the center of the flower is surrounded by numerous stamens. The flowers are attractive to bees.

Leaves are oval to heart shaped. They are arranged opposite each other on the stem, and clasp the stem. The leaf margins are untoothed. Leaves tend to be bluish-green, but may also be yellowish-green or reddish. They appear to be somewhat thick and leathery. Stems are smooth and woody at the base.



Four-petal St. John's wort blooms throughout the year, but late spring is usually its best bloom time. It occurs naturally in moist flatwoods, sandhills and ruderal areas, in full sun to part shade. Look for this beautiful wildflower in moist sunny areas along the trails of the Wekiwa Basin State Parks (Wekiwa Springs State Park, Rock Springs Run State Reserve, and Lower Wekiwa River Preserve State Park). In Wekiwa Springs State Park take a short walk from the Sand Lake parking toward Sand Lake where you will likely find several St. John's-Worts either blooming or in bud.

**Caution: The St. John's-Wort that is promoted as a supplement for use in treating depression is a non-native species. Using native St. John's-Wort can lead to dermatitis or photosensitization due to a hypericin compound found in the plants.**