



## **Wekiva Wilderness Trust Newsletter**

### **April, 2024**

### **News**

March was another busy month with numerous events and activities, all of which served to prove just how valuable volunteers are to our state parks, and especially Wekiwa Springs and Rock Springs. Thank you to all our volunteers for everything that you do.

#### **Heritage Festival and Ethel**

More than 500 people attended the Heritage Festival and official opening of the Historic Trail at Rock Springs Run State Reserve on Saturday, March 9. The annual festival, now in its 11th year, is run by the East Lake Historical Society and is normally held in Sorrento. However, the society agreed to move it to Rock Springs this year to coincide with the trail opening. It was such a success that the society is already planning a bigger and better festival at Rock Springs in the spring of 2025.

A huge effort was needed to get Rock Springs ready for the dual event. Kudos to all the volunteers and park staff who worked so hard to make it happen. Preparation included prescribed burns, litter pick-up, hauling in and setting up everything that was needed, and beautification of the interpretive signs along the Ethel trail. Brent Saulsbury, Park Services Specialist, led the beautification which included planting flowers and small trees and building log fences behind the signs to showcase them.

The event itself included exhibitors with displays from local organizations and crafters, children's activities, historical memorabilia, as well as food and music. The Historic Ethel Trail was officially opened by Brian Fugate, Assistant Director, Florida Park Service, and Kirby Smith, chair of the Lake County Board of Commissioners, followed by a ribbon-cutting ceremony. This was followed by guided walks and non-stop tram rides, which proved very popular.

At next year's festival we hope to recreate the 'Ethel Village'— an area where people can see how folks lived back then, what they wore, their arts and crafts, and a display of agricultural tools and household goods.

There are also plans to reconstruct two homestead cabins, based on a photograph of a one-room cabin built at Ethel in 1888. One will be a small museum and the other will be furnished – sparsely – as it would have been around that time.

## Preparation



## The Event





**Commissioner Kirby Smith, chair of the Lake County Board of Commissioners**



**Don Philpott**



**Ribbon Cutting Ceremony opening the Historic Ethel Trail**



**Volunteer reenactors portraying  
Therese Dawson and Mary McDonald,  
both Ethel residents in the 1920s**



**Vendors and Exhibits**



**The new wheelchair tram proved very popular and  
made nonstop tours along the trail all day.**



**Some of the volunteers who worked so hard all day**

## Anthony Frazier

Anthony Frazier was a slave on the pre-Civil War Delk plantation at what is now Kelly Park. He served as a Union soldier during the War and returned to the Ethel area afterwards. He bought and sold land. In 1880 he was appointed a Special Commissioner for Roads in Orange County, an incredible achievement for a freed slave at that time. His headstone was discovered by chance on park land just north of Ethel. Because it is likely to be sent to Tallahassee, we have had an exact replica made which was 3D printed and then treated to make it look old. We now must decide how best to display the headstone along the trail.

You can read the full story of Anthony Frazier in the Ethel e-book which is available free from the WWT website. This is the updated version and has much more information than the printed version.



## Junior Rangers

Junior Rangers learned how to identify invasives at their March meeting and as usual, the meeting ended with a trash clean up. Details of April, May and June meetings are posted on the Meet Up Wekiva webpage.



**Brent and volunteers at the March meeting**

JOIN US FOR



**FREE**

**Wekiwa Springs State Park JUNIOR RANGER CLUB**

**MONDAY, APRIL 15TH, 2023 5:00PM-6:30PM**

**WEKIWA SPRINGS STATE PARK**

LEARN: LEARN GEOCACHING WITH YOUR FAMILY AND OTHER JUNIOR RANGER FRIENDS.  
 EARN: RECREATION STAMP  
 GIVE BACK: SHORT COMMUNITY TRASH CLEAN-UP  
 PARTICIPANTS UNDER 18 MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT

**PLEASE BRING WATER & CLOSED-TOE SHOES**

**DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL**

EMAIL FOR LOCATION AND TO RSVP:  
[Brent.saulsbury@FloridaDEP.gov](mailto:Brent.saulsbury@FloridaDEP.gov)




**PARK'S PAST**

**MONDAY, MAY 13TH, 2024 5:00PM-6:30PM**

**WEKIWA SPRINGS STATE PARK**

LEARN: LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PARK'S PAST WITH YOUR FAMILY AND OTHER JUNIOR RANGER FRIENDS.  
 EARN: CULTURAL RESOURCES STAMP  
 GIVE BACK: SHORT COMMUNITY TRASH CLEAN-UP  
 PARTICIPANTS UNDER 18 MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT

**PLEASE BRING WATER & CLOSED-TOE SHOES**

**DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL**

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JOIN US FOR

**JUNIOR RANGERS**

**FRIENDLY FLAMES**



LEARN: LEARN MORE ABOUT FRIENDLY FLAMES  
 EARN: NATURAL RESOURCES STAMP  
 GIVE BACK: SHORT COMMUNITY TRASH CLEAN-UP



PARTICIPANTS UNDER 18 MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.

**Please bring water & closed-toe shoes**

MONDAY JUNE 10, 2024  
 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

WEKIWA SPRINGS STATE PARK  
 SINK HOLE PAVILION

**DISPONIBLE EN ESPAÑOL**  
 TO RSVP EMAIL  
[Brent.saulsbury@FloridaDEP.gov](mailto:Brent.saulsbury@FloridaDEP.gov)



SPONSORED BY:




## **Wekiva Paint Out**

The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Wekiva Paint Out was held from February 26 to March 2. This is our major fund-raising event of the year and once again it was very successful. Wekiva Wilderness Trust and Keep Seminole Beautiful jointly organize and both share in the profits. This year, 25 artists were hosted in the Youth Camp. Their paintings were exhibited and sold in our marquee gallery at Wekiva Island.



**Marquee Gallery at Wekiva Island**



**Marquee Gallery at Night**



**Michelle Held painting on the Wekiva**



**Morgan Samuel Price at work**



**Harry P. Otter**

On Tuesday of Paint Out, an orphaned, eight-week-old otter was brought for the artists to paint. It was hugely popular, and for the rest of the week paintings of otters sold well. This otter, named Harry. P. Otter, will go to rehab shortly and then will be released.

### **Nature Center**

Good things are happening at the Nature Center. Brent has been supervising the planting of flowers by the path leading to the nature center, the kiosks are getting a much-needed makeover, and the new gator is proving to be a big hit with both volunteers and visitors.



**Patty with Darth Gator**



**Darth Gator**





**Brent Saulsbury, Park Services Specialist, at the Nature Center**

## **Nature News**

### **Florida Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis pratensis*)**

In the middle and lower reaches of our wild and scenic Wekiva River, where the water is wide and edges are shallow, there the Sandhill Cranes will build their nest of mud and vegetation. She will eight-week-old lay 2 eggs, and after about 30 days of incubation by both mates, the “colts”, as they are known, will hatch, golden fuzz-balls on stilts. Within 24 hours, they’ll be following as the parents forage, swimming vigorously, knees kicking up behind, as the tall parents wade easily in shallow water. The colts will stay with their parents almost a year.

Winter months will see a huge increase as cranes from the Midwest arrive and stay for a few months. Only the year-round resident cranes nest here. The migratory population is the other subspecies, (*G. c. tabida*).

If you’re lucky enough to come across a courting pair, you’ll see a wondrous display of dancing, leaping, and stick throwing. They are monogamous and mate for life and they stay together all year. Their life expectancy is as long as 20 years.

Gray birds with a bustle of tail feathers and a bright red patch on the head (the red is skin, not feathers).

The adults are about 4 feet tall with a wingspan of over 6 feet. When flying, they're easy to spot with their necks extended straight and their long legs trailing. In case you don't happen to be watching the sky, you'll probably be alerted by their loud calls which can be heard over 2 miles away.

Cranes are omnivorous, feeding on seeds and grains, insects and small birds and reptiles. Unlike herons and egrets, they don't go after fish.

Due to loss of habitat, hunting, and being hit by cars, their numbers have declined. They are listed as threatened in Florida, but they have adapted somewhat to suburban areas and golf courses.



## Flower of the Month

### Carolina Frostweed (*Crocanthemum carolinianum*)

Carolina Frostweed (*Crocanthemum carolinianum*) is a beautiful, spring-blooming and often, summer-blooming, flower of pine flatwoods, sandhills, dry woods and old fields. Its native range is southeast United States from Texas to North Carolina, including the north half of Florida. This observer's acquaintance with this lovely flower began while hiking under the open canopy of longleaf pines between trail markers #4 and #6 in Wekiwa Springs State Park.



Even though the plant is diminutive, the five bright yellow petals are easily visible against ground litter. Usually, several stems grow from a woody, taproot. The stems grow up to 12 inches tall and are surrounded by a basal rosette of leaves; however, the basal leaves may be absent at flowering. Stems and leaves are covered with fine white hairs. Stem leaves grow opposite each other, are smaller than the basal leaves, and are elliptic to oval in shape. Flowers are terminal, solitary and are borne opposite a leaf. Flowers are about one inch wide, have five yellow petals, six sepals, and numerous stamens. The flowers are delicate and last only one day. The petals fall easily when brushed.

The anthers (tips of the stamens) are orange. This characteristic, among others, distinguishes Carolina Frostweed from a similar flower in the same genus, Pinebarren Frostweed (*Crocanthemum corymbosum*), also common in the Wekiva River Basin parks. Compare the photo of Carolina Frostweed (above) with Pinebarren Frostweed (below). Can you identify other distinguishing characteristics as well as similarities?

