

City and County Move Forward with Sandhill Habitat Restoration at Boulware Springs Nature Park and Sweetwater Preserve

GAINESVILLE, Fla. - The City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Department and the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department are happy to announce the upcoming habitat restoration projects at Boulware Springs Nature Park located at 3300 SE 15 Street and at Sweetwater Preserve located at 95 SE Williston Road. The long-term goal of the restoration is to bring back the former Sandhill habitat and restore biodiversity to the site. This work will be initiated before the end of this year, with the removal of hardwood trees not native to Sandhill habitat.

The upcoming tree removal will require the temporary closure of the portion of the Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail adjacent to the park. Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail bicycle and pedestrian traffic will be re-routed around the closed segment of the trail for an undetermined, but short, period of time before the end of the year. Barricades, signage and maps showing the detour will be posted on <http://www.cityofgainesvilleparks.org> and www.alachuacounty.us. Additionally the East Trail and Trailhead at Sweetwater Preserve, adjacent to the Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail, will be closed for the duration of the restoration project. Active tree removal will take about one week, but the restoration will be ongoing for a number of years.

The south entrance to Boulware Springs will remain open, and the Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail between Boulware Springs and Hawthorne will not be affected throughout the restoration process.

Please contact Linda Demetropoulos, City of Gainesville Nature Operations manager, at demetropls@cityofgainesville.org or 352-393-8445, or Sandra Vardaman, Land Conservation Biologist, Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, at (352)264-6803 or SMVardaman@alachuacounty.us for more information.

For project details and updates, please visit our websites at www.CityofGainesvilleParks.org, <http://www.alachuacounty.us/Depts/epd/LandConservation/Pages/ACFNews.aspx#News> or follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/GainesvillePRCA) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/GainesvillePRCA).

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Sandhill Habitat Restoration at Boulware Springs Nature Park and Sweetwater Preserve

Project History and Details:

The City of Gainesville is beginning the first phase of habitat restoration at Boulware Springs Nature Park, in conjunction with Alachua County's Sweetwater Preserve and adjacent private lands. This phase requires the physical removal (harvest) of invading hardwood trees in order to begin to restore approximately 80-acres of sandhill habitat on Boulware Springs and an additional 20 acres of sandhill on Sweetwater Preserve to its former health. Soon the public will notice a contractor harvesting hardwood trees. This will dramatically open up the landscape - the exact result needed for this project! The public should be aware that the landscape will look different, especially at first, but over time a beautiful transformation will take place.

Historically, the restoration project and surrounding areas were covered by habitat called sandhill - extensive expanses of grasses and showy flowers beneath widely spaced longleaf pine trees. There were some rich hammocks (hardwood forests), but it was savannas, not closed-canopy forests, that dominated our landscape. The biological diversity in this ecosystem — the highest in North America — was in the understory where flowers, gopher tortoises and fox squirrels once abounded. Over the past half-century, we have suppressed the natural fires that would periodically burn and regenerate the forest and enrich the soils. These fires would also have controlled the young non-fire tolerant oaks, such as the laurel and water oaks that are a primary target of this restoration. Longleaf pines are light-demanding — they don't survive the shade of laurel oaks and other invasive hardwood trees. Likewise for the hundreds of species of savanna grasses, wildflowers and wildlife that die out when fires are suppressed and hardwoods invade.

The goal is to bring back the former habitat and restore biodiversity to the site. It won't look like much at first, but in time the public will witness the re-emergence of a widely-spaced longleaf pine canopy with a beautiful understory of native sandhill grasses and flowers, home to native creatures such as the gopher tortoise. Once the initial tree removal is complete the East Trail at Sweetwater Preserve will be reopened. Eventually, the plan is to have walking trails and signage on Boulware Springs so that everyone can learn about and appreciate this habitat and its connection to our history.

The restoration will take place at Boulware Springs Nature Park, which is located between the Gainesville-Hawthorne Trail and Southeast 15th Street, from approximately Southeast 32nd Avenue to approximately Southeast 25th Avenue, and on the east side of Sweetwater Preserve across the Gainesville Hawthorn Trail from the restoration area at Boulware Springs.

For project updates, please visit our websites at www.CityofGainesvilleParks.org, www.alachuacountyforever.us or follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/GainesvillePRCA) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/GainesvillePRCA).