



TOUCHSTONES



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Filling in the Gaps

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

We recently closed on the 2-acre Teuton Tract. While small in size, its location makes it a critical acquisition. How it even got our attention is a story in itself. Providence, divine intervention, or happy coincidence... which it was all depends on what you believe.

The Legislature and Governor mandated all state agencies assess their conservation land holdings to determine which pieces should be sold off. There were several in Alachua County – none jointly acquired with us fortunately. There was a Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park piece along the Gainesville-Hawthorne Rail Trail that was listed. While it fronted on the Trail, it was separated from the main State Park. About the time we were invited to comment on the list, one of the staff was in line at the bank and a customer in front of her asked her about the “Alachua County Forever” on her T-Shirt.

Turns out he was the owner of the small gap between the listed property and the State Park. It was a time in his life when he could really use the money. We were able to work the deal to a successful conclusion in six months. Even better, the State agreed to manage the property as a unit of the State Park, and recommended the adjacent property be removed from the disposal list.

So conservation property was saved from disposal, the Rail Trail viewshed was enhanced and preserved by filling in a gap and some really fine people got a little bit of extra money when they needed it most. All because a staff person was in line at the bank at the same exact time as a landowner in need.



Rollerblading on the Gainesville Hawthorne Rail-Trail

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Fall comes to Cofrin Nature Park, a joint project between ACF, the City of Gainesville and the State of Florida

ACF Dashboard

Acquisition List protected:	22,405
With Direct ACF funding:	18,728
Remaining on List:	27,615
Under contract:	543
Value of land protected:	\$98,498,556
County share:	\$37,328,306
Partner share:	\$61,170,250
Managed by County:	12,302
Managed by Partners:	10,103
Percent Acreage Open or Opening soon:	48%
As of: 1/14/2014	

This is an electronic newsletter distributed to anyone interested in following the Alachua County Forever Program. To be added to the distribution list, please click [here](#). The information in this Newsletter is available in alternate formats upon request. Back issues are available on our [website](#).

"What is the extinction of the Condor, to a child who has never known a wren?" – Robert Michael Pyle.

Hope for Renewed State Funding

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

The following is taken from the Florida's Water and Land Legacy's January 16, 2014 press release.

Florida's Water and Land Legacy announced that the Water and Land Conservation constitutional amendment has surpassed the statewide signature requirement to be placed on the November 2014 ballot. To date, 685,971 signatures from Florida voters supporting the amendment have been validated by Supervisors of Elections throughout the state. In addition, the constitutional amendment has been qualified in 15 of Florida's 27 congressional districts, clearing its final hurdles to placement on the November ballot. It will need 60% approval to pass.

"Thanks to our dedicated supporters and hardworking volunteers, we exceeded the signature requirement and had the amendment qualified in more than enough congressional districts to place this important measure on the ballot. The unifying support this campaign has received is proof that Floridians care deeply about our state's water and wildlife and want to safeguard it for future generations," said Will Abberger, the campaign's chair and director of conservation finance for The Trust for Public Land. "This means that next November, Florida voters will have the opportunity to dedicate state funding to ensure we have clean water and protect our precious natural resources."

The Water and Land Conservation amendment would dedicate funding for conservation, management, and restoration of Florida's water and land resources for 20 years. The amendment, which if approved by the voters would take effect July 1, 2015, sets aside one-third of the existing documentary stamp tax (paid when real estate is sold) to restore the Everglades, protect drinking water sources, and revive the state's historic commitment to protecting natural lands and wildlife habitat through the Florida Forever program.

The amendment will provide more than \$10 billion for water and land conservation in Florida without any tax increase.

"Nearly one million petitions signed and delivered to local supervisors of elections sends a message loud and clear that Floridians want to see our water sources and natural areas protected. When given the chance to vote on the amendment in November, we are confident that the answer will be a resounding "Yes!" said Pegeen Hanrahan, the Legacy coalition's campaign manager.

The Florida's Water and Land Legacy is the campaign working to qualify the amendment for the ballot and win voter approval in November 2014. Florida's Water and Land Legacy is supported by almost 4,000 dedicated volunteers and more than 340 conservation and civic organizations from across the state. Almost 1 million Floridians have already signed petitions. To learn more about the Water and Land Conservation amendment please visit FloridaWaterLandLegacy.org.



Courtesy Florida's Water & Land Legacy Campaign

State Funding is vital to ACF Success

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

Alachua County has benefited directly from state-funded land conservation, management, and restoration programs. They assist our local efforts to protect conservation lands. Since 2000, the County has received over \$34 million in grants; from the State's Florida Communities Trust, the Water Management Districts, and the Florida Forever program. Other agencies and non-profits have received additional millions of state conservation dollars to protect additional significant lands. Outdoor recreation and tourism is one of Florida's most significant industries, employing one out of every 9 citizens, drawing 90 million people annually to our state, having a \$71 billion annual economic impact. Florida has a longstanding commitment to the protection of outdoor recreation lands, including recreational trails, parks, and urban open space; rural landscapes; working farms and ranches; historic and geologic sites. Florida's Governors and Legislatures, from 1990 through 2008, supported two state programs, Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever, which received approximately \$300 million in state funding each year for conservation lands protection.



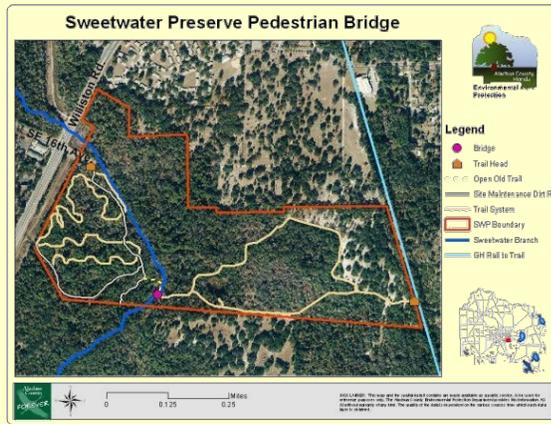
ACF's Barr Hammock Levy Prairie Preserve. Of the \$15M cost, the County's share was \$5M with \$9M from State programs, and the rest from a combination of federal and private funds.



Clockwise from upper left: Barr Hammock/Ledwith Lake, 2013 Opening crowd, our resident bobcat.

Bridge over Sweetwater

By Kevin Ratkus, Environmental Specialist



Map of the bridge location over Sweetwater Branch linking the two sides of the Preserve



Photo of the bridge location site with artist's impression of the bridge

*"Like a bridge over troubled water, I will ease your mind."
- Bridge over Troubled Water, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel.*

A bike-pedestrian bridge is coming to Sweetwater Preserve soon. Sweetwater has the highest visitation of all ACF Preserves due to its accessibility to town and its adjacency to the Downtown Connector of the Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail. Unfortunately there is no bridge over Sweetwater Branch; therefore the Preserve is separated into two distinct sections with separate trailheads and trail systems. The East Trail is accessible from the Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail and the West Trail is accessible from Williston Road and SE 16th Avenue. The bridge will connect both portions of the Preserve linking the almost 3 miles of trails thus providing a safer, more enjoyable visitor experience. The bridge will increase pedestrian use of the preserve and provide a user-friendly bicycle route for commuters and recreationists.

The County posted questionnaires at both trail heads in the spring of 2012 asking visitors if they would support having a bridge over Sweetwater Branch; 705 people responded positively.

We're in the final design and pre-permitting phase. The graceful arch design is intended to span the stream leaving ample room for shoreline instability, peak stormwater flow and to not create any mid-stream debris obstructions. It'll be constructed of metal and concrete, to be durable and low maintenance, and be designed to have a low visual impact.

Get outside

Take a hike with one of our partners.

Date	Location	Event	Contact
February 1, 2014	Lake Alto	Monthly Hike	FTA
February 15, 2014	Barr Hammock	Children's Valentine's 5 Senses Hike and Chocolate Hike	GEC/CTF
March 1, 2014	Sweetwater	Monthly Hike	FTA
March 8, 2014	Barr Hammock	Wetlands Hike and Mosswood Farm Store Treat	GEC/CTF
March 17, 2014	Barr Hammock	St. Patrick's Day Hike/Plant ID	GEC/CTF
March 30, 2014	Barr Hammock	Birding Hike	GEC/CTF
April 5, 2014	Balu Forest	Monthly Hike	FTA
April 19, 2014	Barr Hammock	Gainesville Birding and Nature Festival Birding Hike	GEC/CTF
May 3, 2014	Barr Hammock	Monthly Hike	FTA

Contacts:

CTF – Conservation Trust for Florida

www.conserveflorida.org

Busy Shires- Byerly, busy@conserveflorida.org

FTA-Florida Trail Association

<http://www.floridatrail.org/about-us/chapters/floridacrackers/>

Mitch Sapp, mesapp1941@gmail.com

GEC – Gainesville EcoTours

www.gainesvilleecotours.com

Terri Mashour, terri@gainesvilleecotours.com



Hikers at Barr Hammock Levy Prairie. A great spot for spotting migratory waterfowl this time of year.

View from the Fire Tower

An occasional series on Prescribed Fire and Wildfire

By David Hoyt, Sr. Environmental Specialist

Winter burning is an important tool in our land management kit. But why burn in the winter when historically, lightning-caused wildfires burned frequently throughout Florida in the summer?

To answer that question we have to start in the days before Columbus set foot in the Americas.

Wildfires shaped Florida's landscape. Plants that could tolerate fire, such as pine trees and grasses, flourished as fire swept back and forth across the land every few years. The fires limited hardwood forests to wetter areas or the few places that wouldn't burn easily under normal conditions. Open vistas were common in pre-Columbian Florida. The Landscape would be covered with grasses, widely scattered shrubs and pine trees with very little built up fuels. The first peoples and the early European settlers that followed, understanding the positive response their landscape has to fire, purposely set fires to safeguard their homes and improve foraging for the game and livestock that sustained them.

With the introduction of modern policies to safeguard development and agricultural property, wildfires and even prescribed fires began to be suppressed. Vegetative fuels, which used to be consumed regularly by fire, built up quickly in the moist, warm climate of Florida. When these areas caught fire in the summer, started by lightning, arson or by accident, the fire and resulting damage to both the ecosystem and the human development was catastrophic. Fortunately for us, some ranchers, park rangers and ecologists in Florida continued the purposeful burning practices of the past until the idea caught on that fire can be beneficial. Today Florida leads the nation in acres prescribed burned annually.

Most of the areas Alachua County EPD purchased and is managing have not been burned in some time. They have also been fragmented and isolated from their larger context by 500 years of development. Re-introducing fire into this system, with heavy fuels and surrounded by homes, businesses, busy roads and highways becomes very complicated. Not only do you want to ensure you meet your ecological goals, but you want to avoid an uncontrolled, intense fire, or even a fire that smokes out your neighbors and roadways. Minimizing the unpredictability is key and the secret to that is reducing your fuel loads so that the fire behavior is manageable. This is why we burn in winter; we get milder weather patterns than the storm-fraught Florida summers. The winter weather is more predictable, has milder events and the ground fuels are drier so we can remove some fuel every few years so that your site has a normal fuel load. Ultimately as these areas are restored to their historical stature we will be able to prescribed burn some of them in summer.



Top: Monitoring the Lake Alto Prescribed Burn at the interface with a neighbor's property; Middle: "Stringing fire"; Bottom: Yes, that is the boss... but not really. See article at bottom left

How not to be the Boss – Go light a fire

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

Land managers rave about prescribed fire (see above and Winter 2012 Issue). Well, I decided to see what all the fuss was about. So I got trained as a Wildland Firefighter II so I could participate with our Burn Team. What an experience! But not as you might expect. Yes, there was the adrenaline rush of working with fire, being constantly vigilant so it behaves the way we expect and accomplishes our goals. More fun was to be just part of a disciplined and professional team, led by experienced Burn Bosses. It is true, Virginia: hire good people, create an environment in which they do what they do best, and then... get out of their way. It was like a day off with someone else in charge.



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Mill Creek. Photo courtesy Larry Korhnak

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ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER MISSION

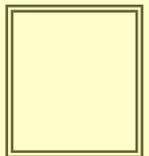
Approved in November 2000 by the voters, to acquire, improve and manage the county's environmentally sensitive lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.alachuacountyforever.us

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