



TOUCHSTONES



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Preview of Fall Wildflowers at Barr Hammock Levy Prairie Loop Trail

By Kelly McPherson, Sr. Environmental Specialist

Last quarter we scared you out of the woods with our tick article. To make amends and to entice you back, this issue leads with a preview of the wildflowers which inspired the Spanish to name our State, La Florida.

Wildflower season on Levy Prairie is approaching. A walk along the Levy Loop Trail from mid-October to early November will reveal a yellow show of flowers across the basin. The eastern-most section is dominated by the pink-flowered shrub swamp loosestrife (*Decodon verticillatus*), but as one moves westward, the yellow show overwhelms the view. The bulk of the yellow is two species of beggarsticks (*Bidens* spp.) but if you look closely, you may also see goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) and bladderwort (*Utricularia* spp.) or yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris* spp.) In addition, other fall-blooming plants such as rice button aster (*Symphytotrichum dumosum*), Elliotts aster (*Symphytotrichum elliotii*), or sometimes a late crimson-eyed rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) can be seen among fall blooming grasses and many others.

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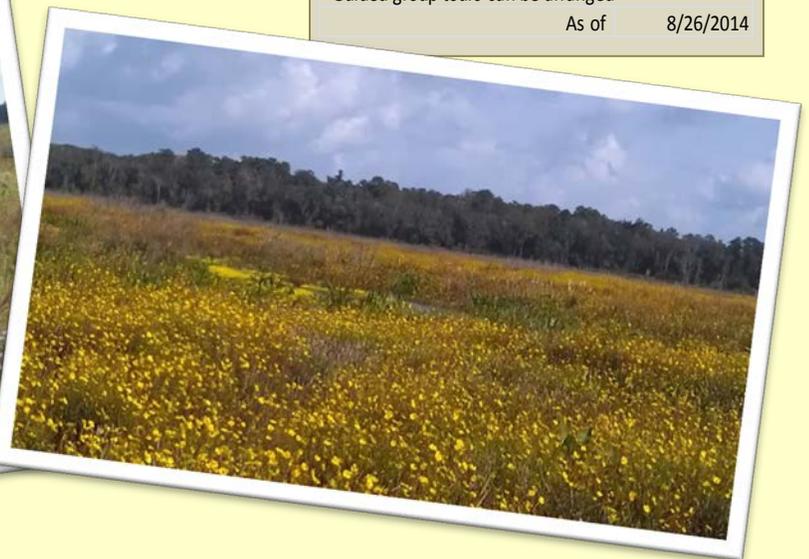
ACF Dashboard

Acquisition List protected:	23,944
With Direct ACF funding:	19,285
Remaining on List:	27,246
Under contract:	-
Value of land protected:	\$ 105,610,976
County share:	\$ 37,661,732
Partner share:	\$ 67,949,245
Managed by County:	10,662
Managed by Partners:	8,624
Acreage open now:	11,908
To be opened in next 5 years*:	5,602
*Guided group tours can be arranged	
As of	8/26/2014

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



Seen here are the purple flowered Elliotts aster (*Symphytotrichum elliotii*), and beggarsticks (*Bidens laevis* and *B. mitis*).



Foreground and background yellows here are beggarsticks. The shorter-statured yellow flowers in the mid-section of the picture are bladderworts (*Utricularia* sp.), a carnivorous floating plant.

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](#).

A touchstone was a bit of hard, dark, finely-grained rock carried by miners, merchants and bankers to test the purity of a gold nugget. They would rub it on the touchstone and compare it to known standards establishing trust in gold as currency. The 2000 Alachua County Forever referendum: "to acquire, improve and manage environmentally significant lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation" is our touchstone. It is the mandate given us by the voters and is our mission statement. When presented with an issue, we rub it - metaphorically speaking - on the referendum: and ask, "is this what the voters intended?" We feel then "Touchstones" is a fitting name for our newsletter. In it, we hope to share with you our thoughts, successes, and challenges. I hope you will let us know if we have maintained your trust.

ACQUISITION

Protecting a way of Life

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

Alachua County continued its success protecting working landscapes. These two projects highlight the ability of land conservation programs to preserve natural resource values, maintain traditional lifestyles, and protect our agricultural heritage. In August, ACF acquired conservation easements on the Higginbotham Ranch and the Cypress Point Creamery. Both are located off SE 171st Street, north of State Road 20 near Hawthorne, approximately 1.5 miles northeast of the ACF Phifer Flatwoods Preserve. The conservation easements also expand the protected lands within the Lake Lochloosa and Orange Creek watersheds. Lochloosa Creek, located approximately one mile west of the properties, flows into Lochloosa Lake, an Outstanding Florida Water, approximately four miles south.

The Higginbotham property consists of a working cattle ranch, which has been in operation since the 1960s. The property owners nominated the land for a conservation easement to preserve the land as they had always known it. The property consists of approximately 255 acres of improved pasture with scattered forested wetlands. Many of the wetlands are interconnected with manmade ditches which ultimately flow to Lochloosa Creek. The Easement allows continued cattle ranching and limited timber management.

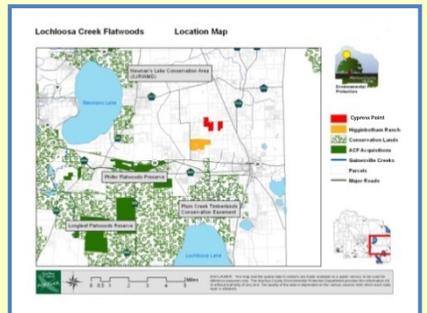
The Cypress Point Creamery property is managed as a working Jersey cow dairy, producing hand-made artisanal cheeses since 1961. This property consists of approximately 98 acres of improved pasture situated among scattered forested wetlands and mesic pine flatwoods. Approximately 69 acres of the pastures are currently managed for hay production and are excluded from grazing, while the remaining 29 acres are utilized for livestock rearing areas. The forested wetlands consist of two basin swamps which extend beyond the property boundaries, and several isolated dome swamps. The condition of the basin swamps is excellent. The Easement allows continued cattle ranching, dairying, milk and cheese production, and limited timber management.

Both landowners donated 25% of the purchase price and the federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, administered by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service contributed 50%. The County provided the remaining 25% and will monitor the easement. The landowners also donated a second wrap-around conservation easement to further protect the environmental values. These were the 54th and 55th acquisitions by the ACF program, the 12th and 13th conservation easements, and the 27th and 28th acquisitions using the Wild Spaces and Public Places Surtax, approved by the voters in 2008 to extend the ACF Program.

The Alachua County Commission supports The Water and Land Conservation Amendment. It will appear as Amendment 1 on the November 4, 2014 ballot.



It will restore funding to the state's land acquisition and management programs. \$34 million from these programs has been spent in Alachua County to match local sources protecting our natural heritage.



Pictures from top: Landowner making cheese at the Cypress Point Creamery; Jersey herd at the Creamery; map of the project areas; Sunrise at the Higginbotham Ranch; Angus herd at Higginbotham Ranch

UF Students Take the Plunge into Volunteer Work at Barr Hammock

By Kelly McPherson, Sr. Environmental Specialist

We at Alachua County Forever have been fortunate to participate in two of the three events that the Center for Leadership and Service at the University of Florida organizes each year. The most recent was the Summer Plunge and last winter we hosted volunteers for the MLK day of service. The Conservation Trust for Florida, a partner in the acquisition and management of Barr Hammock Preserve, has worked with UF to organize ACF's participation in the event.

Volunteers so far have helped move Barr Hammock Preserve toward the opening of Barr Hammock's second trailhead. On July 19th, 2014, 6 students from a variety of majors helped staff ready a segment of the walking trail for boardwalk construction. It was a hot, muggy, mosquito-y morning with more than a little mud along the trail. Students were not deterred. Hard work and good cheer ensued. The next event through the Center for Leadership and Service will be the Gator Plunge on September 27, 2014.



Volunteers at work trail-clearing

Local Partnership to Restore Longleaf Pine at Sweetwater Preserve

By Sandra Vardaman, Conservation Biologist

The Kincaid Loop Longleaf Pine Restoration Partnership (Longleaf Partnership) was formed to facilitate restoration of longleaf pine forests in Southeast Gainesville. Partners include Alachua County, the City of Gainesville, Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, private conservation land owners, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Nature Conservancy. Partners cooperate on restoration activities, longleaf pine education projects, obtaining restoration funding, and sharing knowledge of restoration practices.

This fall through the Longleaf Partnership, the County and the City of Gainesville are implementing a project to remove invasive hardwoods from the sandhill at Sweetwater Preserve and Boulware Springs. The lack of regular fire in these areas has allowed hardwoods, such as laurel oaks, to invade the sandhill and form dense thickets that crowd out longleaf pines and inhibit growth of groundcover plants, thus reducing the fine fuels necessary for low-intensity fires that are vital to a healthy sandhill natural community.



Historically there were over 90 million acres of longleaf pine forests in the southeastern US; less than 3% of these forests remain today



To learn more about the Longleaf Partnership and the upcoming restoration project, please join County and City Staff for a walk through the restoration areas on both Sweetwater and Boulware Springs. Staff will show participants areas in various stages of restoration and talk about the upcoming project. It should also be a good time to see fall wildflowers! Date: September 27th, 2014, 9:00 A.M.- 12:00 P.M. Meeting place: Boulware Springs parking area near the entrance to the Gainesville Hawthorn Rail Trail. Participants should wear closed toe shoes and sunscreen, and bring drinking water. For more information or for persons with disabilities who require assistance, please call 264-6803.

Critter Corner – Feral Pigs

An occasional series on wildlife and their habitats

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

Recently, staff was asked to respond to a concern raised about our policy of eradicating these non-native animals. So we thought we'd take the opportunity to share something about these porcine pests and our policies to deal with them.

Feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*) are large non-endemic, omnivorous animals (eating all kinds of food, both plant and animal) common to Florida and much of the continent. They were introduced to the Americas by early Spanish explorers who brought them aboard ship for food. Pigs were particularly well-suited to 15th century ship-board life as they ate anything the sailors did not, adapted to confinement for long periods, and stayed alive until it was time for a mid-ocean meal. Many escaped when the sailors reach land and still more were deliberately released to be hunted by future explorers and settlers for fresh meat.

They possess the highest reproductive potential of any North American large mammal, and currently inhabit many areas in such large numbers that they adversely impact the environment. Feral pigs degrade habitat, prey on native species, and compete with native species for resources. They are capable of destroying whole plant communities by their rooting activities. Some of these plant communities contain threatened or endangered plants and animals. Feral pigs are suspected of preying on young gopher tortoises, a listed species in Florida, hatchling sea turtles, and other rare amphibians, reptiles, and ground nesting birds.

Public safety is another reason nuisance animals (and plants) are eliminated from conservation lands. It is particularly important in the case of feral hogs. Feral pigs are capable of carrying numerous parasites and diseases that potentially threaten human health, including diseases such as brucellosis, leptospirosis, salmonellosis, toxoplasmosis, sarcoptic mange, E. coli, and trichinosis. In 2006, after hundreds of people nationwide were infected with E. coli (from pig feces) following the consumption of bagged spinach, investigators identified wild pigs as a likely source of the contamination (California Food Emergency Response Team 2007).

The presence of wild pigs in an area can make it difficult or impossible to eradicate certain diseases from livestock and wildlife. Diseases of significance include pseudorabies, swine brucellosis, tuberculosis, vesicular stomatis, and classical swine fever. They also cause billions of dollars' worth of damage every year to the nation's crops, rooting up agricultural fields, pine seedlings, residential gardens, commercial forests and horticulture operations.

Control of feral pigs is consistent with the County Commission's vision for its conservation lands (through the adoption of the [Hunting Business Plan](#), adopted January 22, 2013) and the Land Management Plans approved by the County for each preserve where feral hogs are an issue. Our license agreements with caretakers/hunters include feral pig elimination requirements in the scopes of work. It is one of the major benefits to the County of these arrangements. The cost to contract out the elimination of feral pigs is expensive. The caretaker is required not to remove live animals from the property in order to prevent further spread of the animals. If the meat is useable the caretaker can keep it. If not, the animal carcasses are left onsite. Our feral hog elimination practices and policies are consistent with that of many other conservation land management agencies including the state park systems in all states, the federal park system, the Water Management Districts as well as private conservation land-management entities such as The Nature Conservancy, Tall Timbers, Alachua Conservation Trust and Land Trusts throughout. The popular media and scientific literature is near-unanimous on feral pigs being a scourge.



Above: Feral pig damage to a longleaf pine restoration area. Photo TNC.



Right: Some other culprits on Babcock Ranch State Preserve. Photo FFWCC

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Decodon verticillatus (L.) Elliott - swamp loosestrife. Photo USDA.

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ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER MISSION

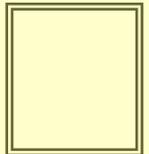
Approved in November 2000 by the voters, to acquire, improve and manage the county's environmentally sensitive lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.alachuacountyforever.us

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