



Adventure Coast Group // Florida Chapter

Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group August 2023 News, Events & Action Alerts

**Victory for Weeki Wachee Springs
FWC Approves Spring Protection Zone**

**Pasco Orange Belt Trail
Workshop Aug 15 & 16th**

**Join us at Bee Conscious Honey Bee Day
& Craft Fair Sat. Aug. 19 th 10am—2pm**

**Protect Ozello Waters: Be there
Citrus BOCC hearing August 22nd 5PM**

**Weekiwachee Preserve: Act Now
Hernando County Submits Revised Proposal**

Hernando Rainy Season Fertilizer Ban Passed

**Adventure Coast Group Monthly MeetUp
Wed., Sept. 13th 7-8 pm**

**Victory For Weeki Wachee Springs
FWC Approves Springs Protection Zone**



Last month at its July 19th meeting, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) unanimously passed the staff recommendation to establish the Weeki Wachee Springs Protection Zone (SPZ). This is a tremendous victory for Weeki Wachee Springs and something that Sierra Club and others have worked long and hard to achieve!

The passage of the Springs Protection Zone will improve water quality for the Springs and protect the native vegetation and habitat along the springs run. Limiting vessels from anchoring, mooring, beaching, and grounding will prevent further shoreline degradation. In the 5.61-mile protection zone, there are 30+ sand bars that will now be able to be restored between the Weeki Wachee Springs State Park head spring to the spring boil at the Rogers Park boat ramp contains. Major Rob Beaton, FWC Staff Member, presented the SPZ proposed rule. He made sure to let there be no misunderstanding - this spring protection zone will not alter the public's access to the spring or the spring's associated spring runs.

Spring lovers and Hernando County residents turned out to urge the commissioners to vote yes on the SPZ proposal. Several residents commented that a SPZ was overdue for the Weeki Wachee River which has experienced severe harm from the trampling of submerged aquatic vegetation and erosion of shorelines from excessive anchoring, beaching, and grounding of vessels. FWC's approval of the SPZ marks a new day for continuing restoration goals on this iconic first-magnitude Outstanding Florida Spring.

Maj. Beaton noted that staff observed harmful vessel activity and harm to root systems along the bank of the spring run. Jasmine Tavares, Sierra Club Adventure Coast's Hernando County Student Leader and President of Weeki Wachee High School Environmental Club, stated the importance of the vegetation along the river as it acts as a filter and maintains Weeki Wachee's pristine waters.

Eugene Kelly, representing the Hernando Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS), expressed their firm support of the staff recommendation and asked the commission to establish the Springs Protection Zone to address the impacts of heavy recreational vessel use on the river. Jilan Crowley, representing the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, implored the commission to vote yes as well and commended the collaboration between the community, experts, the FWC Staff, the Hernando Board of County Commissioners, and County Administrator Jeff Rodgers.

Maxine Connor, speaking as Natural Resources Chair of the League of Women Voters of Citrus County, thanked the FWC Staff for listening to the input from various organizations and revising their proposal to increase the protection area. This increased protection area is especially impactful as Michael McGrath, representing the Florida Springs Council, pointed out: "I think that, like a lot of folks, we realize that Weeki Wachee is being loved to death" McGrath told commissioners. "Frankly, because people just don't realize some of the impacts that they do with their recreational activities when they get out of their vessels and they trample some of the submerged aquatic vegetation."

Shannon Turbeville, the former SWFWMD employee who drove the effort to get the carrying capacity study initiated and funded for Weeki Wachee, commented on the victory: "I'm extremely grateful that Hernando County and our state agencies partnered together to do what's right for this natural resource. It's a compromise that does not restrict public access, but does lay the foundation for effective protection."

Local Hernando County activist, Mary Ann Johnson, expressed that "This has been a long slow process that many many people have been involved with. I give a lot of credit to Shannon Turbeville for sticking with these, Former Sen. Wilton Simpson for opening people's eyes, and our Commissioners for seeing the need to protect this natural resource. This is a win for the Weeki Wachee River, a 1st Magnitude Spring and a beginning step to preserving it as all our Springs deserve protection. I realize it will be an adjustment for many including our Marine Deputies, and FWC, but I feel confident our County Administrator and Commissioners are committed to preserving the Weeki Wachee River for generations to come."

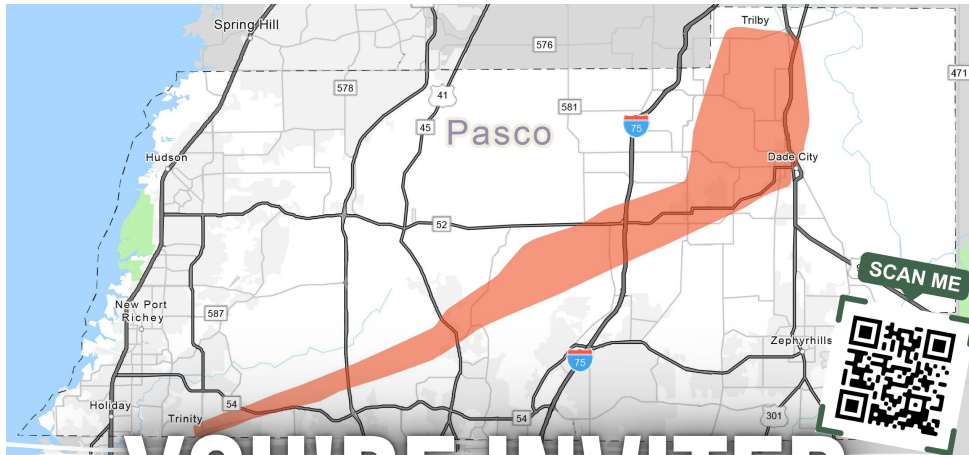
Background: The original proposal by Hernando County was based on a carrying capacity study produced by the Southwest Florida Water Management District and a working group of state and county agencies. The requested zone was a 2.35-mile area with 34 sand bars identified in the study for restoration. FDEP then requested that all waters within the Weeki Wachee Springs State Park be included as well. The FWC offered a counter-proposal that was 0.62 miles with 20 damaged sand bars, but the FWC revised its position after ample public comment and decided to seek approval for the entire spring run beginning within the Weeki Wachee State Park at the spring boil to the Rogers Park boat ramp.



Left to Right, Top: Jasmine Tavares—Sierra Club Adventure Coast student leader, Michael McGrath—Florida Springs Council/Sierra Club lead advocate. Bottom: Jilan Crowley—Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, Eugene Kelly—Florida Native Plant Society, and Maxine Connor—Citrus League of Women Voters

More photos from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners meeting on July 19 in Saint Petersburg, FL [here](#).

Pasco Orange Belt Trail Workshop Aug 15 & 16th



YOU'RE INVITED

ORANGE BELT TRAIL ALTERNATIVES WORKSHOPS

Pasco County Engineering Services is hosting the next round of public workshops for the Orange Belt Trail, a 37-mile, multi-use trail planned from Trinity to Trilby.

Two Alternatives Workshops are being held to highlight progress on the study, including updates following the April 2023 workshops. Potential alignments will be presented along with maps of the alternatives. Public input is welcomed.

August 15, 2023

5:30-7:00 p.m.

GFWC Dade City Woman's Club
37922 Palm Avenue
Dade City, FL

August 16, 2023

5:30-7:00 p.m.

Starkey Ranch Theater Library
Cultural Center
12118 Lake Blanche Drive
Odessa, FL

The workshops are informal and residents can drop in anytime between 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. An informal presentation will be held each night at 6 p.m. Materials will be posted online after the workshops.

For more information, visit [OrangeBeltTrail.com](https://www.OrangeBeltTrail.com)



**Join us at Bee Conscious Honey Bee Day
& Craft Fair Saturday, Aug. 19th 10am-2pm**



BEE CONSCIOUS

Honey Bee Day & Craft Fair

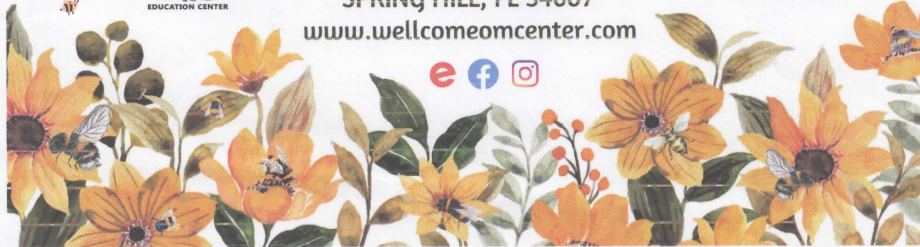
It's National Honeybee Day! Discover how these vital pollinators impact the world – and what you can do to help save the bees!

----- 19 -----
Saturday August 10-2 pm
----- 2023 -----

Join us for a fun-filled day of educational workshops, indoor craft vendors, and family-friendly activities to serve and build community through the celebration of one of our favorite pollinators: bees!



THE WELLCOME OM CENTER
4242 LAKE IN THE WOODS DR
SPRING HILL, FL 34607
www.welcomeomcenter.com



ACTION ALERT: PROTECT OZELLO WATERS

AUGUST 22ND @ 5 PM THE FINAL CITRUS BOCC HEARING



Mark your calendar now to attend the Citrus County Commission (BOCC) final hearing on Tuesday, August 22nd at 5:01 pm at the Citrus County Courthouse. The commissioners will consider an amended proposal for a land use change and a zoning change to develop an RV Park/Campground on Fish Creek in Ozello. The agenda item is Clark Stillwell, Sunshine RV Campground, LLC. The Planning and Development Commission denied it a second time at their May 18th hearing. Now it is set for final hearing.

What does the proposal include?

- 32 RV sites
- 16 "glampsites"
- 20 primitive campsites

All on about 16.1 acres at 1540, 1560, & [1650 S. Fishcreek Pt., Crystal River.](#)

Why oppose the proposed RV Park? It would endanger wildlife in the bordering St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve: fish, scallop, wading birds, manatees, and dolphins.

- Impervious roads, parking areas, RV pads, building roofs, and more would drain contaminated stormwater runoff into Fish Creek.
- The site is in the Coastal High Hazard Area and Special Flood Hazard Area.
- The large septic system proposed will likely fail during flood/storm and high tide events, releasing sewage into Fish Creek Estuary and the Preserve.

This parcel is zoned residential in the Low-Intensity Coastal Lakes (CL) Land Use District. There's no central sewage system and RV Parks are not allowed in this residential area. It violates the county's desire for "preservation" or "only the lowest intensity development" in this land use. The infrastructure is just not there.

The property is accessed by S. Fishcreek Point and Ozello Trail, the only hurricane escape route. These narrow roads and others leading in/out are inadequate for increased traffic and large RV's that would cause congestion, traffic issues and accidents.

The landowner has been fined by the Fla. Dept. of Environmental Protection for actions taken on mangroves, and has hauled in fill, and installed a floating dock without permits. For many good reasons,

this application should be denied.

What can you do? Submit a comment to comments@citrusbocc.com

Make sure to include the agenda item in the subject line: **Clark Stillwell, Sunshine RV Campground, LLC.**

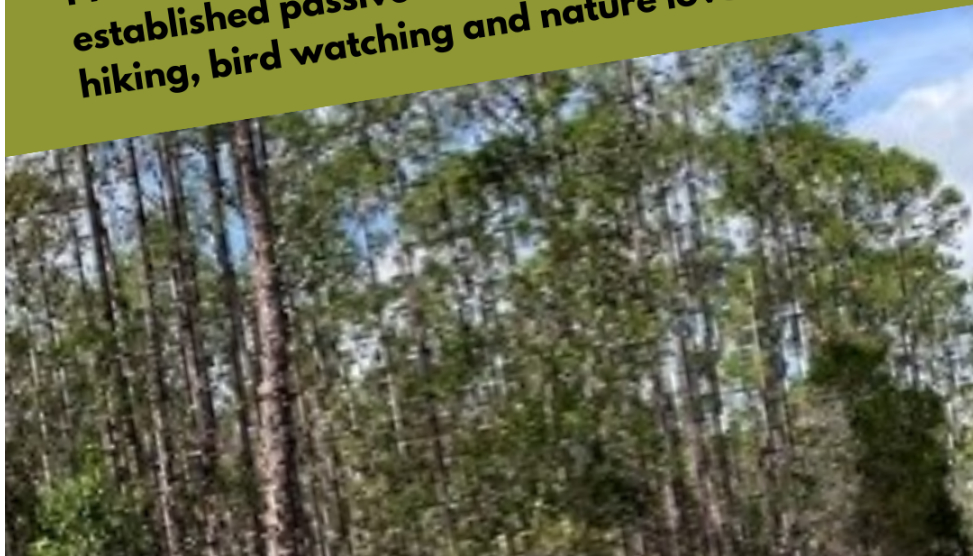
All emailed comments received by 12:00 pm (prior to the board meeting) will be provided to the Commissioners. All comments will be added by the Clerk to the minutes of the board meeting.

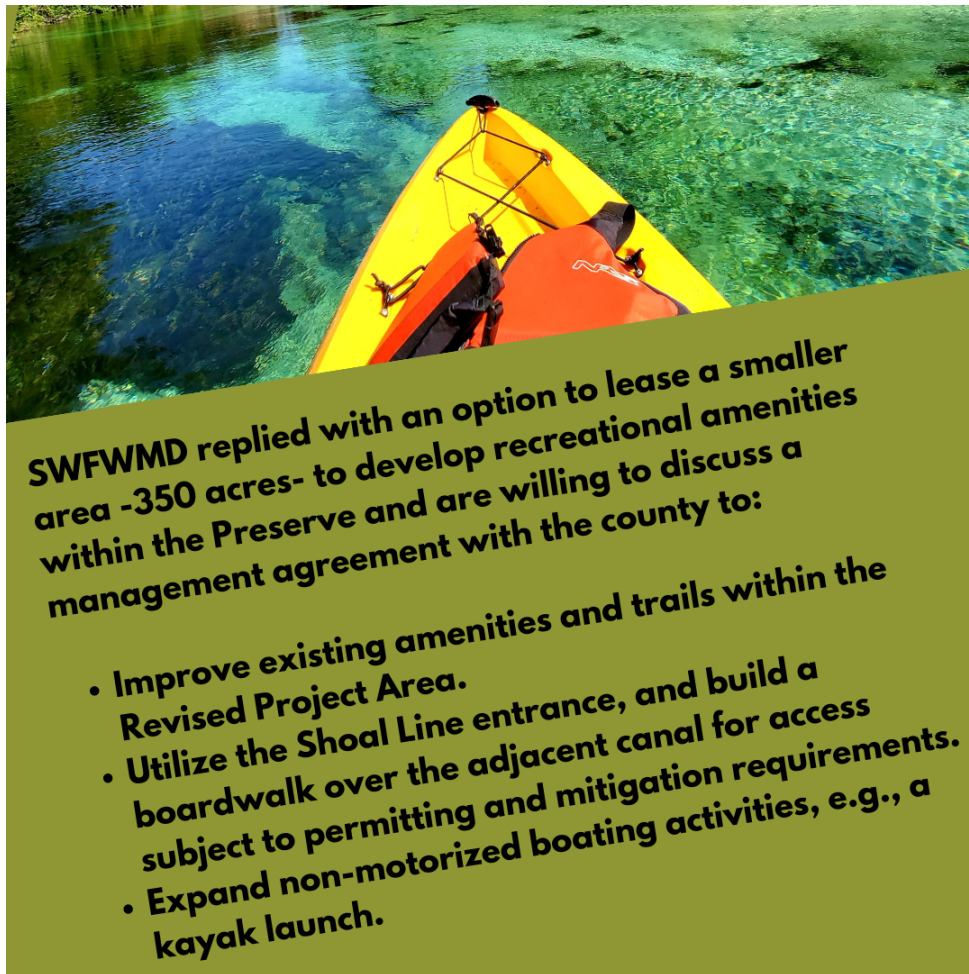
For more information, contact Sierra Club's Citrus Conservation Chair, Maxine Connor maxineconnor@gmail.com or Robin Orlandi at fla34433@gmail.com.

**Weekiwachee Preserve: Act Now!
Hernando County Submits Revised Proposal**

What's Going On?

Hernando County submitted a proposal to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to develop part of the Weekiwachee Preserve. The Preserve is already a well-established passive recreational site for biking, hiking, bird watching and nature lovers





SWFWMD replied with an option to lease a smaller area -350 acres- to develop recreational amenities within the Preserve and are willing to discuss a management agreement with the county to:

- Improve existing amenities and trails within the Revised Project Area.**
- Utilize the Shoal Line entrance, and build a boardwalk over the adjacent canal for access subject to permitting and mitigation requirements.**
- Expand non-motorized boating activities, e.g., a kayak launch.**

We have learned that Hernando County recently submitted a revised application including the three items above for consideration.

Sierra Club supports improvement of existing trails for passive uses. **But we are deeply concerned with the potential for unprecedented development of a beach and swimming area on publicly owned conservation land. Although it is not part of the revised proposal, it is already included in the map of the revised proposal as a future addition to the area.**

SWFWMD will not allow the swim beach as long as they own the property, but it will consider allowing the county to create the swim beach by selling the property to the county after five years of management, pending funding for purchase and maintenance of the proposed swim area, all required permits, and stakeholder support. **Really? Selling lands purchased with Florida Forever funding?**

In addition, we are concerned with the county's newest proposal to provide picnic tables and other intrusions to accommodate large gatherings, cooking and food that would disrupt wildlife and attract bears. This area of the Florida Wildlife Corridor is a critical linkage for wildlife.

SWFWMD plans to revise its Management Plan for the Preserve in the next fiscal year, including the acreage in the Hernando proposal.

Recommendations: Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group urges the county to assemble an Advisory Board to provide oversight for this process. As far back as 2018, The District advised the county of a need for stakeholder input. We've engaged with the county and the district to encourage a positive outcome. We believe these lands should remain in District hands and hoped the district would reject Hernando County's flawed proposal, but that is not the case.

At the public workshops, a majority of the attendants expressed opposition to the County's proposal, yet there was no reference to stakeholder input in the final sketchy county feasibility study. This lack of accountability and transparency could be cured by establishing an Advisory Committee to publicly review and comment on this project if it proceeds to fruition.

Sierra Club will continue to advocate for stakeholder engagement and against a land swap or

purchase of Preserve lands. But we need your support.

Now is the time for everyone to contact Hernando County Commissioners and encourage them to establish an Advisory Board to provide much-needed stakeholder oversight into the county lease negotiations to develop Weekiwachee Preserve.

Despite submitting written comments and meeting with local leaders by Sierra Club and a coalition of other local environmental organizations, our voice is not being heard when it comes to this project.

Before an agreement is approved, we want to review and comment on it and have our comments considered. Express your concern for turning a wildlife preserve into a party scene.

Please email our county commissioners at: ENarverud@hernandocounty.us, BHawkins@co.hernando.fl.us, JAllocco@hernandocounty.us, JerryC@hernandocounty.us, SChampion@hernandocounty.us.



HERE ARE THE NEW RULES:

- No use of urban turf fertilizers containing nitrogen from Dec. 15th to March 15th and from June 1st to Sept. 30th.
- No exemption for commercial applicators.
- Increased distance that fertilizers can be used adjacent to wetlands and surface waters to 25 feet.
- Businesses that sell fertilizers during the restriction period required to post County-provided signage stating the restrictions.

HERNANDO RAINY SEASON FERTILIZER BAN PASSED

**INFO: SIERRA CLUB ADVENTURE COAST GROUP,
WWW.SIERRACLUB.ORG/FLORIDA/ADVENTURE-COAST,
SIERRACLUBADVENTURECOASTCC@GMAIL.COM, OR (352) 277-3330**

To improve water quality and reduce the flow of harmful nutrients into local waters, the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners unanimously voted to pass a revised urban fertilizer ordinance that sets up a rainy season restriction and other limits on fertilizer use at their May 23rd meeting.

Twenty-two percent of the nitrogen affecting Weeki Wachee Springs comes from urban turf fertilizers according to the Weeki Wachee Basin Management Action Plan which has classified this Outstanding Florida Spring as "impaired" by nitrates.

This decision came just in time to avoid new state legislation that bans Florida cities and counties from creating or modifying their fertilizer ordinance after July 1, 2023, while the state undertakes a year-long study of the matter. More than 18 counties and over 100 municipalities have successfully improved their environment with rainy season bans. This is not controversial and studying it only delays local efforts to improve water quality from urban landscape runoff high in nutrients that degrade local water bodies.

Hernando County is now preparing an awareness campaign to let homeowners and businesses know the new rules. Fortunately, they don't have to reinvent the wheel, as many other counties have already done this and Hernando can benefit from their efforts.

The next step in the region is to get Citrus County, which currently has no rainy season ban, to adopt rules akin to Hernando's. Sierra Club Florida Lead organizer Michael McGrath made a presentation at

the June meeting of the League of Women Voters of Citrus County on preventing urban yard fertilizer and spring restoration efforts in the Nature Coast. If you want to reference the material and information covered during the presentation you can access the slide deck [here](#) and this factsheet.

Our ability to organize around securing a stronger fertilizer ordinance in Citrus County in the short term is limited by this recent sneak attack preemption. The "attack" is twofold: it prohibits new strict ordinances for one year and gives UF-IFAS \$250,000 to "evaluate" strict ordinances in a 6-month long period of time. Local governments like Citrus County are doomed to let the urban fertilizer pollution keep running off landscapes and leaching from turf for at least another year and are under the same threat of what comes after the UF-IFAS shenanigans.

Sierra Club Florida has led the rainy season ban urban fertilizer ordinance movement and will continue to do so. We have challenged UF-IFAS' pseudo-science in the past, and we will do so again and again and as long as it takes. Our aim is to make sure this sneak attack is ultimately only a temporary setback.

If you are interested in getting more involved in local efforts to prevent urban yard fertilizer pollution or have ideas to share, contact Michael McGrath. You can schedule a meeting with Michael McGrath [here](#).

SAVE THE DATE!
Adventure Coast Meet Up
Wednesday Sept. 13th with Kenneth Nash
on Climatology & Our Local Changing World



Join us for the next Adventure Coast Group Membership Meet Up at the [South Brooksville Community Center, 601 East Martin Luther King Boulevard](#) in Brooksville, from 7—8pm on Wednesday, September 13th. Mark your calendars now to attend or remotely via Zoom.

Our speaker will be Kenneth Nash, Director of Physical Sciences and Climatology at Gulf Archeology Research Institute. He will describe earth's general water circulations and changes in water levels and how they have affected local lifeways in west Central Florida landscapes and the coastal zone of Big Bend, Crystal Bay, Crystal River, Yankeetown, Homosassa Springs State Park and the Rainbow River. The Institute just finished an extensive project at the Chinsegut Hill Manor in partnership with the Tampa Bay History Center providing detailed analyses of remnants of enslaved inhabitants there.

To participate remotely via Zoom, you must register in advance at:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAKf-qtqTiiHdB1keZqrPAh2IBGkKUz_Ew4

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

More info at adventurecoast@florida.sierraclub.org or call 352 277-3330, check out our website at www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast, or find Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group on [Facebook](#).



For more information about Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, visit our website at www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast, send an email to sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com, find us on [Facebook](#) or call 352 277-3330.