

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

Meet Up Wed. Sept. 13th 7-8PM with Kenneth Nash on Climatology & Our Local Changing World

Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee Zoom Thursday, Sept. 14th, 8PM

> Save the Anclote River Drumming up Support Sun. Sept. 17, 5PM-Sunset

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SPRING LOVERS VS. FDEP Winners and Losers

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 <u>South Brooksville Community Center, 601 East Martin Luther King Boulevard</u> in Brooksville, from 7-8 PM on Wednesday, September 13th. Attend in person or remotely via Zoom.

Note: This is the new location for Sierra Club Adventure Coast Membership Meetups that are scheduled for the second Wednesday of each month from 7-8 PM. Please mark your calendar.

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: <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAkf-qtqTliHdB1keZqrPAh2lBGkKUz\_Ew4">https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAkf-qtqTliHdB1keZqrPAh2lBGkKUz\_Ew4</a>
After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

More info at <a href="mailto:adventurecoast@florida.sierraclub.org">adventurecoast@florida.sierraclub.org</a> or call 352 277-3330, check out our website at <a href="https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast">www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast</a>, or find Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group on <a href="mailto:Facebook">Facebook</a>

## Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee Zoom Thursday, September 14th at 8pm



Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee is dedicated to preserving, exploring, and enjoying nature in areas of Pasco County.

You're invited to join our Zoom meeting the second Thursday of every month at 8:00 pm at this link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7674695843">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7674695843</a> with the Zoom ID: 767 469 5843.

#### SAVE THE ANCLOTE RIVER



Pasco County is currently pursuing the development of the Anclote River Park, a peaceful publicly-owned waterfront with fishing, boating, picnicking and a beach. Signs identify the area as the site of an American Indian mound and Spanish Well, a freshwater spring near the river. Learn more here: <a href="Upscale">Upscale</a> waterfront eatery or Native American mound? Pasco must decide.

But the Anclote River Park provides Pasco County's best public access to the Gulf for boating. A plan to expand the boat ramps and parking, and add a restaurant is underway to create recreational opportunities for visitors. Commissioners approved a bid to develop a 22,000-square-foot themed restaurant, watersports concession, and area for live entertainment at the park over a year ago. The bidder was Keith Overton, 24-year president of Tradewinds Island Resort in St. Pete. He and his partner own Anclote River Resort property adjacent to the park, a development with RV sites and cottages and a trail to the park. That plan is on hold pending additional planning by Pasco. Read more at: <a href="https://www.tampabay.com/news/pasco/2022/08/11/pasco-approves-proposal-for-restaurant-at-anclote-river-park/">https://www.tampabay.com/news/pasco/2022/08/11/pasco-approves-proposal-for-restaurant-at-anclote-river-park/</a>.

Sierra Club Suncoast Group is concerned with the inappropriate siting of the proposed restaurant that would be located in an estuary on stilts within a coastal high-hazard area, and along a living shoreline, teaming with juvenile fish, oyster beds, manatees, dolphins, horseshoe crabs, and an eagles' nest. The Suncoast Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee Chair, Sasha Bartunek, states "We are opposed

to the development of this critical estuary area due to it being both a living shoreline with at-risk endangered species, along with it being a sacred Indigenous site with burial grounds, temple grounds and a Midden Mound."

The development is on hold pending and the county is in the process of developing the park site plan to submit to state officials who will determine how that can mesh with the cultural resources there. In a recent study that the commission ordered, 528 artifacts were found including arrowheads, stone tools, glass, and prehistoric ceramics. Keith Wily, Pasco's director of parks, recreation, and natural resources, supports the inclusion of a plan for these resources, including possibly registering the site on the National Register of Historic Places.

Strong local opposition has been focused on retaining the natural area at the park. 18,000 signatures on a petition have been collected opposing the development. There is now great concern on the part of locals regarding the cultural resources as well.

The American Indian Movement of Florida has gotten involved to advocate for protecting the historic Indigenous cemeteries and cultural sites and stated their opposition to the plan "to place a restaurant/snack bar, volleyball courts, and a parking lot in areas with known Indigenous cemeteries and cultural sites at Anclote River Park." Read more at <a href="https://www.tampabay.com/news/pasco/2023/07/28/opposition-grows-pascos-park-expansion-plan-near-mound-advances/">https://www.tampabay.com/news/pasco/2023/07/28/opposition-grows-pascos-park-expansion-plan-near-mound-advances/</a>.

Join us on Sunday, September 17th at 5pm till sunset at Anclote River Park, 1119 Baillies Bluff Road, Holiday, FL to Drum up support to save the Anclote River Beach Park.

Visit <a href="https://saveanclotepark.org/">https://saveanclotepark.org/</a> and sign the petition here: <a href="Save Anclote River Park">Save Anclote River Park</a>.

Contact Pasco Commissioners to express your concerns at: Ron Oakley: <a href="mailto:roakley@mypasco.net">roakley@mypasco.net</a>, Kathryn Starkey: <a href="mailto:kstarkey@mypasco.net">kstarkey@mypasco.net</a>, Gary Bradford: <a href="mailto:gbradford@mypasco.net">gbradford@mypasco.net</a>, and Jack Mariano: <a href="mailto:jmariano@mypasco.net">jmariano@mypasco.net</a>

**Or mail your comments** to: Pasco County Commissioners, Board of County Commissioner Office, 8731 Citizens Dr., New Port Richey, FL 34654-5572.

#### Citrus County Commissions Approves Ozello RV Park/Glampground



On Tuesday, August 22nd, the Citrus County Commission met and approved an application by Sunshine RV/Fishcreek Glampground to rezone 16-acres in Ozello to allow development of a glampground and RV park on land bordering the St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve.

The approval included 14 conditions recommended in the example of an ordinance the staff proposed except No. 11 that was changed to keep and maintain the ADA loading ramp, and they added a few more: septic tank to be raised to higher flood level planes according to the 1993 flood, septic system to be inspected quarterly, conversion to condominium ownership is prohibited, landscape with Florida Friendly plants, require that all Recreational Vehicles remain roadworthy, and the park would be closed upon an evacuation order.

The hearing began at 5pm and lasted until 10:40 p.m. The room was full with both supporters and opponents of the application with overflow seating in an additional room.



The applicant's attorney Clark Stillwell focused on establishing concurrency with the Citrus land development code, compatibility with state policy that gives priority to recreational and working waterfronts, and consistency with the Citrus land use plan. Additional presentations were made by an engineer, the owner Jen Magradze and Richard Fox, owner of a glamp ground construction company who will provide them for this project.

Next Citrus County Staff Planner Joanna Coutu reviewed the history of past use and the current application seeking a total of 68 sites, including 32 RV lots, 16 glamp grounds, and 20 campsites plus other infrastructure.

Ralf Brookes, attorney for the citizen group Protect Ozello Waters (POW), identified grounds on which the commission could deny the project, inconsistences in the plan and potential flooding and pollution issues.

Many proponents of the development from friends and neighbors to members of the Citrus Chamber of Commerce and a Women's Business Group that one of the property owners belongs to spoke, citing their support for the development and a proposed education center, and its claim to ecotourism and economic growth.

Speakers opposing the development numbered many from the citizen group Protect Ozello Waters. They cited numerous concerns including the lack of infrastructure with just a narrow winding two-lane road into the area that is in need of repair and the mound septic system that is proposed for wastewater treatment. They cited the environmental impacts of stormwater and wastewater contamination on the adjacent St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve from predictable flooding as the property is within the Coastal High Hazard Zone. Others noted the impact on local residents of Ozello, a small rural community.

Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group Chair DeeVon Quirolo urged denial of the project saying it is environmentally inappropriate to allow use of a mounded septic system at this location that is vulnerable to flooding, groundwater contamination, and nutrient loading of the water table and adjacent Preserve

waters. She cited studies of water quality decline and manatee deaths in Florida due to use of septic systems in coastal Florida and quoted experts on sea level rise predicting stronger storms and flooding in Florida. She asked them to deal with climate change now and not compromise current local and state restoration efforts along the Nature Coast.

Gene Kelly spoke on behalf of Florida Native Plant Society asking the commission to protect native plants and these coastal wetland systems from development. They provide a buffer from storms and prevent erosion. He described "ghost forests" of now-dead coastal forests that could not survive due to salt water intrusion and groundwater contamination due to sea level rise.

Kim Dinkins, Senior Conservationist for Save the Manatee indicated that the soil on this land was unsuitable for septic and would likely affect water quality in the adjacent coastal sea grass habitat that manatees depend upon. The increase in boating traffic generated by the new boat ramp and 68 new onsite units with multiple occupants each may lead to increased manatee harassment.

Robin Orlandi, a member of Sierra Club and POW, noted that this commercial venture is incompatible in this residential area and that the property's past uses are no longer realistic due to climate change. She noted that the applicants and speakers claims of it being an ecotourist destination are not valid since the principles of authentic ecotourism are to do no harm, protect the environment, take responsibility. The risk of a 10,000 gallon sewage release into a fragile ecosystem and the increased vehicle traffic on the road and boating activity through shallow channels of the preserve will impact water quality and fisheries.

Maxine Connor noted that the property is in an environmentally sensitive area, with estuaries that serve as nurseries for fish that support the local economy. She cited Florida Department of Environmental Protection data showing that estuary waters in the area are already identified as impaired.







Speakers at the hearing. Top: Gene Kelly. Bottom, left to right: Robin Orlandi and Maxine Connor.

At the end of the speakers, the commission discussed the issue, identified the conditions to add and voted 5-0 in support. Chair Ruthie Schlabach voiced concern with septic pollution from existing on-site septic systems, and Commissioner Diana Finegan wanted more information on the proposed waste treatment. Commissioner Davis recommended the use of native plant landscaping. The meeting

adjourned at 10:40 p.m., a long evening for everyone.

The full video of the meeting can be seen at <a href="https://citrusclerk.portal.civicclerk.com/event/8165/media">https://citrusclerk.portal.civicclerk.com/event/8165/media</a>.

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

### Weeki Wachee Preserve: Act Now! District Replies to County Proposal



In July of this year, Hernando County submitted a revised application to the Southwest Florida Water Management District requesting that they prepare a lease for the "use of the revised project area to include the Mermaid Lakes masterplan within the Preserve."

The District replied on August 17th specifying that "To move forward the County must revise its July 17th, 2023 request to only include those items outlined in a. through e. above for District Review" specifically:

- Improving existing amenities and trails within the Revised Project Area.
- Utilizing the Shoal Line entrance and build out a boardwalk or bridge over the canal to the Preserve for ingress and egress subject to applicable permitting and mitigation requirements.
- Expansion of non-motorized boating activities such as a kayak launch.
- The addition of a bathroom and expansion of trails and addition of some covered picnic areas.
- Expansion of trails and the addition of some covered picnic areas.

They added that any agreement would be referred to as Weeki Wachee Preserve, not Mermaid Lakes Park, a new name for the area created by the county. And that the final agreement must go before the District's Board of Governors for approval.

The District specifically excluded any consideration of a boardwalk adjacent to the canal, swimming area, and associated amenities. And reminded the county that a potential path forward for the county purchasing the revised project area in five years is not part of this agreement by adding "The District is not interested in the development of high intensity recreational use on District-owned lands."

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.

The District will not allow the swim beach as long as they own the property, but it will consider allowing the county to do so 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? Would the Board of Governors approve of such a future contingency?

In addition, we are concerned with the county's newest proposal to provide additional 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.

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 Weeki Wachee Preserve. Despite submitting written comments at every opportunity, our voice is not being heard when it comes to this project. At the public hearings, a majority opposed this plan but there is no reference to this in the county feasibility study.

This lack of accountability and transparency can be cured with public involvement. Before any agreement is reached, 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 and the need for stakeholder involvement. We will continue to advocate to protect black bears and all the wildlife in the Weeki Wachee Preserve and against a land swap, but we need your help.

Email our county commissioners at: <a href="mailto:ENarverud@hernandocounty.us">ENarverud@hernandocounty.us</a>, <a href="mailto:BHawkins@co.hernandocounty.us">BHawkins@co.hernandoco.hernandocounty.us</a>, <a href="mailto:JerryC@hernandocounty.us">JerryC@hernandocounty.us</a>, <a href="mailto:JerryC@hernandocounty.us

#### Hernando Rainy Season Ban New Rules until End of September



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.

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.

Do your part by avoiding the use of fertilizers containing nitrogen on lawns until after September 30th, and then again from December 15th to March 15th.

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

# SAVE THE DATE! Adventure Coast Outing Oct. 25th to Janet Butterfield Wilderness & Environmental Area



Explore a hidden gem with Adventure Coast Group's Outings Leader, Eugene Kelly, for a group outing to the Janet Butterfield Wilderness and Environmental Area (WEA) on Wednesday, October 25th. This beautiful upland habitat is typically only accessible to wildlife management personnel so this is a rare opportunity!

Gene will introduce you to the mosaic of uplands species that call the preserve home and the conservation strategies that support them. Some areas have been burned which means we will get to see growth that is not always visible! The Janet Butterfield Brooks WEA encompasses approximately 319 acres in Hernando County and has some of the area's last tracts of older-growth longleaf pine sandhill forests and hardwood hammocks. The vast mix of mesic hammock, upland hardwood forest and bottomland forest found here provides important wildlife habitat for species including gopher tortoises and southeastern American kestrels.

Moderate in length and difficulty, the hike covers just under 2 miles of mostly sandy and uneven terrain so make sure to bring water and snacks. **Reservations are required** with a limit of 20 participants.

As there is no designated parking area at Janet Butterfield we will carpool from the Chinsegut Conservation Center located at 23212 Lake Lindsey Rd, Brooksville, Fl 34601. If you want to carpool please be ready to leave at 8:30 am. Restrooms and water fountains are at the center but not at Janet Butterfield WEA.

The Janet Butterfield WEA is located across the street from 15478 Bailey Hill Road in Brooksville FL 34614 at 28°35'45.6"N 82°28'04.2"W / 28.595990 -82.467837 0.3 miles west of Citrus Way.

To RSVP or for more information please contact Eugene Kelly at 407 709-7042 or email <a href="mailto:gmkelly@tampabay.rr.com">gmkelly@tampabay.rr.com</a>.

# SPRING LOVERS VS. FDEP Winners and Losers



GAINESVILLE – August 28th, Florida springs lovers in the form of business owners, homeowners, community activists, environmentalists, and springs protection organizations from across North Florida converged on the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) public workshop on its proposed rules relating to the harm from consumptive use (groundwater withdrawals) to Outstanding Florida Springs. Despite fast-approaching Hurricane Idalia, which kept many previously confirmed attendees from participating, well over 100 showed up at the Alachua County Headquarters Library in an outpouring of anger, frustration, and desperation after having waited seven years for any sign from FDEP that it would abide by the 2016 Florida Springs Protection Act which made it absolutely clear that the 2014 Harm Rule was unacceptable, and finding recently that FDEP had once again failed to follow the law.

Springs advocates won this round; they wore stickers, waved neon-blue placards, and gave FDEP representatives an earful of their disgust with DeSantis' agency.

Jake Varn, former Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation and General Counsel of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, joined springs and drinking water protection advocates today in Gainesville. Varn said: "You just wonder what in the world they are thinking about as they try to solve these problems," says Jake Varn. "They are solvable...But their proposed rule just doesn't get you there."

State Representative Anna Eskamani was also present and accounted for: "The damage inflicted by delays and inaction by DEP is not only negatively impacting our springs, but the entire ecosystem that relies on them is suffering. Today we asked for accountability, transparency, and a commitment to the greater good in protecting our springs. So far DeSantis' DEP has sided with developers and water bottling companies and we're fighting to change that."

After years of steep declines in the health of North Florida's springs, the 2016 Springs and Aquifer Protection Act was not a ray of shining hope—it was in no way strong or aggressive enough to turn those declines around—but it contained one extremely important provision: "For Outstanding Florida Springs, the department shall adopt uniform rules for issuing permits which prevent groundwater withdrawals that are harmful to the water resources and adopt by rule a uniform definition of the term "harmful to the water resources" to provide water management districts with minimum standards necessary to be consistent with the overall water policy of the state. This subsection does not prohibit a water management district from adopting a definition that is more protective of the water resources consistent with local or regional conditions and objectives." Seven years later and that provision of law has yet to be implemented.

The question of who is winning and who is losing is of the utmost importance. FDEP had already lost the trust of anyone and everyone who at one time thought FDEP would take responsibility for preserving

and restoring the state's precious natural resources. But no one wins when the water Floridians depend upon are wasted, fouled, or used as political pawns.

Michael McGrath, Lead Organizer, Sierra Club Florida, said, "The moniker 'Don't Expect Protection' isn't strong enough, because it isn't just a dereliction of duty we see from DeSantis' FDEP. It isn't that they don't show up to fight for Florida's springs; rather it is that they take deliberate actions that hurt our springs. 'Florida Department of Environmental Persecution' is a more apt title."

"The rule contains no new standards that will prevent harm to Outstanding Florida Springs, just the same failed policies supported by utilities and developers that have gotten us into this crisis. DEP has gone rogue, abandoned its mission, and now refuses to even follow the law. The people of Florida and our springs deserve better," said Ryan Smart, Executive Director, Florida Springs Council.

"While we didn't we get any action from FDEP today, I was invigorated to see so many springs advocates joined together, arm and arm, to fight for our springs. Together, we sent a clear message to FDEP that we're not going to settle for anything less than justice for the springs" Ryan Worthington, concerned citizen of Clay County.

**Background:** The 2016 Springs and Aquifer Protection Act (now 373.219(3), F.S.), signed by Governor Rick Scott, states that FDEP must "adopt uniform rules for issuing permits which prevent groundwater withdrawals that are harmful" to Outstanding Florida Springs.

Since then, FDEP has flagrantly disregarded the law and refused to propose statutorily required rules to protect Outstanding Florida Springs, thereby failing to abide by the rule of law for seven years.

David Simmons, who served in the Florida Senate from 2010 through 2020, and was integrally involved in the drafting of the 2016 Springs and Aquifer Protection Act – especially those sections addressing Outstanding Florida Springs – sent a letter to FDEP Secretary Shawn Hamilton over a year ago stating that the 2022 draft rule should be rewritten to reflect the law's clear directive. Secretary Hamilton did not make that happen.

Weak agency regulations across the state are causing Florida's waterways, spring-fed rivers and lakes, and aquifers to suffer from over-pumping and over-pollution. Spring flow is down 30% statewide, and 80% of Outstanding Florida Springs are impaired (over-polluted) by nitrogen pollution.







Speakers at the FDEP workshop. Top, left to right: Ryan Smart and Michael McGrath. Bottom: Jake Varn.

#### Images:

Harm Rule History Graphic

Crowd photo 1

Crowd photo 2

Crowd photo 3

State Representative Anna Eskamani photo

State Representative Anna Eskamani video

Poe Springs Then & Now (John Moran photos)

FDEP: You Otter Follow the Law

Click here for more pictures.



For more information about Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, visit our website at <a href="https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast">www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast</a>, send an email to <a href="mailto:sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com">sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com</a>, find us on <a href="mailto:Facebook">Facebook</a> or call 352 277-3330.