



Adventure Coast Group // Florida Chapter

Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group January 2024 News, Events & Action Alerts

Happy New Year!

**Adventure Coast Meet Up Jan. 10th
on Hernando County Recycling**

**Adventure Coast Group Seats Newly
Elected Members to Executive Committee**

**Pasco Conservation Committee
Zoom Jan. 11th at 8pm**

Urban Fertilizer Press Conference

**Croomfest 2024 Feb. 1-5th
Register now for hiking & paddling**

Weeki Wachee Summit Spring 2024

**Action Alert: Florida refuses \$320M
Transportation Tax Dollars**

Happy New Year!



First row Left to Right: Adventure Coast board members Maxine Connor, Jasmine Tavares, Jilan Crowley, Eugene Kelly, Tom St. Clair join other key supporters at FWC hearing on Weeki Wachee Springs Protection Zone.

We look forward to another year of doing our part. 2023 was a year of great challenges and many successes. Our amazing Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group team, with the support of you--our members & supporters--accomplished a lot to protect our environment and community in the past year.

In January 2023, our Executive Committee held a retreat where we prioritized our efforts for the coming year. The final list included Weeki Wachee Springs Protection Zone, Fertilizer Ordinance, Land Conservation, Weekiwachee Preserve, the Clean Energy Schools Campaign and increased member involvement. With the annual Executive Committee election finalized, we also welcomed new and renewing board members Treasurer Ben Berauer, Secretary Jllan Crowley, Hernando Conservation Chair Tom St. Clair, and Chair DeeVon Quirolo, who joined sitting board members Citrus Conservation Chair Maxine Connor, Vice Chair & Outings Leader Eugene Kelly and Dan Hilliard to the ExCom.

Here a synopsis of our progress:

After years of effort, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission voted to establish the Weeki Wachee Springs Protection Zone. This is a big success that will authorize efforts to reduce user impacts and restore degraded shorelines for this iconic first magnitude spring run.

Under the leadership of Sierra Club Lead Organizer Michael McGrath, we launched a campaign to expand Hernando County's fertilizer ordinance to include a rainy season fertilizer ban. The Board of County Commissioners passed it just weeks before the state pre-empted such local action—another big success! The ban will reduce nutrient loading to our springs from stormwater runoff, much of it from urban lawns.

Throughout the year, Hernando County Conservation Chair Tom St. Clair provided expert oversight and analysis of a flood of proposed new developments before the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners. He has promoted sustainable development, helped preserve green space and discouraged environmentally destructive proposals, resulting in some important wins such as the Pinehurst proposal in Spring Hill.

We joined the chorus of residents to pressure Hernando County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District to abandon the plan to lease lands within the Weekiwachee Preserve for an artificial beach and swim area in an area that is home to black bears. Gene Kelly provided invaluable insight due to his role in writing the original Preserve management plan as a SWFWMD staffer. Tom St. Clair and Jilan Crowley led efforts to strengthen stakeholder input to the county and increase informed community involvement.

Gene Kelly, Maxine Connor and DeeVon Quirolo spoke out to urge our Florida Legislative Delegation to take action now to secure the safety of our communities from sea level rise and other climate crisis-related issues by investing in local resiliency planning. Increased flooding and severe storms are ominous warnings of a challenging future that we must address.

Maxine and new Citrus Conservation Committee member Robin Orlandi led our group effort to oppose the Citrus County Commission decision to allow development of an RV Park/Campground in Ozello on land bordering the Nature Coast Aquatic Preserve. We lost that one, but it has raised awareness on the part of the commissioners of the need for sustainability planning.

Board member Dan Hilliard (now retired), is best known as Founder of W.A.R. (Withlacochee Area Restoration). He provided a review of the progress of their efforts to seek state support for needed restoration of the Withlacochee River, as outlined in an extensive study commissioned and prepared thanks to Dan's relentless efforts.

We joined state-wide springs advocates to urge the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to enforce the 2016 Florida Springs Protection Act authorizing them to limit excessive withdrawals of fresh water supplies from Outstanding Florida Springs to insure clean drinking water into the future.

The Hernando County School Board is adopting a high performance/low energy use design and build for the new Wilton Simpson Technical College at the airport thanks to our multi-year efforts. Now Gene, Tom and DeeVon are collaborating with the Hernando Native Plant Society to design a Native Plant Landscaping and Educational Signage Project on the new campus.

We increased member involvement by hosting outings, participating in special events and recruiting additional team leaders. Gene Kelly organized informative and enjoyable trail walks and even a visit to the butterfly rainforest at the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Isabel Baxter, a Citrus County high school student, and Jasmine Tavares from Weeki Wachee High School in Hernando County, agreed to become our first Student Leaders. They provided their input and perspective to our deliberations as well as support for new member onboarding and events. Isabel has since gone off to college and Jasmine is considering her college acceptance letters.

The second Wednesday of each month, Gene hosted our member Meet Ups featuring interesting guest speakers on a variety of current conservation issues. The Jan. 10th meetup will feature Liana Teague, Recycling Coordinator for the Hernando County Solid Waste Department.

Ben Berauer does a great job of keeping our finances in good order as Treasurer, but his expertise is as a long-time Sierra Club Outings Leader. He and Gene will be leading Outings for Croomfest 2024 on Feb. 3 & 4th of this year, joined by new Outings leader Jilan Crowley.

2022 Un. of Central Florida graduate, Denise Dookeran, joined our team in May, 2023 as Communications Director and has revolutionized our media. We are one of the first Sierra Club Groups now able to text our members, in addition to sending out in-house email newsletters and notices to inform and engage members and supporters on multiple platforms.

At the end of 2023, we held Executive Committee Elections for three open seats that have been filled by returning board members Maxine Connor and Eugene Kelly and new board member Denise Dookeran.

What an awesome team and what an incredible year of progress to meet Sierra Club's goals to *explore, enjoy and protect the planet*. Our board members are greatly appreciated for their expertise and dedication. **Our members make it happen! Thank you.** We'll be mapping out the new year's strategies for 2024 at this year's Board Retreat on Jan. 10th.

Adventure Coast Member Meet Up Jan. 10th On Hernando County Recycling Program



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, January 10th.** Attend in person or remotely via Zoom.

Does your household participate in our local recycling program, or do you take a pass because you are skeptical about its effectiveness, or whether your participation would be worth the effort? Are you uncertain if that plastic container from your favorite carry-out restaurant is truly recyclable – or might just be contaminating the waste stream?

Our guest speaker will be Ms. Liana Teague, Recycling Coordinator for the Hernando County Solid Waste Department. Liana began her career with the County in 1991 and began serving as the Solid Waste Enforcement Coordinator in 2012. She will speak about the services offered by the Solid Waste Department, including an overview of Hernando County's recycling and backyard composting programs.

Sierra Club members recognize the fundamental importance of direct, individual action in our efforts to protect the environment. Diligent participation in local recycling and composting programs may be one of the most constructive actions we can take as individuals and the sum of all those individual efforts can equal an important contribution to reducing our overall environmental impact and the amount of waste

that must be landfilled. Please come learn how you can be a better participant in these efforts.

To participate remotely via Zoom, please register in advance at:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAkf-qtqTliHdB1keZqrPAh2IBGkKUz_Ew4

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

More information on the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group website: www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast. Email sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com or call 352 277-3330. Find us on [Facebook](#).

Adventure Coast Group Seats Newly Elected Members to Executive Committee

Congratulations to Maxine Connor, Denise Dookeran, and Eugene Kelly who will fill the three seats that were up for election.



Thanks to all members who took the time to vote in this year's election for three members to the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group Executive Committee. At the Executive Committee Meeting held on December 13th, a unanimous vote was taken that accepted the findings of the Election Committee that had tallied all the ballots and formally announced that the new and renewing members of the Executive Committee would be seated at the January, 2024 meeting to begin a two-year term.

**Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee
Zoom Thursday, January 11th at 8pm**

SIERRA CLUB FLORIDA
PASCO
CONSERVATION
COMMITTEE



2nd Thurs. @ 8pm on Zoom



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: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7674695843> with the Zoom ID: 767 469 5843.

Preparing to Defend Our Waterfronts and Home Rule from Tallahassee Pre-emption



The Sierra Club Florida Chapter is organizing our local groups, coalition partners, and grassroots supporters across the state to defend home rule and our waterfronts this coming legislative session. In

the eleventh hour of last year's session, the Florida legislature passed a budget proviso that placed a moratorium that prevented local governments from passing fertilizer ordinances that contain a strict, rainy season ban. After some swift organizing and advocacy in coordination with our contacts in the Hernando local government and the County Commission, we were able to secure a strong rainy season ban just mere weeks before the moratorium went into effect before this preemptive power grab from Tallahassee and the agrochemical and turfgrass industry went into effect.

With the legislative session soon to begin, we expect that the agrochemical and turfgrass industries will look to build upon their preemptive power grab. We are actively monitoring any bills or legislation that would be retroactive and gut those 'strong' fertilizer ordinances that were grandfathered in with the moratorium. One of our priorities for this coming Legislative Session is to beat back any measures that would further preempt and handcuff the home rule and regulatory authority of local governments to be able to pass common-sense measures like a rainy season ban on turfgrass fertilizer.

While no grassroots event has yet to be planned, we urge you to [stay tuned](#) and on notice early on in the New Year for an event—be it a press conference, protest, or rally—that could be scheduled as early as mid-January.

We must defeat the threat against local urban fertilizer pollution controls, and we can't do it without your help. The last thing Florida needs is to lose the regulation that currently exists for urban fertilizers, especially considering how difficult it has become over the last decade to squeeze any new regulatory action from the state. [Click here](#) if you want information and updates on how to get more involved in this battle. Please share any thoughts, suggestions, or questions you may have regarding this topic with Sierra Club Florida Lead Organizer, Michael McGrath at michael.mcgrath@sierraclub.org.

**Croomfest 2024: Feb. 1-5th
Register Now!**



It all starts on Thursday, February 1 and goes through Monday February 5 from the Silver Lake Campgrounds at **31475 SILVER LAKE ROAD, BROOKSVILLE FLORIDA 34602**. Sierra Club Adventure Coast and the Hernando Chapter of the Native Plant Society are partnering with the SWAMP Mountain Bike Club, host of the annual Croomfest mountain biking event, to provide trail hikes and paddling excursions to this year's activities. Swamp Mountain Bike Club Inc. is a non-profit group focusing on advocacy for mountain biking and natural surface trail recreation in the Greater Tampa Bay Area. Go to croomfest.com to register.

Come as you are to camp, ride, paddle and play! Experience the Withlacoochee State Forest's renowned trail systems like never before! Added benefit? Your participation contributes to improved access and experiences for all trail riders in the Withlacoochee State Forest. We welcome you, wish you the best of experiences and look forward to sending you home with smiles and great memories.

In addition to mountain biking events planned by the Croomfest team, Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group will be hosting a 6-mile round trip paddle the afternoon of Saturday, February 3rd from 2pm—5pm that departs from the Silver Lake campground boat ramp.

We will be paddling the beautiful Withlacoochee River starting from the Silver Lake boat ramp found at the end of Silver Lake Rd (28.578252N, -82.218058W). Kayak rentals will be available and cost is \$40. We will paddle upstream on Silver Lake and the Withlacoochee River past the Cypress Glen and Crooked River campgrounds. The paddle will be about 6 miles round trip, and no more than 3 hours long. This will be an easy paddle upstream, followed by a downstream return. There will be an opportunity to get out at Crooked River before turning back.

Saturday morning February 3rd from 9am—2pm, sign up for a nature hike hosted by the Hernando

Chapter of the Native Plant Society. Experience the natural wonders of Croom by participating in a guided hike of 3-4 miles that will showcase the phenomenal array of habitats and native species protected in this special corner of the Withlacoochee State Forest. The hike is guided by experienced naturalists, including a Florida Forest Service biologist who is intimately familiar with Croom. It is designed to be family friendly and open to children 12 and older. Those under 16 should be accompanied by a responsible parent or guardian.

We are not seeking to cover distance; rather, we want you to enjoy some leisurely time in the woods with guides who know the area and can help interpret what you see. Prescribed fire is an extremely important habitat management tool in Croom, and the hike will incorporate areas that help illustrate the benefits of fire on Croom's longleaf pine "sandhill" habitat and other natural resources. We will also discuss other aspects of habitat and species management employed at Croom.

To attend, please register in advance and plan to wear appropriate footwear and bring a water bottle. Hats, sunscreen and insect repellent are also recommended. If you enjoy watching birds, bring a binocular. An assortment of migratory bird species should be present during this time of year, and we will be traversing habitat occupied by the rare red-cockaded woodpecker.

Please note that you must register in advance to join the paddling or nature hike and to receive your wristbands, breakfast ticket and if applicable, bike numbers.

Check in after your rides. Check in after your rides, paddle or hike to pick up your swag bags, t-shirts, lunch and beverage tickets. \$45.00 - Includes breakfast, lunch, beverage, t-shirt, and swag. Go to croomfest.com.

IMPORTANT DATES: Events Close Friday, Jan 20th.
Registration transfers close Monday, Jan 15th.

Please plan to arrive early so we can begin the paddles and hikes on time. We look forward to seeing you on February 3!

Action Alert: Florida Refuses \$320M Transportation Tax Dollars



In November, we issued an action alert because Florida refused \$340 million dollars in Inflation Reduction Act funding to promote adoption of clean energy to help Floridians address climate change. Now the state has refused another \$320 million dollars from the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to help reduce traffic congestion and clean our air.

This investment would have helped get our economy and environment back on track, and we're expected to foot a multi-million-dollar bill that was already paid for. There is no reason that the Governor should be playing politics with our air end economy as property insurance rates are skyrocketing and

storms continue to get stronger.

Take action now to let Governor DeSantis know that as a taxpayer, you are outraged that he refused access to this funding. Go to: <https://www.flgov.com/email-the-governor/>

This extreme move not only neglected the Governor's responsibilities to take care of Florida's economy and environment, but, as the only state in the nation to refuse this investment, also left Florida isolated from the rest of the country. The Tampa Bay Times reported on the funds saying: "The Florida Department of Transportation... said average commute times have grown in Florida by 11% over the last decade. About 40% of congestion and traffic volume issues are due to roadway capacity." In that same article, State Rep. Lindsay Cross, D-St. Peterburg, noted that this move will have impacts beyond air quality, "Emissions from vehicles are not only a significant contribution to carbon pollution, but also to nitrogen pollution and to water quality."

Enough is enough! We need Governor DeSantis to stop playing politics with Florida's environment and economy. Please send him a quick email today to are outraged that he forced taxpayers like you to foot bills that were already paid for.

Thank you!



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