



Adventure Coast Group // Florida Chapter

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

Check out all that's going on!

**SWFWMD Approves Lease Agreement with
Hernando County for Weeki Wachee Preserve**
**Adventure Coast Meetup Wednesday April 10th
With Vince Morris on the Withlacoochee Forest**

**Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee
ZOOM Thursday, April 11th at 8PM**

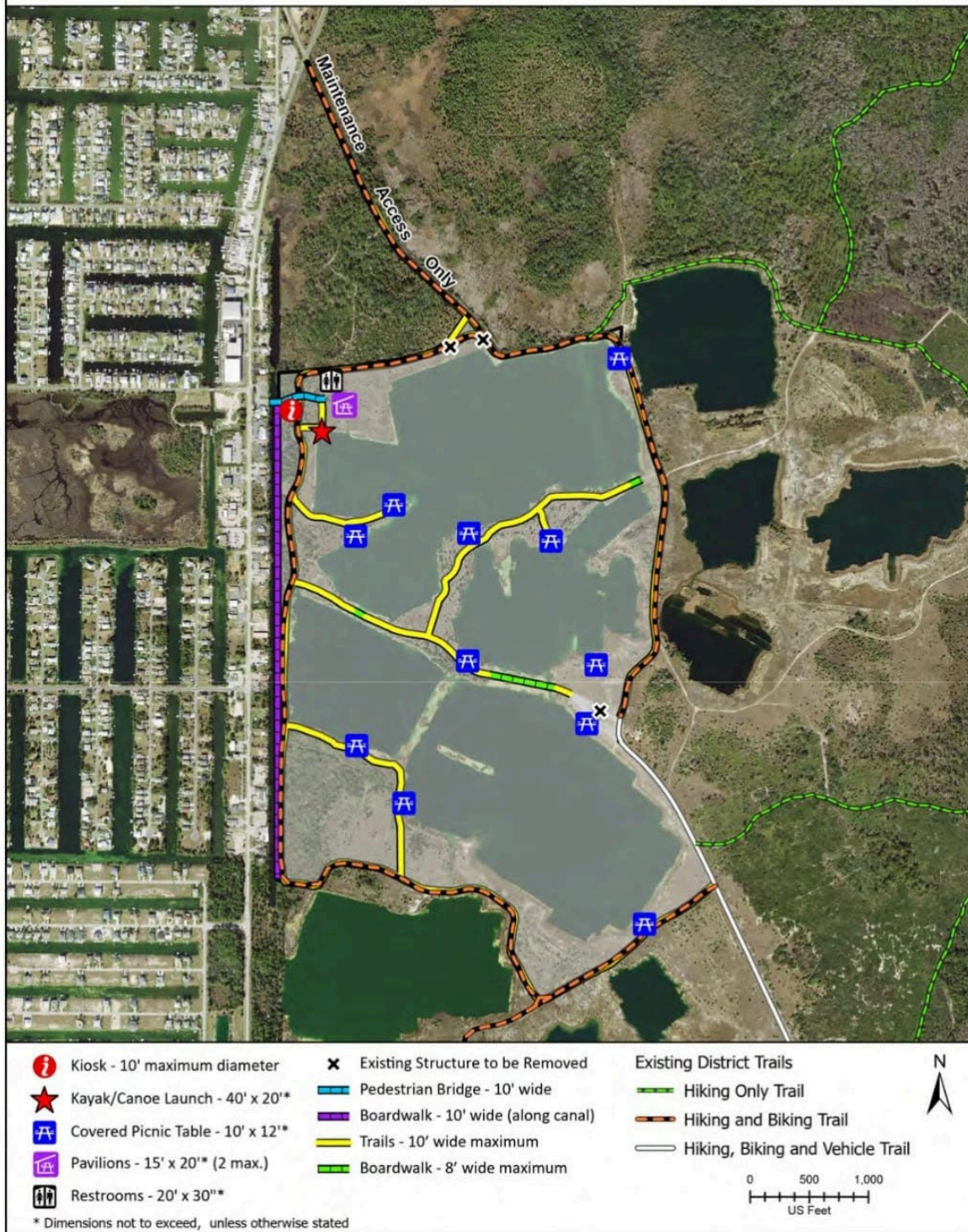
Celebrate Earth Day 2024

Weeki Wachee Summit May 3rd, 2024
RSVP Today!

**Native Landscaping Plans Proceed for
Dennis Wilfong Center for Success**

**SWFWMD Approves Lease Agreement with Hernando
County for Weeki Wachee Preserve**

Exhibit "C"



At its March 26th Governing Board Meeting in Tampa, the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) approved a proposed lease agreement with Hernando County regarding recreational development within the Weeki Wachee Preserve. The proposed lease was approved by the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners on March 12th, 2024. The new 350-acre park will be called Weeki Wachee Park.

The meeting began with a review by Ellen Morrison, Chief of the Land Resources Bureau at the District, of the years-long history of the county seeking this agreement. She listed all the county requests for use of the property and the short list of those items that were incorporated into the final lease agreement.

DeeVon Quirolo, representing the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, was the first speaker. She

reiterated the group's position as contained in a recent letter to the District, saying, "We have limited objections to recreational improvements proposed by the County under the lease and conditions imposed by the District" but noted two areas of concern.

The first was the picnic pavilions the County is proposing and the potential for bear-human interactions. "The pavilions would need to be properly managed as outlined in the Florida Black Bear Management Plan (Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, 2019) and we recommend that it be incorporated into the lease agreement and that a Black Bear Stakeholder Group be formed to guide the process. Eliminating food sources that attract bears is the first and most important action to prevent human-bear interactions."

The second concern was the potential for the leased land to be declared as "surplus" by the District and made available for purchase by the County through a lease provision that gave them the right of first refusal. "Our concern is the County might then proceed with developing a beach/swimming area as initially proposed. This type of development would result in the transition from passive to active recreation within the Preserve and negatively impact our imperiled bear population and other wildlife."

Eugene Kelly spoke next on behalf of the Florida Native Plant Society. He described the lease as a "reasonable compromise" but recommended a provision be added to protect Florida Black Bears and avoid impacts to the resident bears in the public use areas with a strong public educational component. He reminded the Governing Board that the discussion about protecting black bears was a clear indicator of the land's conservation values, which would make it inappropriate to ever declare the lands surplus in the future.

Leslie Tomlinson expressed appreciation for all the District is doing but recommended removing the right of first refusal to the county and said that this proposal makes no sense to taxpayers who do not want to invest tax dollars in it. Other speakers, many also from the local group Preserve the Preserve, advocated for protection of these lands and the wildlife they support, noting that surveys have shown that there is broad public opposition to the proposed development of recreational facilities. Dr. Reed and others noted that the county has not been a good steward of its existing parks. Others cited concerns that the county intends to pursue a Phase Two of the project that would include the artificial beach and swimming area proposed originally but rejected in this lease.

Former District staffer Kevin Love noted that no need has been established for the new park and noted that "No additional value has been afforded the public." He and others recommended that a conservation easement be placed on the property should it ever be sold.

Charles Lee spoke on behalf of Florida Audubon saying that the District had done an excellent job on the final lease proposal and noted that in this case, it is appropriate since the county's ultimate design would have turned this land into a non-conservation use of the property. He supported the right of first refusal to the county as a way to ensure the property would remain in public ownership, but added that restrictive language should be added to assure conservation use only.

Chris Linsbeck, Hernando County Director of Parks and Recreation, then spoke and noted that this is just 350 acres of 12,800 within the Weeki Wachee Preserve. The county will increase ADA access and provide educational information on the land and upon request by the board, he agreed to include the Florida FWC Black Bear Management Plan recommendations in the planning requirements.

Several members of the Governing Board asked questions and offered their concerns about protecting the existing wildlife and support for the right of first refusal. One member recommended that a feasibility study be prepared to indicate how the impacts to wildlife would be minimized. District staff replied that everything will be submitted for their review and approval prior to implementation. One member noted that, "This agreement has been heavily negotiated and staff has done a good job through compromise."

Upon a motion, a unanimous vote was taken to approve the proposed lease.

Many thanks to each of you for your support for the Weeki Wachee Preserve over the past few years by signing action alerts, sending in letters, showing up at public workshops and hearings and speaking out. It has made a huge difference and we were able to achieve a passive recreational plan that will protect Black Bears and other wildlife in the new Weeki Wachee Park. We intend to stay engaged as a stakeholder to ensure that the Black Bear Management Plan is implemented at the new park.

Adventure Coast Meetup Wednesday April 10th with Vince Morris on the Withlacochee Forest



Vince Morris catching red-cockaded woodpecker chicks in Croom a few years back

Love the Withlacochee Forest? Learn all about it at the April 10th Adventure Coast Group Membership Meet Up. Join us at the South Brooksville Community Center, [601 East Martin Luther King Boulevard](#) in Brooksville, from 7—8pm. Attend in person or remotely via Zoom.

Our guest will be Vincent Morris, Resource Administrator for the Florida Forest Service who will speak about current events in the Withlacochee State Forest including prescribed burning, red-cockaded woodpecker management, and invasive species control.

Vince has a degree in Forest Resource Management from Humboldt State University and came to Florida in 1996 to work at the Withlacochee State Forestry Center in Brooksville as County Forester, Ecology Forester, Ecology Unit Leader, and now Resource Administrator.


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

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAkcuisqj0jHtx949mReyTNR44jWGTTh2dK>

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 us on [Facebook](#).

Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee ZOOM Thursday, April 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. The Pasco Conservation team is working towards spinning off into its own Nature Coast Sierra Club Group - if you would like to join us in leading the efforts to educate and protect Pasco's natural open spaces, please email sashabuddha@gmail.com.

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

Celebrate Earth Day 2024



Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group will be at several Earth Day events.

Make plans now to join us at:

Love Your Mother Earth Day at Pasco Hernando State College on Thursday, April 18th from 10am—1pm at the Brooksville campus, [11415 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, Brooksville, FL](#).

Earth Day Festival at OM on Saturday April 20th from 9am—3pm at Wellcome OM Healing and Education Center, [4242 Lake in the Woods Drive, Spring Hill, 34607](#).



Earth Day Celebration Sat. April 20th 10am-1pm at the Citrus County Extension Office, [3650 Sovereign Path, Lecanto, FL](#). We'll be at the Sierra Club table near the electric vehicle exhibit with free Manatee coloring books and coloring sheets of wildlife for children.



EARTH DAY EVENT

APRIL 20, 2024

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

UF/IFAS Extension Citrus County
3650 W. Sovereign Path, Lecanto
352-527-5700



Storybook
Walk

Ask a Master
Gardener



Youth
Activities

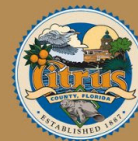


"Trash to
Treasure"
Showcase



UF | IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

An Equal Opportunity Institution



The Pasco Conservation Committee will also be celebrating Earth Day at the following events:

Wednesday, April 10th from 6pm—7pm: Gopher Tortoise Shellabration at the Starkey Ranch Theatre Library Cultural Center, [12118 Lake Blanche Drive, Odessa, FL](#).

Saturday, April 20th from 10am—2pm Rosebud Environmental Education Center Hale Rd Land O'Lakes

Saturday April 27th 10am—11am Crews Lake Wilderness Park, Shady Hills, FL Join us for the free "Compost Happens" Workshop as part of the 2024 Earth Day Celebration.

Gopher Tortoise SHELLabration



**Wednesday April
10 6-7 PM**

Starkey Ranch Theatre Library
Cultural Center 12118 Lake
Blanche Dr Odessa, FL

Great family friendly event

Did you know over 360 species of wildlife use gopher tortoise burrows to survive?

Certainly a reptile supporting so many deserves recognition! ❖❖

This event is to raise awareness about this important keystone species with kids activities and viewing of the new release of the film 'Gopher Games' documentary.

Weeki Wachee Summit May 3, 2024
RSVP Today!

Weeki Wachee River Summit



RSVP at bit.ly/49zRvn3
or scan above

A consortium of Hernando County conservation organizations is hosting the Weeki Wachee River Summit.

Join us as we discuss the present & future conditions of our waters plus future initiatives by Hernando County and state agencies to protect, maintain, and restore riverine conditions!

Featured Speakers:

- Eugene Kelly, Vice Chair of the Sierra Club Adventure Coast, with an overview of the Weeki Wachee River and Springs.
- Hernando County representatives will provide updates on the Springs Protection Zone, watershed improvements, and other initiatives to protect the river and watershed.
- Southwest Florida Water Management District's Madison Trowbridge on the ongoing dredging project and other District initiatives.
- Tammy Heon, Director of Hernando County Tourist Development, on the value of the Weeki Wachee Springs & River to our local economy.
- Matt Vinzant & Andy Pitkin of Karst Underwater Research on the vast underground connections to the river.
- Brittany Hall Scharf, UF IFAS Hernando Extension and Tiare 'TJ' Fridrich, Manatee Biologist with Save the Manatee Club on Environmental Education Along the Weeki Wachee River and Protecting the Manatees in the WWR.
- A panel of local officials and organization representatives including Hernando County Administrator Jeff Rogers, Commissioner John Allocco, Madison Trowbridge, George Foster, Shannon Turbeville, and Taylor Masnjak will discuss the future of the Weeki Wachee River and how together we can restore it for future generations.

This event is free and open to the public, please see above to register. See you there!

Info: Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast, sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com, or (352) 277-3330

**FRIDAY,
MAY 3RD, 2024**

9:00 AM - 1:15 PM

**PASCO HERNANDO
STATE COLLEGE -
SPRING HILL CAMPUS**

**450 BEVERLY COURT,
SPRING HILL, FL.**



The Weeki Wachee River is an invaluable feature in Hernando County, driving tourism, employment, and renowned for its waterways as a prime recreational destination in addition to being a first magnitude Outstanding Florida Waters Spring.

Springs lovers, Weeki Wachee businesses, local residents, waterfront homeowners, visitors and those interested or concerned about springs protection, water quality and the local environment are all cordially invited to the Weeki Wachee River Summit on Friday, May 3rd, 2024, from 9am—1:30pm at Pasco Hernando State College-- Spring Hill Campus, Bldg. B, [450 Beverly Court, Spring Hill, Fl.](https://www.pasco.edu/450-Beverly-Court)

We'll discuss present and future conditions of the Weeki Wachee and learn about watershed initiatives

being implemented. Conservation leaders and Hernando County and state agency representatives will discuss the mosaic of watershed initiatives currently underway as well as those planned to protect, maintain, and restore the Weeki Wachee River.

The summit is being hosted by a consortium of Hernando County conservation organizations including Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, Hernando Audubon Society; Florida Native Plant Society--Hernando Chapter; and the Weeki Wachee River Rescue Team. Hernando County staff, Southwest Florida Water Management District scientists and other agency representatives who will provide updates on initiatives to reduce nutrient loading and improve habitat within the Weeki Wachee watershed.

Conveying this important work to the public and residents of Hernando County is intended to garner support, showcase solutions, and ultimately, achieve our goal to bring the river back to a sustainable condition.

[Register Here](#)

For further information, contact sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com.

Native Landscaping Plans Proceed for Dennis Wilfong Center for Success



The Hernando County School Board is building the Wilton Simpson Technical College on county property at Brooksville Airport. Sierra Club Adventure Coast proposed a design/build concept that reaches high performance/low energy use standards, that has been approved and integrated into plans for the new school. This will increase energy efficiency and reduce electric bills for the life of the building while providing natural light and fresh open air conditioning that promotes healthy classrooms and offices. The planned completion date is late summer.

Last year, Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, in cooperation with the Hernando Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, recommended that the grounds of the new college be landscaped with native plants and informational signage describing the benefits of going native. Thanks to the leadership of Sophia Watson, director of the new school, that approach was approved by the Hernando County School Board. Next, we submitted a Native Plants Demonstration Project proposal to the county as it is responsible for the grounds. The County Construction Manager offered his support, and it was approved to create a native plant landscape for the Wilton Simpson Technical College.

In the future, the new school will have two new buildings constructed on either side—one for Pasco Hernando State College and another for Hernando County. Together, all three buildings have been named the Dr. Dennis Wilfong Center for Success. Meetings were held with all the parties involved and it was agreed that native plant landscaping will be expanded to include the grounds of all three buildings, when they are constructed.

The county's engineer, Coastal, tasked their landscape design firm, Terra Tectonics, with creating plans for the first phase —landscaping the grounds of the Wilton Simpson Technical College. The plans include irrigation; select native plants: trees, shrubs and groundcover species; seating, pavilions and parking areas. The plans have been completed, reviewed and finalized and will be bid out to select a landscaping firm for implementation. We are recommending that a firm familiar with native plants be selected to ensure a successful outcome.



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](#).