

## We join hands in the sand to keep ocean free from oil

Check out this link for a short and lively drone video of the event shot and edited by Jay Herrigel:  
<https://youtu.be/uYh3WevK4s0>

More than 150 sign-carrying, conservation-minded people from throughout the area joined hands at Jacksonville Beach on May 18 to demonstrate their love of the ocean and their strong desire to protect it from oil exploration.

It was the annual Hands Across the Sand event, and this year's had a particular sense of emergency.

Permit applications are pending in Washington that would allow oil companies to use seismic air-gun blasting off the coast to search for untapped oil reserves.

So the group gathered on the north side of the beach pier to clean up the beach, to hear speeches, and to join hands for 15 minutes of solidarity to show their concern and determination for a healthy and prospering ecosystem.

"Never has the coast of Northeast Florida been more at risk from the oil and gas industry than it is right now," said Erin Handy of Oceana's Southeast region.

Oceana was a prime organizer of the event; the Sierra Club, the

(See Hands, on page 4)



Development on AIA near Villages of Vilano (photo by Sacha Martin)

## St. Johns considers tree protection

By John Pilecki

A revision of the St. Johns County Tree Ordinance topped the agenda at a crowded County Commission meeting in May: the overwhelming sentiment was that trees need more help. The commissioners responded by sending the proposal back to the staff to work on improving tree protection provisions.

More than 20 residents and environmentalists addressed the commission on the topic, including Brian Paradise of the Sierra Club Northeast Florida Group, Amy Koch of Audubon St. Johns, Matanzas Riverkeeper Jen Lomberk, and me, John Pilecki of the Democratic Environmental Caucus of St. Johns County.

The controversy about removing trees for development goes back to 2015, when Vilano resident Virginia

Quelch witnessed clear cutting in her neighborhood. "They just cut down an amazing amount of the oaks," said Quelch at the time.

Prompted by this experience, Quelch, a veterinarian, and her husband, Mark Genzier, also a veterinarian, started the group Citizens for a New Tree Ordinance.

In 2016, in the face of the burgeoning development taking place in the county, commissioners directed county staff to review the guidelines for tree protection. The proposed amendments to the existing guidelines were presented at the May meeting, but the consensus was that the changes did not create a tree ordinance that would adequately protect the tree canopy and the wildlife that depends on it.

(See Trees on page 3)

# Who we are

## *Executive Committee*

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## *Committee chairs*

### **Conservation**

*Volunteer! Call 904.990-3191*

### **Environmental Education.**

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### **Outings.**

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**Publicity.** *Volunteer! Call 904.990.3191*



*(photo from Wikimedia)*

## On well-traveled paths

By Henry Benson

Walking on well-traveled paths  
Hiking through the wilderness  
The stranger is not so distant  
Not so strange  
We share a common bond  
Fellow travelers through the forest  
A friendly greeting is not only accepted  
But expected  
As we pass in opposite directions  
We often share news of where we've  
been  
And may ask questions of distance and  
direction  
Knowing where we are  
Provides a degree of comfort  
We offer encouragement to those we  
pass  
Going the same way  
And acknowledge our limitations  
To those that pass us

Sometimes the pleasant exchange is  
merely an excuse  
To catch one's breath  
Couples young and old are on the  
trail  
Experiencing together  
Connected  
Some hikers exercise with purpose  
Showing considerable determination  
and speed  
Their movements are clearly focused  
A brief nod between breaths  
And they're on their way  
Families are often encountered  
Children with boundless energy  
Are directed to stay on the path  
While others may need  
encouragement  
Or carrying  
Elderly couples often display a  
radiance  
of warmth and contentment  
Regardless of physical ability  
they appear confident  
There is something in our bond with  
all things  
that strengthens us  
We are a part of all we are in contact  
with  
Sharing the energy of these things  
for better or worse  
Communing with nature  
We share the experience  
Of expansive external focus  
Forced to recognize perspective  
In the humbling awareness  
Of a universe much greater than  
ourselves  
*(Henry Benson is a member of the  
Sierra Northeast Florida Group)*

## Tree protection vital in St. Johns County

*(Continued from page 1)*

Though the proposed modifications seemed to provide tree protections, such as increased penalties for un-permitted tree removal, Quelch said that two items in the revised ordinance pretty much negated any protective aspects.

It contained a provision that if developers put six inches of fill on a property, they could do whatever they wanted after that because the fill would smother tree roots. Also, the section on "Land Clearing" (clear cutting) was

written in vague terms that would allow the county administrator to make the judgment that cutting is "the minimum necessary for the proposed use."

What's next?

The Sierra Club's Brian Paradise suggested that the county should look to the successful Duval County tree protection program as a model for revising the St. Johns program.

The next commission meeting is Tuesday, June 4. For updates on proposed revisions, go to the website for Citizens for a New Tree Ordinance, [www.citz4trees.org](http://www.citz4trees.org).

## Conservation issues lose in legislature

The political season was a mixed bag for environmentalists in Duval County and at the state level.

In Duval, our club endorsed five environmentally-friendly city council candidates in the March 19 and April 29 elections. Three won their races — Michael Boyland (Mandarin), Matt Carlucci (at large), and Tommy Hazzouri (at large). Two — Sunny Gettinger (Riverside, Ortega) and Lisa King (at large) were defeated.

In the state legislative session, from March 5 to May 3, the environment's priority was low.

Money for land acquisition was drastically reduced, with the exception of \$682 million for Everglades restoration and water quality improvements. The major issues the Sierra Club supported — a ban on fracking, a return to local governments the power to make decisions on plastic bags, and water quality and septic abatement measures — were defeated.

On a brighter note, Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed a bill that would have banned local governments from regulating plastic straws.

But one major issue, the measure to expand the state's toll roads through the mainly rural western parts of Florida, was signed by the governor. His approval came despite a push by a huge coalition of groups saying that the bill endangers wildlife habitat and promotes urban sprawl.

Sierra Northeast Florida Group Chair Janet Stanko said, "It's interesting that the legislature is so cheap with education and environmental preservation, and so generous to private land owners, road builders, and developers with expenditures of up to \$1 billion for this unneeded road."



## Outings: Paddle & hike in June;

Note: To see a full outing description and to RSVP see our website or our Meetup site:

- <https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/northeast-florida/get-outdoors>
- <https://www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Northeast-Florida-Group>

Outings are free (except for any park fees) and open to all. Some outings require a greater level of fitness and skill than others. No pets or firearms allowed on outings.

Outing participants are required to sign a waiver and release of liability at the start of the outing. A link to the waiver can be found at: <https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/northeast-florida/get-outdoors>

**Saturday, June 1, 8:45 a.m.** — Hike the Branan Field Wildlife and Environmental Area. Celebrate American Hiking Society's National Trails Day by joining us on a 3-mile hike

through the beautiful Branan Field Wildlife Environmental Area.

**Saturday, June 1, 1 p.m.** — Hike Little Talbot Island  
We will take an approximately four-mile loop through wooded areas with changing features and emerge at the beach for our return.

**Saturday, June 8, 10 a.m.** — Hike Stokes Landing  
This is a three-mile easy hike through beautiful old oaks with several opportunities to view the marsh and Tolomato River.

**Saturday, June 15, 9:00 a.m.** — Urban Fitness Hike, San Marco Loop  
This fast-paced hike will venture around and through the San Marco neighborhood.

**Thursday, June 20, 9:30 a.m.** — Kayak Vilano  
From the Vilano boat ramp, we'll travel into creeks, then past the St. Augustine fort and down to the old Santa Maria restaurant.

**Saturday, June 22, 9 a.m.** — Kayak Sixmile Creek  
We'll paddle up remote and beautiful Sixmile Creek in St. Johns County for 2.5 or 3 miles and then return.

## Hands Across the Sand protests oil searches

*(Continued from page 1)*  
Surfrider Foundation, Beaches Go Green, and Sea Shepherd Jacksonville were major participants.

A keynote speaker at the event was U.S. Rep. John Rutherford, R-Jacksonville, who represents three coastal counties — Duval, Nassau and St. Johns. He is a strong advocate for protecting the oceans and marine life. And he spoke of a bill he introduced in the House that would do just that.

"The waters off the East Coast are home to vulnerable mammal populations, military operations,

tourist destinations and a vibrant maritime economy," he said.

"Allowing seismic testing in the Atlantic is unnecessary and potentially hazardous to the coastal communities that rely on a healthy ecosystem."

Rutherford and U.S. Rep Jeff Van Drew, D-New Jersey, introduced the measure in February.

The bill, called the Atlantic Coastal Economies Protection Act, would prohibit seismic air-gun testing in the Atlantic Ocean, the first step toward offshore oil and gas development.

**Sierra Club,  
Northeast Florida Group**

*Website*

sierraclub.org/florida/northeast-florida

*Facebook*

www.facebook.com/NEFLSierraClub/

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**Your contributions** are welcome as long as they relate to our mantra of enjoy, explore, and protect the environment. Send submissions to rmlblade@gmail.com.



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Suite 1300, Oakland, CA 94612 or go  
to [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

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## June meeting hosts land trust leader who successfully preserved Fish Island

The club's last meeting until September features the president of the North Florida Land Trust who will talk about the huge task of preserving land in North Florida.

Jim McCarthy will speak about the mission and plans of the trust which works to protect the area's natural and cultural resources, often by buying critical tracts.

The program begins at 6 p.m. on Monday, June 3, in the Friends of the Library main meeting room of the Ponte Vedra Beach Public Library at 101 Library Boulevard (at intersection of A1A) in Ponte Vedra Beach.

McCarthy was in the news in May with the announcement that his group had reached an agreement to buy Fish Island and preserve it forever.

The 57-acre property is located on the Intracoastal Waterway immediately adjacent to the 312 bridge onto Anastasia Island. The property has been the center of many controversial development efforts over the years, and an effort to rezone it failed in fall of 2018.

North Florida Land Trust began discussions with the owners late last year and received commitments from the state to fund the property through its Florida Forever program.

While some details still need to be finalized, McCarthy told the news media he is optimistic.

"It is exciting news from both a conservation and historic standpoint as saving the property is both good for the environment and for the preservation of St. Augustine's past," he said.

The property has a healthy hammock forest that will help avoid water quality problems on the Matanzas River. Historically, the island was the site of one of the plantations that were integral to St. Augustine's history. It still has some ruins and other evidence of its historic use.

The trust is seeking donations to help with the cost of the acquisition. Go to [www.nflt.org/preservefishisland](http://www.nflt.org/preservefishisland). to contribute.

The trust is a nonprofit group, founded in 1999.