



Reflections: Two views of kayaking at Fort George Island (Photos by David F. Williams)

Outdoors indoors? Enjoy virtual walks in our parks

Even though the club's group regular outings are suspended at least until the middle of June, there's nothing to keep you from going outside. We've got a suggestion: Before you go, take a look at Bill Armstrong's YouTube videos.

They're at <https://sierraclub.org/florida/northeast-florida/get-outdoors>. Scroll down to see the list.

Armstrong, our group's outings chair, has walked the trails of the area's parks and reserves and offers an intimate look at what you'll see if you decide to go.

The videos are short, about 12 to 15, minutes, and start in the park's parking lot. He walks from his car to the trail head and takes a look at the trail map to get everyone oriented. Then he starts in, giving a lively narration along the way.

"I've shot all these videos since the COVID shutdown," he says. "They're pretty much ad-libbed, but I know the areas well—they're places where I've led hikes many times."

He shoots the videos in chunks as he walks, describing the history and the wildlife. Back at his computer, he merges the chunks with Microsoft's video editor, then posts them.

One of the newest is a 3-mile hike in the Theodore Roosevelt Reserve off Ft. Caroline Road. It's rich in history and scenery (there is even a hilly part and a salt marsh where a meteor may have struck), and Armstrong's 15-minute video offers viewers a wonderful experience.

All stripes of moms

Late on Mother's Day afternoon, my husband and I kayaked in the Fort George Island area and saw pristine water, a huge egret, and, best of all, a heron rookery full of crying babies with their busy moms. Thank goodness for moms of all stripes!

—Lisa Williams



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Who We are

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Group seeks excom candidates

Nominations are now open for seats on our group's nine-member executive committee. The terms are for two years. Nominations close August 31. The election will be in October.

The excom serves as the board of directors for the Sierra Club's Northeast Florida Group. Members meet monthly to decide on the group's direction and focus, including its budget.

The only requirements to serve are a commitment to our environmental goals and a current Sierra Club membership. Serving is a great way to get more deeply involved in the Northeast Florida environmental community.

The excom meetings are open to all. They are held at 6:30 p.m. on the fourth Monday of the month, usually in the Southeast Regional Branch library off Gate Parkway. While the coronavirus limitations last, the group meets online. Information on joining those virtual meetings can be obtained from the excom chair, Janet Stanko, janestan@bellsouth.net.

Nominations may be made by the nominating committee or individuals may nominate themselves by obtaining the signatures of 30 other members on a candidacy petition.

For more information and questions, contact the nominating committee chair, Brian Paradise, bgparadise@comcast.net.

St. Johns strengthens tree ordinance

The St. Johns County Commission strengthened the county tree-cutting ordinance just after a St. Augustine movie theater cut down protected trees on its property to show drive-in movies, the St. Augustine Record reports.

Under the original ordinance, land owners paid fines or replaced the trees they cut. After a years-long campaign by citizens' groups, the commission voted on May 19 to revise the law by adding more protected species and increasing the fines.

The Orlando-based company that owns Epic Theatres cut dozens of trees, including protected live oaks, in its parking area to offer a clearer view of its outdoor screen, the newspaper said.

On May 11, the county told Epic it had violated the tree ordinance. Paying into the tree bank fund was not an option, since it had the ability to replace the trees. It was given until Oct. 1 to do the job.

The revised law extends protection to an area west of the Intracoastal Waterway, designating Southern red cedar and sand live oaks as additional protected species. Violation fines will range from \$200 to \$1,000 per tree.



Use a reusable bag when you shop. It's good for you and the environment. Our club is starting with a petition drive directed at Publix. The details: <https://addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/stop-using-plastic-bags-publix>

June meeting ahead

Our Sierra group will host an online meeting in June featuring Lauren Watkins of St. Augustine's Impact by Design, an environmental consulting firm. She will guide us through ways to have positive conversations about climate change.

This will be a Zoom meeting. The date and logon information will be posted on our website, <https://sierraclub.org/florida/northeast-florida/>

Sierra opens national push to replace Trump

The national Sierra Club announced in mid-May a major effort to replace Donald Trump in the White House.

Michael Brune, the executive director of the club, said that in addition to replacing the climate-change-denying Trump, there would be a major effort to elect environmentally-friendly legislators at all levels of government.

"This is the most important election of our lives," he said during a live-stream event through Facebook.

Sierra's efforts, he said, are going to be concentrated in four key states: Florida, Arizona, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

He roundly criticized Trump's record in the White House.

"Instead of lifting people up, Donald Trump distorts the truth, muzzles scientists, and uses fear and chaos and race-baiting and scapegoating to divide us," Brune said.

After a successful election, he added, the club would focus on rolling back Trump's environmental abuses and "putting out the dumpster fire that this administration has been."

Initially, the campaign will focus on friendly voters who need a little extra encouragement to go to the polls.

This will be done through personal letter-writing, texting, and phone calls—all of which will be done at home by volunteers.

Full information on the campaign and how you can get involved is here: https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?id=7013q000001afPjAAI&formcampaigned=7013q000002CEK0AAO&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=political&utm_content=may9fblive

The Sierra Club, founded by John Muir in 1892, is the nation's oldest environmental and largest environmental group. It is organized through chapters in all 50 states, each of which is subdivided by groups focusing on geographical areas.



Peaceful kayaking on Six-Mile Creek

Mindfulness, action lead to meaningful change

J. Logan Cross, a member of our group's Excom and an active outings leader, is opposed to plans that might disturb the fragile Okefenokee ecosystem, and he's for using the ideas of mindfulness to enhance our experience of the natural environment.

He made his Okefenokee views clear in an op-ed piece published recently in the Florida Times-Union opposing a mining company's plan to strip-mine an area only a mile from the Okefenokee boundary. It's at this link: <https://www.jacksonville.com/opinion/20200517/oppose-mining-plan-near-okefenokee>

"The company claims the mining will have minimal impact on the area ecosystem and be a financial boon to the region," he wrote. "In reality, these claims are not backed by science, history and common sense."

In a totally different direction, he also wrote an essay on using the idea of mindfulness to enjoy the outdoors, no matter where you are. It's on our Sierra Club webpage at this address: <https://sierraclub.org/florida/northeast-florida/get-outdoors>

"You can engage in nature at almost any time or setting ... by applying the practice of mindfulness," he says.

Club endorses Deegan, three others, in races for fall election

Sierra Club's Northeast Florida Group has endorsed Democratic candidate Donna Deegan in her race for the 4th Congressional District, challenging John Rutherford, the incumbent, in the general election in November.

The group's chair, Janet Stanko, said, "Donna Deegan is an environmental champion for our area. We will enthusiastically work for her election in November."

The group's endorsement—after an extensive round of interviewing and background checking—was its first of the 2020 campaign.

Other endorsements include U.S. Rep. Al Lawson, the incumbent in the 5th Congressional District; Tracie Davis, the incumbent in Florida House District 13; and Joe McAnarney, a challenger for the St. Johns County Commission District 1 seat.

In the Deegan race, her opponent, Rutherford, has an uneven climate record at best, Stanko said. "His environmental voting score, according to the League of Conservation Voters, is 8 percent for his terms in office, meaning he voted correctly on environmental bills only 8 percent of the time. We have to do better than that."

Deegan welcomed the endorsement. "The science is clear," she said in a statement. "Our warming oceans are causing seas to rise, which hurts our most precious resources—our water, our coastline and our economy. We are already seeing the impacts to the First Coast. We need to be good stewards to the Earth that God gave us."

U.S. Rep. Lawson's District 5 covers parts of Duval and Nassau counties and runs out to Tallahassee. He is running for his third term.

State Rep. Davis's District 13 includes the central area of Jacksonville. She is running for her third term.

St. Johns County Commission District 1 candidate McAnarney's area includes much of the northern part of the county.

Sierra Club, Northeast Florida Group



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Notes:

To change your mailing address or to change from paper to email, write to sierrasentry@gmail.com. Please include your membership number found on the mailing label.

Your essays, opinions, poetry, and photos are welcome as long as they relate to our mantra of enjoy, explore, and protect the environment. Send submissions and ideas to rmlblade@gmail.com.



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Sierra Sentry changes to digital distribution: Here's what you need to know

Starting in July, we're making a change to our monthly newsletter, Sierra Sentry: we're going to distribute nearly all the issues by email.

This is what it means:

- If you currently receive the email version, you don't need to do anything.
- If you are not receiving the email version or are not sure if you get it, we want to update our records so that you don't miss a single issue.

The details:

Currently our newsletter is published on paper six months of the year and digitally the other six months, using an email service called Constant Contact.

Starting in July, we're going to publish 11 issues digitally with Constant Contact and one issue, each October, on paper.

The major reason is money: It costs more than \$600 per issue to print and mail the newsletter and we thought that money would be much better used in our environmental efforts.

The other big reason is timeliness: With digital newsletters, we can set later deadlines and include clickable links that will take you directly to the source material.

Here's what we ask of you:

- If you don't currently receive the Sierra Sentry's digital version in your email, please send your name and email

address to me, Robert Blade, at rmlblade@gmail.com. I'll make sure you're added to our list.

- If you're not sure whether you receive the digital version, send your email address to me, rmlblade@gmail.com, and I will check for you.

- If you currently receive the pdf version of the printed newsletter, you don't have to do anything; you'll automatically receive all the digital issues.

No email address?

If you don't have an email address, you can easily get a free one through Google by opening your computer web browser and searching for "Create your Google Account."

Follow the instructions from there.

If you don't have a computer, you can use one at any of the city's libraries—when they open again—and create your account from there.

When you do, make a note of your new Google password and your new Gmail address.

Finally send your Gmail address (but not the password) to me, rmlblade@gmail.com.

If you have any questions, write to me at rmlblade@gmail.com or phone or text me at 904.398.0574.

—Robert Blade, newsletter editor