

POLK GROUP

Issue: 08-04

FROM THE CHAIR...Paul Anderson

FLORIDA FOREVER - OR UNTIL 2010? The Florida Forever (FF) state land acquisition program will end in 2010. This is an excellent, highly successful program which has saved 116,619 acres in Polk County. Statewide it has saved a total of 1,364,258 acres. Of the lands approved for purchase this represents 41.4% of the Polk County lands and 40.1% of the statewide lands so we see Polk County is doing slightly better than average. I did a county by county analysis and found some counties, including Hillsborough and Pinellas, have no FF projects.

Of the 61 counties that do have FF projects 6 have nearly completed their purchase plans, but 21 have not begun, or barely begun, their purchases. Five of these counties have not purchased a single acre. The major problem is a lack of funds. In 18 years the state funding has remained at \$300 million per year, while land prices have skyrocketed. What the FF Coalition urges the legislature to do is to reauthorize FF and to increase the funding in fiscal year (FY) 2008-2009 to \$600 million per year for 5 years, and increase it to \$900 million per year for the 5 years beginning in FY 2013-2014.

In Polk County there are 165,001 acres of approved FF projects remaining, and statewide there are over 2 million FF acres approved. The current real estate slump provides FF with a chance to acquire some of this land now at lower prices, before it is developed and lost forever for conservation purposes. FF states that "The protection of Florida's natural water supplies is a top objective of FF." Particularly distressing is the number of first magnitude springs on the list which have still not been protected 18 years into this project.

What we ask Sierrans to do is to write Letters to the Editor and to write Governor Crist and your state Senators and Representatives asking them to push for reauthorization of FF and at the higher levels discussed above. You can find more information at <http://www.supportfloridaforever.org/>

(Continued on page 2)



SIERRA
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APRIL 2008 NEWSLETTER

serving DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands and Polk County

PROGRAM FOR APRIL 10, 2008

Polk, Hardee and DeSoto counties are a major part of the Peace River Watershed. This river and watershed are a major source of water for agriculture and the public. **John Walkinshaw** with the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center will help us understand how people have adversely impacted the watershed and what we can do to help.

PLEASE SUPPORT GROWTH CAP EFFORTS

The Sierra Club has endorsed the petition efforts of the Growth Cap Coalition to amend the Polk County Charter to cap residential growth. The Coalition needs our help to do that! The objective of the charter amendment is to control urban sprawl, protect water quality, open space, agricultural lands, and wildlife resources, and to promote the efficient use of public funds to provide essential services and infrastructure. Volunteers are needed to help collect petitions at local events and various locations. Contributions are needed for the campaign to buy needed supplies for printing and mailing petitions, signage, advertising and other needs.

The Coalition website will soon be on line at GrowthCapCoalition.com. Please visit the site to learn more about this effort and to download petitions. If you would like a petition e-mailed to you, please call Marian at 863-293-6961 or e-mail mryan@pipevines.net.

Make your generous donation payable to Sierra Club – Polk Group and mail to:

Sierra Club – Polk Group
P.O. Box 7544
Winter Haven, FL 33883

COLEMAN RUN

In northern Highlands County a reach of the Kissimmee River in the Pool B restoration area has been named Coleman Run by the South Florida Water Management District. Lawrence Glenn, Director Kissimmee Division, said it "was the first name suggested [at a recent division meeting] and it took about five seconds for the entire group to agree. Richard was a fantastic advocate for the restoration program and we are thrilled to preserve his legacy by naming a river run in his honor." Coleman Run is partly historic oxbow and partly re-carved river channel excavated through the spoil mound.

Polk Sierra plans to put up signage and a memorial nesting box on the Run.



(Continued from page 1) From the Chair

On a different subject, in last month's From the Chair article regarding Florida Hometown Democracy I asked you to send letters requesting legislation setting reasonable statewide standards for validation of petitions. I was later encouraged by a March 14 article from Howard Troxler, a columnist for the St. Petersburg Times, who argued the same point. His title was "Clarify Law on Petition Signatures" .

NEW COUNTY PARK OR HUNTING CAMP?

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) bought land along the southwestern shore of Lake Kissimmee roughly two years ago. This purchase of low elevation land would make it possible for the District to store more water and thereby accomplish one of the goals of the Kissimmee River Headwater Revitalization Restoration Project. 142 acres of the property will be developed by the District as a ramp/park facility and deeded to Polk County which will operate and manage the facility. The District will construct airboat and power boat ramps (an existing ramp will be dedicated to the use of canoe/kayak users), restrooms, picnic shelters, shell roads, and whatever else is possible up to a one million dollar cap.

Polk County has been in the process of developing rules for the park with the advice of a citizens committee heavily weighted toward airboater/hunters. The rules would allow 24/7 launching and institutionalize the movement of firearms between vehicle and boats - also 24/7. This will be a public facility theoretically open to all users but in reality primarily attractive to power boaters/hunters. Because of the configuration of the land, locating the airboat launch at one end and camping at the other won't provide enough of a buffer for a quiet night's sleep.

This property contains one of the most magnificent live oak hammocks on Lake Kissimmee. An arborist recently evaluated similar hammocks in that area and concluded that those trees were suffering damage from prop wash (the roots were excessively exposed by blasts of air from the big props) and tree limbs were improperly cut to evidently facilitate passage of airboats to shady areas. Because of heavy use there were no young trees developing to replace the old ones. Polk County most definitely should hire an arborist and develop a management plan to safeguard this treasure.



Photo by Chuck Geanangel

As a percentage of the population, hunters and airboaters are losing ground and the number of hikers, kayakers, and family campers are increasing. The land in question is public property bought and maintained by all taxpayers. The County is remiss in failing to take the lead in encouraging recreational uses of the future.

....Frances Howell-Coleman

A NEW SPECIES COMPETES FOR HOUSING!



Photo by Cheri Gore Dean

A pileated woodpecker in the Bradenton area checks out a box that wood ducks used last year. Authorities say that pileateds make round nest holes - which this box clearly has. Another neat bird to attract to your backyard. Call Bob at 863 439-2251 to request your box now.

FLORIDA LAWNS

For many people a big part of the Florida dream is to surround their homes with big, green, lush, weed free lawns. Few realize that maintaining this dream will become a full time job, cost a bundle, and consume vast amounts of water. Here are a few more things to think about.

Lawn maintenance is a \$5 billion dollar a year business. Depending on the level of care you hire, mowing, pest treatment and fertilizers can run you several thousand dollars per year. Remember, in Florida your lawn needs attention the year around. Then there is watering. Lawn irrigation uses fully one half of all your household water allocation. Americans use an average of 106 gallons of fresh water per day and 53 gallons are reserved for watering the lawn. In Polk County it's even more. Turf grasses are by far the largest agricultural enterprise in Florida with 5 million acres under cultivation. That's 1/7 of the State that is covered by turf grass and 75% is in our yards. Watering lawns in Florida consumes an average of about 1 billion gallons of fresh water PER DAY.

No one is recommending that we do away with lawns since they absorb carbon monoxide, cool the surroundings, reduce glare and lower the ambient level of noise. Well maintained lawns can add value to your home and are very attractive. So here are a couple ways to conserve water recommended by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. First don't water so much. Tragically 30% to 80 % of your water is wasted through run off and evaporation. Your lawn can get by with about one to one and a half inches per week. During the summer watering once a week is fine and in the winter once every two weeks will keep your lawn green. After a heavy rain you can usually wait about 2 weeks before you water again. Second, cut back on the area that needs watering. Try Xeriscaping part of your lawn or use some drought resistant plants. Become part of the solution, not part of the problem.

....Chuck Geanangel

PARK VOLUNTEERS RECOGNIZED

Recently at DeLeon Springs State Park an energetic group of bird and butterfly experts from Polk County, headed by Chuck Geanangel, Buck and Linda Cooper, was recently honored by the Florida State Parks (District 3) in a ceremony to recognize volunteers. Their group project, involving over 50 volunteers, was to identify all the birds and butterflies in the 5,087 acre Colt Creek State Park, north of Lakeland. An amazing 79 species of butterflies and 156 species of birds were discovered during 2007. This nomination will be forwarded to Tallahassee for possible further statewide awards.

MARCH PROGRAM BY ED HOBIN

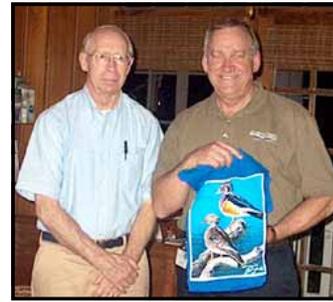


Photo by Frances H. Coleman

In appreciation for a presentation on "Understanding the Drought of 2008" Paul Anderson presents Ed with a Polk Sierra t-shirt.

EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

For more activities/events, please visit our web site at <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

Apr. 5	Trek Ten Trails Guided Hike - Saddle Creek Nature Trail - just off Hwy 92 between Lakeland and Auburndale. Observe birds and other wildlife as we hike through a wonderful natural enclave in a highly developed area. Start 9AM - call Marian at 293-6961 for more details.
Apr. 17 & 24 May 1,8,15,22&29	Water School - W.H. Stuart Conference Center in Bartow. Take advantage of a unique opportunity to learn about the water resources of Polk County. This series of tours and panel discussions is sponsored by various governmental entities and organizations highly knowledgeable about water quality and quantity issues. Registration deadline is Apr. 11 - call 863 519-8677 ext. 112.
Apr. 19	Drasdo and Adjacent Lake Kissimmee Areas - Boating and Hiking. SFWMD has made arrangements to provide Sierrans with a boating survey of several diverse habitats in the Kissimmee watershed. The highpoint of the trip will be the stop at the Drasdo Management Unit which contains magnificent oak hammocks as well as rare scrub habitat. Wildlife and bird watching should be good. Be prepared to contribute toward boat costs. Participants are limited to the first 14 registrants - call Frances at 863 956-3771 for further information and to reserve your place.
May 3	Trek Ten Trails Guided Hike - Lake Wales Trailway. Start 9AM - call Marian at 863 293-6961 for more details.
Nov. 1	Water, Wings & Wild Things - Polk's version of Earth Day. This event has been shifted to the fall to additionally celebrate the completion of the Educational Center at Circle B Bar.
Service - These Saturday events are Ridge Ranger projects. For more details, call the Volunteer Coordinator at 863 699-3742 or email ridgerangers@myfwc.com	
Apr. 12	Flamingo Villas Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge - Sebring. Fence/Scrap Metal Removal. Start 8AM.
Apr. 26	Lake Louisa State Park - Clermont. Spend the morning planting trees then enjoy lunch and a presentation from the park biologist. Start 9AM.
May 10	FWC Royce Unit - Lake Placid. Fence Removal. Start 8AM.
May 17	Saddle Blanket Lakes Preserve - Avon Park. Stewardship. Start 8AM.
May 31	Historic Bok Sanctuary - Lake Wales. Stewardship. Start 8AM.
Winter Haven, with the assistance of a grant from the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, has purchased 12 kayaks. Participate in the following events and learn to kayak as you clean up waterbodies in the Peace River watershed. For confirmation of details call the Natural Resource Division at 863 291-5881.	
Apr. 5	Sunset Celebration - McDock, Lake Howard - Winter Haven. 3PM-sunset.
Apr. 19	Chain of Lakes Challenge Take-Out, Lake Hartridge - Winter Haven. 8:30-10AM
Apr. 26	Project EAGLE - Lake Shipp Park - Winter Haven. 8AM-noon. Kayaks are a great way to access and pick up trash at the lake's edge.
May 17	Kayak the Upper Peace River - from Fort Meade to Wauchula. 6AM to 3PM - reservations required (see above).

In order to participate in one of the Sierra Club's outings, you will need to sign a liability waiver which will be furnished at the beginning of the outing. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver prior to the outing, please see <http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/> or call 415-977-5528. In the interests of facilitating the logistics of some outings, it is customary that participants make carpooling arrangements. The Sierra Club does not have insurance for carpooling arrangements and assumes no liability for them. Carpooling, ride sharing or anything similar is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. Participants assume the risks associated with this travel. Please note that some of the above listed activities are events that we think you will find interesting and fun, but they are not official outings. Florida Seller of Travel Ref. No. ST37115



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 Winter Haven, FL 33883

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Members should send **changes of address** to: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80322-2968
 or address.changes@sierraclub.org

APRIL MEETING
 Thursday, April 10, 2008

PROGRAM:

**Understanding and Mitigating Man's Impact
 On the Peace River Watershed**

By

John Walkinshaw
Senior Water Resource Specialist
Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center

*General Meeting and Executive Committee
 Meeting Run Concurrently*

Join us for our pot-luck suppers at 6:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of every month. Bring a dish to share, a drink and your utensils. Dress is casual. **The meeting will start around 7:15 p.m.**

Meetings are held at the Audubon Nature Center, 115 Lameraux Rd., Winter Haven. From the traffic light at the intersection of Hwy. 540 (Cypress Gardens Blvd.) and Cypress Gardens Road (look for the Shell station and Blockbuster Video) - Turn east onto C.G. Road and follow around sharp right hand turn & then sharp left hand turn. After left hand turn, Lameraux is fourth road on left, two blocks west of Garden Grove Elementary School. Distance from the light to the Nature Center is about 2.3 miles. (Phone 324-7304)

Web Site: <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

Sierra Membership Application

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Annual dues include subscription to Sierra (\$7.50) and chapter publications (\$1). Dues are not tax-deductible.

Please mail your check and this form to:

Sierra Club, PO Box 52968, Boulder, Colorado, 80322-2968

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