

2022 CONSERVATION STEWARDS AWARDS



Saturday, March 19th
5:30-9:30 p.m.

Prairie Creek Lodge

2022 Honoree

Judy Smith



Judy of Gum Slough, aka the Swamp Otter, formerly known as Judy Smith, is an eco-warrior, guardian, ambassador and deeply in love with the spring-run-swamp ecosystem engulfing Gum Slough Run. Oink is her right-hand pig and while he would never say it (how could he after all, he's still a pig albeit some pig), a celebrity in his own right with a CD and t-shirt to prove it. Oink recently also became a TV celebrity when he was featured on one of ACT's own ads about springs protection and conservation easements. Judy was instrumental in her family donating conservation easements to protect their beautiful 1,000 acres with more than 12 springs in Marion and Sumter Counties that feed the Withlacoochee River. These springs and land were hugely influential on Judy metamorphizing into the Swamp Otter

she is today. Swimming in these crystal clear spring waters and roaming this vast landscape nurtured her innate connectedness, deep respect, and compassion for all wild creatures and nature itself. When the Sabal Trail pipeline path was first unveiled, its proposed path went directly through the heart of the most undisturbed wilderness surrounding Gum Slough, home of Florida Panther as well as Florida Black Bear, along with endless generations of ancestors of the creatures and beautiful cypress trees who inhabited this area well before the first humans. The pipeline was to cross under the run a third of the way downstream from the head springs, just outside of the Smith family property boundary line, but the route did clip a tiny SW corner of the Smith property. Which was enough to give Swamp Otter a foothold from which to contest the proposed route. She fought the path largely by proposing an alternative route and pointing out the relative merit of the two routes to multiple Sabal Trail officials. She persisted for well over two years. It finally became clear to enough people involved with Sabal Trail that the alternative route was indeed superior to the original and also that the Swamp Otter was not backing down. The end result was that the pipeline was rerouted to avoid the run, the springs, the surrounding wilderness lands, many other ecologically sensitive areas on the cluster of surrounding ranches, as well as the entire adjoining state owned conservation lands, as well as completely avoiding all the rural human communities to the south of Half Moon Wildlife Management Area and also those along the western side of Lake Panasofkee. Judy (and Oink) continue to be strong advocates for nature and wildlife across the globe, but especially in their Beloved Florida.