

ALACHUA CONSERVATION TRUST

Gazetteer



**Saving Natural Places
of Special Significance**
Helianthus with Goldenrod Soldier Beetle

FALL 2021 UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

7-24 – UFCC Leadership Campaign

18 – Volunteer Workday

@ Little Awesome Preserve
9am to 12pm

27 – UFCC General Campaign Begins

OCTOBER

9 – Volunteer Workday

@ Little Awesome Preserve
9am to 12pm

15 – UFCC General Campaign Ends

17 – Pumpkin Spice & Everything Nice

@ Rockwood Park
1pm to 3pm

19 – Sandhill Habitat Restoration Tour

@ Fox Pen Preserve
9am to 11am

24 - Pride

@ Prairie Creek Preserve
1pm to 4pm

30-31 – Visit the ACT Booth

@ The Micanopy Fall Festival
9am to 5pm

NOVEMBER

6 – Visit the ACT Booth

@ The McIntosh 1890s Festival
9am to 4pm

6-7 – Visit the ACT Booth

@ The Gainesville Downtown Arts Festival
10am to 5pm

13 – Bird Walk

@ Fox Pen Preserve
9am to 11am

19 – Volunteer Workday

@ Serenola Preserve
9am to 12pm

30 – Giving Tuesday

DECEMBER

11 – Volunteer Workday

@ Prairie Creek Preserve
9am to 12pm

17 – Holiday Mingle

@ Prairie Creek Lodge
6pm to 9pm

JANUARY

8 – Freshwater Fish and Critters of North Central Florida

@ Santa Fe River Preserve
9am to 12pm

22 – Conservation 365 Member Annual Tree Planting

@ Prairie Creek Preserve
9am to 12pm

MARCH

13 – SAVE THE DATE: Conservation Stewards Awards

@ Prairie Creek Lodge
5:30pm to 9:30pm

All ACT events are subject to cancellation or rescheduling. Additional events may also be added as they are confirmed. Event updates at: AlachuaConservationTrust.org/upcoming-events



WHY WE NEED NATURE

Today, Tomorrow, and Always

Nature gives us an escape from the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives. Being able to immerse ourselves in a world filled with flora and fauna from time to time, instead of phone calls and emails, helps us slow down and provides us with renewal. Natural spaces have always been a sanctuary for uninterrupted thoughts and peaceful moments. Along with the serenity and individual benefits of the outdoors, they are also a place of community. Outdoor spaces are places where people can gather and enjoy the beauty of the area and the company of others. We foster collective care for our natural resources by visiting them and sharing those experiences with one another. By facilitating access to beautiful Florida places, ACT has always aimed to maintain our preserves as a service to the community. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the sanctuary and safety of nature has become even more vital.

Since the pandemic began, many of us have been isolated in our homes unable to visit with family and friends. The outdoors have become a haven for us to spend time with our loved ones or take a much-needed mental break from current events. Our preserves, along with other beautiful natural spaces in North Central Florida, have experienced an influx of visitors during this past year. We hope that the silver lining to this pandemic is the increased connection between people and wild places. More and more, we are seeing ourselves and others in our community seek out nature, even if to simply take a deep breath and reflect on this past year.

The pandemic has ushered in an opportunity to evolve the relationship between communities and the natural spaces they depend upon. The need to protect and provide accessibility to Florida's wild places has become more important than ever in light of the pandemic. Continuing to foster an equitable

relationship with our community and the land will remain a large aspect of ACT's work.

To learn more about our nature parks and preserves or to plan your next nature break, visit our website at www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/act-parks-preserves.

UF GATORS CHOMP IN SUPPORT OF CONSERVATION DURING ANNUAL CAMPAIGN FOR CHARITIES



Even amidst a pandemic, employees and faculty from the University of Florida continue to answer the call to support local conservation during the annual Campaign for Charities (UFCC) event. Over the past 11 years, the Gator Nation has donated more than \$281,000 to ACT through the UF employee payroll deduction program. This year, the UFCC Leadership Campaign kicks off on September 24th, and the General Campaign runs from September 27th through October 15th. If you are a UF staffer, please consider selecting ACT as your designated agency during the 2021 campaign. Your support will help protect land, water, and wildlife (including alligators!) in North Central Florida.



CONSERVATION STEWARDS AWARDS

Photo By Kim Davidson

Growing Up Florida Wild

Though every Conservation Stewards Awards (CSAs) is unique in its own way, 2021 was a year like no other. The pandemic had forced our first-ever cancellation last March, and there was just no circumstance under which we were willing to let another year go by without honoring our stewards Willa Drummond, Kate Lee, and Ian Kress in the way that they so richly deserved. Without their vision, persistence, and tangible support, Serenola Forest Preserve would not exist as a permanent public treasure today, and that warranted celebration.

We also wanted to make sure that our ever-faithful event partners - our local caterers and brewers - also benefitted after a very difficult year for their industries, since all had experienced periodic closures and occupancy reductions that still impact them today. So we schemed up our 2021 event as a hybrid of actual and virtual togetherness; a way to see “in-person” our wonderful supporters all around the community, provide them with a delicious meal and some lively spirits, and to share our deep appreciation both for our honorees and for our shared experiences during a very tough time in recent history.

And since it was written, no previous annual read of Sidney Wade’s poem “The Hard Saving”, which she specifically wrote in honor of all of our Conservation Stewards, has

held deeper meaning or greater significance for the times in which we live. ***“Yet we must save more of our oldest reserve, we must learn to balance trust and power; we must sing the economy of saving grace, we must continue that song and not stop saving.”*** For all of us at ACT, 2020 represented a year of hard saving indeed, with many important conservation gains won, but also for some, irreplaceable friends and supporters lost - to Covid-19, to fate, and to time itself.

With this in mind, to our partnering sponsors (who still gave more than they got), the chefs and brewers at East End Eatery and Blue Highway Pizza, Swamp Head Brewery, Cypress & Grove Brewing Co., and First Magnitude Brewing Company, we say thank you. To our lively entertainers, The Savants of Soul, who delivered a magical musical performance as the sun set on Orange Lake, we thank you. To our stewards Willa, Kate, and Ian for their ferocious conservation efforts to save Serenola Forest, with deep and lasting regard we say thank you, and to all of our friends, volunteers, and supporters who participated in numbers as great as any in-person CSA event past and for whom we can find no accurate superlative, as ever and again - thank you. It was a joy to see you all, even if only briefly, and a wonderful reminder that through the darkest of times, our ACT conservation community is still here and definitely stronger than ever.

2021 CONSERVATION STEWARDS AWARDS



GROWING UP FLORIDA WILD
2021 CORPORATE SPONSORS

Live Oak



CRANE RAMEN

Longleaf Pine



Cypress



Magnolia



VOYA FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Tupelo



Wiregrass



Mosswood Farm Store & Bakehouse
MICANOPY, FL

CREATING A FLORIDA WILD FOR ALL

ACT Launches Inaugural Diversity Scholarship

In the wake of numerous difficult national events and discourse on the topic of race and equity, ACT Staff and Board began discussing ways in which we as an organization can address inclusion within ACT and the greater natural resources field. Incorporating a working understanding of the intersectionality that is inherent within our work is only step one in being able to better serve every person in the communities where we work. The environmental field often silences the voices of our marginalized peers that are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). We want to make a consistent and engaged effort to ensure our work truly reflects the diversity of people, thought, and background in North Central Florida.

One aspect of these efforts is the inception of the Florida Wild for All Scholarship. This scholarship was born from staff conversations about how we can give back to the BIPOC individuals in our working area of 16 counties in North Central Florida. These counties include Alachua, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Lake, Levy, Madison, Marion, Putnam, Sumter, Suwannee, and Union. The Florida Wild for All scholarship is open to any high school senior, college student, or student enrolled in a natural resource program (i.e. AmeriCorps) that lives in this working area and is a member of the BIPOC community. The scholarship is intended to give back to and amplify the voices of BIPOC individuals in our community. We want our recipients to have a positive experience through this scholarship and help foster environmental mindfulness as they work toward establishing their future careers.

ACT is excited to announce that the application cycle for our inaugural Florida Wild for All Scholarship has finished accepting applicants and that we are moving into the next stage of the award process. Over the last few weeks, a diverse committee has reviewed the eligible pool of candidates and selected our 2021 recipients. Stay on the lookout for our announcement of the recipients and spotlights of each awardee in the next issue of the Gazetteer. We look forward to sharing more with you about some of the amazing BIPOC students in our community looking to make their mark on the environmental field.

ACT acknowledges the lack of diversity within our own organization and as we work to amplify voices in our community, we are also working to bring more diversity of thought and background into our own institution. We recognize the importance of including BIPOC voices in the ongoing process of creating a more inclusively-minded organization. If any members of our community have thoughts or suggestions on how we can best serve the diverse communities of North Central Florida, we accept and appreciate your feedback. To learn more about our inaugural Florida Wild for All Scholarship and our equity and representation efforts, please visit our website at www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/flwild-for-all.

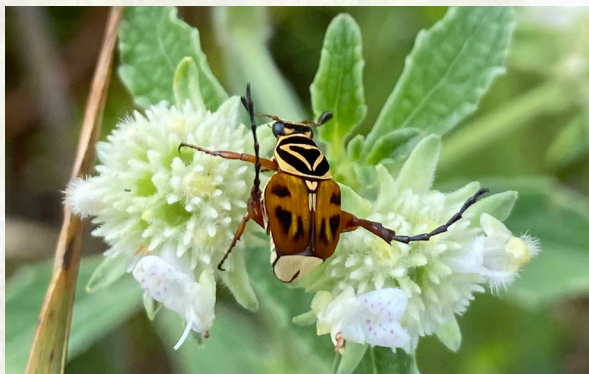


Photo By Alison Blakeslee



SAVING THE SANTA FE: LITTLE AWESOME PRESERVE

Your Help Is Needed to Protect This Awe-Inspiring Natural Place

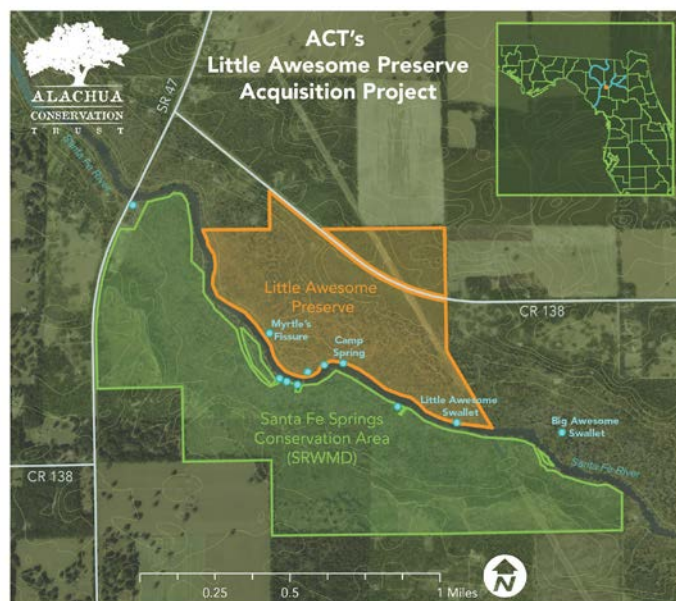
Photo By Alison Blakeslee

Walking through the woods surrounding Little Awesome is enchanting and comforting all at once. On this 203-acre tract, piney uplands gently slope towards the river. The pristine bottomland forest that winds along one of the wildest sections of the lower Santa Fe River evokes nostalgia for times long past and appreciation for the incredible beauty that persists. Entering these Florida woods, your eyes are drawn to the height of the upland canopy dominated by towering longleaf pines. Below them, large, healthy flowering dogwoods buzz with pollinators. Spanish moss drapes from sparkleberries over patches of saw palmetto, and legumes and grasses stretch through the dappled sun on the sandy forest floor. You recognize this landscape as quintessential “Old Florida” as the stresses of daily life begin to quietly melt and you yield to the insistent beckoning of nature’s surprises.

As you travel a gently sloping path to the river, a landing appears under a cove of buttressed trees, inviting you to picnic, launch a kayak, or just sit quietly and watch the river flow and gurgle around the Little Awesome Swallet. As your gaze wanders away from the water, the woods open up around you. Impossibly, the trees become even larger.

In the distance there are trunks so big and tall that you are pulled towards them, to get a better look. The understory is open and vast. The ground undulates, carpeted with pink and white rain lilies in a bed of spring green. A flock of turkeys moves quietly away from you.

The uneven ground supports enormous live oaks with giant spreading craggy limbs, Florida maples, and American elms on higher limestone hummocks. You walk through this quiltwork of giant cypress, locust and gum trees interspersed with upland forest rises. Your footsteps are constantly challenged by the change in landscape: the unexpected limestone bridge across a crack in the ground, and the scattered springs and swallets that suddenly appear at your feet. Your eyes are simultaneously drawn up into the vast canopy, down to the complex wonder of karst features below, and out towards the river calling you to its rippling edge. Across the river, as far as you can see in any direction, are unspoiled swaths of conservation land which protects the Santa Fe River Corridor in the Santa Fe Conservation Area. This property stirs a deep sense of awe.



In late spring, the opportunity to protect this 6,000-foot swath of undeveloped river and woods arose suddenly, and Alachua Conservation Trust jumped to the task, outbidding a real estate development group from Jacksonville at an online land auction in April.

Thanks to bridge loan from The Conservation Fund and a private donor, ACT was able to save this land from the bulldozers. But even as we joyfully exhale from this narrow conservation win, we urgently ask for your help to fund this unexpected \$1.9M purchase by donating to the *Rise Up for the Santa Fe River Campaign*.



Photo By Tedd Greenwald

BLUES CREEK RAVINE PRESERVE

Nature Where You Need It

Located in a fast-developing portion of the community in Northwest Gainesville, Blues Creek Ravine Preserve contains a large percentage of the floodplain and drainage basin for Blues Creek and its tributaries, which crisscross on site. Hardwood hammock surrounds the ravine, which features steeply incised stream banks and unique seepage slopes.

“As far as ACT properties go, the ravine is probably one of the more unique features that we have on any of our properties. There’s also a lot of cool species out there. It’s just really different from everything else that we have,” said ACT land management specialist Steve Wasp. Blues Creek Ravine Preserve contains a number of important plant species, such as the threatened crane-fly orchid and southern lady fern. The site also provides excellent habitat for several state-listed species.

In the preserve’s current state, there is a publicly accessible 0.5-mile loop trail that overlooks the ravine. Hikers, bikers, and leashed pets are all welcome to enjoy the views while wandering beneath the hardwood hammock variants. A second trail on the other side of the ravine is currently in development and will be accessible by a footbridge in the future.

VIRTUAL YOUTUBE TOUR

Alachua Conservation Trust, Inc.



Visit the Alachua Conservation Trust YouTube page to take a virtual walking tour of Blues Creek Ravine Preserve!

When talking with another member of the ACT Land Management Team, Joe Nieves, in reference to the diverse hardwood hammock canopy that makes up the majority of the preserve, his thoughts were nothing short of uplifting. “I think the tree diversity is the big takeaway point from Blues Creek. Considering that most of our properties are either swamps or pine flatwoods, Blues Creek represents a type of ecosystem that is very rare for us to own,” said Nieves.

When exploring the preserve, you can spot American hornbeams, hickories, spruce pines, and various other hardwoods. The tree diversity across all 160 acres that make up Blues Creek Ravine Preserve is quite literally a breath of fresh air.

You can learn more about Blues Creek Ravine Preserve and plan your visit at:

www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/act-parks-preserves.





FOX PEN PRESERVE

Now Open for Exploration

One mile of hiking trails, a view of Moss Lee Lake, and wide open sandhill restoration sites...oh my! Opened in late 2020, Fox Pen Preserve is one of ACT's newest preserves. Located in Hawthorne, Florida, the preserve is less than a half-hour drive from downtown Gainesville.

Fox Pen's 578 acres are part of a key tract in the Florida Forever Lochloosa Forest project area and are located within the Orange Creek Basin, which includes several outstanding Florida waterways. The preserve includes a diverse mix of longleaf sandhill habitat, flatwoods, mesic hammock, and shoreline of Moss Lee Lake. This mix of natural communities provides habitat for diverse wildlife such as the gopher tortoise, Northern bobwhite quail, indigo snake, and Florida black bear.

When asked about his favorite ecological aspects of Fox Pen Preserve, ACT land management specialist Joe Nieves says, "Fox Pen is the home of our most mature stands, like entire stands, of longleaf pines that ACT owns. I think for the most part it has very good or very recoverable groundcover, which is also one of those rare things for us to be able to manage. Plus, the overlook of the lake is very cool."

Following up on Joe's response, Steve Wasp, also a land management specialist at ACT, exclaims, "one of my favorite ecological features of Fox Pen has got to be the open wiregrass savannah. It's such a rare instance in Florida to have that kind of giant, open, continuous grassland. It's super beautiful. When you get the wind blowing through making waves in the grass... it's definitely my favorite part!"

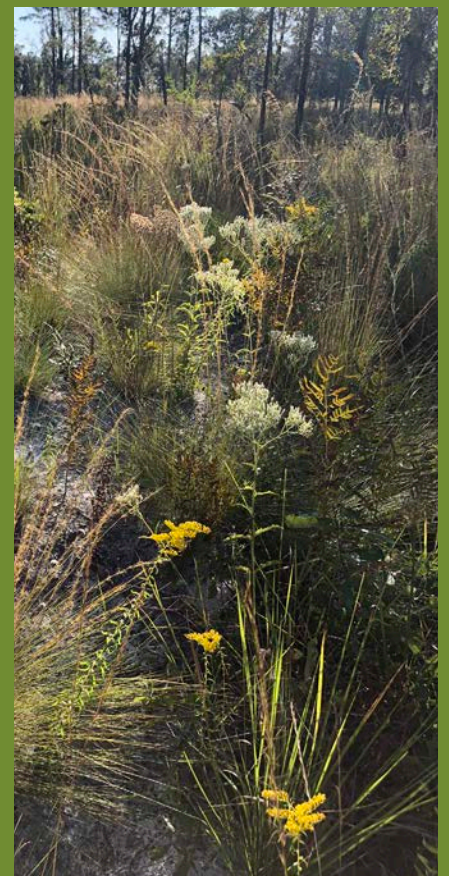
Aside from the pines and wide open field of wiregrass, visitors can enjoy a picnic or resting point at the apex of the loop trail whilst enjoying the view of Moss Lee Lake. From all of us at ACT, happy trails at Fox Pen Preserve!

A BIG SAVE

Thanks To A Big Tip

Thanks to the quick thinking of a friend and long-time supporter of ACT, a beautiful 28-acre parcel adjacent to Fox Pen Preserve has been saved! Not only did this friend give us the tip about this important parcel within the Lochloosa Wildlife Corridor, which spans much of eastern Alachua County, but they also donated all the funds to make this acquisition happen!

In early March, ACT acquired this beautiful forested land with a creek and pocket wetlands, making it a part of Fox Pen Preserve. We are grateful for the land tip and the support, and we hope you will head out to Hawthorne to hike the newly opened Fox Pen Preserve soon. *And if you have a land tip for us, definitely give us a call!*



SAVING NATURAL PLACES OF SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE

A Family's Journey



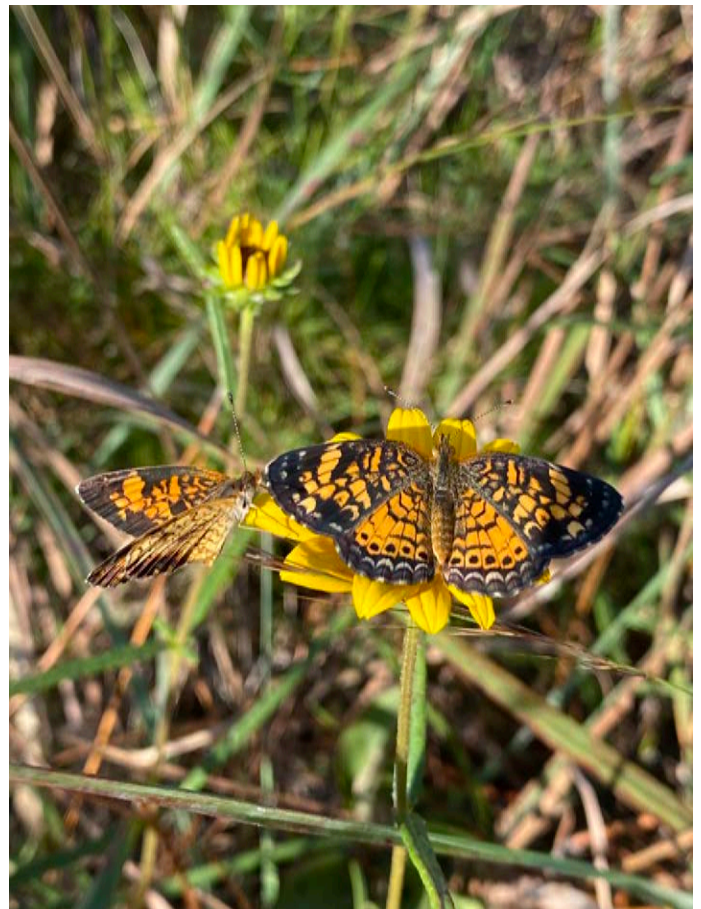
Dalea Carnea Var. *Albidum* - White Tassletops

As the sun rises over gently rolling sandy hills, the nodding grasses sparkle, glittering with the night's heavy dew. A Bachman's Sparrow, balanced between last fall's prickly chinquapin burrs, belts out his dawn song. Day breaks and the world comes alive with color in the quiltwork of grasses, peas and sunflowers thriving in the fine white sand. There is the delicate pink stem of the summer farewell, the feathery purple of the three-awn grass, the fuzzy leaves of a wooly pawpaw, the smiling yellow of the pineland silkgrass. Sentinel longleaf pines rustle in the wind as the day begins to warm.

This scene may be what James Y. Wilson first saw when he first purchased this property in 1956 with his wife Olema. Back then, the region was covered in native Florida sandhill ecosystems, but as early as the 1970's the property was hemmed in by residential homes and pasture. An avid quail hunter, J.Y. was aware of the benefits of prescribed fire to quail habitat. J.Y. burned the property himself with assistance from the Lake City Forest Ranger school he helped to found in 1947. Over the years, parts of the property were used to grow small plots of tobacco and corn, run cattle, and more recently, grow hay. J.Y. trained his own dogs and even into his 80's could outwalk and outlast most of the young men he took hunting. J.Y. and Olema's children wanted to honor their parent's legacy by protecting this property forever.

The J.Y. Wilson Grassland of Special Significance is the first of this designation for the state of Florida by the Natural Resources Conservation Service Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The property boasts over 240 native species of plants. It is within the state-designated Ichetucknee Springs Priority Focus Area (SPFA). Being in a spring SPFA means that even though it is over 9 miles to the Ichetuck-

nee head spring, the property's 518 acres of deep sandy soils and native ground cover directly contribute naturally filtered rainwater to these springs as well as the Floridan Aquifer. This property is now protected forever by a conservation easement held by Alachua Conservation Trust.





Penny and Russ Weber

J.Y.'s daughter Penny married consulting forester Russ Weber and they have continued to manage the property with prescribed fire to benefit the landscape. The family still enjoys quail hunting and organizing an occasional Native Plant Society wildflower tour. Conservation easements are important tools to protect these landscapes held in private ownership. This property exists today in this exemplary condition due to the Wilson and Weber families' passion, stewardship and management. Under a conservation easement, the land will stay private and without public access. The family can continue to manage the property as they have historically done and enjoy the recreational value of hunting and managing for hay. ACT will continue to work with the landowners in perpetuity to ensure the purpose of the conservation easement is being met and the land is protected from future development or intensification.

Partnerships made the protection of this special property possible. The North Florida Land Trust worked with ACT to build a strong application for the competitive U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service grant and helped raise the funds to purchase this conservation easement. Individuals from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission were integral in engaging the landowner's interests in recognizing the rarity of this landscape and working with non-profit land trusts to protect it. Funding was made possible through private foundations, Stetson University Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience, the Suwannee River Water Management District, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.



Symphotrichum walteri
Walter's Aster



James Y. Wilson Hunting Quail

Photo by J.Y. Wilson Family



Eriogonum Tomentosum, Dogtongue
Wild Buckwheat



A LAND REUNITED

The Amazing Story of Saving Piney Prairie

Steve and Betsy Updegraff are nature lovers. Many of us who share that identity have a place on earth that we associate with our discovery of the wonders of nature. This is true of both of them, Betsy having grown up spending magical summers at a lakeside cabin in Wisconsin with her grandmother. As a teenager, Steve spent unforgettable weekends bonding with his father and immersing himself in forest life at a hunting preserve southwest of Chiefland, FL, where his father was a member. These memories were powerfully rooted and have remained closely treasured throughout his adult life. In 2019, a miraculous story began to unfold for the Updegraffs and in December 2020, this very special piece of land was officially preserved forever.

Making your way down the dirt road entrance, the first thing you see as you approach the hunt camp lodge is a pond-like sinkhole through the woods, then another. Then, rounding the bend, is the magnificent Cook Sink, which resembles the many familiar springs throughout North Florida, with its limestone outcrops and deep cool blue water. Steve recalls refreshing swims here after days spent romping through the woods as a teenager. These are just some of many glorious memories from the trips he took with his father. Although these were “hunting” trips, the majority of the time was spent quietly observing nature together, walking through the piney woods and hardwood hammocks, and maintaining jeep trails and the lodge itself. These were definitely the beginnings of a lifetime of fascination and enjoyment of nature, and to Steve, Piney Prairie and the surrounding forest was hallowed ground.

In 2018, Steve and Betsy began to search for a piece of land that they could enjoy and take care of on the weekends and

as they slowly approached retirement. Between a busy ophthalmology practice and raising three kids, they were ready to slow down and take some time to enjoy the natural world. Steve’s youthful imprint led him to begin their search around the Chiefland area, and it didn’t take long to see that the very land of his childhood memories was on the market! The timing was extraordinary and the decision to purchase it came easily and with incredible joy.

The Updegraffs have wasted no time in expressing their appreciation for this fortuitous reunion with Piney Prairie, and quickly set out to learn everything they could about being good stewards. Immediately they began clearing overgrown trails and consulting with experts about managing the land for the benefit of local wildlife, plant communities and water resources. Steve remembers a vast pine forest in his youth,





Steve and Betsy Updegraff



but many years of fire suppression had transformed the former longleaf sandhill, which covered more than half of the 628-acre property, into a mixed hardwood forest with a shady canopy of oaks. Already, significant progress has been made to restore the sandhill ecosystem. Laurel oaks are being removed, liberating the stately longleaf pines and light-starved understory plants. Wiregrass and wildflowers have been reseeded in several areas. More than 5,000 longleaf pine seedlings have been planted in former pastures, which were historically sandhill as well. Fire lines are being established in order to reintroduce fire. Steve and Betsy have recently completed their Florida Prescribed Burn Certification training and will work with ACT and the North Florida Prescribed Burn Association to safely burn the property, which will benefit the ecosystem and protect against wildfires.

Although they are often hard at work on restoration projects, Steve and Betsy also remember to take time at Piney Prairie to simply enjoy nature. They follow the movement and habits of deer and other wildlife, observe and identify plants and wildflowers, and spend time with their grown children and beloved pups walking in the woods. They are getting to know this special place all over again.

In addition to sandhill, the property features its namesake Piney Prairie, a depression marsh covering roughly 44 acres, which offers excellent wintering habitat for migrating waterfowl and year-round cover for nesting water birds. On the northern part of the property lies over 100 acres of mature upland hardwood forest, which can be seen intact on the earliest historic aerial photos of the area. Enormous Live Oaks, Swamp Chestnut Oaks, Sweetgums, Magnolias and White Ash trees tower over shady forest paths. Another remarkable feature is the numerous sinkholes and karst features found throughout. More than a dozen established sinkholes offer windows into the limestone bedrock just beneath the surface and hideouts for wood ducks. The species richness and ecological diversity found on this land is exceptional.





CROSSING THE COUNTY LINE

Santa Fe River Preserve Adds 133 Acres!

Tucked against the northern portion of Alachua County and fronting the Santa Fe River, Santa Fe River Preserve now totals 1,067 acres of conservation land. The initial negotiations for the first tract of the Preserve started in 2008. Acquisitions were completed in multiple phases over the last decade kicking off in 2012. By the time the public opening was held in November 2017, ACT and Alachua County had acquired 934 acres and protected more than 6 miles along the river. This preserve serves as an anchor for ACT’s work along the Santa Fe River corridor.

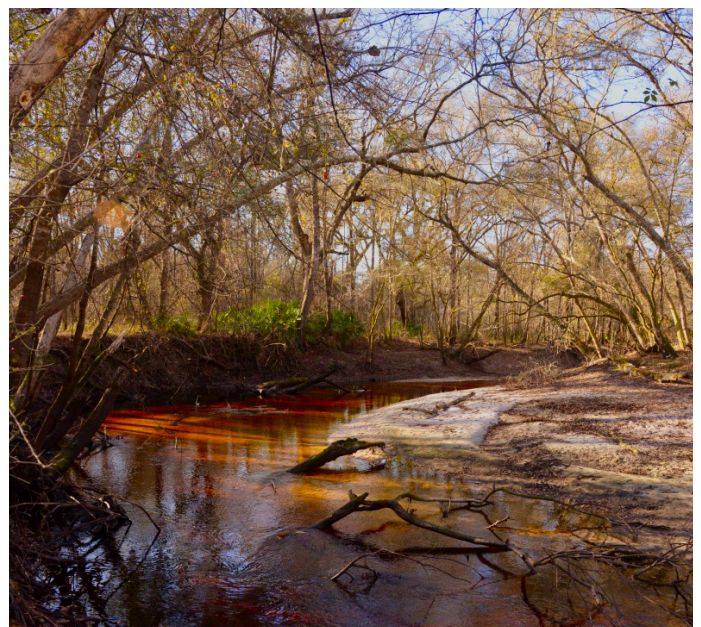
Recently, an incredible opportunity to expand this regional treasure by 133 acres came to ACT. The land located in Bradford County stretches the Santa Fe River Preserve north across the river, and most importantly, conserves another 1.3 miles of riverfront. This further protects the upper Santa Fe River and establishes a portion of the preserve on the New River – a key tributary to the Santa Fe River.

Along the river frontage of this property there are uncommon trees such as water elm and river birch, as well as a profusion of flowering shrubs including wild azalea. It is home to several endemic species that have disappeared or declined elsewhere. The blackwater stream of both the Santa Fe and New River provide habitat for Oval Pigtoes, Swamp Darters, and Sailfin Shiners. In 2007, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service identified this stretch of both rivers as critical habitat for 7 mussel species. The natural communities found within the new land are similar in composition to those found on the existing preserve, but largely differ in elevation as the bulk of the property consists of wetlands and is located within the ten-year floodplain.

Thanks to a very generous private foundation, private donor loan, and individual donors like you, ACT secured the funds needed to close on this key property in May – safeguarding water sources for several counties in North Central Florida.

This project is one of many that ACT is working on within the Santa Fe River Corridor and your support is needed now more than ever to help pay back the loans that allowed ACT to engage in these necessary conservation efforts when the opportunity arose. Your support for the Santa Fe River Preserve – North Addition prevents future land use conflicts on the northern boundary of the existing Santa Fe River Preserve that could adversely affect water quality and furthers a vision to keep this watershed wild and scenic. Together we can continue to permanently protect critical lands with both outstanding environmental and recreational resources that are valuable to the local and regional communities.

If you’d like to support this critical conservation corridor and the wildlife that depend on it, please visit www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/donate and select the Rise Up for the Santa Fe River campaign fund. You can also mail your donation to Alachua Conservation Trust at 7204 SE County Road 234, Gainesville, FL 32641.





HORSE FARMS FOREVER

Protecting Land in Marion County's Farmland Preservation Area

Marion County is widely known as the “Horse Capital of the World” and, as home to over 80,000 horses, the region is cherished for its deep cultural and economic ties to the traditions of horse farming. In the upcoming years, the population of Marion County is expected to increase significantly and pressure to convert historic horse farmland into new urban development could seriously impact the ecosystems of the area.

The region serves as a recharge area for rainwater that flows into both the Rainbow and Silver rivers. Activities including urban development or agricultural land conversion can increase the quantity of pollutants entering our waterways and decrease habitat for Florida wildlife.

In 2021, ACT has continued its partnership with Horse Farms Forever (HFF) to pursue conservation easements in Marion County's Farmland Preservation Area. With a generous grant from the Felburn Foundation, ACT and HFF will be able to protect land for future generations through conservation easements in this ecologically sensitive area of the North Central Florida. The conservation easements are located on private property and protect the land from future urban development or agricultural land use conversion. By placing a conservation easement on the property, the land can continue to be used for horse farming as well as other activities, but will be protected in perpetuity from being used for activities that will negatively impact the physical land and surrounding ecosystems. We have begun identifying and contacting potential property owners in the Marion County Farmland Preservation area to gauge interest for conservation easements in the region, and interested property owners, aided by ACT staff, are now gearing up to begin the process of putting easements on their land.

To learn more about ACT's Horse Farms Forever partnership and work, visit our website at www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/horse-farm-conservation. If you are a farmer located in the Marion County Farmland Preservation Area, contact ACT to learn more about options for protecting you land.

102 ACRES ADDED TO INDIAN LAKE STATE FOREST

Located just north of Silver Springs State Park, Indian Lake State Forest is a sandhill and pastureland habitat that stretches over Florida's karst topography. The forest is comprised of 4,466 acres of land providing habitat for tree species such as longleaf pine, sand post oaks, turkey oaks, wire grass, as well as wildlife including gopher tortoises, turkeys, fox squirrels, and kestrels. The forest contains the titular deep sinkhole, Indian Lake, which drains into Indian Lake Prairie, a significant recharge area for Silver Springs and the Floridan Aquifer.

With a generous grant from the Felburn Foundation last year, ACT was able to facilitate the acquisition of an additional 102 acres adjacent to Indian Lake State Forest. The final acquisition was completed by the St. Johns River Water Management District, which will own the land located near the Silver Springs Forest Conservation Area. This property will be managed by the Florida Forest Service and is an important addition to the existing state forest.

The new acres add high quality sandhill habitat along with longleaf pine, turkey oak, and native groundcover to Indian Lake State Forest. Two sinkholes are also located on the property, further protecting the quality of water reentering the aquifer. In addition to the ecological benefits of acquiring the property, the increased acreage also provides greater opportunities for recreation. Members of the community can come enjoy this beautiful habitat by hiking, bird watching, and horseback riding.

This conservation victory is a great example of the power of public-private partnerships to protect land, water, and wildlife in North Central Florida.



Photo By The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services



PARTNERING TO PROTECT FLORIDA, FOREVER

Last October, Alachua Conservation Trust embarked on a “Prized Property” tour of two key Florida Forever Projects located within the Santa Fe River Basin.

Story and Photo By Melissa Hill

“This has to be the most UTVs I have ever seen in oneplace”, I thought reflexively to myself as our tour group consisting of State Senator Keith Perry, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Secretary Noah Valenstein and other environmental leaders from the Suwannee River Water Management District, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) and FDEP climbed into their respective vehicles. Soon the engines turned over and we began our tour at the first stop of the day.

As we caravanned through the pristine longleaf pine savannah within Gilchrist County’s Florida Forever Bell Ridge Sandhills Project located within the Devil’s Ear Spring Priority Focus Area - a 3,000-acre grassland ecosystem with a critical role in water recharge of the Floridan Aquifer - I reflected on how good work is never accomplished in a vacuum. My appraisal of the importance of strong partners only grew as the tour participants stopped to discuss how the permanent protection of these key Florida Forever projects relate to habitat restoration, long-term management, threatened and endangered species, and the Floridan Aquifer.

We soon left the sandhills and drove north to rendezvous for the second part of the tour - a paddle down the Lower Santa Fe River led by Lars Andersen, a local paddling legend. The group drifted over the ethereal wonder of the first magnitude spring at Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs, out across the crystal-clear spring run, and into the always-stunning Santa Fe River. We stopped for a discussion at another Florida Forever project located within the Devil’s Ear Spring Priority Focus Area - Sawdust Spring - highlighting partnerships and land acquisition as a tool to address water quality and quantity issues in our region.

I left the tour at the end of the day brimming with excitement. While the day had been a great opportunity to highlight ACT’s work in the region, what was really showcased was how broad community support, collaboration among multiple funding partners, and a strong network for conservation is typically the winning combination needed to accomplish land protection projects. The two Florida Forever projects our group toured were a perfect example of the power of strong coalitions amongst state agencies, regional organizations, and nonprofit partners like ACT to protect critical natural lands from development and change.

Florida is a leading case study for the value of state-based funding to leverage land protection at a state level to safeguard drinking water, wildlife habitat, and open green spaces. As a strong proponent of a planet where natural places, wildlife, and people thrive together, Alachua Conservation Trust supports and urges for continued dedicated funding to Florida Forever and Springs Funding programs that will purchase conservation lands in the state of Florida. We invite you to contact Florida lawmakers to voice your gratitude and support for the protection of natural resources and advocate for continued land protection funding allocations to Florida Forever and associated state-backed conservation programs that promote both a healthy economy and environment.



Photo By Suwannee River Water Management District

THROUGH THE CAMERA'S LENS

Local Photographers Capture Natural Beauty in Support of Conservation

In the click of a camera and a whirl of wings, it's over. The moment is gone. You watch the subject of your shot flit away behind the trees, back to its nest. Then, with a slow, silent turn, you tear away, and the soft sound of leaves crunching underfoot keeps you quiet company on the journey home.

And yet that second still remains, captured in the camera. The perfect moment doesn't have to stay a secret. Lured out of the house and into the open air, you find yourself grounded in the beauty of the outdoors, even if it was for just a second.

Photography is a patient practice, and Alachua Conservation Trust board members Kim Davidson and Alison Blakeslee have mastered the art of it. Specializing in wildlife and landscape photography, they are able to support ACT's mission and engage in conservation in a special and unique way.

"Photography is another form of preservation," said Blakeslee. "The hope is that our images will introduce viewers to the places and wildlife that ACT works so hard to protect, and broaden support for all the work it does. There's always a need for that."

Turning moments into memories is just one of the many ways one can contribute to the cause. According to Davidson, "With photography, my hope is to provide viewers with a visceral and emotional connection to the natural world so they will have the desire, see the need, and want to preserve it. To that end, whether it be learning about conservation and sharing that information with others, or hands on help with local preservation cleanup and habitat restoration, or donating, there's always a way to play a part."

Their work also does more than help organizations like ACT. On a personal level, photography serves as a challenge, a purpose, and a reason to get outside. Beauty awaits just outside the door, waiting for someone to capture that moment.

"These kinds of environmental opportunities are always personally rewarding too - you get more than you give," said Blakeslee. "I love the challenge of it. The technology, the light, the processing... There's always something to be learned."

Together, Davidson and Blakeslee have shot hundreds of stunning images for ACT. And now, many of Davidson's photos can be found on her new website, KimDavidsonPhotography.com, where proceeds from each sale will be donated to ACT.

When asked about her favorite shot, Davidson laughed. "That," she said, "is probably the one I haven't gotten yet."



Alison Blakeslee



Photo By Alison Blakeslee



Kim Davidson



Photo By Kim Davidson

FILLING IN THE GAPS

Between People and Birds

From the famous pink feathers of the roseate spoonbill to the croaky call of a sandhill crane, hundreds of bird species can be found in Florida. And whether you're birding from your backyard or combing through the coast, anyone can take part in this casual kind of citizen science. But according to Peter Kleinhenz, Aucilla River watershed coalition coordinator for Tall Timbers, about 71% of Florida lies on private land, making access to information about birds and their habits harder to come by. On top of this, the United States and Canada have lost over 3 billion birds since the 1970s.

This is why ACT is proud to play a part in the "Filling in Gaps Between People and Birds Project," a partnership between ACT, Tall Timbers, Alachua Audubon and Conservation Florida. "Through this project, our goal is to empower private landowners to document the birds on their properties," Kleinhenz said. "And by doing that, we'll be developing strong relationships between local land trusts, Audubon chapters, and private property owners."

Last winter, ACT partnered with Alachua Audubon and five private landowners who have conservation easements on their property. During annual easement inspections conducted by ACT, these landowners were provided a pair of binoculars and given some tips on how to bird right from their backyard utilizing "eBird", an online tool and phone app that allows anyone to record the birds that they observe. A bird list was also recorded by Alachua Audubon Society volunteers and provided to the landowner so they could learn more about the species identified on their property.



Great Crested Flycatcher

"It can be addicting, birding," said Barbara Shea, the field trip leader at Alachua Audubon Society. "I'd encourage anyone to get into it. You're making memories, you're helping scientists, and it makes you feel lucky."

As another component of this partnership project, ACT and Tall Timbers each conducted a virtual webinar, where attendees were able to discover the many benefits of birding, as well as how to use the eBird app. ACT also produced a short video about eBird and Alachua Audubon's new bird banding lab at Prairie Creek Preserve.

"ACT is very excited to be working with our partners at Tall Timbers, Conservation Florida and Alachua Audubon on this important project," said Heather Obara, associate director at ACT. "We're especially looking forward to continuing our work with private landowners to utilize eBird, getting more people into birding, and bringing together local organizations and the general public in the interest of wildlife conservation."

You can view ACT's "Birding with eBird" webinar and a short video about this project on our YouTube channel.





WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER!

Czerne Reid, Ph.D.

Czerne Reid is a lecturer and program director in the University of Florida (UF) College of Medicine Department of Psychiatry, and affiliate faculty in the UF College of Journalism and Communications Department of Journalism. She earned a Ph.D. in environmental chemistry at Emory University, and a graduate certificate in science communication at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her bachelor's degree in chemistry is from the University of the West Indies, Mona, in her native Jamaica. Czerne teaches science journalism and leads graduate-level online courses and programs in psychiatry-related subject areas such as addiction and autism. She is also an independent science journalist, serving as a contributing editor for Science News, and publishing in National Geographic and other outlets. She co-chairs the education committee of the National Association of Science Writers and serves on the Committee on Science & Technology Engagement with the Public, of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She is also a member of the American Medical Writers Association, the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences and the Association of Health Care Journalists. Czerne serves on the UF Faculty Senate (starting Fall 2021), the University Curriculum Committee, the University Libraries Committee, and the UF Library Leadership Board.



WELCOME NEW STAFFER!

Lianne D'Arcy, Outreach Coordinator

Lianne D'Arcy first joined ACT as editorial intern back in 2018. After completing a Bachelor of Science in journalism with a minor in nonprofit organizational management at the University of Florida, Lianne now serves as ACT's Outreach Coordinator. In the years before joining ACT full time, Lianne held multiple intern positions in environmental and science communication, conducted research with the Bob Graham Institute for Public Service and served as a coxswain on the University of Florida's Women's Rowing Team. She aims to combine her passion for communications and love for the environment in her role here at ACT. In her free time, you can find her attempting to roller skate or caring for her many houseplants.



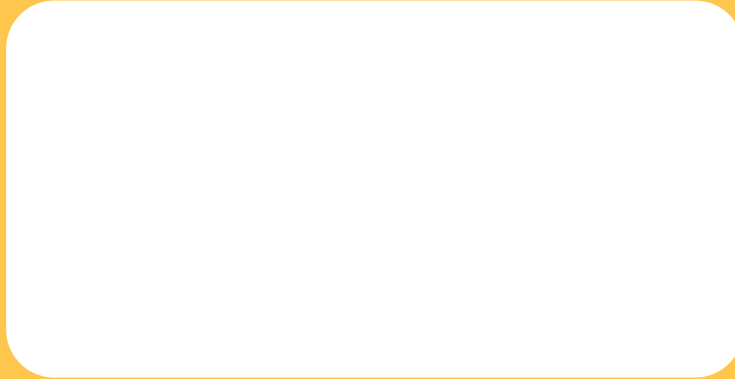
A FOND FAREWELL

Melissa Hill

ACT would like to wish a fond farewell to Melissa Hill. Melissa first started with ACT in 2014 as an intern before becoming a member of our staff in 2016. Over the years since, Melissa has worked on important conservation projects for ACT, including efforts to protect coastal sea turtle habitat, and on land and water in the Santa Fe River Basin. She also served as ACT's first Community Outreach Coordinator. Many of you have met Melissa tabling events, at paddles, and out on our preserves. Her passion for conservation and the environment have made her an invaluable member of the ACT team, and though we are going to miss her, we wish her the best of luck in her new position.



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Since 1988, the mission of Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) has been to protect the natural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources in and around North Central Florida. ACT protects land through purchase, donation, and conservation easements.

ACT is a 501(c)3 non-profit charity and receives no government grants for general operating support; we rely on contributions from private individuals, corporations, and foundations. Donations may be tax deductible, however ACT does not provide tax advice.

Alachua Conservation Trust's charitable solicitation number is CH12693. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free (800) 435-7352. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.