

Fish & Wildlife News

Volume 38, Issue 1



Florida
Wildlife
Federation
Since 1936

Winter 2023

A New Chapter *for Conservation*

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Chair's Message

Dave Preston



Protecting What We Treasure

On September 28th, 2022, Hurricane Ian made landfall in Southwest Florida, packing winds in excess of 150 mph and a storm surge as high as 15 feet. Ian's impacts were devastating to the region – reverberations of the impacts to SWFL's residents, business community, and natural ecosystems will be felt for years through the recovery process.

Hurricanes have been part of Florida's DNA since long before we got here. But in a relatively short period of time, we have lost a tremendous amount of resilience. What were once coastal mangrove forests that absorbed much of the energy of wind and waves are, in many cases, now concrete sea walls. Many of our wetlands that once absorbed stormwater runoff and fed our aquifers and drinking water supply have been paved over, increasing flooding and polluted runoff into our estuaries.

It is critical that we prioritize the conservation of our remaining wild undeveloped lands, especially as once gone they are irreplaceable. Our once pristine coastal waters and springs are under constant pressure from polluted runoff, algae blooms, seagrass die-offs, and seemingly annual recurring events of hyper-charged red tide and fish kills.

As we move out of the 2022 hurricane season and into a new year, it is critical that we urge Florida's elected officials to prioritize the protection of our coasts and estuaries. The challenges of sea level rise, rampant over development, and outdated infrastructure continue to put our way

of life, and things we treasure most, at risk. With 1,000+ people moving to Florida each day, it would be naive to envision a future that does not contemplate growth, but we need to learn from our mistakes and enact a more sustainable approach to growth management. There is far too much at

“It is critical that we prioritize the conservation of our remaining wild undeveloped lands, especially as once gone they are irreplaceable.”

stake – we can and will do better.

On an organizational note, I would like to personally thank Preston Robertson for his decades of exemplary service to the Federation. His presence and leadership will be missed, and we wish him the best of luck in his retirement. We are excited to move forward with our newly elected President and CEO, Sarah Gledhill, at the helm, and have the utmost confidence that Sarah is the perfect fit to lead our team and organization into this next critical chapter.

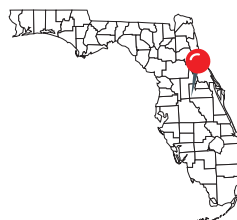
Cover Photo

Title: Artsy Profile

Photographer: Jim Uhing

Animal: Brown Pelican

Location: Orlando



Florida Fish & Wildlife News

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Title: Artsy Profile Artist: Jim Uhing Species: Brown Pelican

Contact Information

Tallahassee Mailing Address
PO Box 6870
Tallahassee, Florida 32314
info@FloridaWildlifeFederation.org

Tallahassee Street Address
2545 Blairstone Pines Dr
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
850-656-7113

Southeast Florida Office
336 NW Spanish River Blvd.
Boca Raton, FL 33431
954-254-3571
tomanr@fwfonline.org

Northeast Florida Office
PO Box 840012
St. Augustine, FL 32080
904-347-6490
sgledhill@fwfonline.org

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Jon Potrzeba

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President's Message

Sarah Gledhill, President and CEO



A New Chapter for Conservation

I am honored to serve as the fourth executive leader of the Florida Wildlife Federation. But first, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Preston Robertson for his leadership during his tenure. He led this organization through a time of uncertainty during the global pandemic. Not only did he stabilize the organization but expanded our capacity to continue being a fierce advocate for Florida's natural environment. Since joining the Federation, he has served as a mentor in guiding my career. On behalf of the staff and board, we wish him a wonderful retirement and many days walking amongst the longleaf pines.

Now, with the guidance of an engaged and active Board of Directors, I'm excited to help write the next chapter in this iconic conservation organization's history. Building on a foundation established by previous conservation heroes and leaders, the Federation will serve as an educator, convener, and advocate for the protection of our unique Florida wildlife and their habitats.

We will continue to fiercely advocate for Florida's iconic species and wild places, as well as public access and enjoyment. We will accomplish this through **education** and **outdoor recreation** supported by science-based regulations. The Federation represents all walks of life and that includes anglers, hunters, nature observers, bikers, hikers, and other outdoor recreationists.

The 2023 Florida Legislative Session begins March 7 and concludes May 5. This year, the Federation will focus on promoting land and water protection through full funding of the **Florida Forever Program** and **Rural and Family Lands Protection Program**, as well as reuniting the **Great Florida Riverway**

by way of restoring the **Ocklawaha River**.

At the federal level, we have two great opportunities to bring more land conservation dollars to Florida. The **Farm Bill** renewal, which happens every five years, brings significant funds to private landowners interested in voluntarily protecting our soil and water resources on their working lands.

In 2022, Congress came very close to passing the most significant investment in wildlife conservation in decades, **Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA)**. RAWA dollars will be used for on-the-ground conservation efforts such as conserving and restoring habitats, fighting invasive species, reintroducing native species, and tackling emerging diseases. If passed, Florida is poised to receive \$38.6 million a year. The Federation will work diligently to pass this bipartisan legislation this year.

The Federation strives to work with state and federal agencies on policy issues. However, we will pursue legal remedies to advance critical conservation issues. We are committed to:

- Upholding the will of 75% of voters who supported the **Water and Land Legacy Amendment** – the 2014 constitutional amendment mandating full funding for Florida Forever;
- Restoring the once oyster-rich **Apalachicola Bay** that relies on a healthy riverine system with adequate water supply from the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, and Flint Rivers; and
- Challenging Florida's unlawful assumption of the responsibility and oversight of the **dredging and filling of waters and wetlands** which are essential to water quality, storm and

climate resiliency, threatened and endangered species, and the economy.

Florida is the nation's third-largest state, and as of December 2022, we are now the nation's fastest-growing state for the first time since 1957. This puts extreme pressure on our natural resources from south Florida to the panhandle. Permanently protecting habitat and promoting landscape connectivity is the only way to ensure that native wildlife such as the **panther**, **gopher tortoise**, and **black bear** remain part of our landscape.

A quote I once heard has resonated with me – “People move to Arizona for the weather, but they move to Florida for the water.” Tragically, our waterways are suffering from excessive nutrient pollution associated with fertilizers, deteriorating septic tanks, and sewer lines, as well as harmful discharges from **Lake Okeechobee**. As **climate change** alters the water temperatures and more storm events occur, the natural system has an even harder time healing itself.

Fortunately, we have the tools to curb these threats and improve our water quality. Improving water quality doesn't only mean creating a better environment for **manatees**, **fisheries**, and **wildlife** in general, but a better quality of life for Floridians.

Lastly, I offer a heartfelt *thank you* to all our generous members and supporters who enable the Federation to continue being a fierce advocate, to Manley Fuller, who brought me on as staff in 2004, and to the Federation's Board of Directors for their leadership across the state.

For the Wild!





Letting it (Nature) Go

My wife and I recently bought the one-acre lot next door to us. The lady that previously owned it had passed away. She originally purchased the land in the 1980s and put a small house on it, using the rest of the property primarily as a large garden. Her finances were meager and as her health failed, she ended up living in a state-sponsored healthcare facility. Thus, there was about a 10-year period where the property (including the house) reverted “back to nature.”

One of our neighbors asked what our plans were with the property, so I told her that we were currently in the process of removing the house and that I was going to reestablish natural plant communities on the property. She replied, “so you are just going to let it go.”

Hmm I thought, this might sound wonderful and easy, as nature has done a pretty good job of managing life on earth for a very long time. Well, that is what was done on this property for the last 10 years and it’s now a real mess. Invasive exotic plants from other urban landscapes dominate the understory. Additional invasive plants came from some of the attempted food-producing trees planted by a previous landowner. On top of that, huge clumps of bamboo and nonnative ornamentals were planted.

Studies have shown that nonnative plant-dominated landscapes have greatly reduced value for wildlife.

In the past, nature was not transporting and establishing plants (and animals) all over the world at such a rate as we humans have. Additionally, we now have significant wildfire restrictions. Fire no longer travels for long periods over large landscapes as it did just a hundred years ago. These



Stan Rosenthal stands in a batch of invasive, exotic, and thorny silverthorn (*Elacagnus pungens*), one of many non-native plants that took over the unmanaged property. Photo credit: Phil Gornicki

changes have created a new environment that requires “active management” to keep land beneficial to wildlife. Our state parks are mostly managed this way now. Invasive plant control is a regular activity as well as prescribed burning.

While it has been a lot of work, I get the satisfaction of developing a piece of land “back to nature.”

Stan Rosenthal is Forest Advocate with the Florida Wildlife Federation and Extension Agent Emeritus with UF/IFAS Leon Extension.



Photographer: Mitch Eiseman; Title: Inbound; Species: Barred owl; Location: Indian River



Photographer: Rey Lastra; Title: Cloudy Sunrise Over The Skyway; Location: St. Petersburg



Featured Animal

Florida Native – Eastern Tiger Salamander

By: Tasman Rosenfeld

OThe eastern tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) is Florida's largest land-dwelling amphibian species, growing to lengths of almost a foot long. Though many salamanders look superficially like lizards, complete with four sprawling limbs and a long tail, their closest relatives are frogs. Like frogs, salamanders typically have wet skin, mate and lay eggs in the water, and have an aquatic juvenile stage—imagine a tadpole with legs and feathery external gills.

Unfortunately, there are only a handful of places that remain in the state where eastern tiger salamanders are thought to breed consistently year after year. Let this serve as another reminder about how important it is to conserve and manage habitats!



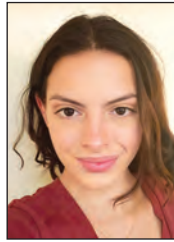
Photo Credit: Tasman Rosenfeld

Native Florida Plants/Plantas Nativas de Florida

Plants are a great way to personalize a home, and it can be fun to watch plants grow. One thing to consider when deciding which plants to choose for one's yard is if the plant is native to Florida. There are several benefits to selecting plants native to Florida. They often are healthier, stronger plants as they grow in conditions in which they thrive. Plants native to Florida also do not require as much maintenance as other options such as turf grass or invasive plants. Less watering is involved because the plants have adapted to the environment over time. Additionally, these plants can become natural habitats for animals in the area. Some animals that may come to visit include bees, butterflies, and birds.

One of the most significant benefits of choosing native plants is that they help the environment rather than harm it. They can prevent water runoff and improve air quality more than non-native species. Furthermore, if native plants choose to spread to areas of wildlife, it is not harmful to wild plants or animals in the area, but invasive plant species can threaten native plants and wildlife if they aggressively spread.

From tickseed flowers to butterfly milkweed, and from sabal palms to Fakahatchee grass, there are many native Florida plants to choose from for a yard.



Allison Ramos

Las plantas son una excelente manera de personalizar un hogar y puede ser entretenido verlas crecer. Una cosa a considerar al decidir qué plantas elegir para el jardín es si la planta es nativa de Florida. Hay varios beneficios al seleccionar plantas nativas de Florida. A menudo son plantas más sanas y fuertes porque crecen en las condiciones a la que están acostumbradas. Las plantas nativas de Florida tampoco requieren tanto mantenimiento como otras plantas, como el césped o las plantas invasoras. Se requiere menos riego porque ellas se han adaptado al medio ambiente con el tiempo. Además, estas plantas pueden convertirse en hábitats

naturales para los animales de la zona. Algunos animales que pueden venir a visitar se incluyen abejas, mariposas y pájaros.

Uno de los beneficios más significativos de elegir plantas nativas es que ayudan al medio ambiente en lugar de dañarlo. Pueden evitar la escorrentía de agua y mejorar la calidad del aire más que las especies no nativas. Además, si las plantas nativas eligen extenderse a áreas de vida silvestre, no es dañino para otras plantas o animales silvestres en el área, pero las especies de plantas invasoras pueden amenazar las nativas y la vida silvestre si se propagan agresivamente.

Desde flores de semilla de garrapata hasta el algodóncillo mariposa, y desde las palmas sabal hasta pasto Fakahatchee, hay muchas plantas nativas de Florida para elegir para un jardín.



Fakahatchee Grass



Photographer: Marianne Dent Lee; Title: Get A Move On Kids; Species: Sandhill Crane



FWF President and CEO, Sarah Gledhill (right), moderates the Florida Wildlife Corridor and Everglades Restoration panel during the 38th Annual Everglades Coalition Conference.



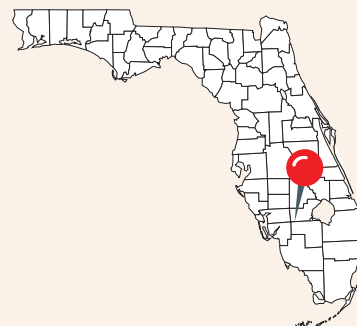
Featured Natural Area

Fort Center/Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area

By: Tasman Rosenfeld

Fort Center, which today lies within Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area, was inhabited by the people of the Belle Glade culture from as early as 3,000 years ago through around the year 1700. This archaeological site is open to the public and includes a network of mounds and other earthen embankments along the shore of the meandering Fisheating Creek, which empties into the western shore of Lake Okeechobee. Supplying almost 10% of its water, Fisheating Creek is Lake Okeechobee's second-largest natural source for the lake and the only remaining free-flowing watercourse that feeds into it.

Wading birds of all sorts, gators, and otters are common along the shores, and it is even possible to see more elusive animals like panthers and black bears as well. Fort Center and Fisheating Creek are must-see sites for any of those who appreciate the history and ecology of Florida. To learn more about Fisheating Creek and its many recreational opportunities, visit <https://myfwc.com/recreation/lead/fisheating-creek/>.





Native Groundcovers as Alternative Lawns

There are nearly 45 million acres of lawn in the United States – slightly more than half the total acres in our national park system. That's a lot of grass! Maintaining lawns can use millions of pounds of insecticides, herbicides, and fertilizer annually and uses billions of gallons of water daily. Turf lawns often can't absorb heavy rains that recharge our water systems, and they don't support native wildlife. Trading in some lawn for native groundcovers, along with native grasses and plants, provides food and cover for pollinators, other insects, toads, birds, and many small animals.

Turkey tangle frogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*) sounded like a good addition to our neighborhood school pollinator garden – a hardy, native groundcover with a name the kids would enjoy. A handful of starter plants, used to fill in a bare area, took off and grew vigorously. The goal of the garden is to attract and support native wildlife – and frogfruit delivers in a big way! Its tiny white and purple flowers provide nectar for many native bees and small butterflies and the plant is a host for caterpillars of common buckeye, white peacock, and phaon crescent butterflies. When blooming spring to fall, the frogfruit is alive with pollinators.

Frogfruit is evergreen and drought tolerant once it's established and grows in full sun to part shade in a variety of soils. It can take some foot traffic and even some mowing. This



Turkey Tangle Frogfruit

versatile, low-growing groundcover tends to form dense mats making a good lawn replacement. It does grow vigorously but is easy to trim or to pull out of areas where it's not wanted.

Powderpuff mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*), also known as sunshine mimosa, is a low-growing Florida native. Pink, ball-shaped flowers that look like small powderpuffs attract



Powderpuff Mimosa

native bees and butterflies. Its bright green fern-like leaves fold up when touched, giving it the nickname "sensitive plant." This mimosa grows in full sun to shade and is drought tolerant when established. It spreads quickly but is easily maintained by pruning. This plant is not evergreen, so its leaves tend to disappear in cooler months. Powderpuff mimosa can grow in with turfgrass and other plants.

Gopher apple (*Licania michauxii*) is a low-growing, evergreen native groundcover frequently seen in dunes and scrub habitat. It typically blooms spring through summer but may bloom year-round, attracting a variety of pollinators. Its small fruits, or apples, are a preferred food for gopher tortoises. Gopher apple is salt and drought tolerant, can help stabilize sandy soils, and makes a great ground cover for coastal landscapes. Gopher apple is also known as *Geobalanus oblongifolius*.

Our gardens, neighborhood parks, and schools have an essential role in sustaining our local native wildlife. Healthy gardens and landscapes, focusing on native plants, can help restore a greater variety of the animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms that make up our natural world. These organisms are all essential in our ecosystems – large and small – to maintain balance and support life.



Leave a Wildlife Legacy



Photographer: Robin Ulery; Title: Lean On Me; Location: Winter Garden

Did you know you can create your own lasting wildlife legacy with a planned gift? Establishing a planned gift is a commitment to the future of Florida's wildlife and habitat.

By considering the Florida Wildlife Federation in your giving strategy, you will:

- Conserve Florida's remaining wild places and iconic species
- Advocate for the protection of Florida's natural resources
- Promote sustainable outdoor recreation
- Deliver environmental education for generations to come

To make a bequest to the Florida Wildlife Federation, contribute through a retirement account or life insurance policy, or discuss your legacy giving options, please call our office at (850) 656-7113.

FLORIDA WILDLIFE Kids' Quiz

by Marney Richards

1. This large freshwater turtle has a red belly, broad red stripes on the shell, and bright yellow stripes on its head and legs.



2. This native Florida fish has distinctive vertical black and white bars on its sides and fins with sharp spines.



3. What common Florida gull is named for its distinctive call?



See page 10 for answers
and more information.



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Answers to **FLORIDA WILDLIFE Kids'** Quiz

1. The Florida red-bellied cooter is common in the Florida peninsula, found in rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and marshes. They are also found in the Apalachicola River basin. They are primarily herbivores, or plant eaters, feeding on a variety of aquatic plants. Females lay their eggs away from water, even laying some eggs in alligator nests!

2. Sheepshead are found in coastal waters near seawalls, pilings, jetties, rocks, and oyster bars. They average 1-2 feet in length and have a diverse diet, eating fish, worms, crustaceans and even seaweed and algae. Their teeth look surprisingly similar to human teeth.

3. Laughing gulls are about 16.5 inches in length, with a 40-inch wingspan. They are gray above and white below. In summer, adults have a black hood, white around the eyes, and a reddish bill. Winter birds have a gray mask on a white head; immatures are much browner. Laughing gulls eat mainly fish, shellfish, crabs, mollusks, insects, bird eggs, and young birds. They also eat garbage and food snatched from beachgoers.

How Did You Do, Florida Kid?

2023 Crawfordville Arbor Day Celebration

by: Claudia Farren

Nearly 1,000 native trees were given away on Saturday, January 21, to Wakulla County residents at the 19th annual celebration of Florida's Arbor Day. Vehicles lined up early outside the Wakulla County Extension Office to place an order for two free trees to take home for their yards.

The Wakulla County Garden Club (WCGC) bought tree seedlings in December 2021 with funds from the National Wildlife Federation's Trees for Wildlife program. They were planted in pots in February and nurtured by garden club members for a year at Just Fruits & Exotics Nursery. The WCGC gave away 9 species: arrowwood viburnum, chinquapin, dahoon holly, hop tree, overcup oak, parsley



Logan Austræng volunteered at Tree Station 8, giving away parsley haw baby trees.

haw, red maple, sand live oak, & yellow poplar (plus small numbers of other species). The Florida Forest Service gave away 2 species: red cedar & sweetbay magnolia.

Crawfordville Arbor Day is a partnership between the Wakulla County Garden Club, the Florida Wildlife Federation, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sarracenia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, and other community organizations.

Photos by Claudia Farren



WKGC member Chris Hill delivers a young Hop Tree into a waiting vehicle.



IN MEMORIAM – Tom Reese

Florida has lost an environmental giant. Tom Reese, a renowned attorney who practiced environmental and land use law, sadly passed away on February 4th, 2023.

During his career, he helped protect the Little Manatee River and the Withlacoochee River by leading efforts to designate them Outstanding Florida Waters. He also assisted the Federation in panther habitat preservation in South Florida. In 2014, Tom received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Federation for protecting Florida's land and water from development and his outstanding contributions to conservation.

Thank you, Tom, for dedicating your life's work to protecting our state's wild places and creatures.



Tom Reese

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Photographer: Claudia Daniels; Title: Midnights Stretch; Location: Sarasota, Florida