



# Audubon FLORIDA *Naturalist*

SUMMER 2015

Parks:  
The Heart  
of Natural  
Florida

2015 Audubon  
Assembly:  
October 23-24

What does the BP  
settlement mean  
for Florida's  
coastal birds?



Photo by Lori Piper

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Photo By Ralph Anwood



*Steve Lynch, Chair of the Board  
Florida Audubon Society*

Dear Audubon Members & Supporters,

Please enjoy this edition of the Audubon Florida *Naturalist* magazine. In this issue we celebrate Florida's remarkable network of parks and public conservation lands. You will find stories from across the state about these special places and what people like you are doing to protect them.

With binoculars in hand, Audubon members are often first at the park when the gates open and the last ones to leave when the sun sets. We bring our families and friends to parks for special occasions or just a fun afternoon. We are "parks people."

Unfortunately, many of our most beloved state and local wild areas face an uncertain future.

Despite an ever-growing population, the budget for Florida's conservation land has dwindled. Some leaders believe that parks must somehow pay for themselves. That means we can expect more attempts at money-making schemes like cattle grazing, boat marinas, and luxury lodging.

To make matters worse, funds for managing public parks and conservation areas have been cut. This makes managing land for birds and wildlife more difficult each year. But the people of Florida have responded to these threats in inspiring fashion.

I'm proud to say that Audubon Florida works with park staff, volunteers, citizen scientists, and other non-profit allies on many projects that make public lands more valuable for native wildlife and ecosystems.

For example, Audubon's Marianne Korosy leads our citizen science Jay Watch program. Important state land management agencies like the Florida Park Service, Water Management Districts, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission use data collected by Marianne and other Jaywatchers to better manage land and natural resources. This effort helps protect Florida Scrub-Jays and other animals and plants that call Florida's rare scrub habitat "home."

With the EagleWatch program, Audubon's Matt Smith and volunteer Reinier Mungia and Barbara Walker coordinate hundreds of volunteers to monitor eagle nests and fledglings in many state parks and local conservation areas. All the observations collected by these dedicated volunteers are then compiled and presented to park managers so they can better plan prescribed burns and other management activities.

Audubon Florida Chapters are also parks leaders. Alachua Audubon is right now leading the fight against a proposal to allow cattle grazing in Paynes Prairie State Preserve. I'm inspired to see many chapters across the state "adopt" parks and other conservation areas. Audubon members are also leading advocates for Amendment 1 spending at the Capitol.

Parks are the heart of natural Florida. They connect our citizens to the land, drive our economy, and provide habitat for the wildlife that makes our state so unique.

Thank you,

Steve Lynch  
Chairman, Audubon Florida

Make a Difference at [www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org](http://www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org)



## Parks are places where we fall in love with each other and nature.

*Eric Draper, Executive Director  
Audubon Florida*



Kayakers enjoy the Silver River and other conservation lands that represent all habitats found in our beautiful state.

Dear Friends,

Thirty years ago a newspaper photographer took a picture of my young family paddling on the Hillsborough River. The photo ran on the front page of the Tampa Tribune. The yellowed clipping still hangs in my home and reminds us of those special days when park outings and camping trips kept our family close.

I love to visit Hillsborough River State Park and other public lands. I drag friends, colleagues, and family to enjoy the wildlife, woods and water.

Florida has a great assemblage of local, state, and national parks and other conservation lands. They represent most types of habitat. Every park exists because someone, and in many cases it was an Audubon member, said let's save this place for the benefit of people and birds. We go to those parks and often give little thought to the efforts that laid the groundwork for our enjoyment.

Lately, legislators and some people working for the governor have developed a different vision for parks and public lands. It's a dark plan built on cutting state spending. Decisions are being made out of ideological beliefs and without recognition of the purpose for which the parks were created.

Legislators don't see what I see at places like Maclay Gardens near my home. Runners, walkers, and cyclists on trails, family picnics, swimming and canoeing in the clean lake (and yes, birdwatching). All within a few square miles now surrounded by development.

How do legislators conclude that Florida has too much public land and should sell some? When I visit these special places and see families enjoying the outdoors, I want to do everything in my power to enhance and expand our parks to allow more people to enjoy them and protect more water and wildlife.

Last year we voted for the Water and Land Conservation Amendment for precisely this reason. More than four million people said yes – 75%. Yet legislators cut spending this year for new public lands claiming the voters were fooled. Were you? I believe people knew exactly what they were voting for. I voted for the young boy I saw at Bald Point State Park who stalked a horseshoe crab in the surf and called ecstatically to his father, "Dad! A crab, a crab!"

That was me as a boy and my son and daughters too. We don't just love parks. Parks are places where we fall in love with each other and nature.

Now with a group in Tallahassee who just see parks as another budget item, the people who love parks need to show up. The effort that led to the creation of Florida's state, local, and national parks and other public lands is needed once again.

Parks: The Heart of Natural Florida is the theme of this year's Audubon Assembly. I hope you can join us at this exciting conservation event. See pages 14-15 for details and ticket information.

Sincerely,

Eric Draper

Eric Draper, Executive Director  
Audubon Florida

# The Heart of Natural Florida *Under Threat*

The heart of Florida is not a theme park, a palatial shopping mall, a beach lined with sprawling resorts, or a designer golf course. You find Florida's heart in its nature parks and conservation lands. Picture windswept dunes and sun-kissed beaches, clear springs that make you feel like you're flying, not swimming, Florida Scrub-Jays in their rare scrub habitat, perched high and dry along Florida's ancient backbone, moist and mysterious oak hammocks where time seems to stand still, and sprawling marshes of sawgrass, mangrove islands, and of course, the famed *River of Grass*.

We are fortunate that our predecessors had the foresight to set aside many of these special places through programs like Florida Forever, Preservation 2000, and municipal environmental lands programs.

State forests, wildlife management areas, water management district lands, and local conservation areas, combined with our award winning system of 171 state parks and trails, help make up the remarkable and accessible habitat mosaic of natural Florida.

These special places are home to some of our most iconic birds like Roseate Spoonbills, Florida Scrub-Jays, and Wood Storks. They also provide natural

solace and enjoyment for people looking for affordable outdoor recreation.

For decades, state and local conservation efforts have raced against the pace of relentless development to save the remaining places that make Florida a unique and special place to live and work. But conservation isn't just for posterity's sake. Parks are an essential economic engine for our state. Florida's State Parks alone generated \$38.3 billion in consumer spending in 2014 (beyond park admissions), supporting 330,000 jobs. Park visitor revenue sent \$2.5 billion in taxes to state and local coffers, making parks a solid investment that continues to perform year after year.

Yet while the benefits are well understood, Florida's parks have never been under greater threat.

In recent years, decision-makers have steadily reduced funding available to manage conservation areas, requiring land managers to do more with far less. They are also calling for 100% "self-sufficiency."

This could mean the sale of some parklands and privatization of park functions to generate more revenue.

Audubon Florida has fought a litany of park development proposals that serve no conservation purpose. Along with our Chapters, we've helped stop plans to build golf courses, permits for grazing of zoo animals and cattle, construct luxury lodging facilities, build boat marinas, add zip line attractions, and allow for fireworks displays over nesting birds. There have also been calls for hunting in state parks, Florida's only class of state lands not open to hunters in some form. One particularly bad idea would have closed or surplused 54 of our state parks. It's hard to imagine a Florida without those special places.

Parks are Florida's golden goose. The economic numbers don't lie. And our residents and tourists have said time and again, most recently with the overwhelming approval of Amendment 1, that the protection of these places for wildlife and for people is a core government function that we want funded for the foreseeable future.

Florida's elected officials need to hear from people like you now more than ever that parks and conservation lands are important and should be protected. Every story in this edition of the Naturalist includes opportunities for you to take action. Join the cause to defend the heart of natural Florida.



# Amendment 1, the Parks Budget, and the 2015 Florida Legislative Session

By Eric Draper, Audubon Florida Executive Director



"Together, we are building a new conservation movement for Florida. Amendment 1 was the first step." – Eric Draper, Executive Director

## You Can Help Parks, the Everglades, and Hold Legislators Accountable for Amendment 1 in 2016

Audubon members were not only the number one source of petitions to put Amendment 1 on the ballot. Thousands of us wrote, called and visited legislators to speak up for land and water projects. Some even came to Tallahassee during the session to make their voices heard. I hope we can continue to count on you to help advocate. The 2016 Florida Legislative Session has been moved to start in early January.

You can become an advocate for parks and other public lands and for waterways that need our help. Stay involved with Audubon, sign up for our Advocate eNewsletters for instructions on how you can participate: <http://fl.audubon.org/signup>

Come to the 2015 Audubon Assembly on October 23-24 and learn the issues and how to be an effective advocate for parks and public lands. You can find out more about the Assembly, including a program outline and ticket information, on pages 14-15 of this magazine.

The Audubon Assembly will run concurrently with the Florida Parks Summit at the Sheraton in Maitland, Florida October 24, 2015.

We knew the odds were tough even before the 2015 Florida legislative session began last March. Thanks to you, our supporters and members, Audubon was able to make our voice heard on behalf of Florida's parks, public conservation lands, water, and wildlife. But the results for Amendment 1 were disappointing.

Over 4 million people voted to pass the Water and Land Conservation Amendment last November. They voted to put \$20 billion over 20 years into the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to buy and manage land and restore the Everglades, springs, and coastal areas.

Yet legislators convinced themselves that Amendment 1 voters were fooled and used that created belief to justify short-changing the Florida Forever program and Everglades restoration. Surprisingly, the final appropriations bill provides far less than even what Governor Rick Scott proposed in his budget.

In one of the most troubling parts of the debate, legislators decided that parks and other public lands were not well managed and even advanced a bill to lease out more public lands for cattle grazing and timbering.

Audubon strongly supports land management efforts such as prescribed fire and exotics control. We will be watching how funds for these programs are spent during the year.

In June, House and Senate leaders returned for a special session and passed a budget spending about \$700 million. But a large part of the money was just shifted from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (repository of Amendment 1 monies) into routine agency expenses.

There were a few bright spots. (See graphic below.) The Florida Forever priority project list is funded for the first time in years and some funds for springs are targeted toward land acquisition.



Land Conservation  
\$52.4 million



Everglades  
\$82 million



Springs  
\$50 million

# Grassy Waters Preserve: A Gem of the Real Everglades in a Sea of Development

The Palm Beaches of Florida are world famous cities. They are home to some of the greatest in art, culture, and beauty - and other human attributes of cities: crowds, concrete, congestion, and pollution. But in the midst of this intensely developed landscape is the 23-square mile Grassy Waters Preserve, a shockingly-pristine remnant of the original Everglades ecosystem.

The Preserve is an ecological gem lying within a concrete jungle. It is also a remarkable testament to the value natural systems provide to citizens and wildlife. Grassy Waters was purchased by West Palm Beach in the 1950s to help protect this piece of the Everglades, and especially to protect drinking water for tens of thousands of residents. Like most natural South Florida landscapes, the Preserve captures and holds rainwater, recharging the freshwater aquifer underneath. Grassy Waters is the principal source of drinking water for the major cities of Palm Beach and West Palm Beach. The City of West Palm Beach owns the Preserve and it is managed by the Department of Public Utilities.

Grassy Waters is part of the headwaters for the Loxahatchee River and is composed of myriad sloughs, ponds, cypress stands, and lovely, clear waters. A visitor center offers residents and tourists a great view of the original, natural Florida. There are also popular trails and guided kayak tours so this

special place can be explored on foot or by floating on its waters.

But the Preserve is not just an oasis for urban South Florida citizens. It also provides important habitat for wildlife. Visitors can find an abundance of birds here, including Bald Eagles, Wood Storks, and the endangered Everglade Snail Kite, which nests and roosts within the Preserve.

Despite the park's stunning beauty and usefulness, significant threats loom. Surrounding neighborhoods introduce polluted stormwater, exotic plants and animals, and noise and light pollution. But the largest immediate threat is the Department of Transportation's plan to extend State Road 7 along the Preserve's western side. The planned road expansion would impact 273 acres of important Everglade Snail Kite habitat through infilling, pollution, and hydrology changes.

In April, the City of West Palm Beach sent a letter to federal agencies warning they are prepared to sue if the road is built, citing threats to drinking water, impacts to wetlands, loss of sensitive habitat, and endangered species impacts. The Audubon Society of the Everglades has mobilized its members to oppose the road expansion and help protect the Preserve.



Audubon Florida is weighing in for the Kites in the road debate and coordinating with Audubon Society of the Everglades. To learn more about what you can do to help protect the Grassy Waters Preserve, attend an Audubon Society of the Everglades meeting. More information about chapter meetings and Grassy Waters Preserve is available here: [www.auduboneverglades.org](http://www.auduboneverglades.org)

The Everglades has lost over 50% of its historic area to development. Grassy Waters Preserve is a beautiful reminder of the way things once were. Despite change all around it, this park remains as an original Florida landscape.

And as the county brochure says, "Remember, you are dependent upon the Preserve for water and the Preserve is dependent upon you for protection."



# The Intersection of Birds, Parks, and People at Shell Island in the Panhandle

Even some of Florida's most remote parks are in danger of visitors loving them to death. Yet many of these places are often understaffed and underprotected. One good example is Shell Island in the Florida Panhandle, where a fight is brewing over the fate of its vulnerable resources.

St. Andrews State Park spans both sides of the St. Andrews Bay inlet near Panama City. While its western part is accessible by car from Panama City Beach, its eastern part—the end of the peninsula known as “Shell Island”—is accessible to the public only by boat and offers a more rustic experience.

With no facilities and no roads, it's a dune-lined, white sugar-sand beach set against the warm, emerald Gulf. This park provides valuable habitat for wildlife and an experience for people that is increasingly rare in Florida. Shell Island is crucial for rare and threatened species including beach mice, nesting sea turtles, wintering Piping Plovers and nesting Least Terns and Snowy Plovers. Unfortunately, this important island is suffering from too much people-love.

While some visitors pay their entrance fee and take the ferry to Shell Island, far more people arrive by private vessels that land on Shell Island's bay side. Some boats are bound for private

“inholdings,” but most head towards the state park beach to recreate at the expense of the park and its wildlife. Large tourist party boats with double-decker waterslides moor on the bayshore. Personal watercraft tours zip over from urban Panama City Beach.

On busy summer weekends, literally thousands of people land on Shell Island in private boats. Many of these visitors violate park rules by running their dogs loose on the beach, trespassing in areas posted to protect Threatened species, walking in sensitive habitat areas, and using the dunes and shallow water as restrooms.

By their sheer numbers alone, these visitors harm the habitat, species, and wild experience that the state set out to protect when they acquired St. Andrews State Park. A single disturbance can cause Snowy Plover nests to fail or Least Tern chicks to be separated from their parents and lost.

And because they don't pay the required admission fee, these visitors don't get “counted” in the park's attendance figures or figured into the Park Service's assessment of how much recreational use can be allowed without impacting the park's resources.

You can find problems like these at other parks across the state, like Anclote Key Preserve and Three Rooker Island. The Park Service is in the course of updating its management plan for St. Andrews State Park, focusing particularly on increasing public use. This vulnerable home to 10% of the state's nesting Snowy Plovers will need your voice later this fall when the Florida Park Service makes the plan available for public comment.

Florida's parks need your voice. Sign up for Audubon's Coastal Strand eNewsletter to get the latest information about Shell Island and other important coastal conservation areas. Please visit <http://fl.audubon.org/signup> right now.



**Shell Island is home to 10% of Florida's entire population of Snowy Plovers**

Private vessels crowd Shell Island.



# Audubon Releases the *500th Bald Eagle* Back into the Wild

Photo by Bill Randolph

When you see a Bald Eagle soaring in Florida's skies, you are witness to one of conservation's greatest success stories. The story is about the relationship between birds and people. It's about injuries healed, illnesses cured, and habitat saved. You can find the story written in the DNA of the eagles that struggled for so long to make a comeback. This story of survival continues today.

In May, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey released the 500th rehabilitated Bald Eagle back into Florida's skies. With the help of Audubon Board Member Ann Harwood-Nuss, Charlie was released back where he was found – at a county park near Melbourne. It was an unforgettable moment if you consider the tragic history of Bald Eagles.

Just 40 years ago, only 417 pairs of eagles existed in the entire continental United States. Today, Florida hosts over 1,400 nesting pairs, making Central Florida the hub of eagle activity east of the Mississippi. Audubon members, donors, and volunteers have largely contributed to this remarkable success. But the effort to save eagles and their habitat can't end at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey.

Eagles prefer open land near fresh water for foraging and nesting – like Kissimmee River State Park. Nests are typically built in mature pine stands, with a well-developed canopy. Florida's excellent network

of state and local parks and conservation areas provide this kind of habitat. Florida's parks are one of the reasons Bald Eagles are doing so well. Protecting the places that eagles rely on for survival is the other side of the coin to Audubon's veterinary success.

For example, Audubon's statewide EagleWatch citizen science program protects habitat and identifies potential impacts to eagles and their nest sites. EagleWatch volunteers monitor almost 20% of Florida's nesting eagle pairs and provide important data to land managers and regulatory agencies.

At the Capitol, Audubon is working to secure funding for more parks so eagles that are displaced by increased development have a place to go. There are more than 100 environmentally endangered lands just waiting to be bought by the state. This includes lands within vital ecosystems like the Green Swamp.

"Saving one Bald Eagle may, in turn, save many, many more," said, Dianna Flynt, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Supervisor. "Many of our patients are admitted due to human-related activities including vehicle strikes, habitat loss, electrocutions, and poisoning by toxins. We even see gunshot wounds. It isn't easy or cheap work to rehabilitate these birds, but it's worth it every time one is returned back into Florida's skies. Each person touched

by these birds becomes educated in their plight and connected to their future. All of this isn't just for the birds; it's also for us. We need a healthy environment and, in turn, we need birds like Charlie to be out there, contributing to his species' longevity."

Audubon Florida offers many opportunities to protect Bald Eagles. For more information on how you can volunteer with EagleWatch or the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, please visit [www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org](http://www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org).



"Watching Charlie fly free to the horizon was an awesome sight. Moments like this are why we work so hard for Florida's parks and wildlife."

– Ann Harwood-Nuss,  
Audubon Florida Board of Directors

# The Value of Environmental Education in *Nature's Classrooms*



Barred Owl by RJ Wiley.



Have you ever seen a child's face when you point out a Barred Owl perched in a tree? Or watched their eyes light up when they spot an alligator hidden amongst the lilies of a swamp? It's a joy to watch their unfettered curiosity and excitement for the natural world. The staff and volunteers at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary get to witness this reaction every day. *And with adults, too!*

Many people know Corkscrew for its Wood Storks, Florida panthers, ghost orchids, and ancient bald cypress trees. But Corkscrew is no zoo. It is the heart of a dynamic, complex, and living ecosystem, providing refuge for native birds and wildlife threatened by rapidly encroaching urban development.

Corkscrew is also home to the Blair Audubon Center, the gateway to a 2.25 mile boardwalk into the lush swamps of the Western Everglades. For many, the boardwalk serves as their introduction to environmental education and up-close appreciation of the natural world.

If our effort to protect Florida's parks and conservation lands are to last, we have to invest in environmental education for both children and adults. Parks and other conservation areas across Florida serve as nature's classrooms. Their value to each community is immeasurable, especially in urban and developing areas.

Leonardo da Vinci said "One has no right to love or hate anything if one has not acquired a thorough knowledge of its nature. Great love springs from great knowledge of the beloved object, and if you know it but little, you will be able to love it only a little, or not at all."

This insight is key to the importance of educating people about the natural world. To know it, is to love and protect it.

Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is a 20-square mile mosaic of native habitats located just east of Naples. The Sanctuary rests in the midst of the state-owned Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW). Audubon manages the land to provide sanctuary for the beleaguered wildlife driven from the inhospitable patchwork of rooftops, pavement, crop-scapes, and sterile lakes ever more common in rapidly developing southwest Florida.

But Corkscrew is also managed for people. Here local families and tourists from around the world can get up close to some interesting and rare Everglades plants and wildlife and bathe in the serenity of the watery landscape. Nearly 100,000 people visit Corkscrew Swamp each year. The boardwalk, which winds through the scarce wet prairie and (far scarcer) old growth cypress forest, provides the public a unique experience into this wild and fragile landscape. Informative signs, displays, and sitting areas convey the complexity and beauty of this special place in a learning context.

Many visitors choose to engage with volunteer boardwalk naturalists, who take delight in answering questions about our natural world. Others join special education programs like the popular bird walk series or the family-friendly Ancient Forest Walking Tours. Last year, nearly half of Corkscrew's 5,000 special program visitors were elementary-aged children. And that number is expected to grow.

Da Vinci's insight guides Audubon Florida's educational mission. Many visitors come to our state hoping to see an alligator or add a rare warbler to their life list. But the magic of natural Florida also captures their imagination and instills in visitors a pride and enthusiasm for conserving our wildlife, parks, and public conservation lands.

# Parks Protect Florida's Water at the Source

Imagine yourself floating effortlessly over gin-clear water with lush river grasses below under a canopy of bald cypress, maple and water oak. You hear songbirds in the trees and the occasional splash of a jumping mullet. A Limpkin cries in the distance.

Seventeen state parks in Florida are named after springs and dozens more are enjoyed as county parks and private recreation areas. And it is vital for these special places to remain protected. They allow us a peek into the vast water supply of the Floridan Aquifer - the source of drinking water for millions of Floridians and tourists. Springs are also a heck of a lot of fun.

Go to any springs park in the summer and you will find families swimming, diving, snorkeling, boating, tubing, and fishing – reveling in the cool, fresh water. These protected areas conserve our natural and cultural heritage and provide life support for many threatened plants and animals.

At first glance, everything seems as it should. But beneath the surface all is not well.

Withdrawals of millions of gallons of water from the aquifer to support agriculture and urban development continues to increase each year, reducing the natural flow of underground water. To make matters worse, the draining of wetlands and other human activities on the surface have altered the ability of rain to replenish the aquifer below.

Simply put, we're taking too much water out of the system and not making sure enough gets put back in.

But that's not all that's wrong. Nutrients (primarily nitrogen and phosphorus) from fertilizer, septic systems, and animal waste increase the growth of algae in spring runs, rivers, and estuaries downstream. This creates thick brown slime smothering and killing the native underwater grasses visible in so many spring runs throughout our state.

Aquatic grasses are the basis for an underwater food chain. They provide food, spawning grounds, and shelter for a wide variety of fish, reptiles and other species. When the grasses die, these dependent species disappear or are replaced by exotic species. A once perfectly adapted ecosystem has been thrown into a tailspin.

Studies have revealed the need to identify and protect springsheds, the geographic basins that collect the rainwater that feeds the springs themselves. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection established Basin Management Action Plans to guard against nutrient pollution in these sensitive areas, but the (well-intentioned) plans fall woefully short of reaching their intended goals as the thick brown slime attests.

Purchasing land around the actual springs is the most effective tool we have to protect these fragile ecosystems. With increased understanding of the geology and flows within the aquifer system, scientists have been able to identify critical areas for purchase. Many of these high-value parcels are just waiting to be bought and protected...before they are developed.

Securing Florida's water at the source is the best way to guarantee long-term sustainability for our people, our springs, and our birds. Now it's our job to make the case to our leaders.



## YOU CAN HELP.

Together with our Chapter partners, Audubon Florida works to educate local and state decision makers so that they understand the economic and resource value of our springs parks. Your voice is needed. Send an email to [flconservation@audubon.org](mailto:flconservation@audubon.org) if you want to find out how you can make a difference in your local community.

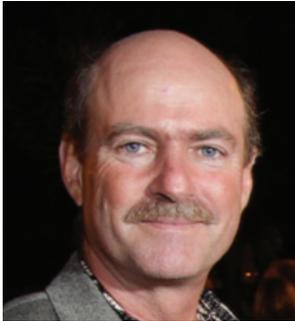


Above: Ichetucknee Springs State Park by Georgia Shemitz. Top: Limpkin by Charles Lee

# Audubon Science at Work for Our Parks and Conservation Lands

Many people focus on land acquisition as an end point, but it's just a beginning. Conservation purchases need restoration and ongoing land management to keep them healthy. With management funding beholden to the political process in Tallahassee, conservation science work is often done on a shoestring budget. Land managers are able to keep up thanks to hard work from their dedicated staff and from support by groups like Audubon Florida.

Here are a few examples of how Audubon Florida staff scientists and volunteers are helping promote science in our parks and conservation lands.



## *Dr. Paul Gray*

### **Funding Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Technicians**

The vast grassland of Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park in Okeechobee County is one of the last known places on Earth where you can find a Florida Grasshopper Sparrow. The small, cryptic bird is possibly the most imperiled federally Endangered subspecies in the continental US. Unfortunately, only a small staff manages the park's 54,000 acres of fire-dependent dry prairie. This makes it hard to survey the entire preserve even once per year, let alone collect research data. Audubon's Okeechobee Science Coordinator, Dr. Paul Gray, was able to allocate Audubon endowment dollars to support 3 technicians on the prairie this season. Surveying and studying the sparrows is crucial to their recovery.



## *Dr. Shawn Clem*

### **Turning Back the Clock on Wetland Loss in Southwest Florida**

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Research Manager Dr. Shawn Clem studies the restoration of relic agricultural fields in southwest Florida. Her research will demonstrate the ecological value of restored lands for wildlife, and the speed and diversity with which wetland species return to public lands following restoration. Her team of technicians, interns, and volunteers is also establishing an ecological baseline in Western Everglades wetlands in advance of the arrival of invasive exotics, like Burmese pythons. Results from this research will help guide future restoration efforts throughout the region.



## *Dr. Marianne Korosy*

### **Jay Watch Drives Land Management and Policy Decisions**

It would be easy to think the Jay Watch volunteers marshalled by Audubon's Dr. Marianne Korosy just count Florida Scrub-Jays. In fact, this data helps drive the application of prescribed fire—without which, the birds would not survive. Based on changes in jay distribution and breeding success tracked by Jay Watch volunteers, managers can tell when areas need fire sooner, and see the rewards from recent burns with new colonies and more young birds fledged per territory. Similarly, these volunteers become some of the most knowledgeable and effective advocates for jays and scrub in the state.



## *Dr. Jerry Lorenz*

### **Real-time Feedback on the World's Most Ambitious Ecosystem Restoration**

Everglades restoration is an intricate process. Project managers need rapid feedback from regular field monitoring to make sure projects and policies are operating as planned. Audubon's Dr. Jerry Lorenz and his team at the Everglades Science Center at Tavernier helps collect this important data. His team of scientists work deep in the backcountry of Florida Bay and the Southern Everglades to monitor changes in water levels and salinity and the health of forage fish. The information they provide helps shape the restoration process.

# The BP Settlement

## What Does It Mean For Florida's Gulf Coast Birds and Habitat?

Photo by Daniel Ewert



This update is a follow-up to our five-year Gulf Report. Download <http://bit.ly/FiveYearGulfReport>

In July, the U.S. Department of Justice and BP settled the fines, claims, and damages resulting from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. BP will pay out a record-setting \$18.7 billion settlement over 15 years. Some \$3.2 billion will be distributed to Florida.

The slow outlay of money certainly benefits BP's bottom line. But from Audubon's perspective, a steady flow of restoration dollars across a longer period of time will help pace the selection of projects. It also allows time for the important coordination needed to make sure that projects are strategic and additive.

Worrisome is the fact that \$2 billion will be paid for the state's economic claims. That amount is way more than the \$680 million that will address Florida's Natural Resource Damage claims.

The individual Gulf Coast counties in Florida and the County Consortium (made up of the 23 Gulf Coast counties in Florida) will use the remaining \$520 million to select a spectrum of ecosystem restoration, tourism, and community projects.

Florida restoration projects will also compete with the rest of the Gulf States for funding from an additional \$1.32 billion controlled by the RESTORE Council.

The state economic claims are likely to be channeled into economic development schemes, some of which could end up with their own environmental impacts.

Additionally, on August 13, the RESTORE Council released its draft Funded Priorities List (FPL). The list includes the first Council projects likely to be funded from the 2013 settlement with Transocean.

Audubon believes the FPL is a good first step towards addressing the natural systems that support the Gulf. The RESTORE Council organized projects around estuaries and their watersheds, including Pensacola Bay, Apalachicola Bay, Suwannee River watershed, and Tampa Bay. Nevertheless, the early projects selected in Florida favored water quality and planning projects to the exclusion of habitat protection and wildlife conservation.

One good outcome is the proposed establishment of a new National Estuary Program somewhere in the Panhandle.



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### How You Can Help

With this much funding in play, the role of Audubon Advocates remains as important as ever. Florida lacks a state-wide Gulf restoration plan, so there is always a risk of funded projects that will not deliver good ecological results.

Thank you to our Audubon members and other Gulf Advocates for helping pass the RESTORE Act and persuading public officials that a healthy environment is the key to a healthy economy. The Gulf still needs your involvement to ensure the restoration really does make the Gulf whole again:

1. Stay informed. Subscribe to our RESTORE Florida's Gulf eNewsletter: <http://fl.audubon.org/signup>
2. Review the latest Gulf Restoration fact sheet: <http://bit.ly/1Jh4XBI>
3. Provide public comment whenever possible—right now, public comment on the RESTORE Council's FPL can be sent to: [restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov](mailto:restorecouncil@restorethegulf.gov)
4. If you live in a Gulf Coast county, engage with your local county decision-making process about how the money will be spent in your region. Learn more from Audubon's Jacqui Sulek at [jsulek@audubon.org](mailto:jsulek@audubon.org)

# Julie Wraithmell Wins National Audubon Society's Highest Honor

Congratulations are in order for Julie Wraithmell, Audubon Florida's Director of Wildlife Conservation, for winning the National Audubon Society's 2015 Charles H. Callison award. Julie's remarkable efforts to build citizen science and habitat stewardship programs were the basis for this prestigious recognition.

Julie has many signature conservation achievements. Among them are Audubon Florida's urgent response to the 2010 Gulf oil spill disaster, when she marshalled volunteers to guard nesting coastal bird colonies and relentlessly reported the impacts of both the spill and the response. Under her direction, Audubon participated in recovery efforts that now include programs to monitor nesting sites along the Gulf Coast.

Thanks to Julie's leadership, Audubon was able to raise the funds to buy



Audubon Florida's Julie Wraithmell wins the prestigious 2015 Callison Award.

Lanark Reef. Lanark is an important Panhandle nesting site for Brown Pelicans and provides vital winter habitat for other coastal birds.

Julie Wraithmell is an exceptional part of Audubon – an effective advocate for birds and wildlife and an impressive leader of staff and volunteers.

# Mike Sheridan Recognized as Audubon Florida's 2015 Philanthropist of the Year



Audubon Florida Board Treasurer Mike Sheridan has over several years stepped up his commitment of time, energy and money. And, he has made stewardship of the organization's finances a top priority by implementing a board investment policy.

Mike has made Audubon a preferred recipient of his generous giving, and he has reached out to others to elevate a culture of philanthropy on the Audubon Florida board.

Through his own gifts and those of his businesses and associates, Mike Sheridan is one of Audubon Florida's most generous donors and is being recognized with Audubon's 2015 Philanthropy Award.

Mike brings a passion for Florida conservation to Audubon. A native of Miami and Audubon member since the 1960s, he has seen so much change in our Florida environment over the years.

"I can remember the dark days for the natural places of beauty in our State in the 1950's and 60's before the public had much of a sense of stewardship and before we had much, if any, environmental protection laws in place to protect what we had left", Mike recalls.

"About the time of the first Earth Day, the few conservation groups that existed, led by Audubon, began to bring about a change in culture and consciousness that moved us to defending and protecting our wild places, our habitat, and our wildlife. We began to lobby, litigate and create preservation

refuges. But it took money as well as public support but we did it".

Progress was made, but Mike says, "It still comes down to raising money as well as awareness in order to offset the deep efforts of some of the opposition who are only focused on profits, at whatever cost".

Mike has urged Audubon members at all levels to give generously to support the science and advocacy that ensure good conservation outcomes. In his own words, "I am so proud to be an Audubon member and donor for these past decades and I hope to share my dedication and passion about environmental protection to many more people in the future and hope that all our members can feel this same way as voices for Florida."

Mike has been one of the most consistent and committed directors and donors. We are extraordinarily grateful to him and lucky to count him as part of Audubon's legacy.

# Audubon Assembly 2015

## “Parks: The Heart of Natural Florida”

### October 23-24, 2015 • Sheraton Orlando North, Maitland, Florida

The Audubon Assembly is Florida's premiere conservation event and conference. This year's gathering will be held Oct 23-24, 2015 at the Orlando Sheraton North in Maitland and you are invited!

The theme for the Assembly is “**Parks: The Heart of Natural Florida.**” If you have visited a park in Florida then you know first-hand their incredible value. State, county, and local conservation areas have a unique place in our network of public lands. From urban oases with playgrounds and ballparks to remote wilderness preserves that offer solitude and serenity, every park plays a role - for our birds, our citizens, and our economy.

We will focus this year's Assembly on celebrating and promoting discussion about how we can protect and enhance these “special places” for future generations. Our goal is for you to leave inspired to engage a broader more diverse audience to secure Florida's internationally-recognized system of public conservation lands.

## Featured Guest Speakers

**Friday Banquet Keynote Speaker:**  
**Rafael Galvez, artist, birding tour leader, and director of Florida Keys Hawkwatch**



Access to wilderness should be available to all, but as is the case with many first-generation immigrants and children

from inner city communities, Rafael spent his childhood disenfranchised from nature. His exploration of urban ponds and canals during formative years in South Florida awakened an innate interest in birds. Rafael's presentation will enthrall and inspire Assembly attendees with stories from his unique career contributing to several initiatives designed to introduce children and others from underserved communities to nature. Rafael Galvez is the current director of Florida Keys Hawkwatch - the southernmost migration project in the continental U.S, strategically positioned to count birds as they fly southward into the Caribbean.

### Friday Welcome Luncheon: Special Guest Speaker (TBA)

After the morning field trips it's time to break bread with friends old and new at the Audubon Assembly Welcome Luncheon. Join Audubon's Eric Draper for an exciting recap of the year in Florida conservation and for a look ahead to the challenges we face in 2016. Stay tuned for updates on this year's special guest speaker. More information about the Friday Welcome Lunch will be posted on our website as it becomes available. Please visit [fl.audubon.org](http://fl.audubon.org) for the very latest.

### Friday Learning Sessions

After our welcome lunch, you will have the opportunity to participate in one of three different breakout sessions. As opposed to other years, the learning sessions will only run once. Following the breakout sessions, Audubon will host the annual Conservation Action Agenda Setting Session.

### A) Bringing it Home: Sea Level Rise and Coastal Bird Nesting Areas

How will sea level rise affect coastal bird nesting areas on your favorite beaches? Where will the birds nest and rest when beaches are flooded? In this session, presenters will utilize online, easy-to-use viewer tools to illustrate how coastal bird habitat will be reshaped by the ocean and how scientists look for upland areas that could become future shorebird habitat. If you love coastal birds or help as an Audubon bird steward, plan on attending this session to hear from experts working in the field about the greatest challenges facing our coastal birds and - most importantly - what you can do to help.

### B) One Audubon: Identifying Barriers and Crafting Solutions to Diversity in Conservation

Florida is a big state and as diverse as it comes. Yet, the conservation movement still struggles with attracting diverse and nontraditional partners. The challenges that face South Florida are different than those experienced in the Panhandle. The Audubon Assembly is the one time of year where a large part of the Florida conservation community comes together. This year we're using the power of One Audubon to identify barriers and craft creative solutions to break through. Join us for an interactive workshop on diversity and leave with a bag-full of innovative ideas to take back to your chapter and community. Together for more. Juntos por más. Ansanm pou plis.





### C) Advocates Needed: Making the Case for Florida's Conservation Lands to Public Officials

The Audubon family was instrumental in the passage of Amendment 1 last November. Now, conservation projects across Florida need advocates like never before. In this session, you will hear from leading land conservation professionals to learn how you can be a successful advocate on behalf of new conservation purchases and improved land management. This is your chance to learn how you can make a real difference for land conservation in your local community. Together we will make the promise of Amendment 1 a reality.

### 2016 Conservation Priority Agenda Setting Session – Approving Audubon Florida's State and Regional Priorities

Audubon Florida and the seven Regional Conservation Committees representing Florida's 44 chapters present their 2016 Conservation Priorities for final adoption. Don't miss your opportunity to weigh in on our conservation goals for the coming year. The final package will be presented for approval by the Audubon Florida Board of Directors after the close of Assembly.

### Saturday Morning Celebrating Chapters Breakfast

The annual celebration of Audubon Florida chapters has a new format this year. We will meet Saturday morning for some early bird networking around the issues that affect all chapters before we launch into our more traditional awards celebration recognizing outstanding chapters and individuals. Help us celebrate the heart and soul of the Audubon network and their success in engagement with both traditional and new partners.

### Friday Field Trips

There is no doubt that the Assembly Field Trips put birds (and fun!) in the Audubon Assembly. This year Orange Audubon Society, Seminole Audubon Society, and Kissimmee Valley Audubon Society are your host chapters and will provide local expertise and guidance to some of Central Florida's most special parks and conservation lands. Locations: Apopka North Shore Restoration Area, Wekiwa Springs State Park, Lake Jesup Wilderness Area, Mead Gardens, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey.

### Conservation Leadership Initiative

Now in its fourth year, Audubon's Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) is a co-mentoring opportunity for Audubon leaders and college students to network, share, and learn from each other. Get to know what makes the younger generation tick, share your passion for Audubon with them and make a long term connection with a future conservation leader. Contact Audubon's Katie Warner at [kwarner@audubon.org](mailto:kwarner@audubon.org) for more information on how you can participate.

### Saturday Parks Summit

All Audubon Assembly registrations include attendance to this special event. From 10am to 4pm on Saturday, we will welcome friends and advocates from all over Florida to join civic and conservation leaders, public officials, and more for a special meeting to discuss Florida's parks and public conservation lands. Topics will include strategies to promote and protect parks for use by people and to benefit water and wildlife. You are encouraged to attend this unique event. Lunch will be provided.

## Ticket and Hotel Information

Assembly officially begins Friday, October 23 and runs until Saturday, October 24. Purchase Assembly tickets online at [fl.audubon.org](http://fl.audubon.org) or call Jonathan Webber at 850-999-1030. A limited amount of early-bird tickets are on sale for \$129 and include lunch and dinner on Friday and breakfast and lunch on Saturday. Reserve your ticket now.

Please note, you must book your hotel room separately. Book your hotel room online: <https://www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/AudubonAssembly> or call 1-407-660-9000 (mention you are with Florida Audubon) and book by October 1, 2015 to reserve your room. Group rate is \$109 a night.



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Please contact Cathy Rodgers at [crodders@audubon.org](mailto:crodders@audubon.org) or 407-644-0190 for estate planning or to make an end of year gift of stock. For other gifts go to [www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org](http://www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org). Gifts specified for Audubon Florida or Florida Audubon Society will be used exclusively to support conservation in Florida.

## Join Us for the **Audubon Assembly 2015** Parks: The Heart of Natural Florida

**October 23-24, 2015 - Sheraton Orlando North - Maitland, Florida**

The Audubon Assembly is Florida's premiere conservation event and conference. Don't miss this opportunity to reconnect with natural Florida.

- Field Trips to Local Parks and Conservation Areas
- Special Presentation from Keynote Rafael Galvez
- Workshops with Florida Conservation Professionals
- Exciting Guest Speakers
- Review and Vote on Audubon Florida's Annual Conservation Action Agenda
- Networking opportunities with Audubon members, staff, and other passionate Florida conservationists
- Located just 10 minutes from downtown Orlando



Find out more details inside this edition.

Pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the Florida Audubon Society will be held at the Sheraton Orlando North, Maitland, Florida at 9:00am on Friday, October 23, 2015.