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Florida State Parks Foundation

Success Breeds Success

Three gold medals for excellence is proof enough that Florida has the best state parks in the nation. However, to win these prestigious gold medals - more than any other state has won - takes a huge amount of planning, commitment and effort.

Luckily, these three commodities are not in short supply thanks to the leadership coming from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Florida Park Service, the dedicated park staff and the army of passionate volunteers supporting them.

The Florida State Parks Foundation proudly supports all those working on behalf of our state parks, most of whom are unsung heroes. That is why this newsletter is so important. It helps keep you informed about what is going on but more importantly, it allows us to talk about the many achievements that take place day after day in our parks.

If you know of a success story, please let us know. If you have pictures or a small video clip, even better as we can post them on our social media pages. We have so much to be grateful for that a little bragging is in order.

Florida State Parks Sets New Record for Land Management with Prescribed Fire

Records are always worth talking about and the Florida Park Service has just chalked up another one.

Land management is one of the most important missions of the Florida Park Service and it is essential if our state parks are to be protected and preserved for future generations. In fact, many of the land management policies now being enacted will not produce visible results for many years but our children and their children will be able to enjoy what is being done today.

One tool of land management is prescribed burns and more Florida State Park acreage has been managed with prescribed fire this fiscal year than in any other previous year. In June, park staff broke the previous all-time record for managing prescribed fires on more than 80,837 acres within state parks.

Prescribed fires are one of Florida's most effective land-management tools, applying a natural process to improve ecosystem health, biodiversity, and wildlife. Any prescription for fire takes into consideration fuel type, fuel moisture, relative humidity, air temperature, wind speed, wind direction and many other planning factors.

"We are proud of Florida State Parks staff for setting a new record for protecting park habitat with prescribed fire," said Florida State Parks Director Eric Draper. "Florida is fortunate to have such dedicated people working in state parks reducing risks of wildfire and restoring natural systems."

Prescribed fires are planned, set and extinguished by specialized staff. The training is rigorous for prescribed burners, who are tested for physical stamina and trained in fire safety protocols, fire behavior and related issues.

Read the rest of the article [here](#).

More Success - Caladesi Island and Grayton Beach Named Top Beaches

In June, Grayton Beach and Caladesi Island State Parks were recognized on Dr. Beach's 2018 Top 10 Beaches list for the third consecutive year. Dr. Stephen Leatherman, known by many as "Dr. Beach," is the Director of the Laboratory for Coastal Research at Florida International University and a renowned expert in coastal ecosystems. He uses criteria like beaches' wildlife, algae levels, cleanliness, accessibility, and safety to determine his rankings.



Caladesi Island Park Manager Pete Krulder and Grayton Beach Park Manager Matthew Allen have done an outstanding job of improving and maintaining these wonderful places. The beauty and quality of these parks is not an accident or a given, but the result of the stewardship and hard work of Florida State Parks staff and volunteers.

Caladesi Island is remote and pristine, and its aquatic trails are an ideal escape for those who can stay upright on a stand-up paddleboard while the trails at Grayton Beach weave through vast pine flatwoods and magnolias twisted by wind from the Gulf.

Yet Another Success Story

In response to recent sightings of the endangered snail kite at [Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park](#), the Florida Department of Environmental Protection surveyed the park and discovered a nest containing three chicks.

Declining snail kite populations led to the protection of the species under federal and state law in 1967. In 2016, Alachua County residents spotted a snail kite for the first time in nearly 20 years. Since then, estimates have put the snail kite population in the Paynes Prairie basin in the single digits.



Last year, Hurricane Irma destroyed dozens of snail kite nests around Lake Okeechobee, the more common nesting area for the imperiled species.

The Paynes Prairie sightings sparked the interest of the [Florida Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit](#) at the University of Florida. Wildlife biologist Brian Jeffery led the survey expedition along with Florida State Park Environmental Specialist Keith Morin.

Read the rest of the article [here](#).

Meet Your Board - Ben Pingree

Ben Pingree takes over as President of FSPF at this month's annual meeting and brings a wealth of experience to the position.

Ben has a master's in public administration from Florida State University and started as a management and budget analyst for the Leon County Commission in 2000. He followed that with three years as special projects coordinator and two years as an assistant to the county administrator.



He left Leon County in 2007 to become Wakulla County Administrator, where he served nearly four years. After a two-and-a-half-year stint as president and CEO for the Zoological Society of Florida in Miami, he joined the Leon County Economic Development Council in July 2013 as vice president over business retention and expansion. He took over as executive vice president in August 2014. In 2016, he was hired as the director of the joint City of Tallahassee-Leon County Department of Planning, Land Management and Community Enhancement (PLACE), which includes Blueprint 2000. He currently oversees land use and transportation planning as well as the administering of \$90 million in Blueprint dollars, money set aside for economic development beginning in 2020.



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