



SIERRA
CLUB
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Calusa Digest



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SERVING SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

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FISHEATING CREEK

BIG WIN FOR STATE SUBMERGED LANDS

December 5th, 1999 the banks of Fisheating Creek reverberated with sounds of a long awaited celebration, the culmination of a ten year fight led by Atty. General Bob Butterworth, the final signing of the Governor and Cabinet for the purchase of almost 9,000 acres, fee simple and over 40,000 acres of conservation easements from Lykes Brothers in settlement of the final lawsuit that brings to an end the years long battle over the creek and its submerged lands.

This precedent setting case found the footprint of the creek (an additional 8,000 acres) to be public lands.

Members of Save Our Creeks, the group which maintained the creek and kept it accessible through the long years of court battles, (many demonstrations and a nationwide boycott of Lykes products) Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Chairperson Julie Morris, Commissioner Jamie Adams, Col. Greg Holder, South Region Director, Major Floyd Buckhalter along with a member of the Glades County Commission, Alvin Ward Jr. Wayne Daltry, director of the Regional Planning Council as well as Dr. Win Everham, professor of environmental studies from FGCU and ECOSWF board member Clark Keller enjoyed BBQ ribs, beans and pot luck dishes brought by around 75 other folks, canoers, kayakers, fishermen, birdwatchers and others who had followed the battle.. Environmental entertainers Heidi and Jim Walsh had us all singing along with a rousing rendition of their Fisheating Creek Ballad.

WHAT! You missed it. NOT TO WORRY there will be an annual meeting (we hope) in July. That may be dependent on Fish and Wildlife, as the managing agency, getting their rules and regulations in shape to make the area accessible while protecting, preserving and enhancing the most beautiful preserve in Florida. Stay tuned. Save Our Creeks' address is PO Box 1057, Moore Haven, FL 333471. Or you can call President Becky Hendry @ 941-946-3352 or VP Ellen Peterson @941-992-5455, email yepeterson @Juno.com

If you would like to join Save Our Creeks, send \$10 (single or family) with your name, address, phone, email to SOC at PO Box 1057, Moore Haven, FL 33471

Executive Board Meeting

JANUARY 3, 2000
7:00 P.M.

EVERYONE WELCOME!

CALL ELLEN PETERSON
992-5455
FOR DIRECTIONS

OUTINGS COMMITTEE MEETS

The Calusa Group outings committee met on December 8 at the Passage to India restaurant. The committee welcomed newcomers Julia Habel and Kris Decker, who recently completed Outings Leader training given by the Florida chapter. They are enthused and ready to take you members out into the wilds! They want to concentrate on women and children, and introduce them to enjoyment of the great outdoors. They are sponsoring several events in February and March, so if you are new to camping and kayaking, mark the dates on your calendar. We have a full schedule of events throughout the winter season, and would like to see more participation from our members. There is something for everyone! You can call Lynn Livingston at 269-6645 for a complete schedule, or check it on our web site at <http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/fl/calusa/>

OUTINGS

Jan 1 (Sat). Lover's Key Hike. 10:30 am. Come celebrate the new year with us on the beautiful trails at Lovers Key State Recreation Area. We'll hike about 3 ½ miles, and then head for the beach for a swim. Bring water and lunch, if desired. Lover's key is 11 miles west of exit 18 on I-75, or south from Ft Myers Beach. Leader Lynn Livingston 269-6645

Jan 15 (Sat) Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve Swamp Walk, 10:30 am. Come Slough Slogging with us on this walk in the swamp. We'll be led by Ranger Mike Owen of the Preserve, and we'll visit special places in the Strand in search of

rare orchids and other plants. We'll be wet walking, so wear long pants and sneakers or hiking shoes. Meet at the Fakahatchee ranger station on Jane's Scenic Drive, about a mile off SR 29, north of US 41. Call for details, Lynn Livingston, 941-269-6645.

Jan 20 (Thu) Full Moon Hike-Delnor Wiggins State Park. 8 pm. Meet at the parking lot before the gate entrance to the park. We'll hike along the beach and enjoy the moonlight. For anyone hardy enough to stay up, there'll be a total lunar eclipse at 11:43 pm. Call Lynn Livingston at 941-269-6645.

Jan 23 (Sun) Johnson Bay Kayak. 10 am. Meet on the Isles of Capri at Get Wet Sports kayak rental on Capri Blvd. It's located just behind Andiamo's restaurant, next to Pelican Bend restaurant. Bring your own Kayak or rent here. We'll paddle about 3 hours through the mangrove islands and maybe make a beach stop on Keewaydin Island. Bring water and sunscreen. Possible lunch stop afterwards at Tarpon Bay General Store. Call Lynn Livingston at 941-269-6645.



Feb 5 (Sat) Collier Seminole State Park Service Outing. 9:30 am. Meet at the hiking trail about 7/10

mile on the left past the main park entrance, on US 41. Please call ahead to find out if there'll be a service outing or just a hike. Long pants and a long sleeve shirt is recommended, as the mosquitoes can be quite fierce. Bring water and a snack. Rated moderate. Call Lynn Livingston at 941-269-6645 for details.

Feb 12 (Sat) Outdoor Gear Day. We'll demonstrate different kinds of gear for hiking and camping, as well as general outdoor recreation. This is primarily a demo for those who are not very familiar with outdoor equipment, especially women and children. Call Kristi Decker at 941-275-7831 or Julia Habel at 941-432-0111.

Feb 18-20 (Fri-Sun) Everglades Canoe/Kayak Campout. Space limited. Call Kristi Decker at 941-275-7831 or Julia Habel at 941-432-0111 for details and reservation.

Feb 26 (Sat) Biking and Hiking in South Golden Gate. 10:30 am. There is a fascinating story about the fortunately failed efforts to develop this area into another Lehigh Acres. Now it is slated to be returned to the wild as a part of the Everglades Restoration Project. There are many bikeable roads and hikeable lanes in this domain of the panther and the black bear. Sturdy, comfortable shoes are a necessity. Bring water and lunch. Meet at the entrance to the Picayune State Forest on Everglades Blvd just as you cross over I 75 going south. Everglades Blvd intersects Immokalee Rd, Oil Well Road or Golden Gate Blvd. Details from Charles Holmes 941-540-0599 or cfholmes@mindspring.com.

Calusa Group Membership Meeting

The Calusa Group will hold its first general membership meeting of the new year at 7pm on January 26. This is our first general meeting in some time, so we are inviting all members and guests to attend. The group will present a program called "Battle for the Everglades." This is a program for all ages. It explains just what the Everglades are, and tells the history of how they got to the current state, and what the hope is for the future. The photography is beautiful, and you will come away with a little more respect for the magnitude of the task of saving the Everglades. There'll be a social hour with refreshments before the program, where you can meet each other and maybe make some new friends. The meeting will be held at Florida Gulf Coast University, just east of exit 19 off I-75. Signs will be posted to the meeting location, or you can call Lynn Livingston at 269-6645 for directions. Hope to see you there!

Park in Lot Number 2. The Meeting will be in Building 3, Room 102.

Notes on Membership

The Calusa Group of the Sierra Club represents Charlotte, Lee, Collier, Hendry and Glades counties. In these five counties, there were 963 members as of September 30, 1999.

In these five counties, there have been many issues that the Calusa Group has been involved in: the Incinerator, Fisheating Creek, Lover's Key, Pelican Bay, and the oil pipeline, for starters. We try to keep abreast of projects under discussion by the counties, the Army Corp of Engineers, the Water Management District, private industry, road projects, housing developments, golf courses and many other projects that might prove to be harmful to the environment.

We try to stay aware of legislation being considered by the county commissions, the state legislature, and the federal government that might affect us adversely. If you are looking for a way to be more

involved in this group, plan to attend the General Meeting on January 26, the board meeting (everyone is welcome, whether you are a board member or not) on January 3, attend county commission meetings, workshops, etc. The first one is the hardest.

If you are unable to attend meetings, keep an eye on this newsletter or on our web page <http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/fl/calusa/> or call or email Ellen Peterson (see her phone number and email address in the next column) and find out where and to whom to write letters.

Watch the news, read the paper, keep your eyes and ears open about what is going on in your community, and let the board members know of issues of concern to you.



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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<http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/fl/calusa/index.htm>

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FIRE ANTS RAVAGE THREATENED, ENDANGERED SPECIES

Researchers have discovered the ants favor the young of such endangered species as the Stock Island tree snail and Key deer.

When the Stock Island tree snail vanished from the Florida Keys in the 1990s, biologists rounded up the usual suspects: urban development and exotic trees.

But a fresh look at the old case fingers another rogue.

What is this vicious and implacable enemy, a scourge on this and other endangered species? The fire ant.

“We think it played a big role,” said Eckerd College professor Elizabeth Forsy, who was part of a three-year study financed by the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The bane of Florida homeowners and Texas ranchers, the fire ant has spread widely since it invaded the United States by riding a South American freighter into the Mobile, Ala., port in the 1930s. It has shown up as far north as Virginia and recently was discovered in California, to the dismay of Western officials.

Even biologists involved in the study were surprised to find fire ants had established colonies in every kind of landscape in the Keys: salt marshes, pinelands, hardwood hammocks, and even the beaches.

“They’re very opportunistic,” said Daniel Wojcik of the University

of Florida, who also worked on the project.

The fire ant’s sting is painful and can be life-threatening for those allergic to its venom. It also has been known to injure livestock and game birds such as quail.

When the fire ants encounter the young of an endangered or threatened species — everything from Schaus swallowtail butterflies to sea turtles and even Key deer — they swarm over it, stinging, blinding and killing it.

The fire ant is a recent arrival in the Keys, showing up along roadsides on just three of the islands in the 1980s. Since then, it has spread into the rest of the islands, usually following in the wake of new homes, stores and roads. The development would wipe out native insects, clearing the way for the fire ants to invade, Forsy said.

“In the really pristine areas, there were not any fire ants,” she said. “Our hypothesis is they prefer disturbed areas because there are fewer native ants there — no competitors.”

When Forsy was studying endangered Lower Keys marsh rabbits in the early 1990s, she noticed that many times when she peered into a mother rabbit’s den she found no young, just fire ants swarming from the crevices. The bunnies didn’t really have a chance.

“There was no way for them to run away when they had just been born,” she said.

With the state’s backing, she and the other scientists returned to the Keys to map how widely the ants

have spread and to determine whether they pose a threat to other rare animals.

Studying the ants required the researchers to risk being stung repeatedly. They dug up whole fire ant mounds, down to the queen, and used their hands to scoop up the bait they had set out to determine what kinds of ants lived in certain areas.

The researchers studied whether fire ants were attacking the endangered sea turtles that nest on Florida’s beaches. Observers have sometimes found fire ants swarming over recently hatched turtle eggs, and Forsy said her studies have found fire ant colonies on 80 percent of the state’s prime sea turtle nesting beaches, including Egmont Key, Fort De Soto, Pass-a-Grille Beach and Clearwater Beach.

But not until this study did anyone figure out how their attack worked. The biologists used a type of turtle that is not endangered, putting a clutch of its eggs near a ball of hamburger and some honey. That way, the ants could choose which food they preferred.

The ants preferred the turtles. And the ants waited for the turtles to invite them in.

“The ants did not get into the shells,” Forsy said. “What they did was make foraging trails to the eggs and check them periodically. Then on the day the turtle hatchlings began to break through the eggs, the fire ants came over en masse to attack. In half of the turtle deaths, they were never even

able to leave their shells. They were killed in their eggs.”

The other half, the ones that made it out of the shell, “got out and were stung and killed, and then the ants built their mounds over it so you wouldn’t have even known it was there.”

The fire ants used a different attack for different species. Young deer would be blinded by repeated stinging, and then the ants would invade their bodies. Swallowtail butterflies would be swarmed over by the ants when they were still eggs, caterpillars or in cocoons. Snake eggs fell prey the same way as turtle eggs.

Because fire ants are attracted by mucous, tree snails that leave a mucous trail are particularly vulnerable to fire ant attacks. The area where the Stock Island tree snails used to live now has one of the highest densities of fire ants in the Keys, Forsy said.

Fortunately, there are still some Stock Island tree snails in a Gainesville laboratory, the University of Florida’s Wojcik said. So wildlife officials hope to re-establish the tree snail in its old habitat.

But to do that, Forsy said, they will have to use pesticides to try to beat back the fire ants, and then replant native vegetation that will bring native insects back into the area.

Only then will it be safe enough to try to put the Stock Island snail back where it belongs, she said.

HOW ABOUT THAT!

A recent poll by pollster John Zogby found that: 93% of republican voters believe that protecting the environment is an important issue when choosing a candidate, 91% said encouraging family values and 91% said cutting taxes. The most important environmental issues to those polled were: cleaning up toxic waste (96%), improving air quality (93%) and requiring auto manufacturers to meet fuel efficiency standards. The most popular pro-environment positions which will help GOP candidates win the most support include requiring the requiring the information about cancer producing ingredients on labels and favoring a stronger federal role in regulating pesticides.

REDWOOD PROTEST

A California woman, Julia “Butterfly” Hill, who spent two years perched atop a giant redwood in a personal protest against logging returned to the ground on Saturday after the local timber company agreed to preserve the towering tree.

Her mother lives in Bonita Springs. We hope she is as proud of “Butterfly” as we are!

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Call to Action

ROADLESS INITIATIVE

Here is the link to Clinton’s roadless initiative:

roadless/wo_caet-slc@fs.fed.us

All that is necessary is a simple comment that one supports President Clinton’s roadless initiative and e-mail counts as much as hard copy. Spread the word and keep those cards and letters coming. Monday the 20th is the cutoff for comments tho the hook and bullet boys, mudboggers, and timber hogs want the comment period extended for 120 days. This four month extension would stretch the rule making process beyond the end of Clinton’s administration and is unacceptable. These roadless areas have been studied for 20 years. Now is the time to act.



PEOPLE FOR TREES ANNOUNCES A TREE FESTIVAL 2000

Saturday, January 5th, 10 AM-2PM on the grounds of the North Port Community Education Center on Pan American Drive in North Port. The festival is sponsored by the City of North Port. Karen plans to set up a Sierra Club booth or table. Any one wanting to help call her at 693-3854.

DRINKING WATER

EPA audit released last fall reported that nearly 90% of all violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act are not reported to the federal government. That audit found tens of thousands more cases per year

than previously documented. State regulators were at fault as they have primary responsibility for enforcement. That is what usually happens when the feds abdicate their responsibilities to the states. Just when we are giving more responsibility to local governments for everything. Scary isn't it?


NULEAR POWER

In September NE Utilities pleaded guilty to 25 federal felony charges of violating nuclear safety and water pollution laws at the Millstone, Conn. Nuclear power plant. They agreed to pay \$10 million in fines. (How come all the biggies get to agree to their fines? No body ever asked me to agree to a traffic fine!) Japan is said to be still


investigating that accident in the uranium processing plant? (sure they are, and the folks in Russia are being allowed to return to Cherynoble) And we never heard anymore about the cracks in the Turkey Point reactor. I guess they just weren't important after the NRC changed the rules to allow the plant to continue to operate. And how about the medical waste incinerator spewing dioxin and mercury over a neighborhood of low income people of color. Does any one know where our nearest medical waste incinerator is? NRDC asks, Doesn't it seem like the health care industry of all industries has no business sending dangerous poisons into the air. What happened to their principle of "at least, do no harm."

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