

2015 Audubon Assembly Notes and Observations

This year's focus is on our Florida State Parks and 2016 Conservation Agenda. I have an Assembly packet which includes these resolutions which I will give to our chapter president. All resolutions passed.

On Friday morning we enjoyed a field trip to Wekiwa State Park. We hiked about 2 miles through the forest where we saw redheaded woodpeckers, gnat catchers, warblers and many butterflies. The weather was perfect and the birds were singing. All in all a beautiful experience.

After the field trip we hustled to get ready for our Welcome Luncheon. We listened to a speech given by the League of Women Voters past president, Deirdre McNabb. She celebrated the success of Amendment 1 but stipulated that there must be good governance and accountability. The League of Women Voters collaborated with Audubon on behalf of the environment and Amendment 1.

After lunch we had to choose between 3 Learning Sessions. We selected the "Sea Level Rise and Coastal Bird Nesting Areas". Sea level rise is affecting bird populations. The beach is a moving environment. A major long term threat called "Coastal Squeeze", which is caused by coastal development which limits beach movement. Shoreline hardening through seawalls, jetties, and buildings trap the beach and will cause erosion and loss of beach. Seawalls are inhospitable to nesting birds. We need to have a managed coastal retreat and allow beaches to migrate upland. We should not sell surplus land. Coastal habitat areas if managed well will maintain quality habitat character that will provide for healthy bird populations.

The recipe for a beach has 3 ingredients: sand, water, and space. Tidal current, waves, and wind cause the exchange of sand. Beaches will remain resilient as long as they have room to roam.

We need to preserve and protect undeveloped lands adjacent to coastal beaches and salt marsh habitat. As sea level rises, habitat can reestablish naturally farther inland so coastal birds will still have a place to live in the future.

Let's plan for climate change and make sure our response to sea level rise helps, rather than harms Florida's coastal wildlife.

This is really happening and should not be a political issue. It is a human issue and must be addressed. We need to identify the decision makers and contact them verbally or in writing. Write to whoever covers your area and send a personalized message expressing your concerns regarding sea level rise and loss of bird habitat. Letters to the editor and OP Ed letters are also effective tools to use.

Some available online tools are listed below:

www.skepticalscience.com

this will give layman's terms for arguments and myths regarding climate change.

<http://coast.noaa.gov/slr>

Go to the upper right click to zoom to state or territory. I have a few copies of the instructions to hand out.

<http://sealevel.climatecentral.org>

Mapping choice tool shows predicted sea level rise as a function of CO2 levels.

We had a lovely dinner while a lot of people received well deserved awards for their achievements in conservation. The keynote speaker was Raphael Galves who is director of Florida Keys Hawkwatch. He has done a lot to introduce birding and nature to underprivileged children. Hawkwatch is the southernmost migration station where migrations are recorded and tracked. Mr. Galvez is also a very talented field artist and you can see a lot of his work at: www.GalvezBirds.com

The next morning, Mr. Galvez joined our table for breakfast and we learned even more about the hawk migrations and his artwork. Some of the topics raised during breakfast were:

Fundraising, Attracting young people to Audubon, How to grow our membership, and maximizing value of our education program to name a few. For example; some schools gave permission to allow Audubon to build

bluebird boxes for young students to observe bird activity. Feedback from teachers was that the students have become avid bird watchers.

Eagle Optics donated binoculars to students.

FPL gave Audubon a check for \$12,000.00

We attended the lunch buffet and listened to Eric Draper, Charles Lee and others speak on behalf of our State Parks. Some highlights of Mr. Lee's speech: "We must not let park parcels be surplussed thus exploited and sold to private interests. Anastasia State park has 2.5 acres of coastal hardwood hammock which is very valuable to buntings, warblers and other migrating birds. They are trying to create another RV park on it.

Wekiva Springs has several parcels east of the park with heavy scrub jay and black bear usage. Luckily it was pulled off the "surplus" list.

Homossassa Springs on the east side of US19 has a corner notch that was surplussed for a future hotel. This parcel was solid wetlands. Why should it be surplus for a private buyer? Luckily this was fought off successfully.

Unfortunately the State has created listening sessions where 3" x 5" cards are filled out by the public. That way nothing is verbally said for the public record. This is an example of subtle and sinister change in the division of state lands and parks. People need to go to public meetings and be creative and politely disruptive. We need to shift to actual public input FOR THE RECORD."

Mr Draper's speech was about the Everglades Restoration Program and cattle grazing impacts. Cattle grazing is ok on "improved pasture" which has Bahia grass. If cows are removed the improved pasture fills up with myrtles which are not good for most wildlife. If the native cover has already been removed than leave the cattle on it. Graze smartly. But when cattle are grazed on native natural landscape then there is a loss of biodiversity with fire pattern changes and nutrient concentration in the waters.

Another speaker discussed commercial timber harvesting.

Do we need to add that use to Florida State Parks? There are pros and cons.

Timbering can be used selectively for habitat restoration. Overgrown scrub will not support scrub jays. Sometimes timbering is used for scrub jay habitat restoration. If a ranger is around ask what they are doing.

Natural woods have a lush understory ecosystem. A commercial forrest has no understory. It is barren on ground and covered with pine needles which chokes out bird food. One downside to clear cutting is that logging trucks

inadvertently bring in invasive species. Rows of pine trees in tracts are called Pine Plantations. The Florida grasshopper sparrow will not nest near these trees. Our dry prairie habitat has been made unusable. Maximum timber harvest minimizes the ecological value of these habitats.

The final speaker spoke of recreational overuse of our parks. Proposed golf courses in our parks were suggested. Public outcry ended that.

Shooting ranges have been suggested for already restored habitat. That was not successful. Glamping (luxury camping) in remote locations will strain those locations with local traffic and access.

Beach Parks are the most heavily visited.

When schools are overcrowded we build more schools. We need to buy more land for more parks to prevent over crowding and over use.

The refrain in Tallahassee. "If we can't manage what we have then we shouldn't buy more of it". As the state continues to reduce resources and personnel, they justify poor management and say we shouldn't buy more parkland. When schools are overcrowded we build more schools. When parks are overcrowded we need to buy more land to prevent over crowding and over use. Locals need to help park managers and bring their local knowledge to Tallahassee by attending meetings and writing letters.

In 1952 Mr. Barron Collier said, "We need to make available to all citizens the quiet enjoyment of nature. This can only be done by appropriating State revenue."

One third of The Florida Park Service Alumni Association consists of volunteers. Our parks generate 2 billion dollars a year to the local economy. Our parks are designed to give to the people of Florida and their guests something that money cannot buy, our unspoiled natural scenery to be enjoyed by all. A highly recommended book is called "Legacy of Green-The Making of Florida's Magnificent State Park System". This book can be ordered on the FLorida Park Service Alumni's website: <http://fpsaa.org>

A handout was provided listing the 9 principles for the future of Florida State Parks. Citizens who care about the parks should stand together in supporting these following principles.

1. State Parks will be managed for the primary purpose of conserving their natural and cultural resources and providing compatible resource based recreation. Secondary uses will only be approved where they do not conflict with the primary purpose (no cell towers, billboards, etc)
2. State Parks will meet recreation demand by expanding the park system and developing facilities at under utilized parks rather than by accommodating additional visitors at parks where visitation meets or exceeds their ecological carrying capacity. Park improvements that degrade resources will not be made.
3. State Parks will receive annual appropriations adequate to meet the needs for management of natural and cultural resources and recreation opportunities.
4. Cattle grazing will be conducted only on improved pasture as a temporary maintenance activity until ecological restoration can occur. Cattle leases will not be issued in natural areas and park land will not be converted into pasture.
5. Timber harvesting and thinning will be conducted only for resource restoration purposes. Sustained-yield forest management practices and commercial harvesting of forest products will not be conducted in state parks.
6. Recreational hunting will not be expanded beyond the three state park properties where it presently occurs; Cedar Key Scrub State Preserve; Rock Springs Run State Preserve and the Marjorie Carr Cross Florida Greenway.
7. State Parks will be exempt from future legislation that requires agriculture or multiple use to be approved on state conservation lands.
8. Public hearings will be conducted before any disposal of state park lands or transfer of parks to other management agencies.
9. DEP will be open and transparent to the public when considering changes in the way state parks are managed. The public will have ample opportunity to review and provide oral and written comments before changes are adopted.

DEP had a session after the luncheon but it was for “invited people” only. I heard through the grapevine that they disagreed with some of the above items but said they wouldn’t destroy what we worked so hard to obtain. I am guardedly optimistic but feel people should remain very vigilant.

When corresponding to official decision makers it is better to say what you are for rather than what you are against. The 9 items above are considered a Bill of Rights for our parks. There are 171 state parks and 1.6 million volunteer hours which saves the state 24 million dollars a year.

All members are valuable to Audubon. Whether you are a member who enjoys presentations and birding trips or you wish to become a member who becomes a political activist and guardian of endangered wildlife and their habitat. We as Audubon members can be proud that we are part of a tremendous team that has a high regard for our earth and wildlife.

I have also included a schedule of nearby Field trips from Halifax Audubon and below are dates for two big events:

19th Annual Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival January 20-25, 2016

Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival Birdapalooza Weekend February 5-7 2016
www.Birdapalooza.com

I will close with some inspiring quotes that were shared at the Assembly:

“Never doubt for a moment that one person or a group of concerned citizens cannot change a thing.” Margaret Meade

“Failure is not an option” Susan B. Anthony

Marjorie Stoneham Douglas started activism in her 70’s.
When we care we can make changes and solve problems!