

The Head Spring

Friends of Blue Spring State Park Newsletter

August 2023

Meet a CSO member – Trinket Mason

Trinket Mason is a native Central Floridian who grew up in Sanford. She was first introduced to manatees while fishing off the seawall at Port Canaveral in 1981. It was love at first sight. That same year Gov. Bob Graham and Jimmy Buffett announced the formation of Save the Manatee Club. Trinket lived out of state for many years, but continued to support manatees from afar; maintaining her Save the Manatee membership and following those “Gentle Giants” every time she came home on vacation.

After moving back to Florida in 2014, Trinket started volunteering for Save the Manatee Club (SMC), stuffing envelopes, shipping orders and doing whatever else needed to be done. When the festival time rolled around she filled any gaps in SMC’s work schedule. While working with SMC, she was introduced to members of Friends of Blue Spring State Park and became involved with both groups.



Trinket is also a manatee rover and educator at the park during manatee season. She helps with bingo on Wednesday evenings at Riverwalk Pizzeria and Brew Pub in Orange City, coordinates the Brick Walk project, and puts in many hours during the park’s spring Firefly Festival. In her spare time Trinket volunteers for some of the big local golf tournaments: the Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill and The Players at Sawgrass.

Junior Ranger Program August 16th from 4-5 p.m.

by Missy Gibbs

Calling all young park enthusiasts, come join us at Blue Spring to start or continue your Junior Ranger experience! The park is hosting an *Identifying Invasives* Junior Ranger Program on August 16th at the Roadside Pavilion in the lower parking lot. During this program you will learn about Florida’s many exotic plants, and how to identify which are invasive. The Florida State Parks Junior Ranger Program provides the opportunity for young people to learn, serve and share Florida’s natural and cultural resources. The program is outside, so wear closed-toe shoes and bug spray, and bring water and snacks if needed. A notepad and writing utensil are recommended, and please bring your Junior Ranger materials if you are already in the program.



PLEASE RSVP to Connor.Wagner@floridadep.gov by Monday the 14th, and include the total number of junior rangers in your email.

Blue Spring State Park Junior Ranger Friends



Olivia the Otter discovered these nifty bags down by the bathrooms at the lower parking lot. She hopes that everyone who brings their dog to the park picks up after it using one of their own bags or one of these. Some of Olivia's friends told her that dog poop is biodegradable and only needs to be picked up if its somewhere that a person might step on it. Olivia is a good Junior Ranger, so she did a little research of her own and discovered that dogs can have intestinal parasites and bacteria that can infect some of the wildlife in the park. Junior Rangers help keep the park safe and clean for humans and animals!

Prescribed Fires Keep Park Ecosystems Healthy

by Missy Gibbs and Rich Hatton

What is a prescribed fire? It's a controlled fire that has been thoroughly planned for in order to reduce the risk of uncontrolled wildfires and maintain or restore native ecosystems. Before a prescribed fire can take place, a sort of prescription will have been written for it containing a careful plan for the area where fire is needed, making sure weather conditions are ideal, and getting approval from the Forest Service.

In Florida, we use prescribed fires to keep our native longleaf pine ecosystems healthy. These unique ecosystems used to dominate in Florida, but have been dramatically reduced by land-use changes (by humans), invasive hogs, and fast-growing hardwoods. Longleaf pine ecosystems evolved to thrive with regular (1-3 years), low-intensity, fast-moving fires. Local native Americans used a form of controlled burning to keep the pines as productive and healthy as possible. When Europeans arrived, their management scheme was fire suppression, which ultimately made fires worse. Without regular fires, highly flammable pine needles and understory plants build up, so when fire starts (lightening or arson), the fires are much more intense and slow-moving. Slow-moving fires are more likely to kill the forest and its inhabitants.

Regular, prescribed, and natural fires not only preserve longleaf pine ecosystems, they improve conditions for wildlife by increasing the number of wildflowers (for pollinators) and new plant growth (for herbivores to eat). They also reduce ticks and protect human homes. Although fire is inherently alarming for most humans, remember that prescribed burns are well controlled and are conducted to make life better for the flora and fauna of the land being burned and to keep us all safe. You can learn more about controlled burns [here](#).



Safety is a priority - Even though the weather is in the 90s, firefighters must add 75 pounds of Personal Protective Equipment to keep them safe. The canisters they are holding are drip torches; the safest tool for igniting fires. The truck on the right is used to transport firefighters, equipment, and water. All photos by Rich Hatton

Blue Spring Bank Restoration Project Plantings

by Cora Berchem

You may have noticed, or heard about, the ongoing bank restoration project at Blue Spring to stabilize the eroding banks alongside the spring run and the spring head. Much work was accomplished during the summer of 2021 and more work remains to be done. Originally, the project was going to be continued and finished this summer season, but it got moved to 2024. In the meantime, staff and volunteers from the park, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Save the Manatee Club (SMC) and Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute (CMARI) spent two mornings in mid-June planting native plants alongside the bank to help with stabilization until the next phase of the project can be completed. The plants were supplied by FWC and included Gal Swamp sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*), Blue Flag Iris (*Iris virginica*), Sand cordgrass (*Spartina bakeri*), Eastern Gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*), Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), Bushy Bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*), Spanish Bayonet (*Yucca aloifolia*), Needle palm (*Rhapidophyllum hystrix*), coral bean (*Erythrina herbecea*) and beauty berry (*Callicarpa americana*). The hope is for these plants to take root and help stabilize the banks.

If you are recreating at the park this summer, make sure to look out for this newly planted vegetation and do not anchor your kayak or paddle board against the banks or climb up the banks when swimming. Are you interested in helping with projects like these and becoming a park volunteer? Email Connor at Connor.Wagner@floridadep.gov

Due to the delay in finishing the remaining parts of the bank restoration project, construction on the planned manatee rescue/release ramp has also been postponed until summer/fall of 2024. We are continuing to fundraise for this important project and can't wait for it to all come together next year!



A group consisting of staff and volunteers from the park service, FWC, SMC and CMARI are meeting to plant along the shorelines of the spring run.



Plants are transported to the shoreline banks by canoe. Newly planted plants along the shoreline.



The Friends sponsor bingo every Wednesday night at Riverwalk Pizzeria and Brew Pub in Orange City. The pizzeria provides the space, a large menu, and a well-stocked bar. Come join the fun and maybe you will win a stuffed manatee or another fun prize! Hope to see you there next Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

Would you like to help out at Bingo? We are always looking for volunteers to sell bingo cards and call numbers. Please click [here](#) to sign up to help out.

Critter Corner

by Missy Gibbs

Today's "critter" is actually a trio of really interesting epiphytic plants, all of which manage to get all of their water and nutrients from the air instead of through roots like most other plants. Our first two plants are both bromeliads, which means they are related to pineapples! The big difference (besides fruit) is that pineapples DO have roots for getting water & nutrients. The first photo, on the right, was taken over the lower boardwalk, and includes (L-R) Bartram's Airplant, Resurrection Fern, and Spanish Moss.



Bartram's Airplant (*Tillandsia bartramii*) is named after the famous naturalist, William Bartram, and is common in oak hammocks in Georgia, Florida & Mexico. This airplant produces a pretty red flower spike in the spring and summer, and although you usually see it attached to the trunks or branches of large trees, you may find them on the ground after a storm like Jake the Snake did in the photo on the left. That will give you a chance to get a closer look at these pretty plants.



Photo by Rich Hatton

