



Friends of St. Sebastian River

P.O. Box 284 ❖ Roseland, Florida 32957-0284

May 2016

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The mission of the Friends of St. Sebastian River is to maintain and improve the health and beauty of the St. Sebastian River and its watershed.

ST. SEBASTIAN RIVER – BEAUTY AND THE “BEASTS”

Please join us for this month’s presentation about the beauty and the “beasts” of the St. Sebastian River. You’ll enjoy a photographic journey up the South Prong of the river, with photos taken earlier in the spring, as trees and the spectacular tillandsias, were leafing out and in bloom.

The second part of our program will present the “beasts” of the river – the numerous invasive plant species that have invaded our area and are threatening the river habitat and its beauty. Tim Glover will take you on the photo tour of the river, followed by Tracey Wright, who will help us identify the common invasive plants of the Central Florida area. She will also help us learn some basic methods of controlling these invasive plants. We look forward to working with our members and other homeowners who live along the river, as the Friends undertakes a renewed effort at beating back some of these “beasts!”

In the past, we have worked on our own and with the Marine Resources Council extensively at Dale Wimbrow and Donald MacDonald Parks on Brazilian pepper removal. This allowed many of the native plants to recover and gain a hold on their native habitat, but peppers and other invasives are a continuing problem.

Tracey has Master’s degrees in both Environmental Education and Conservation Technology and is an AmeriCorps employee, currently working at the St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park, helping them to address invasive plants at the Preserve.

Our meeting is **Tuesday May 24th, 7:30 pm** at the North Indian River County Library, 1001 Sebastian Blvd in Sebastian. All are welcome and encouraged to attend.

JUNE IS NATIONAL RIVERS MONTH

June offers us many occasions to celebrate: the end of school, the beginning of summer and, among all the season’s celebrations, National Rivers Month! All of these events encourage us to get outside and take advantage of this gift that Mother Nature has granted us.

Across the country, rivers serve people, animals and plants in a variety of ways. Humans rely on rivers for drinking water and recreational activities such as fishing, swimming and rafting. As for plants and animals, rivers serve as shelter where these living creatures can grow, reproduce and thrive. However, our rivers are falling victim to increasing pollution. National Rivers Month aims to get people learning about, celebrating, and cleaning up these waterways.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimate that 70% of the riparian habitat nationwide has been lost or altered. What is riparian habitat? “Riparian” refers to habitat and wetlands located along the banks of, or adjacent to, a waterbody, most specifically, a river.

More than 247 million acres of United States’ wetlands have been filled, dredged or channelized—an area greater than the size of California, Nevada and Oregon combined.

In addition to pollution, rivers are being compromised by increasing demand as a source for drinking

water and climate change. As pressure on limited water resources grows, conflict must give way to cooperation if we are to satisfy the nation's growing water needs and maintain clean and healthy rivers.

Each year, the American Rivers organization issues its list of the top ten most endangered rivers in the United States, which spotlights rivers facing urgent threats across the country. This year's report finds that outdated and ineffective methods of water management threaten major river basins on both the east and west coasts. Their number one most endangered river this year is the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin, which includes portions of Alabama, Georgia and Florida.

"We can't live, work, grow crops, or enjoy healthy rivers without clean water, and we don't have an unlimited supply," said Bob Irvin, President of American Rivers. "As more people compete for a limited resource, everyone is losing: farmers don't have reliable water for their crops, commercial fisheries are collapsing, urban supplies are strained, fish and wildlife are declining, and recreation businesses are closing their doors. Instead of continuing conflict, we need a new era of water cooperation that strikes a balance among all users. We must not only understand and respect the needs of upstream and downstream communities, but also appreciate the importance of healthy, functioning rivers to those communities."

For over 20 years, Georgia, Alabama and Florida have fought in court over the allocation of water in the ACF Basin, which provides water for industry, power generation, agriculture, recreation and fisheries. More than four million people, including 70 percent of metro Atlanta, rely on the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers for drinking water.

One of the most productive estuaries in the nation, Apalachicola Bay in Florida is located at the bottom of the ACF Basin. Historically, the bay has yielded more than 10 percent of the nation's oyster harvest, as well as significant shrimp, crab and fish harvests. But dam management and excessive water withdrawals throughout the ACF Basin—due to increasing population growth and agricultural production, as well as electric power generation—have significantly reduced freshwater flowing into the Bay, contributing to the collapse of the oyster fishery, thus devastating the local economy.

For more information about the American Rivers 2016 list of Most Endangered Rivers, visit www.americanrivers.org/newsroom/press-releases/2016-most-endangered-rivers.

Source: excerpts from American Forests "Loose Leaf", June 12, 2014; National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, "River and Water Trivia;" American Rivers, "Major U.S. River Systems Threatened by Drought, Water Mismanagement," April 13, 2016

GEORGE SCHUM MEMORIAL AWARD

George Schum was a long-time member of our Board of Directors. He passed away in 1997 and the award was started to memorialize his spirit of community service and volunteering. The award is given to a Sebastian River High School senior who has been involved in similar community service, and shown an interest in environmental issues.

The award includes a \$500 scholarship, and this is the fourth year in a row we were able to present a second award, due to the generous donation of a previous recipient, Dr. Kimberley Maxwell! Kimberley received our Schum award in 2004 and has kept in touch with us ever since. She attended the West Point Military Academy and now serves as a pediatrician, currently stationed in Italy.

Congratulations to this year's Schum award winners, Eric Bush and Kimberly Toperzer, and best wishes with your continuing education and future careers!

ST. SEBASTIAN RIVER CLEANUP

The "Friends" once again hosted a river cleanup on May 15th, as part of the American Rivers organization's "National River Cleanup" events throughout the country. Friends and volunteers collected 27 bags of trash and recyclables in a matter of a couple of hours. This was one of our quickest cleanups due to the many folks who helped out, including Austin, a local student gaining community service hours, and Kimberley Maxwell's mom! (see the Schum story above).

We thank Keep Indian River Beautiful (KIRB) for donation of supplies and the Sebastian Dunkin

Donuts for their donation of doughnuts and muffins. In addition to Austin and Kimberley's mom, we thank the other volunteers—Bruce, Buzz, Jane, Judy, Karen, Marion, Matt, Quentin, and Sandy, who gave of their time and energy to help maintain a clean and attractive environment along the river. Visit the "Photo Gallery" page of our website for photos from our event.

FIRST GOPHER TORTOISE DAY CELEBRATED

On April 10th, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and its partners celebrated Gopher Tortoise Day for the first time in Florida.

Gopher tortoises live in every county of Florida and are known for their extraordinary digging skills. These gray or brown tortoises use shovel-like forearms to carve out burrows averaging several yards deep and 5 yards long. Their burrows give shelter to hundreds of other native species.

Gopher Tortoise Day is a newly-launched effort to highlight the importance of conserving this state-threatened species, whose presence goes back 60 million years.

The FWC is encouraging the public to be aware of the gopher tortoise as a Florida keystone species and learn how their actions can strengthen recovery efforts. From now through May, for example, the gopher tortoise is increasingly active, leaving its underground burrow in search of spring greenery to eat and, in many cases, a mate. People can help by watching out for a tortoise crossing the highway and, if it's safe for you to do so, picking it up and placing it on the roadside in the direction it was heading. Just don't put this terrestrial animal in the water.

"Many Floridians and visitors to the state are knowledgeable about gopher tortoises and willing to take actions to help them. We're excited about Gopher Tortoise Day as a way to get more people involved," said Deborah Burr, who leads the FWC's gopher tortoise management program. "Indeed the success we have had so far in conserving Florida's gopher tortoise population and its habitats is closely tied to the enthusiastic support and participation of the public."

Local governments and private landowners, including farmers, foresters and ranchers, have worked with the FWC to help conserve and restore gopher tortoise habitat. The tortoise needs sandy, sunny habitats with an open tree canopy, such as longleaf pine forests, to thrive and survive.

Individuals also have helped by using the "Florida Gopher Tortoise" mobile app, which gives people a chance to report gopher tortoise sightings while learning about the species. You will find more information, and can download the app at <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/managed/gopher-tortoise/app>, and find more information about the new Gopher Tortoise Day at <http://gophertortoisedayfl.com>. You may visit the "Links" page of our website for a list of more citizen science projects and opportunities such as this.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Monday, May 16, 7:30 PM
**Wind, Water and Waves –
What's up with the Indian
River Lagoon?**

Dr. Steven Lazarus, FIT
Pelican Island Audubon
Vero Beach Community
Center

2266 14th Ave., Vero Beach
info:
www.pelicanislandaudubon.org



Tuesday, May 24, 7:30 PM

Beauty and the Beast
FSSR

North IRC Library
1001 Sebastian Blvd.,
Sebastian

info: www.fssr.org or
772-202-0501



Wednesday, June 8, 5:30 PM
World Oceans Day
Special Event

"Plastic is Forever"
**Barbara de Vries, Fashion
Designer and Conservation
Advocate**

Harbor Branch Oceanographic
Institute
5600 US 1 North, Ft. Pierce
info: [http://www.fau.edu/hboi/
community/events.php](http://www.fau.edu/hboi/community/events.php) or
772-242-2293

Please visit the "Meeting Info/
Events" page of our website
for more events!

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NOTE: The date on your mailing label is the month/year when your dues are next due. Thank you.

APPLICATION FORM

The Friends of St. Sebastian River depends on member support for programs of conservation and education.

Youth (under 18) free — Individual \$10/year

Family \$15/year — Corporate \$50/year

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Special interests, concerns or expertise: _____

Please mail your completed application and dues to:
P.O. Box 284, Roseland, Florida 32957-0284

This newsletter is available on our website and delivery by email for current members. We encourage email-only delivery to save funds and paper! Email us at the address on the front to request email delivery.

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