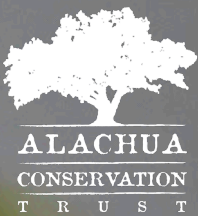


ALACHUA CONSERVATION TRUST

Gazetteer



SUMMER 2023

White-eyed Vireo
Vireo griseus

Photo By Tedd Greenwald

SUMMER/FALL 2023 UPCOMING EVENTS

JULY

10-21 Young Leaders for Wild Florida Summer Camp
9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

AUGUST

12 Visit the ACT Booth
*North Central Florida Outdoor Expo
(World Equestrian Center)*
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

SEPTEMBER

5 University of Florida Campaign for Charities (UFCC) begins

19-20 Give4Marion
10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

28 UFCC Kickoff Luncheon
UF Reitz Student Union
12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

OCTOBER

13 University of Florida Campaign for Charities (UFCC) ends

14 Visit the ACT Booth
The McIntosh 1890s Festival
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

15 Pride at Prairie Creek
Prairie Creek Preserve
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

22 Pumpkin Spice & Everything Nice
Rockwood Park
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

28-29 Visit the ACT Booth

The 48th Annual Micanopy Fall Festival
9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

NOVEMBER

11 Cycling for Our Springs
First Magnitude Brewing Co.
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

18-19 Visit the ACT Booth
The Gainesville Downtown Festival & Art Show
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

28 Giving Tuesday

DECEMBER

10 Annual Holiday Mingle
Prairie Creek Lodge
2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

MARCH

23 SAVE THE DATE:
2024 Conservation Stewards Awards
Prairie Creek Lodge
5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

All ACT events are subject to cancellation or rescheduling. Additional events may also be added as they are confirmed. Event updates are available at: www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/upcoming-events

Photo By Rachel Townsend



Photos By Thomas Niemi

CLASSROOM TO CONSERVATIONIST

2023 Conservation Stewards Awards Honors Community Educators

On Saturday, March 25th, ACT hosted its Annual Conservation Stewards Awards at Prairie Creek Lodge. Each year, this event honors individuals in our community who are influential in a wide variety of ways – the arts, historic preservation, and particularly, in protecting our wildlife and natural resources. The Conservation Stewards Awards is the largest gathering of community leaders and supporters of wild Florida in the region. This year, over 500 guests were treated to dinner, drinks and a musical performance from Gainesville-based Soozza Brass Band. All funds from the sold out event supported ACT’s work towards land conservation.

Our theme this year celebrated the profound impact of community educators and their work to inspire future generations. Their devotion to providing educational opportunities to all and empowering young people to find their passion in conservation and their local communities is inspirational. The future of conservation would not be possible without community educators, who work tirelessly to ensure that those they serve have a meaningful understanding of the natural world, its history, and the opportunities for enacting change. Whether in outdoor classrooms at local nature preserves, community centers, or lecture halls, our honorees have made conservation and preservation a component of their work. Thank you for helping us honor their efforts and recognize their passion and persistence to shape the past, present, and future of conservation.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2023 HONOREES!

RANDI CAMEON

Following a successful career in public health, international and women’s health, and grant writing, Randi Cameon charted a new path as an environmental educator and has

positively impacted the lives of thousands of students in our community. Randi has been a long-time volunteer with ACT, launching and guiding several environmental programs with the organization, including the Creekside Environmental Ed for Kids (CrEEK) Program.

RICHARD HAMANN

Richard Hamann was born in Gainesville but raised in the swamps of South Florida. He received both a B.A. (1971) and a J.D. (1976) from the University of Florida and was employed as an attorney, researcher and teacher at the UF College of Law’s Center for Governmental Responsibility. He has conducted research on a wide variety of environmental, land use and water management issues. Richard was a founding member and served on the ACT Board of Directors for 35 years.

VIVIAN FILER

Vivian Filer is a long-time resident of Gainesville, Florida. Her professional career includes employment at Shands Teaching Hospital as both a Nursing Assistant and a Registered Nurse and at Santa Fe College as a professor of nursing. Vivian has served on a remarkably diverse number of committees, boards, and auxiliaries often as chair or president. In her present role, she is founder and Chair of the Board of the Cotton Club Museum and Cultural Center.



SOME PLACE TIMELESS

Community Rallies (Again!)

When you think about the view from Marjorie A. Hoy Memorial Park at Orange Lake Overlook (OLO), one word may spring to mind: Timeless. Over the centuries this place has meant different things to so many, inspiring memories of a landscape that has remained largely unspoiled. But while the property itself has been kept in its natural state - thanks in large part to community support to see it saved - the land around it has experienced significant development pressure as North Florida continues to grow in population at unprecedented rates.

Last year, ACT opened 71-acres of Orange Lake Overlook to the public, dedicating it in the name of Marjorie A. Hoy, an internationally recognized entomologist and researcher whose work focused on Florida citrus pests. Upon her passing, Marjorie's estate via her husband, Jim, made a \$1 million donation to ACT. This donation, combined with over 300 individual donations as well as grants from the Felburn Foundation and Duke Energy, allowed ACT to pay off the remaining loans and install trails, kiosks, and picnic tables before opening the preserve to the public. Jim, along with family members and friends, attended the grand opening and dedication ceremony in Marjorie's honor. Over 100 individuals and families from surrounding cities and towns were also in attendance, showing just how powerful community-driven conservation can be.

Wondering what will happen to the historic structures at OLO? ACT was recently awarded a Small Matching Grant from the Florida Division of Historical Resources to create architectural renderings for restoration of the Orange Shop and Packing Shed structures as a future museum and community gathering space. With the help of Shatkin Architecture, LLC, those renderings are now complete and will be used during the next phase of restoration. ACT has applied for additional grant funding with the Division of Historical Resources to begin restoration work at OLO, starting with the Orange Shop. Funding through this grant program will be allocated by the Florida Legislature later this year, and ACT will then need to raise the matching funds required to complete the next phase of this project. Stay tuned for how you can help with this effort!

Since conserving OLO in 2019, ACT had hoped to one day be able to expand the preserve and continue to protect land around Orange Lake, which provides habitat for many birds and other wildlife, recreational opportunities for the public, and serves as a window into the history of Old Florida. That opportunity arose in late 2022, and with the support of private individuals who provided donations and bridge loans totaling over \$500,000, as well as grants from Duke Energy and the Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation Project Assistance Fund, ACT has recently closed on the acquisition of 86 acres directly North of OLO. The acquisition more than doubles the size of the existing preserve and is also contiguous to conservation land owned by Marion County.

Once again, the local community as well as donors from afar rallied to save the land and conserve it for wildlife and passive public recreation along the shores of Orange Lake, giving ACT the unique opportunity to add to this iconic property and conserve a part of Florida's natural history for generations to come. But the work isn't over. ACT still needs to pay off these bridge loans - potentially through grants for which we've applied, but more timely and importantly, with additional donations from folks like you. OLO supporters can continue to donate online at www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/donate by selecting the "Orange Lake Overlook Campaign" or by mailing their donation check to ACT. Once these loans are paid off, ACT will then be able to open the additional land to the public as part of the existing nature preserve, with extended hiking trails and new natural areas to explore. Many thanks to all who came together to help continue to grow O-L-O!

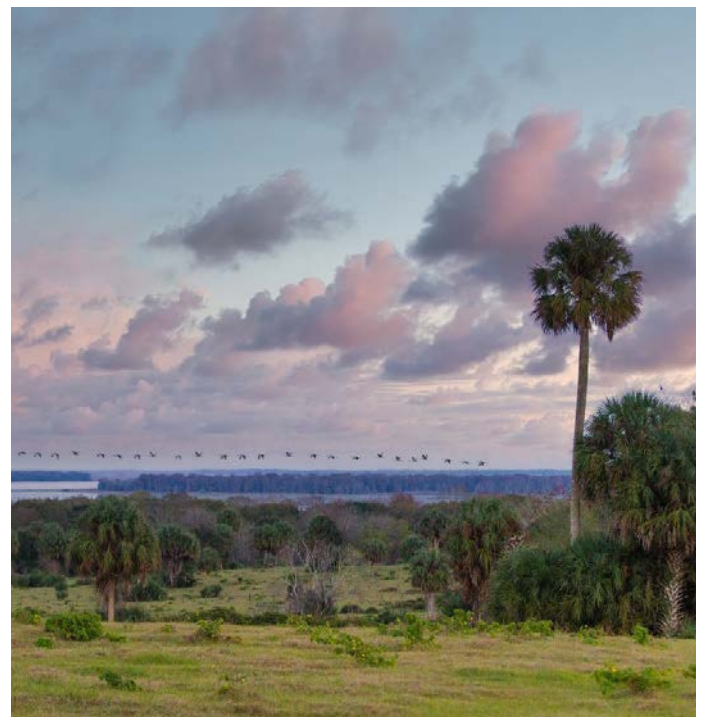


Photo By Kim Davidson



Thank You to the River Branch Foundation & Cofrin Family for Helping Protect Little Awesome Preserve!

RIVER BRANCH FOUNDATION & COFRIN FAMILY

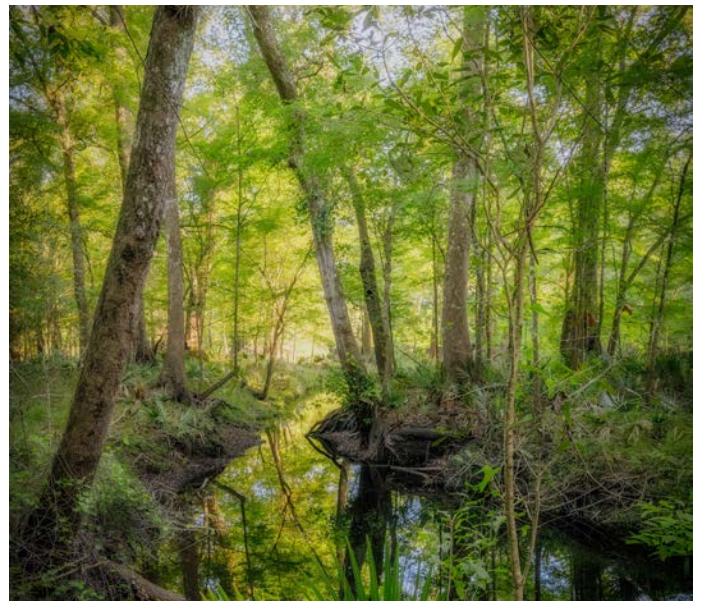
Photos By Alison Blakeslee

Support Springs & Aquifer Protection on the Lower Santa Fe River

Christmas came early last year at ACT! Just before the holidays, we received an amazing gift from the River Branch Foundation. The Foundation's generous donation of \$1 million helped ACT pay off a portion of the bridge loans on the Little Awesome Preserve acquisition, which closed in 2021. The 195-acre preserve borders the Santa Fe River in Columbia County, and contains a second-magnitude spring, numerous karst features, and a siphon from which the preserve gets its namesake. Little Awesome is part of ACT's growing preserve system along the river, and contributes to the protection of this environmentally sensitive area. In 2021, Little Awesome was up for auction on the open market, and no doubt would have been developed had ACT not acted quickly to buy it. As a result, we can all enjoy this segment of the spring-fed river and the mature bottomland forests of this priceless jewel.

We are incredibly grateful to the River Branch Foundation for supporting our work and our vision for the Santa Fe River corridor. The Foundation, based in Ponte Vedra Beach, has been actively working for over fifty years to improve the quality of life in Florida. In recent years, its focus has increasingly been on environmental protection, particularly wilderness land preservation. We are thrilled that Little Awesome is part of the Foundation's growing portfolio of protected lands in North Florida.

This spring ACT also received another incredibly generous gift from the Cofrin Family to pay off the remaining bridge loan held by The Conservation Fund on this property. This proves once again that a community committed to conservation, creative financing tools, and many donations of all sizes will lead to the protection of more special places along the Santa Fe River and in our greater region.



PRESERVING AN ISLAND OF SERENITY

Gina Early and Brian Smith's Act of Rebellion to Protect Florida's Wilderness

The enchantment of Gina Early and Brian Smith's property begins before you even turn into the front gate. In 2021, they recorded a conservation easement on the property with ACT in order to protect the land and their legacy from development. Taking a sharp turn off of 441, you immediately become immersed under a canopy of live oaks and other hardwoods. Cars traveling along at 65 mph nearby immediately feel miles away. Tucked back into the oak trees sits their beautiful historic house with two chimneys. The two-story home, built in the 1880s, is surrounded by azalea bushes that paint its foundation with vibrant hues of pinks and reds during the early spring blooms.

Gina and Brian have owned and stewarded the property for the last 50 years. Sitting on the back of the wrap-around porch, Gina notes that the land is an "island of serenity and peacefulness, even though it's bordered by U.S. 441." With a hint of imagination, the sound of cars whizzing by is transformed into a kind of wind through the trees, losing all its markers of humanity. The house ushers in this feeling of nostalgia even if you've never laid eyes on it before. Nestled on 20 acres, it is surrounded by a fruit grove, a well-cared-for garden, and pine trees planted and tended by Gina herself. Towering cabbage palms and stunning old live oaks blur the lines between forest and garden. From the house, the land grades dramatically towards a forested wetland. This sloping forest harbors large magnolias, black cherries, and swamp chestnut oaks, and protects limestone outcroppings and a deep sinkhole from which Brian and Gina have removed loads of historic debris, including an entire car from the 1930s!

The house sits uphill from Orange Lake and the trees have grown tall enough to obscure the view but Gina recalls a time when she could see the lake from the upstairs window. Gina speaks to the history of the land, saying "the property is memory laden from the people who have lived here before." She connects this thought to the indigenous people who lived along this corridor long ago subsisting from the bounties of the lake. Orange Lake is a vital resource for communities past and present and is currently a region in Florida experiencing tremendous development pressure. The protection of properties like Gina and Brian's conserves historic habitats and the health of natural ecosystems now and into the future.

Gina and Brian have tended and cared for this land's natural resources and cultivated it into a space for themselves and their loved ones to enjoy. The true value of this property, and land in general, lies not only in its natural beauty but also in the care they continue to invest in it in coordination with ACT as the conservation easement holder.

With more than 1,200 people moving into the state every day, Gina feels that this easement is her personal "act of rebellion" against the staggering amount of habitat conversion that is occurring due to this increasing growth. ACT is thankful for landowners like Gina and Brian, who by protecting their privately-owned land, help create a permanent corridor of Florida wilderness that buffers water resources and amplifies our collective impact.



WHERE THE SANTA FE RIVER BEGINS

ACT and Alachua County Forever Partner to Protect One of Florida's Iconic Riverways

Photo By Alison Blakeslee

Emerging from a cypress swamp, braids of tannin-tinted water wind between trees and suddenly form into a coherent stream. This is the beginning of the Santa Fe River and can be found at ACT's newest acquisition - the Bell property, which closed on January 31st. Straddling the county lines of Alachua and Bradford, this project represents another collaboration between ACT and Alachua County and their shared goal to protect the unique beauty of the Santa Fe River.

The 128-acre Bell property is situated just north of the city of Waldo and features about 1-mile of tannic, meandering Santa Fe River frontage. Walking among tupelos, oaks, and magnolias of the floodplain forest, one might hear the call of a warbler or notice bear marks on the trunks of storied hardwoods, while a barred owl sits in shadow above. A natural, possibly seasonal stream connects the floodplain forest to a majestic dome swamp, where stately cypress trees tower overhead and the songs of frogs and wood ducks echo while Spanish moss sways in overhead branches.

Nearby to the Bell property, a 314-acre property located east of the city of Waldo sits adjacent to Alachua County's Lake Alto Preserve along its northern border. The property provides excellent plant diversity and habitat for several endemic and listed species and features abundant wetland habitat for wading birds. Visitors to this future conservation land might be lucky enough to spot a bald eagle soaring overhead while observing white ibis wading along the lakeshore or winding through bottomlands dotted with cinnamon and royal ferns. Lake Alto and its swamp flow north into the headwaters of the Santa Fe River, through the Bell property where the flow transitions from a small stream of water into a distinct channelized, albeit narrow, river. Expected to close by the end of 2023, conservation of this property will help preserve the natural shoreline of Lake Alto and maintain the natural

wetland filter that reduces pollutants entering the lake and ultimately the river.

Another collaborative effort between ACT and Alachua County, this project and the nearby Bell acquisition continue the long-term efforts of ACT and the Alachua County Forever program to protect larger tracts along the headwaters and swamps that feed into the Santa Fe River. Protecting these lands from development not only safeguards North Florida's drinking water supply, it also protects the water quality of the river itself while creating a corridor of land for wildlife to roam freely.

Santa Fe River preservation success stories like these can be told thanks in large part to the generosity of our community and people like you. With your help, ACT is working to raise an additional \$100,000 towards these two important projects, allowing us to close on the 314-acre acquisition and pay back bridge loans that helped make the Bell acquisition possible. Donations in support of these efforts can be made online at www.AlachuaConservationTrust.org/donate by selecting the "Rise Up for the Santa Fe River & Springs Acquisitions Fund" or mailing a donation check to ACT. Together we can continue to permanently protect critical lands along the Santa Fe River to safeguard these invaluable ecological and recreational resources for present and future generations to enjoy forever.



COASTAL PROPERTY PROTECTED THROUGH PRIVATE FUNDRAISING COMMUNITY EFFORTS

ACT helped facilitate the purchase and protection of the largest remaining tract of unprotected habitat on Dog Island in the summer of 2022. The Dog Island Conservation District (DICD) purchased the property utilizing private foundation dollars and a tremendous local stakeholder fundraising campaign. A coastal conservation easement was donated to ACT to ensure the property is protected in perpetuity. The DICD worked with Florida Natural Areas Inventory and ACT to develop a strong management plan to ensure the property is managed for shorebird and sea turtle habitat protection. The protected parcel boasts excellent intact coastal swale, salt marsh, upland pine, beach front and coastal habitat. Protection of this 40 acres precludes any future subdivision or building that could have occurred on the dune ridge.

2022 HURRICANE IMPACTS

A coastal conservation easement held by ACT in St. Johns County was washed over by storm surge last November ahead of Hurricane Nicole. The Atlantic Ocean breached the beach and connected to the intracoastal waterway smothering and washing away sand fences and intact coastal vegetation.

This region has been washed over many times over the years. ACT has strategized to identify the area as protected with a conservation easement through signage so that the washed over areas are not further impacted by foot, vehicular traffic, and dumping. ACT's signs remain in place and will encourage protection so the area can naturally revegetate and recover over time without intervention. This cycle has been observed multiple times by staff and the previously intact vegetation likely contributed to the protected area not losing more sand than it might have.

FLORIDA KEYS

Utilizing grant funds, ACT worked with a local sea turtle non-profit to protect one of the only sandy nesting beaches in private ownership in the Florida Keys. With the help of volunteer labor, we were able to work with local property owners and non-profits to leverage these grant funds to restore dune vegetation and remove shoreline armoring to recover nesting habitat impacted by hurricanes in 2018. Two hurricanes impacted the beach with overwash in 2022. Our partners report that the lots with established dune vegetation planted in 2019, 2020 and 2021 did not have any losses. Property owners will keep an eye on vegetation to determine if supplemental planting would be beneficial or necessary.

CONSERVATION ON OUR COASTS

Working with Local Communities Towards Lasting Results for Coastal Ecosystems

Did you know ACT has active sea turtle and coastal habitat protection projects all over the state including the Florida Panhandle, St. Johns County and the Florida Keys? Here are a few updates from these coastal conservation areas.

NESTING NEWS

In the summer of 2022, ACT has protected over 70 acres of coastal habitat on Dog Island. Protected areas include a beachfront parcel where the former Pelican Inn existed prior to Hurricane Michael in 2018. The hurricane and subsequent storms buried rubble from the former inn, impeding natural revegetation and creating barriers underneath the sand for sea turtle nesting. ACT worked with its partners, the local tax authority, island residents, and ACT supporters, to remove concrete, rebar, and woody debris and restore the beach.

The dune and beach habitat on the former Pelican Inn parcel is now naturally revegetating and building dune structure. In the summer of 2022, the Dog Island Turtle Patrol reported two Loggerhead sea turtles and a state-threatened Snowy Plover nested on the protected parcel, a testament to the quality of the habitat regeneration that has occurred there.



NATURE WINS THE ELECTION AGAIN!

Alachua County Votes to Extend Wild Spaces & Public Places for 10 More Years

Photo By Kim Davidson

On November 8, 2022, Alachua County went to the polls and renewed Wild Spaces & Public Places for a third time. It is the fourth time Alachua County voters have approved such an initiative including the original Alachua County Forever ballot initiative that passed in 2002.

With this major conservation victory, the Alachua County Forever Program will now be able to acquire and improve environmentally sensitive lands to protect drinking water sources, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and to create, improve and maintain parks and recreational facilities in all cities and the county for another decade to come.

With 10 years of conservation funding in place, Alachua County is well positioned to go after available federal funding that was allocated through the Inflation Reduction Act and Great American Outdoors Act, as well as conservation funding available through the Farm Bill, the Land & Water Conservation Fund, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). ACT has had tremendous success in partnering with Alachua County to leverage their conservation dollars with these federal dollars as well as other state and private philanthropic conservation dollars. To date, the Alachua County Forever Program has conserved more than 33,703 acres.

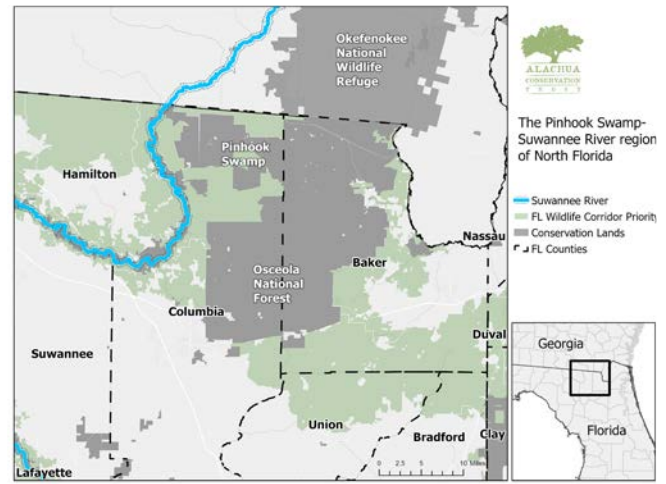
ACT's executive director, Tom Kay, was one of the four co-chairs for the Wild Spaces & Public Places campaign along with former UF Soccer Coach Becky Burleigh, former Newberry City Commissioner Joy Glanzer, and Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce CEO Eric Godet. Each took on a part of the ballot initiative's objectives – conservation, active recreation parks, roads, and fire stations respectively. Their efforts were instrumental in getting the word out to voters.

We want to give a special thanks to Pegeen Hanrahan, Kristen Young, Hutch Hutchinson, and Meg Niederhofer for their immense efforts in helping to secure another 10 years of conservation funding in Alachua County. This also would not have passed without the wisdom and guidance of the conservation ballot initiative gurus at the Trust for Public Land. They have been involved in most of the successful conservation ballot initiatives at the local, municipal, county, and state level across the U.S. over the last few decades. Much gratitude to the Alachua County Commissioners who put the initiative on the ballot in the first place. We are also especially grateful to all the folks who donated to the campaign to educate and inform voters via mailers, social media, radio, and yard signs. And, of course, to all the voters who cast their votes Yes for Wild Spaces & Public Places, THANK YOU!

Over the next 10 years, the half-cent sales tax allocated for conservation and parks is expected to generate 285 million dollars. You rock, Alachua County!



Photo By Alison Blakeslee



PRESERVING NORTH FLORIDA'S WILDERNESS

The Pinhook Swamp and Upper Suwannee River

Photo By Kim Davidson

Rivaling that of the better-known Florida Everglades, North Florida is home to one of the wildest landscapes in the eastern U.S. The Pinhook Swamp/Upper Suwannee River region includes nearly 500,000 acres in Columbia, Hamilton, Union, and Baker counties, and is bounded by the Osceola National Forest and the Okefenokee Swamp. The Pinhook Swamp contains the headwaters of Florida's most storied river, the Suwannee, which is fed by tannic waters from the swamp's vast wetlands and tributaries. The region forms a wildlife corridor and provides refuge for many of North Florida's imperiled species, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, woodstork, and Florida black bear. These lands remain unprotected, and are vulnerable to land use changes that threaten the integrity of the natural landscape.

ACT is accelerating efforts to protect and restore lands in the Pinhook Swamp/Upper Suwannee region. We recognize its conservation value and the opportunity to protect this remaining Florida wilderness. In cooperation with our partners and benefactors, ACT is stepping up outreach to conservation-minded landowners in this area to connect them to Federal and State conservation programs and assist them with land management.

We look forward to working with our partners, benefactors and landowners as we continue our efforts to protect one of Florida's last great wild landscapes!

- ACT works with several landowners of lands eligible for acquisition through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Florida Forever program. We have successfully added 1,000 acres of private lands to the 180,000-acre Pinhook Swamp Florida Forever project area.

- ACT also employs agricultural easement programs to protect working lands. These include Federal and State programs that fund easement purchases on grazing and timberlands.

- The ACT private lands prescribed burn program helps regional landowners implement fire management. We work with several regional landowners to improve wildlife habitat with prescribed fire.

- Last October, we successfully facilitated the purchase of 142 acres by the State of Florida through the Florida Forever program. The property is contiguous to 6,000 acres of public lands variously managed by several State agencies and known as the Big Shoals Conservation Area.

- ACT also launched a new Project Assistance Fund to accelerate land conservation in the Pinhook Swamp/Upper Suwannee region. This new fund helps ACT cover costs related to land acquisitions and restoration management.

WELCOME TO THE PARTY

Celebrating 35 Years of ACT Conservation

Here's a curveball...What do dire predictions of global warming, chart topping Guns & Roses rock anthems and a .65 cent carton of eggs all have in common?

Well, if you turn back the clock to 1988 you'll find they share a moment in history with Florida's conservation movement. That's right, the end of the eighties and a .65 cent carton of eggs! Talk about how the times have changed. But that's not all. 1988 was also the year that ACT got its start conserving and preserving precious bits of North Central Florida.

You heard right, more than 56,000 acres of conserved land and 16 counties later, ACT is turning 35 years old (we don't feel 35, do we?!). At any rate, a big "Happy Birthday"! Because of you and your support, ACT has made it to this huge milestone and we hope you're ready to continue celebrating many more conservation victories with us!

A LOOK BACK

In 1920, the population of the State of Florida was just over 900,000 people. By 1988, that number had reached 12 million or nearly 14 times as large. Today, the number of folks living in the Sunshine State has topped 21 million and is growing by 1,200 new residents every day. In the three and a half decades that ACT has been in existence, the population has almost doubled and the realities of climate change are coming to fruition. Notice an alarming pattern? So did the founding board of ACT. They knew then that if you're going to save land, you have to buy it and you have to do it NOW! If you're going to save the pristine and fragile ecosystems of this most unique peninsula, you have to establish a mission that protects land through acquisition. Through these efforts, our partnerships and connections with the community have allowed us to create a legacy of land over the past 35 years.

THROUGH THE YEARS

It's fun to look back and highlight a few lands that have helped shape ACT's conservation history. It is hard to pick just a few, but here are 3.5 in celebration of three and a half decades of ACT conservation!

The 78-acre Saarinen Preserve came to ACT by donation from Arthur and Phyllis Saarinen in the late 1990s. This property in the western part of Alachua County boasts century old live oaks and longleaf pines. 2.6 miles of public access walking trails gently lead you through mesic hammock forests and picnic facilities are available for a respite. ACT is working to thin the planted slash pine on the property and return it to a more natural state by promoting the historic longleaf community with its wonderful diversity of native flora - more per square meter than any other forest community in the state.

The 600-acre Tusawilla Preserve in historic Micanopy is a great place to see the interface of a hardwood hammock forest, fringed by stands of lofty native cabbage palms and opening up to a beautiful wet/dry prairie. In the winter, the preserve becomes home to great flocks of migratory birds including the boisterous sandhill cranes. Trails in the preserve cover a 1.5-mile loop. There are great birding opportunities here and nice picnic tables that sit below centuries old live oaks. Tusawilla Preserve was conserved through the generous donation of six different landowners and through partner funding with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Communities Trust between 2005 and 2010.

The Marjorie A. Hoy Memorial Park at Orange Lake Overlook (OLO), with the recent addition of 86 acres directly to the north, now boasts 155 total acres of conserved land. The Huff family grew citrus on the property until the great freezes of the early eighties when they closed up shop and leased it for cattle grazing. When development of the property threatened the breathtaking view and historic structures, the local community went to work to acquire it under ACT's leadership. Today you can enjoy sweeping panoramas of Orange Lake as you hike or bike the several trails. You can even bring your furry friends provided they stay on a leash. Artists flock to the park as do eagles and cranes.

And now for the .5 on our list. Our work at OLO is far from complete! When the Huff family ceased operations at OLO, they left behind the former citrus shop and packing shed. While not in the greatest condition, ACT plans to restore these buildings for adaptive use. Buildings like these speak to the region's historic and cultural ties to citrus farming. Restoring them can only reinforce that "Old Florida" aesthetic we all know and love. With your help, we can make this a reality! Your continued support will help in the preservation of these historic resources!

LET'S WORK (AND CELEBRATE) TOGETHER!

Birthdays are great times to celebrate, reminisce and look back on grand accomplishments. But birthdays are also a time to set goals, envision the future and to get about the work of "The Hard Saving" as ACT friend and poet Sidney Wade reminds us.

We need you. We need your continued help and passion for conservation. It is estimated that 30% of the land in Florida is now in conservation of some type, but it's clear that to even come close to reaching a balance, given constant development pressures and population growth, we need to achieve 40% or even 50%. Your gifts, donations, time and advocacy are essential to helping ACT accomplish its goals.

So, here's to 35 years of inspiring work. And here's to 35 more! We can celebrate, but we can't rest on our laurels. We can't afford to. The stakes are too high.

For now, welcome to the party! Have a piece of cake and raise a toast. Go ahead and turn up that Guns & Roses.



A NEW ADVENTURE AWAITS YOU!

Santa Fe River Preserve South

In early December, ACT officially opened its newest public preserve on the Santa Fe River. The 273-acre Santa Fe River Preserve South adds almost 3 miles of river-front protection to the upper Santa Fe River. The preserve features nearly 2 miles of hiking trails, providing stunning views of the river along with benches, a picnic area, and parking lot. In early 2023, ACT installed two kayak take-out points with support from the Florida Paddling Trails Association and REI Co-op, connecting the new addition with the northern part of the preserve close to Worthington Springs.

This part of the river and sections of the nearby New River are designated “critical habitat” for two federally listed mussels - the endangered oval pigtoe and the threatened Suwannee moccasinshell. This project is one of many that ACT is working on within the Santa Fe River Corridor. ACT is working to protect 75,000 acres of land in the Santa Fe River Basin by 2045. Please join ACT and help reach this goal by making a donation online.



FOR THE BIRDS

North Florida Sandhills Grassland Bird Restoration Project

The saying “for the birds” has long been used to describe something that is worthless. At Fox Pen Preserve in Hawthorne, the phrase has a different meaning. In spring of 2020, ACT partnered with The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Alachua Audubon Society (AAS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and UF’s Audubon Student Chapter (GREBE) on the North Florida Sandhills Grassland Bird Restoration Project. This 40-acre restoration project was the first phase of a larger sandhill restoration plan to restore 140 acres at Fox Pen Preserve, which focuses on restoring grasses and other herbaceous groundcover of sandhill habitat for the benefit of Bachman’s sparrow, northern bobwhite quail, and the state-listed threatened southeastern American kestrel, brown-headed nuthatch, and common night-hawk.

These species were identified in Florida’s 2019 State Wildlife Action Plan as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The decline of grassland bird populations in North Florida is not only due to habitat loss, but also caused by the degradation of plant community structure on lands where fire is suppressed and hardwood species encroach into sandhills.

After initial baseline bird surveys were completed, ACT removed oaks, sand pines, and remnants of the former slash pine plantation on the site with support from Alachua County. Over the next two years, ACT conducted a prescribed burn, treated exotic invasive plants, and hand-planted over 16,000 wiregrass plants to help bolster the existing groundcover.

ACT plans to burn the sandhill at Fox Pen every three years to maintain the “grassland” look of the site. This will both provide ideal habitat for grassland birds and stimulate native grass seed production, serving as a seed donor site for future sandhill restoration in the region. Managing “for the birds” will pay off for decades to come!

PRESCRIPTION FOR FIRE: COLLABORATION

As prescribed fire in the state of Florida becomes more widely accepted and utilized, many non-industrial private forest landowners are looking to organizations like the North Florida Prescribed Burn Association (NFPBA) for guidance and assistance. The NFPBA is a private cooperative of landowners dedicated to providing support, training, and education to facilitate the use of prescribed fire on private lands throughout North Central Florida. ACT works closely with the NFPBA, acting as one of the primary resources for both equipment and experience. The landowners assisted by the NFPBA come from a variety of prescribed fire experience, each with their own land management objectives. The burn objectives range from hazardous fuel reduction to understory restoration to site preparation. This makes every burn a unique educational opportunity, where ACT focuses on giving the landowner hands-on experience in how to use prescribed fire to effectively meet their objectives. ACT's Barry Couliette and Rachel Townsend, along with Jason Ballard, a Private Lands Biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, often lead the burn and educate the participating landowners and crew members.

Members are spread throughout North Central Florida, with burn units that can span just 10 acres to 100 acres or more. Some NFPBA members have established conservation easements with ACT, making their burns even more worthwhile for both organizations. That said, no matter what the acreage or specific objective, ACT and the NFPBA are always happy to assist forest landowners who care deeply about conserving and restoring native Florida ecosystems. As the burn season starts back up in the fall, the land management team hopes to be able to participate in as many burns as the weather permits.

ACT was honored to be a cooperating partner in the successful return of the Flatwoods Fire and Nature Festival earlier this year. The ongoing cooperation and collaboration of Florida's natural resource management and conservation community was on full display during the event with representatives from over 30 different public, private and non-profit agencies in attendance. A final tally counted over 600 attendees throughout the course of the afternoon. For many, the festival was a wonderful first exposure to prescribed fire and the benefits it provides natural communities. Three live prescribed burns were conducted at the University of Florida's Austin Cary Forest Campus throughout the afternoon, providing valuable first-hand experiential learning for a diverse audience of children, students, private landowners, and natural resource professionals. In between burns, attendees had the chance to visit tables hosted by state, federal, and private resource management agencies to talk about their current missions and projects, as well as opportunities to get more involved with the groups' on going efforts.

ACT was well represented in all its capacities with Land Management and Projects staff available to answer questions and educate visitors in both the latest successes and future aspirations of the organization. Students were able to connect with internship opportunities, landowners were informed of the value of conservation easements for their land, and most importantly, kids of all ages were able to make a positive connection with prescribed fire and get excited about a career in the outdoors. ACT looks forward to being a part of the continued success of the Flatwoods Fire and Nature Festival and its efforts to expand the network of partnerships between diverse stakeholders working together to restore and conserve Florida's unique natural beauty.





Keara Clancy
CrEEK Coordinator

CREEK SIDE ENVIRONMENTAL ED FOR KIDS

Program Expands with New Coordinator

Photo By Tedd Grenwald

“I am a scientist!” echoes through the trees as students disembark from their bus for a day of learning in an outdoor classroom. The students cycle through three stations that day: Buggin’ Out, where they learn to be an entomologist; Aquatic Adventure, where they learn to be an aquatic biologist; and Scales & Slime, where they learn to be a herpetologist. Along the way, they take notes in their science journals, cataloging their lessons and discoveries during a day full of learning and new experiences. Some of these students have never been camping, never held a bug, and have never gone on a hike before. By the end of the day, they are buzzing with excitement about their next voyage outdoors.

The Creekside Environmental Ed for Kids (CrEEK) Program is a partnership between ACT, Friends of Little Orange Creek, and the City of Hawthorne. Approximately 800-1,000 fourth graders from underserved schools in Alachua and Putnam counties are bused out to Little Orange Creek Nature Park annually to learn about ecology and conservation. By integrating outdoor learning compatible with state education standards, the CrEEK Program establishes an engaging educational experience to inspire curiosity and adventure in the outdoors.

The CrEEK Program aims to safely bring students into the outdoors to create a long-lasting impact on their relationships with nature. The program covers all costs associated with the visit, which includes transportation to and from the schools.

By working with Title I schools and rural communities, the program aims to actively work against educational barriers and foster a diverse future of nature lovers and environmental leaders.

As the program continues to grow, ACT is supporting the program through its CrEEK Program Coordinator position! Keara Clancy joined ACT in September of last year after finishing a Master of Science in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at the University of Florida. Keara’s six years of experience leading an environmental education club, the Natural Resources Diversity Initiative at the University of Florida, coupled with her background in Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion through serving on boards at various institutions made her the perfect person to take on the role. Keara looks forward to growing the program beyond Little Orange Creek Nature Park and creating access for more young people and their families to learn about the natural world around them.

If you are interested in supporting the CrEEK program, donations to ACT are always welcome. You can donate through our website by selecting the “Creekside Environmental Ed for Kids at Little Orange Creek Nature Center” to ensure that your contribution goes directly towards the program. We are always open to new volunteers assisting, as well. You can email info@alachuaconservationtrust.org for more information.

FLORIDA WILD FOR ALL

2022 SCHOLARSHIP

"Receiving the Wild for All Scholarship from ACT was meaningful to me because it shows active engagement in my own community to create a more inclusive and diverse talent in the field of conservation. I am excited to be supported by the scholarship and ACT as I discover how I will use my future career to help our planet and its people." - JOCELYN KREIDER



Photo By Tedd Grenwald



EMILIO ZIPF, 2022 Scholarship Recipient

Emilio Zipf is in his final year at the University of Florida studying Landscape Architecture with a minor in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. He hopes to pursue a career in land conservation, specifically in either landscape analysis, land management, or wildlife ecology. He grew up in Melbourne, Florida and enjoys backpacking, long-distance running, paddling, observing wildlife, and SCUBA diving.



LORENZ ANDERSON, 2022 Scholarship Recipient

Scholarship recipient Lorenz Anderson works to live his life by considering what can you do to make a difference and have an impact? Growing up in West Palm Beach, Lorenz became engaged in conservation issues by visiting the Florida Everglades. Experiential learning has made an impression on Lorenz's life, from witnessing fish kills in Florida's bays to watching family farms lost to development. Protecting water is at the center of Lorenz's passion and he sees an important connection between being an engaged community member, lifting the local economy, and protecting our environment. When not busy with school, Lorenz enjoys playing basketball with his friends.



JOCELYN KREIDER, 2022 Scholarship Recipient

Jocelyn was born and raised in Gainesville, Florida and grew up loving her trips to the springs and state parks in the area. She recently graduated from the University of Florida with a degree in Sustainability Studies, and loves having any opportunity to apply her coursework knowledge to the real world. Jocelyn has interned with National Geographic on a project writing a white paper for the Florida Wildlife Corridor and notes that it was an amazing experience to work with a project with local impacts on a national level. Jocelyn wants to continue her journey following graduation by using creative conservation solutions to work with companies and organizations to harness the power of sustainability through an economic lens.



A GIFT FROM THE HEART

From Barbara Esrig

On a quiet street in a cozy downtown Gainesville neighborhood, a house holds decades of joyous memories treasured by an entire community. In 1986, Barbara Esrig searched and searched for this place and when she found it she recognized it immediately. “Oh, this is my home,” she affirmed. At that time, the large lot was full of air potato vines and outdated shaggy green carpet stretched from wall to wall inside. But she fell in love with the potential she saw and “it’s been my baby ever since”! This house has been a refuge and safe space for Barbara, her family, and many friends and acquaintances throughout the years that she’s lived here. Recently she decided to leave it, nestled in her beloved gardens, in a Life Estate to ACT. She envisions a downtown office location for the land trust and neighborhood pocket park. “I trust ACT to be kind to it,” she said.

Barbara, with the help of numerous friends, has restored and transformed the house and yard over the last 40 years. A covered porch envelopes the house on two sides, the south side screened in and shaded, overlooking the side yard. Two ponds and a fountain create a secluded garden oasis out the kitchen window with cabbage palms, ferns and camellias, and a pair of wrought iron sandhill cranes keeping watch. From there, a vine-covered trellis is a doorway leading to “Bubbe’s Secret Garden”, where an orchard of citrus, persimmons, walkways and shade trees invite one to enjoy the breeze, smell the flowers, eat a piece of fruit or visit with a friend.

The house, built in 1908, is immediately warm and welcoming when you pass the threshold. An exposed brick chimney rises through the center of the house. Transoms, high ceilings, and plentiful windows invite playful sunbeams into

each room. Antique furniture, warmly painted walls, potted plants and a fish tank offer timeless comfort. As happens often with old houses in the South, when the old carpets came out, an exquisite heart pine floor was revealed beneath! With the addition of a staircase, the attic space was transformed into a loft that features decorative windows, a sunny office and a tranquil space for yoga or meditation.

Naturally for an inspired cook who loves to feed her friends, Barbara’s most elaborate transformation has been the kitchen. The original Florida room and galley kitchen were combined to support an extra large range, multiple ovens, extensive cabinets and counters, a breakfast nook, cookbook shelves, and most importantly, lots of windows to gaze out over the gardens! For her birthday each year, she celebrates with a special potluck and there is one simple instruction: “Bring something yummy!” Her friends know that this is a time to make something truly extraordinary and that the offerings will be delectable.

Barbara’s nurturing spirit has expressed itself in the way she has lived her life. She worked as a nurse for many years and eventually combined that experience with her love for writing and storytelling working as the Writer in Residence at UF Health’s Arts in Medicine program, recording patients’ oral histories. Her work is a testimony to her caring nature, generous spirit and love of storytelling. Since she moved to Gainesville, Barbara has been involved in the vibrant women’s community here. Over the years, she has hosted many gatherings at her home. Weddings, memorials, Seders, so many birthday parties, women’s groups, writers’ conferences and workshops. “Everyone’s been here at some point. That’s how I want it.” Her hope is that once she is gone, her home will continue to give to the community. We can’t think of a more generous and thoughtful gift or a sweeter story to tell.





HOLLEY TAYLOR – LAND CONSERVATION’S BEST FRIEND

Photos By Alison Blakeslee

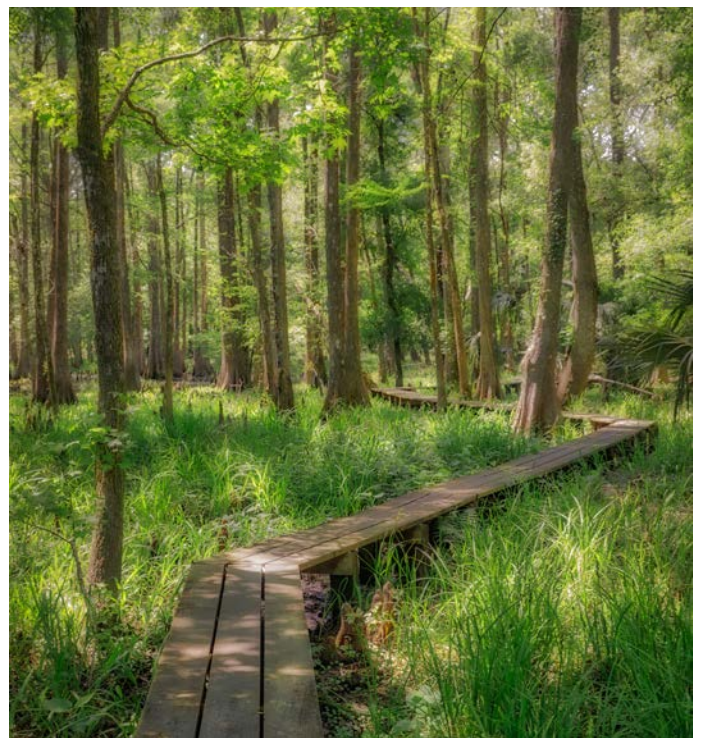
by Robert “Hutch” Hutchinson

The philanthropic nature of people who support land conservation springs from a deep love of nature. Many are quiet and unassuming, and their generosity has nothing to do with personal benefit and is often done anonymously. J. Holley Taylor was among the first of such supporters to a young and scrappy Alachua Conservation Trust, and here are a few of my reminiscences of this courageous, brilliant, generous, loving and uber-private man.

First and foremost, Holley was committed to peace and justice, and stuck by his principles during the Vietnam War era. Later, he became a pioneer of the computer age, with numerous innovations that are the backbone of today’s digital world. With the wealth that generated, he and his wife supported many environmental causes, usually with little or no recognition or fanfare.

I was introduced to Holley by our mutual friend Susan Wright, and she mentioned that he enjoyed bicycling and hiking. At the time, ACT was scrambling to raise funds to cover the purchase of Phifer Flatwoods, which we had won at an auction with exactly no money in the bank, but with a \$3 million dollar real estate closing less than ninety days away. I took a short bike-ride with Holley and he guaranteed that we would reach our goal, along with 50 other private lenders and 300 donors. He then repeated this support for the acquisition of Prairie Creek Preserve, and several more times whenever ACT ran out of other options. He and his wife were among the largest donors to the Florida Forever campaign, and to scores of other causes.

I visited Holley and his wife a few years ago at their ranch in the High Sierras. Their simple pleasures were to keep some horses happy and to savor the scenery they were enhancing through their land management of a wild and beautiful ranch. Whenever I find myself lost in the natural beauty of a special place, Holley Taylor is one of those to whom I whisper a quiet, heartfelt "thank you".



WARM WELCOME TO **NEW STAFF**



JEFFREY FORBES *Development Coordinator*

Jeffrey Forbes brings a wide range of experience and expertise to ACT. Jeffrey holds a B.A. in Anthropology from the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Prior to joining ACT, Jeffrey spent 10 years working for the Goodwin Heart Pine Company of Micanopy, Florida. He has quite an affinity for distinct styling and unique architecture, admiring the work of esteemed architects, including his favorite, A. Hays Town. Jeffrey is a member of the Sweetwater Shapenote Singers and is also the senior warden of the Episcopal Church of the Mediator in Micanopy, Florida. Jeffrey is President of the Friends of Paynes Prairie Inc. (citizen's support organization). Leisure activities include reading books by his favorite authors (William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and C.S. Lewis), traveling and spending time with his lovely wife, Megan.

AMY COMPARE *Land Management Specialist - Natural Resources Intern Coordinator*

Amy joined ACT in October 2022. Her professional back ground lies at the intersection of conservation and education. She has taught environmental education to grades 5-12, led high school trail crews, supervised AmeriCorps crews with the Washington Conservation Corps, and served as a Volunteer Program Biologist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Amy has a Bachelor's of Science in Environmental Studies and a Master of Education with a focus in Curriculum and Instruction. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, exploring natural areas, reading, biking, and playing music.



KEARA CLANCY *CREEK Program Coordinator*

Keara is a life-long nature enthusiast who joined ACT after completing a Master of Science in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. Her focus is on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion initiatives (JEDI) and the intersection of JEDI with science communication efforts. Keara currently serves as the coordinator for the Creekside Environmental Ed for Kids (CrEEK) program, working to foster a future of diverse nature lovers and environmental leaders through hands-on learning and engagement at Little Orange Creek Nature Center.





GEORGE JOHNSON *Conservation Practice Specialist*

George Johnson joined ACT's staff in 2023 as a Conservation Practice Specialist for the Surface to Springs Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). George grew up in Long Branch, NJ in a commercial fishing family which helped shape his appreciation of the relationship between people and the natural world. He graduated from Rutgers University, Cook College of Agriculture and Environmental Science. He spent his early life commercial fishing and is recently retired from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) after 23 years of service. He was the District Conservationist in DeLand, FL for 18 years where he worked with farmers, ranchers and forest operators developing conservation plans, facilitating conservation practice design and implementation and managing NRCS financial assistance program applications and contracts. He is an avid outdoorsman and enjoys golf, hiking, canoeing, fishing, history and exploring new places.

KIMBERLY TILLMAN *Partnership Coordinator*

Kimberly Tillman joined ACT in September of 2022 as the Partnership Coordinator. She will be coordinating and helping to grow the Local Implementation Team for Longleaf restoration in North Florida as well as assisting with the continued development of the CrEEK Program with local schools. Kimberly has a Bachelor's degree in Biology and is a wildlife biologist with 17 years of experience in natural resource management, conservation, and education. Most recently, Kimberly coordinated the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor Program and Partnership where 26 organizations have joined together under the mission of protecting and connecting a 100-mile-long wildlife corridor to support plant and animal diversity, room to roam, clean air and water, recreation, military buffers, working lands, and resilience in the northeast portion of the state of Florida. Kimberly and her husband have two young children that love to be outside.



MICHAEL BIRD *Conservation Acquisitions Specialist – Alachua County*

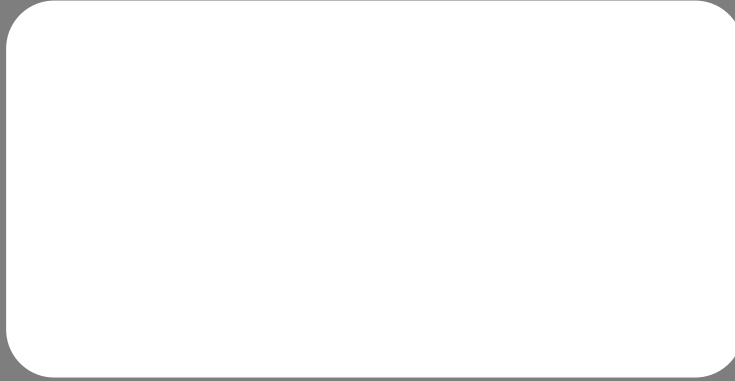
Michael Bird is a fourth generation Floridian and Alachua County native. After graduating from the University of Florida, Michael lived in Miami and Austin, working in a variety of commercial real estate capacities spanning acquisitions, development, brokerage, and asset management with a focus on adaptive reuse and urban infill projects. Having grown up in and around the conservation world, he is excited about bringing his real estate experience to protecting the environment in his home region. In his free time Michael enjoys playing soccer, collecting vinyl records, and hiking, biking, and paddling across North Central Florida's one-of-a-kind landscapes.



Kim Dunder



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GEORGE JOHNSON, Conservation Practice Specialist

CAMERON MITCHELL, Land Management Tech

Since 1988, the mission of Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) has been to protect the natural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources in and around North Central Florida. ACT protects land through purchase, donation, and conservation easements.

ACT is a 501(c)3 non-profit charity and receives no government grants for general operating support; we rely on contributions from private individuals, corporations, and foundations. Donations may be tax deductible, however ACT does not provide tax advice.

Alachua Conservation Trust's charitable solicitation number is CH12693. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free (800) 435-7352. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.