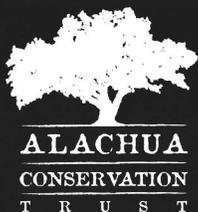


ALACHUA CONSERVATION TRUST

Gazetteer



WINTER/SPRING 2024

Praying Mantis
Mantis religiosa

WINTER/SPRING 2024 UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH

8 Weekly Walk & Talk

Tusawilla Preserve

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

9 Springs Paddle with Lars Andersen

Lower Santa Fe River

9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

15 Weekly Walk & Talk: Santa Fe River Basin

Santa Fe River Preserve (South Entrance)

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

22 Weekly Walk & Talk: Evening Hike

Marjorie A. Hoy Memorial Park at Orange Lake Overlook

5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

23 Conservation Stewards Awards

Prairie Creek Preserve

5:00 to 9:00 p.m.

29 Weekly Walk & Talk : Wetlands and Birds on Location

Tusawilla Preserve

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

30 Drawing Workshop with Artist Margaret Tolbert

Telford Spring

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

APRIL

5 Weekly Walk & Talk

Prairie Creek Preserve

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

19 Weekly Walk & Talk: Santa Fe River Basin

Santa Fe river Preserve (Main Entrance)

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

20 Pancakes on the Prairie

Tusawilla Cabin

9:00 to 11:30 a.m.

26 Weekly Walk & Talk: Bioblitz

Santa Fe river Preserve (South Entrance)

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

27 Visit the ACT Booth at the Poe Springs Fest

Poe Springs Park

12:00 to 6:00 p.m.

27 Tree Fest

Swamp Head Brewery

12:00 to 11:00 p.m.

MAY

3 Weekly Walk & Talk

Prairie Creek Preserve

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

4 Springs Paddle with Lars Andersen

Upper Santa Fe River

9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

10 Weekly Walk & Talk

Santa Fe River (South Entrance)

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

17 Weekly Walk & Talk

Santa Fe River (Main Entrance)

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

18 Ice Cream in the Park

Rockwood Park

1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

31 Weekly Walk & Talk: Wetlands and Birds on Location

Tusawilla Preserve

3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

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

A MESSAGE FROM ACT'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The year 2023, on a conservation front, was clearly defined by the gates of federal funding opening fully, and this historic level of federal funding for conservation should be in place until the end of the decade. At the state level, conservation funding is also coming back on board at levels sufficient to aid in leveraging that federal funding albeit nowhere near the level needed to meet the need to address the backlog of landowners interested in the State's land conservation programs.

At a local level, Alachua County is well funded for the next decade with the renewal of the Wild Spaces & Public Places sales tax increment that ACT spearheaded last fall. Numerous other counties across Florida have followed suit and similarly passed local initiatives to fund conservation in the last couple of years, while others have plans - and ACT is assisting them - to put such initiatives on their ballots for voters to decide in 2024. Even with all of this funding, if you feel that the path ahead for Florida feels uncertain, you're not alone. Ever-increasing population growth and the corresponding development that accompanies it has dramatically narrowed the window to conserve the remaining large tracts of land across the Florida landscape not already in conservation. To make the most of the circumstances, ACT has and will continue to relentlessly pursue all funding sources available to conserve land, restore our native habitats, and educate the next generation of conservation stewards.

Over the last couple of years, ACT has successfully leveraged your financial support on behalf of our mutual conservation efforts along with these various government funding sources for major awards from several federal programs. We've experienced particular success with the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). ACT and its partners on those projects have been awarded \$44 million while leveraging more than \$68 million from numerous partners and ACT donors. While these are large numbers, significant portions of the funds are reimbursable or are otherwise paid by the funder directly to the landowner at the closing of a real estate transaction. ACT is by no means sitting around with \$44 million in the bank! And the vast majority of both state and federal dollars that will come in over the next few years are strictly for the acquisition of new lands, the purchase of conservation easements on agricultural lands, and cost-share payments to landowners for conservation practices

that will benefit our regional natural resources, including water quality, native species plantings, and wildlife habitat improvement.

It remains vital to note that the key to accessing these funding sources is matching funding and robust partnerships. ACT's strong conservation record over the last 35 years and our community's unwavering support - through its private contributions and its support of conservation funding initiatives at the ballot box - is what has allowed us to have the success we've had to date in receiving these federal awards. However, please know that this funding stream will only continue with your continuing financial support of ACT and its critical conservation mission.

The year 2023 also marked the commencement of ACT's 35th year as Florida's natural leader in conservation. The celebration of this milestone as a community-supported conservation organization commenced in September and will carry on for the next several months. As part of this recognition, we asked our past executive directors to reflect on their time with ACT and share their favorite projects and experiences from their time at the helm. You'll find these vignettes on pages 8 and 9, and we hope they'll make you feel as good about how much of the wild landscape we've conserved so far, through ALL of our efforts over the years, as we do.

Thank you so much for being a part of the ACT conservation movement over the last three and a half decades. I sincerely hope you will continue to hold strong in your partnership with ACT for another 35 years of conservation successes throughout our beloved North Central Florida.

Tom



2024 CONSERVATION STEWARDS AWARDS

Celebrating 35 Years of Saving Special Places



Photo By Thomas Niemi

Join us as we celebrate the first 35 years of ACT's conservation journey and honor several individuals who have helped make saving special places possible along the way. Conserving land is no small endeavor and ACT could not have accomplished so much over the last 35 years without support from so many. This year's theme invites you to reflect on the moments that have defined a legacy of conservation across North Central Florida.

Much like the beginnings of ACT, our honorees represent the different ways in which a group of committed and passionate individuals can come together to save the natural lands they love. A donation of a conservation easement from the Gary Family on multi-generational farmlands has led to the protection of hundreds of acres in Marion County over the last decade. Anne and John Shermyens' dedication to environmental protection has ensured the conservation of thousands of acres of land that runs along the banks of the iconic Santa Fe River as well as a conservation easement buffering San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park. These individuals exemplify the belief held by many Floridians that our environment and way of life is worth protecting today for the benefit of future generations. Please join us in recognizing the impact this year's honorees have made on the story of conservation in North Central Florida.

The 2024 Conservation Stewards Awards will be held on Saturday, March 23rd from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Prairie Creek Preserve. There will be a cocktail hour, catered dinner, silent auction, award program, and live music from the Savants of Soul. Tickets for this event are \$125 and will likely sell out. Visit www.Alachua-ConservationTrust.org/2024csa for more information.

The Gary Family

The Gary Family has stewarded hundreds of acres of agricultural land in Marion County over multiple generations. In 2009, five siblings – Faye, June, Gladys, Ollie, and Homer - decided to protect their family's farming legacy by donating a Conservation Easement to ACT. Ten years later, the Gary Family expanded their Conservation Easement to include additional portions of the farm. With over 300 acres conserved and in active agricultural production, the Gary Family's actions have been instrumental in protecting a rural area of North Central Florida that is under rapid threat of development. With the help of their children, the Garys continue to farm the land today and are working with ACT to expand conservation efforts on the property.

Anne & John Shermyen

Anne and John met at the University of Florida (UF) as geography majors. Anne switched to a fellowship in political science for her masters while John stayed in the department to complete his masters research in Honduras. After graduate school, John worked with the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) collaborating with both the USGS to model agricultural water use and NASA to use satellite data for resource management. Anne first worked as planner with the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council and then as a management systems analyst with Alachua County. While at Alachua County she started the effort to save Poe Springs and collaborated with John and the SRWMD to find funding. She headed to UF's Bureau of Economic and Business Research where as Associate director for ten years she edited the Florida Statistical Abstract and researched growth management legislation. John went on to found and become CEO of a company based on emerging GPS technology, LogistiCare. They are retired to a farm with a large garden, cows and horses and look forward to more time volunteering with the Florida Museum of Natural History and the Florida Springs Institute.

CELEBRATING A COMMUNITY THAT CARES ABOUT CONSERVATION

UF Campaign For Charities

The annual UF Campaign for Charities (UFCC) got underway in early September and wrapped up on Giving Tuesday on November 28th. The UFCC provides an opportunity for university employees to give to their area charity of choice through payroll deduction, check, cash or stock contribution.

Since 2009, the UFCC Campaign has been an instrumental part of our annual fundraising, garnering over \$339,000 in total support. This has enabled us to work productively towards our mission of protecting the natural, historic, scenic and recreational resources in and around North Central Florida. Knowing, through these generous donations, that the University of Florida community is a conservation minded one, makes all of our pursuits that much more rewarding.

During the campaign, ACT was excited to learn that the Planning, Design and Construction division of Business Affairs at UF held its 11th Annual Cornhole Tournament Fundraiser in support of UFCC. The tournament raised an incredible \$23,000. In a humbling gesture, project manager and tournament committee member, Andrew Meeker, chose to direct his fifth of the raised funds to ACT in “thanks for all you do for the community.”

If you donated during the campaign, thank you for your generous and thoughtful gift. Your donation to ACT, Florida’s natural leader since 1988, directly impacts the work we’ve done for 35 years.

Give4Marion

Later in September, ACT participated in the 33-hour Community Foundation of Ocala/Marion County’s Give4Marion campaign on the 19th and 20th. Donations went towards the restoration of the Ollie Huff Citrus Shop at Marjorie A. Hoy Memorial Park at Orange Lake Overlook (OLO). Your support for this important historic restoration project exceeded our wildest expectations. Can you believe that this community pooled together gifts that totaled over \$43,000 in less than 2 days!? With your generous contributions combined with Match Challenges, Power Hours, and an overall special matching donor, ACT is now well on its way towards fully restoring this historic property to its former glory.

Despite the peeling paint and fading framework, plans are underway to fully restore Ollie Huff’s old storefront into a community gathering space, art display, and museum. Buildings like this speak directly to the shared cultural heritage we in North Central Florida have with the citrus industry. Its preservation connects us with that past. We couldn’t have done it without your support! Increasingly, land conservation and preservation of the historic built environment on it are seen as working in tandem to save communities. And while this is just the beginning of the road to restoring OLO, we’re off to a great start! THANK YOU!



TREE FEST

Eight years ago, local businesses Swamp Head Brewery and Solar Impact came together to find a way to support conservation in their community and the idea for Tree Fest was born. Since then, over 695,216 trees have been planted through this annual event. The event, which is held at Swamp Head Brewery in April each year, features specialty craft beers, food trucks, environmental organization tabling, and music throughout the day. The public is invited out to enjoy the festivities with proceeds donated to ACT to plant trees in restoration areas in Alachua County.

And if that is not amazing enough, the staff at Swamp Head and Solar Impact provide ACT with additional support by helping plant the trees themselves. Every January, volunteers from both businesses as well as other local sponsors come together to plant 1-year-old longleaf pine seedlings in an area that ACT is actively working to restore back to native sandhill. These efforts help provide habitat for threatened and endangered species such as gopher tortoise and the red-cockaded woodpecker.

Tree Fest has become a favorite gathering for many over the years and we are so thankful to Solar Impact and Swamp Head for brewing up this great event with a big impact many years ago. Join us for Tree Fest on April 27th at Swamp Head Brewery!



SAVING THE STATELY SANDHILLS OF THE SOUTHEAST

Duffy-Gillikin Conservation Easement

For those enamored by Florida's rare longleaf pine sandhills, Joanne Duffy and Craig Gillikin's rolling 100-acre property in Gilchrist County is a delight to behold. Tall, stately longleaf pines and burly sand post oaks dominate the canopy, while a variety of milkweeds and other groundcover species favored by pollinators blanket the gently rolling sandhills below. Walking along the footpaths that crisscross the property, visitors to this land will almost certainly spy occasional white sand mounds dotting the landscape - telltale evidence of the property's healthy gopher tortoise population - and might be lucky enough to observe fox squirrels jumping through the pines or even catch a glimpse of a federally endangered eastern indigo snake as it silently glides across the sand in search of its next meal.

A desire to conserve their beloved property to provide wildlife habitat and protect against the rapid development taking place across Florida motivated Joanne and Craig to donate a conservation easement across the entire 100-acre property to ACT this past summer. Joanne has a background in entomology and Craig is a former biology professor at Santa Fe College; they purchased this land in multiple transactions beginning in the early 1990s and have devoted decades to managing it and educating others about its natural resource value. By working with ACT to record a conservation easement they sought not only to protect their land and legacy against fragmentation and development but also to leave a space for family and community alike to learn about natural resource conservation and to experience the beauty of Florida's rare longleaf pine sandhill ecosystem firsthand.

Joanne and Craig recently completed construction on their dream home, nestled within the sandhills and fea-

turing porches overflowing with well cared-for flowering plants surrounded by a workshop, chicken coop, and fenced-in garden. Towering oaks and lush native and ornamental plants are abundant throughout the homestead area and footpaths radiate out into the sandhills from the home, providing ample opportunities to explore this serene land.

Maintained consistently with prescribed fire and occasional forestry practices, these high quality sandhills provide important ecological benefits and critical habitat for many species of wildlife native to Florida. Sandhill species endemic to the area including fringed blue star (*Amsonia ciliata*) and trailing ratany (*Krameria lanceolata*) are abundant throughout the property, and a diversity of native bunchgrasses, asters, and legumes support a host of pollinators and wildlife species. Located less than three miles from the Santa Fe River within the Devil's Ear Springshed, permanent protection of the karst features, sinkholes, and permeable soils on this land contributes to the health of our springs and drinking water quality by limiting impacts from development in this unconfined region of the Floridan aquifer.

Joanne and Craig have tended and managed this land's natural resources to cultivate their property into a place for visitors and the numerous native species that inhabit this landscape to enjoy. The protection offered by the recorded conservation easement will ensure that the land will remain forever protected from development and habitat fragmentation, providing refuge for native wildlife and plant communities and contributing to the ongoing health of our rivers, springs, and aquifer. Call us at (352) 373-1078 or email Info@AlachuaConservationTrust.org to discuss your conservation easement options!



PROTECTING FAVORITE TREES, BREEZY HILLS & JOYFUL MEMORIES

GHC Farms Conservation Easement

Peggi Young has always known that her property was special and needed to be protected. She has been stewarding this land since moving to her farm in 1970. The plan was to live off the land, raise hogs and grow the corn to feed them. That very year the southern corn blight hit and the hogs lost marketable value. Instead, Peggi made BBQ out of lemons!

Peggi and her friends did live off the land. They grew their own food, bartered with neighbors and built things by themselves from salvaged materials. When needing to make a phone call, one had to walk up the road to the phone pole. Back in those days the farm was known for epic parties, a couple of music festivals and even a Halloween Ball. These days it's a quiet respite for Peggi's family, including her son who was born on the property, and her David Brown tractor that is more reliable than most cell phone service.

Back in the 70s, this very rural and wild region of Levy County near the Alachua County border was covered in longleaf pine savannas and dotted with ranch and agricultural lands. Fortunately, some of this region was protected as Goethe State Forest in the 1990s, but much of the private land is now rural residential subdivisions dotted with occasional ranch land. Peggi, an active member of many local community groups, reached out to ACT about the potential to protect her 197-acre property with a conservation easement.

Peggi's property supports both agricultural practices and native longleaf pine/wiregrass natural communities. It is not uncommon to spot an eastern indigo snake or gopher tortoise while visiting. There are sinkholes and limestone outcroppings, enormous flat topped longleaf pine trees and five native species of milkweed flowers. Back in the 1980s, an escaped wildfire from an adjacent property ripped across Peggi's woods, almost burning down her home. It left an impression and anxiety around fire that was understandably difficult to overcome. While cattle grazing can help keep wiregrass communities from growing up into shrubs, prescribed fire can be a great tool to encourage flowering plants and grasses and provide better habitat for wildlife. ACT staff spent time working with Peggi and designed a plan to help her feel comfortable introducing prescribed fire into the landscape. Last year, for the first time in almost 40 years, prescribed fire was successfully applied using funds to enhance longleaf pine ecosystems with help from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and North Florida Prescribed Burn Association!

Peggi was patient as ACT worked to identify grant funding to protect her property. Working with both state and federal partners, ACT successfully applied for an agricultural land easement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and leveraged these federal dollars with a state springs protection grant. The farm sits in the Rainbow Springs Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) footprint. Preserving low intensity rural and natural landscapes such as Peggi's land supports the BMAP's goal of protecting surface and groundwater resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also assisted with some of the due diligence costs because this property protects habitat for the federally threatened indigo snake.

It's a special thing to get to know a place intimately, to steward and care for it, to watch its changes and expect its rhythms. Peggi and her family want to give back to the place that has cared for them by committing to a future where it will exist perpetually. With a recorded conservation easement, this property will never be subdivided or built over, ensuring the protection of favorite trees and breezy hills, joyful memories of loved ones, and efforts of hard work and persistence. We are grateful to protect this beautiful place, to Peggi and her family, and to the many partners who saw the value in protecting this land, working together to make it happen.



A HIKE ALONG MEMORY TRAIL

With ACT's Past Executive Directors

Photo By Kim Davidson

As part of ACT's milestone birthday, we asked some of our past executive directors about their favorite and most impactful conservation projects during ACT's 35-year history of saving land. Join them below as they recount these special moments of conserving land over the decades.

THE EARLY DAYS OF ACT

as told by Lu Wilson

I enjoyed working with ACT from July 1991 to February 1997, and I remember picking up a lot of trash! ACT operated like a small business during those years, making an income from land acquisition contracts with the State (Paynes Prairie, San Felasco Hammock, Watermelon Pond) and the City of Gainesville (Hogtown Creek Greenway). Prior to a property closing, the land had to be cleared of trash and debris. With a staff of only two, we were able to accomplish the clean-ups (despite ticks and rattlesnakes) with the help of dedicated volunteers and board members. We bought about 10,000 acres during those early years.

Collaborative urban projects were also satisfying work. For example, ACT brought UF's landscape architecture department together with the City's public works department to design and restore the meandering flow of Sweetwater Branch through the Duckpond neighborhood. The Sweetwater project became the first link in a chain of water treatment projects leading to Alachua Sink in Paynes Prairie, including Depot Park and Sweetwater Wetlands Preserve.



HAILE HOMESTEAD

as told by John McPherson

The project I remember working on most was the transfer of the Haile Homestead from the Haile family to ACT. Located in Gainesville, Historic Haile Homestead is a 6,200 square-foot structure that was nestled in the center of the 1,500-acre Kanapaha plantation. The property was completed in 1856 with the labor of enslaved black craftsmen. ACT worked on grants to allow for restoration of the historic structure. ACT also hosted tours of the property to generate interest in the restoration efforts. The structure, now restored, is open to the public.

THE BIRTH OF CSAS & ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER

as told by Pegeen Hanrahan

The years of 2000-2003 were lean ones for Alachua Conservation Trust, but served as groundwork for practices that would become foundational in the years to come. In 2000, ACT established the Conservation Stewards Awards, which quickly became an annual tradition and a staple of our community identity. That first year we focused on raising funds to support the Alachua County Forever campaign and invited John Delaney, a former Jacksonville Mayor and now President of Flagler College to be our speaker, to share his experience adopting the Better Jacksonville Plan with voter approval. I realized there was a significant difference between Jacksonville and Gainesville when he asked if he should wear a tuxedo to the event! Our honorees in those early years included people who had helped establish the long-term vision for our community's conservation ethic, including Alfred Ring, Courtland Collier, Doris Bardon, and Gladys Cofrin.

November 2000 brought our community a huge win, passage of our first conservation bond at the ballot box, a \$29 million fund that was matched generously with private, state and federal funds, with ACT's help. Clay Henderson and I were hired by the County to set up the project ranking and selection process, a system that is still in place today with relatively few updates.

By 2001, we had submitted our successful first independent grant application to the Florida Communities Trust (FCT), and we received a 100% grant to purchase Blues Creek Ravine and Fox Pond. ACT went on to complete several other direct applications to FCT, and in 2008, 2016 and 2022, Alachua County voters reaffirmed their support for conservation funding with approval of Wild Spaces & Public Places. ACT was involved in all of those campaigns.



HANSON PRESERVE

as told by Lauren Day

It's hard to pick a favorite place or memory from my time at ACT. There were obviously the lands – watching thunder clouds roll in over Tuscawilla Prairie; tromping through the swamps at Phifer Flatwoods (and finding pitcher plants!); paddling the gently glinting waters of Prairie Creek (while dodging the occasional gator). Then there were the people – working lunches from Harvest Thyme Café with Pegeen; “peanut Cokes” with Hutch while exploring the Suwannee River; late night envelope stuffing and pizza with the ACT Board for the Conservation Stewards Awards.

But one of my favorite places and memories is a small but special one. The Hanson Sanctuary on Little Lake Santa Fe is home to the only active bird rookery on the lake, and I'm told the great egrets and great blue herons still return each spring to nest. The story behind it is equally special – a late night call from a woman seeking to fulfill her deceased uncle's wishes to preserve “ecological wetlands,” a flurried evening boat ride with the “Ladies of the Lake,” and a gift that allowed us to purchase the property and ultimately led to ACT's first revolving fund. This small, but mighty fund played a critical role in protecting all of the aforementioned lands – revolving in and out of the Hanson Sanctuary, Phifer Flatwoods, and Prairie Creek Preserve, before finding its final resting place in the ground at Tuscawilla. It's also a great example of the big effect ACT can have with relatively little.



Photo By Alison Blakeslee

PRAIRIE CREEK PRESERVE

as told by Robert “Hutch” Hutchinson



Photo By Kim Davidson

I was raised on the shores of Pithlachocco and cavorted on Prairie Creek beginning in the mid-1960s. My adventures with friends in small boats always included encounters with dinosaurs, serpents, amphibians, and raptors. It's the wildest place you'll find so close to a city.

By the mid-1980s, I was smuggling my employer's professional video gear out after work to take it on daring cruises in rickety boats. The result was a short documentary “Prairie Creek: A Vital Link” including swamp scenery, dramatic music, and interviews with scientists, historians, and community leaders as they paddled the creek. Then, with a 100-pound video projector, I would show it to any local group who would watch, eventually making it to agency meetings where mapping and ranking future land conservation projects was being determined.

When I became ACT's first employee in the late 1980s, all of Prairie Creek was privately owned but now on every conservation organization's list of priorities. With patience, strategy, generosity, and shared love of the landscape, ACT was able to convince several partners, over two decades, to step up and acquire parcels as they became available. Our partners included the St. Johns River Water Management District, Florida Park Service, Trust for Public Land, Florida Communities Trust, Alachua County Forever, and the private landowners who discounted their land to help save it.

I only wish every person could be as lucky as me – to see that special place whose natural wonders map my dreamtime and whose waters flow through my veins – protected just in the nick of time.



GOING FOR GREEN Alachua County Forever in Action

Lake Alto - Dinh Property

2023 was an exciting year for the Alachua County Forever (ACF) program, which was in its 23rd year of land conservation following re-approval of the Wild Spaces & Public Places half cent sales tax by Alachua County voters in 2022. As we celebrate the start of 2024, here's a recap of ACF and ACT's conservation collaborations over this past year:

In January, ACF and ACT partnered to acquire the 128-acre Bell property, which sits at the headwaters of the Santa Fe River and straddles Alachua and Bradford counties. The property protects both sides of the first mile of the Santa Fe River as it channelizes out from the Santa Fe Swamp.

One month later, ACF completed its second 2023 acquisition securing more critical Santa Fe River protection with the Matthews acquisition. This project protects a half of a mile of the Santa Fe River and intact floodplain forest as well as 189 acres in the Santa Fe watershed.

In March, ACF continued its protection of the County's highest priority area, the Santa Fe River, with the acquisition of the 158-acre Waldo Tree Farm. Located within the Santa Fe headwaters, the property contains nearly 50% wetlands including a blackwater stream, dome swamp, and floodplain swamps.

In July, ACF closed on the Colasante property. This 349-acre acquisition conserved the final portion of Lochloosa Slough and added to ACF's Lochloosa Slough Preserve. The property is part of the Florida

ways Network, which is a corridor connecting the Ocala National Forest to Alachua County.

In October, ACF and ACT again partnered for the acquisition of the Dinh property. The culmination of nearly 20 years of negotiation efforts, 314 acres were acquired adding to the County's Lake Alto Preserve. The property protects a half mile of the Lake Alto shoreline, which is part of the Santa Fe River watershed. Additionally, the property falls within the Florida Wildlife Corridor. More on this acquisition later!

After a successful year, 2024 looks to build on these conservation successes with numerous projects across the County under contract or in the negotiation process. Thanks to Alachua County voters, the Alachua County Forever program is funded through 2032, allowing ACT to continue to partner on important conservation projects that will protect land along the Santa Fe River and throughout Alachua County.



Santa Fe River - Bell Property



COLLABORATION FOR CONNECTING the Headwaters of the Santa Fe River

In partnership with Alachua County Forever, ACT acquired 314 acres buffering the headwaters of the Santa Fe River from the Dinh family in October. Located east of the city of Waldo, this new acquisition is adjacent along its northern border to the County's Lake Alto Preserve. The waters of Lake Alto and its swamp flow north into the headwaters of the Santa Fe River, through nearby county-owned conservation lands protected earlier this year. There the flow transitions from a small stream of water into a distinct channelized, albeit narrow, river. Visitors to Lake Alto 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.

The acquisition of the Dinh property preserves the natural shoreline of Lake Alto and maintains the wetlands that filter and reduce pollutants entering the lake and, ultimately, the river. The property, which resides within the Florida Wildlife Corridor, also provides excellent plant diversity and habitat for several endemic and listed species and features abundant wetland habitat for wading birds.

Alachua County's Environmental Program Manager Andi Christman was happy to see the Dinh property protected, stating that the project, which was completed over the span of two decades, "could not have been completed without ACT's partnership. ACT continues to be a critical partner in local conservation efforts." This collaboration between Alachua County and ACT is part of a greater long-term effort to conserve the remaining large tracts along the headwaters and swamps that feed into the Santa Fe River. The results of which will improve water quality of the river and create a corridor for wildlife to roam freely. Conserving this unique land is one of many legacies of a remarkable man, Mr. Khanh Dinh, who dedicated his life to making the world a better place. As shared by his family, "Dad dearly appreciated the beauty of nature, and was far ahead of his time in his efforts to conserve the earth and its resources. His first company, founded in the early 1980's, focused on harnessing the thermal and electrical powers of solar energy. During his career, he developed other technologies to enhance energy efficiency in residential and commercial climate control systems. He would be thrilled that these beautiful lands will be preserved in their natural state for the benefit of all."

Funds from the Wild Spaces & Public Places ballot initiative, supported by a half cent sales tax re-approved by Alachua County voters in 2022, and Amazing Give donations were used to conserve these lands from development and safeguard North Florida's drinking water supply. ACT's Executive Director, Tom Kay, celebrated the purchase as "another major win for Alachua County residents and for keeping Florida wild. With ongoing robust support from the community, collaborative conservation wins like the Dinh project will continue." ACT continues to work tirelessly towards protecting land along the Santa Fe River. To date, your support has helped protect thousands of acres along this iconic waterway. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to ACT to help us continue to protect these special places for generations to come.

ALACHUA CONSERVATION TRUST EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



Critters Of North Central Florida

On October 7th, ACT hosted the Fish and Critters of North Central Florida at Santa Fe River Preserve with Howard Jelks and U.S. Geological Survey. Participants learned about field techniques to catch fish and critters in the Santa Fe River, as well as how to identify the ones we caught under the canopy of the preserve. Pictured is one young scientist holding a crayfish collected from the seine nets.



Night Bug Hunt

On September 29th, ACT hosted a Night Bug Hike, led by Dr. Jiri Hulcr and Dr. Andrea Lucky at Tusawilla Preserve. Participants took to the trails with nets and flashlights in tow, catching and learning about all the bugs they could find. Pictured are two young explorers coming up to a group who had caught a praying mantis.



Pride At Prairie Creek

On October 15th, ACT hosted its annual Pride at Prairie Creek event, an outdoor celebration of the LGBTQ+ community for family, friends, and allies to come together and enjoy a day celebrating inclusion at the preserve!



Young Leaders

The Young Leaders for Wild Florida and ACT hosted the YLWF Fall Fest at 4th Ave Food Park on September 30th, where they organized environmental education activities and brought in local conservation organizations to highlight the amazing work being done in our community. Pictured is an event attendee who got some awesome facepaint from the resident YLWF artists!



WHAT'S NEW: PRESERVES FOR YOU

Expanding the View, Trails & More

As the morning light filters through the cypress trees, an alligator slides from the bank into the water below. Snowy egrets methodically move through the wetland in search of their next meal as Carolina chickadees and warblers flit through the trees at the edge. Thousands of marsh marigolds carpet the area and add a fresh pop of color that heralds fall in North Florida. Visitors to Little Orange Creek Nature Preserve can experience this view for themselves thanks to a new set of stairs added to the observation tower at the end of the Orange Trail this summer. Currently, ACT staff and interns are working on rebuilding the boardwalk to the observation tower.

ACT staff and interns have been working hard on our preserves to provide new views and improved experiences to the visitors who frequent them. In addition to the completion of this tower, ACT has also installed another observation tower at Tuscawilla Preserve on the south side of Thrasher Trail. Visitors can admire the views of the preserve from the top of the tower or relax at a picnic table in the shade underneath.

Visitors to Santa Fe River Preserve South can enjoy a different view of the Santa Fe River with the installation of a new hiking trail! The Flatwoods Trail winds through the eastern side of the preserve, crossing through pine flatwoods to the edge of the Santa Fe River. The trail parallels the river before ending at an opening where visitors can rest on a newly installed bench that overlooks the Santa Fe. ACT Natural Resource Interns were heavily involved with the development of this trail - spring semester interns built a footbridge on the trail, summer interns cleared the entire trail, and fall interns installed the bench at the end of

ACT Natural Resource Interns also helped reroute a portion of the Blue connector trail at Blue's Creek Ravine Preserve and install handrails on the footbridge over the ravine. Rather than a steep climb out of the ravine to the Blue Trail, hikers can now follow a more gradual switchback up the slope.

Visitors to ACT preserves primarily enjoy our preserves on land, but can now do so from the water at Santa Fe River preserve thanks to the installation of two new kayak launches/take-outs. ACT interns cleared the launch areas and installed mats donated by the Florida Paddling Trails Association and REI Co-op. The launches are located at the end of the Blue Trail at Santa Fe River Preserve North and along the River Loop Trail at Santa Fe River Preserve South. Visitors can paddle five miles along the Santa Fe from one launch to the other. This section of river typically requires maneuvering around downed trees and is best attempted when the river is high.





ACT's internship program aims to provide students pursuing a career in conservation with hands-on experience and professional development opportunities that will help them in their future careers. Supplies, stipends, and professional development for program participants is supported by donors like you. Please consider donating to ACT today to help support future ACT interns on their conservation journey.

In addition to creating new views through our towers and trails, we have been opening up our forests. If you have walked Creek Nature Preserve, you may have noticed more sunlight on the ground in some places. ACT staff and interns have been working to treat hardwood species in the midstory to help restore these ecosystems. Typically, prescribed fire is used to maintain land, but when fire has been excluded from an area, often land managers need to physically treat overgrown hardwoods in tandem with prescribed fire to return an ecosystem back to a healthy state. A portion of Prairie Creek Preserve was burned this past spring, a portion of Fox Pen Preserve was burned this year during the summer growing season, and pending weather conditions, there are plans to burn additional areas of of Prairie Creek , Fox Pen, Saarinen, and Little Orange Creek preserves in 2024.





PYRODIVERSITY ENKINDLES BIODIVERSITY

Growing Season Versus Dormant Season Burning

In conjunction with a dry winter in 2022, 2023 was a year of drought, which significantly lowered the number of “good burn days” across the state. Without the proper moisture content in the soil many of our fire-dependent habitats cannot afford the added stress of fire heating their roots and scorching their crowns, which they are regularly adapted to withstand in wetter years. Despite the limitations of this year’s weather, ACT’s ecological restoration team was able to put that good fire on the landscape with every chance we were given!

How do you know what “season” is the right one?

One of the leading questions our team is asked during burn season is just that. There are a number of variables we look at when deciding our preferred season to burn; every single property (and every single unit within that property) has its own unique elements that factor into those time of year decisions.

There are two general seasons when discussing fire: dormant and growing. When referring to a “dormant” season burn, those are the months when the energy of the trees is being stored in their roots. Think of those beautiful fall color-changing leaves...As the deciduous trees drop their leaves they are going into dormancy in order to withstand the colder temperatures of the winter. On the flip side, when the bright green new growth begins to emerge in spring and into summer, the energy of those trees recirculates from root to branch, bringing us into “growing” season.



So what’s the difference between burning in the dormant season vs. growing season? Although a natural element, burning is still a stressor to our plant communities. Think of fire as a disturbance ecology. If an area has no known burn history, a very dense understory, or young trees that have not yet established themselves, it is typically best to prescribe the initial reintroduction fire during the least stressful time on those plants. With energy being stored beneath the surface and colder temperatures to combat the heat of the flames, dormant season brings less stress on our native plants. However, there are some species that depend on growing season fire in order to bloom. Wiregrass, for example, relies on spring or early summer fire in order to



produce viable seeds! This is a naturally adapted process going back to the historical lightning-struck fires that would regularly spread across the landscape before human factors were at play. Which brings us back to “growing” season fires. As a community, prescribed burners are objectively doing our best to apply fire in the most natural setting possible provided for safety first. When deemed safe to do so for both our crews and the land, the goal is to apply more growing season fires as defined by lightning season for the benefit of a healthy diverse plant community and the wildlife that is utilizing these plants for food and shelter.

When you are limited by weather, such as we were in 2023, there is not always enough time to accomplish all of the number of burns that are planned within the season. Different plant communities require different fire return intervals, meaning some sites depend on fire every 1-3 years, such as sandhill, while other habitats rely on a more variable fire frequency, such as a fire every 5-30 years in a scrub. When pushed to the end of the interval, it is preferred to maintain the fire frequency over a targeted season. Keeping fire as a functional piece of the landscape is key to a healthy ecosystem. Take it from Burner Bob, pyrodiversity enkindles biodiversity!

Learn more about how ACT and its partner Tall Timbers Research Institute and Land Conservancy utilized growing season fire to restore habitat for birds as part of the Burning for Birds Conservation Collaborative, a grant project funded by the Cornell Land Trust Bird Initiative, at <https://arcg.is/1eanmi>.

How many acres did ACT burn in 2023?

- 114 Acres on ACT Lands
- 1,433 Acres on Private Lands
- 3,660 Acres on Public Lands
- 5,093 Total Acres Burned in 2023





MATCHMAKER, MAKE ME A CONSERVATION MATCH

State and Federal Programs for Landowners

Photo By Kim Davidson

“I own land in Florida and I want to protect it. How do I do this? What are my conservation options?”

At ACT, we get these and similar questions almost every day as we work with landowners to help them realize their conservation goals. Each landowner has specific objectives, and we try to match their conservation needs with compatible strategies. In many ways, the role of ACT is similar to that of a matchmaker – we learn about the landowner’s interests and goals, and try to match them with the conservation programs that fit those goals.

More often than not, landowners want to protect their land, but they are not in a position to donate the land or land interests outright. Rather, they seek funding for the purchase of their land or conservation easement. Landowners have many reasons for wanting to sell: A purchased conservation easement may provide funding for future management or be part of family estate planning. Or, a landowner may want to sell their land to become part of a public park or preserve. In most cases, these situations require funding from state or federal conservation programs.

Several federal and state conservation programs fund the direct purchase of land and conservation easements. On the State side, ACT works with Florida Forever, the State’s premier conservation and recreation lands acquisition program, and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, which funds conservation easements to protect agricultural or working lands. On the Federal side, ACT works with many different agencies, the largest of which is the Natural Resources Conservation Service as the administrator of conservation programs under the Farm Bill. Remarkably, Farm Bill conservation programs are the largest single fed-

eral source of funding for private land conservation, including Florida’s forests, grasslands and wetlands.

Each conservation program has specific eligibility criteria, conservation purposes, timelines, and application requirements. The “fit” of a program very much depends on the landowner’s desires and objectives: Does the landowner want to sell the land outright? That generally narrows the options to state acquisition programs. Does the landowner want to sell a conservation easement that is compatible with agricultural land uses? Perhaps a Farm Bill easement program is the best option. Does the landowner want to couple a conservation easement with ongoing restoration? Perhaps the landowner wants to apply to multiple programs?

As you can see, the options and requirements of these programs can be complex and sometimes cumbersome. However, the benefits cannot be overstated. Simply put, federal and state conservation programs are central to our mission to protect the natural and working lands of North Central Florida. Moreover, conservation funding has reached unprecedented levels in recent years, with record appropriations for state conservation and Farm Bill programs. ACT and other land trusts play a crucial role in implementing these programs, including identifying good projects and facilitating great matches between funders and landowners.

In light of all this, what is a conservation-minded landowner to do? Contacting ACT is a good start! As skilled conservation “matchmakers”, we can consult with the landowner to determine their land protection goals and help identify the best compatible options. Opportunity comes to those that are prepared, and ACT can help!

FLORIDA WILD FOR ALL

2024 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



The Florida Wild for All Scholarship seeks to amplify and celebrate the existing voices of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Multiracial People of Color interested in pursuing a career path in natural resources management or protection of the environment of Florida. Since 2021, ACT has awarded scholarships to eleven students. You can help support diversity in conservation by making a donation to ACT today towards the Florida Wild for All Scholarship Fund.



Mia Lauren Cabrera

Mia is preparing to seek further education at the University of Florida with a Master of Science in the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences. This scholarship has gone towards funding that degree. Mia is a first generation Cuban American, and the first in her family to strive to continue her education past an undergraduate degree. She is seeking a Masters of Science in Agronomy because she loves hands-on work related to plants and our natural resources.



Tanya Charan

Tanya moved from Pittsburgh to Florida when she was 5 years old. She loves the beaches of Florida and is always trying to incorporate visits to the beach in all her coursework. At the University of Florida Tanya is majoring in Soil and Water Science as well as minoring in Computer Science and Engineering. Being able to study conservation topics has allowed her to learn so much more about how they can be applied and how important protection is to the community.



Christian Fernandez

Christian is a Natural Resource Conservation student at the University of Florida graduating in 2024. He grew up in a Cuban family in Miami, Florida. Growing up, Christian did not venture into nature with his family, but he has found value in nature and passion through talking to his family about conservation. This has led to him to seek a career in wildlife biology with a focus on nature communication.

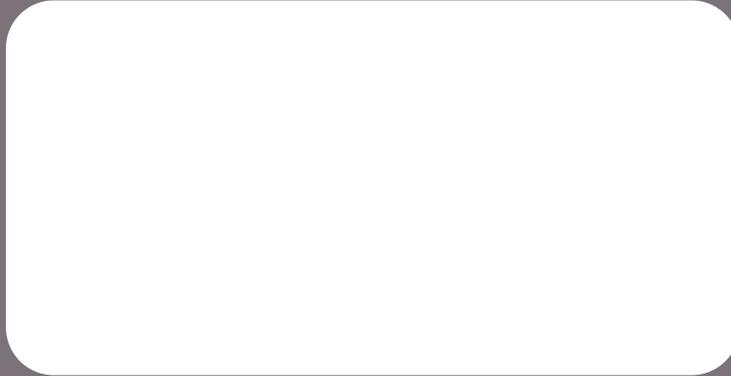


Maria Rodriguez Acosta

Maria is a rising senior who has just begun her freshman year of college, she is interested in Environmental Engineering. Maria moved to Gainesville, Florida from Peru four years ago and has been involved in volunteering with the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department as well as other local conservation groups. She is eager to keep learning about conservation both here and back home.



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GEORGE JOHNSON, Conservation Practice Specialist

CAMERON MITCHELL, Land Management Tech

KRISTEN POLACIK, Rangeland Specialist - Okeechobee County

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.