

F · I · R · S · T W · A · T · C · H

VOLUME 3, February 1999

NEWSLETTER OF BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION
The South Walton Coastal Conservancy

ISSUE 1

WILL SOUTH WALTON KEEP GREEN NATURAL LANDS & PRISTINE BEACHES?

– *From the Editor*

Is there enough conservation and recreation land in South Walton? Approximately 18,000 acres in South Walton is designated park or forestland. Sounds like a lot until you stop and think about St. Joe Corporation

developing their 18,000 acres. This will be in addition to the roughly 15,000 acres of remaining private land that is, or will

be, developed in South Walton. Our community will be a different place when St. Joe begins clearing their land.

The only natural green space remaining will be our parks and forest. Residents are already saying, "I thought that was state forest land" when the private woodlands near their homes are bulldozed. (In the case of Butler Elementary School it was state forest land.)

False and misleading information repeated often enough by county officials and representatives in regard to our preservation land in South Walton is soon believed as fact.

Come find out the truth.

Dr. Greg Brock, Environmental Administrator of Florida's Conservation and Recreation Land (CARL) program, will be the guest speaker at our next Public Meeting. He will present a brief history of the CARL program in South Walton and acquisitions to date. Clear

up the myth that the state of Florida never meant to purchase Point Washington State Forest.

Dispel the disinformation that Walton

County officials did not know the state purchase for the forest was to take place.

Discard the idea that there was ever meant to be a net loss of preservation land in South Walton as an outcome of the Trust study.

Come to appreciate how South Walton contains the last bastion of natural and wild coastal lands, squeezed between overdeveloped Destin and Panama City.

Discuss future plans for acquisition in South Walton and discover what has happened to Point Washington Phase II.

Find out how you can increase the conservation land in your neighborhood.



PUBLIC MEETING: THE MYTH OF NEW TOWN & THE 18,000 ACRES

Wednesday, February 10, 1999

6:30 PM

Seaside Meeting Hall



MISSION

The mission of Beach to Bay Connection is to enhance and protect the undeveloped lands and waters within South Walton County by taking an active role in gathering and disseminating information specific to our ecosystems, and acting as stewards of our public lands.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Celeste Cobena, Chair
Edmond Alexander
Tiana Burton
Judy Hambrick
Carolyn Latham
Sharon Maxwell
Bonnie McQuiston

www.beachtobay.org

coastal dune Lake Campbell and Lake Morris will take your breath away.

*Deer Lake State Park & Camp Creek
Headwaters Adventure*

Saturday, March 20, 9:00AM

Celebrate the Spring Equinox and Earth Day! Meet at the Deer Lake State Park parking lot located on the south side of Highway 30A about two miles east of Eastern Lake. We will take an out-and-back hike through the northeastern part of the Deer Lake State Park ecosystem to the headwaters of Camp Creek Lake. Don Hambrick, biologist with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, will lead the three-mile expedition. After assembling at the parking lot anyone preferring a shorter hike can drive up to the trail entrance north of Highway 30A.

Suggested items to bring: water, snacks, bug repellent, comfortable shoes.

For more information call 267-2227.

SPRING ADVENTURES IN THE PARKS & FOREST SERIES

*Western End Topsail Hill Preserve
Adventure:*

Saturday, February 27, 9:00AM

Meet at the parking lot of Topsail Hill Preserve located on the south side of Highway 98 approximately one-quarter mile east of Mack Bayou Road.

Dale Shingler of the Choctaw Geopark staff will lead us on a one mile or so nature walk through the western end of Topsail Hill Preserve. Topsail Hill Preserve is considered one of the top two properties in the State of Florida. Sweeping views of pristine

ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION ONE MILLIONTH LONGLEAF PLANTED!

Arbor Day (January 15) is truly an American Holiday. Arbor Day was fathered by J. Sterling Morton in 1872 in Nebraska. A Michigan native, Morton missed trees when he settled in Nebraska, and inspired his community to plant. One million trees were planted on that first Arbor Day in Nebraska.

Florida's first Arbor Day was celebrated in 1886. By 1945 the Legislature passed the Arbor Day Bill, officially establishing the 3rd Friday in January as Florida's Arbor Day. This is our tree planting season.

Arbor Day is a day to honor, plant and reflect upon what trees mean to us. This Arbor Day was

cause for special celebration in South Walton as our one millionth longleaf pine seedling was planted in Point Washington State Forest. We are very proud of this accomplishment.

Point Washington State Forest was purchased May 19, 1992 by the Nature Conservancy on behalf of the State of Florida.

Point Washington State Forest is valued as one of the remaining remnants of native longleaf pine coastal scrub ecosystems. The forest contains a diversity of natural communities including wet, mesic and scrubby

flatwoods, sandhills, coastal sand pine scrub, wet prairie, beach dune and coastal dune lake. Six endangered or threatened plant species are present, including the Parrot pitcher plant and Curtis grass.

Snowy plover and sea turtle nesting

areas occur in the Deer Lake area of the Forest as well as the federally endangered Red-cockaded woodpecker, Bald eagle, Gopher tortoise, Indigo snake and Choctawhatchee beach mouse.

Forestry began planting trees in 1993. Longleaf pine planting averages about 700 trees per acre. These one million trees are planted on 1,370 acres of the forest, about 10 per cent of the forest. Aggressive reforestation continues as part of Forestry's plan to perpetuate and rewild Florida's forests to restore and maintain the integrity of our environment.

Leading
Forests are made for weary men,
That they may find their soul again.
And little leaves are hung on trees
To whisper of old memories.
And trails with cedar shadows black
Are placed there just to lead men back
Past all the pitfalls of success
To boyhood's faith and happiness.
Far from the city's craft and fraud,
O Forest, lead me back to God.
Mary Carolyn Davies



Celeste Cobena, BEACH TO BAY chair, Tom Beitzel, Forestry Supervisor, Janie Gurisco, Science Teacher and Brady Bautsch, Student Council President, Seaside Neighborhood School plant the one millionth longleaf pine at the Eastern Lake Trailhead.

Foresters Butch Hall and Melvin Tate have spent numerous hours supervising planting contractors on the forest. Walking behind the planters and ensuring that each tree is properly planted, they are both dedicated caretakers of our longleaf pine trees.

Point Washington State Forest is a gift to us now and to generations to come. As a refuge to wildlife and those seeking spiritual renewal through the restorative sounds of wind, water and birdsong, the forest offers a sanctuary of solitude.

NEW TRAIL

A new trail has been blazed through Point Washington State Forest from Blue Mountain Beach to Grayton Beach. Tom Beitzel, Forestry Supervisor of Point Washington State Forest, will designate a color for the Point Washington State Forest Greenway Trail for this new trail's official markings. Until then follow the blue flagging.

Two bridges will be built over creeks and a boardwalk over a marshy area. BEACH TO BAY'S Greenway fund is purchasing materials for these projects. If you would like to contribute just use the form on page 3 of this newsletter. Please designate GREENWAY NETWORK for your donation. Donations of building materials for the bridges are also accepted.

Volunteer labor is making the trail system a reality, but is in short supply. If you would like to donate either materials or time call 267-2227. Special thanks to Jim Sawyer for designing and supervising the bridge building projects on the Blue Mountain to Grayton Beach Trail.

Tom Beitzel says, "the grant work on the trail is progressing very well." He plans to spread mulch on the Eastern Lake Trail and build five small bridges at creek crossings along the Eastern Lake Trail System as part of the trail improvement grant. Volunteers and materials will be needed to complete this phase of the Eastern Lake Trail System improvement plan. The large bridge over Peach Creek will be built with prison labor and donated material.

Please continue your wonderful support for the South Walton Greenway Network.

One thousand trees were sold or donated to be planted throughout the community during BEACH TO BAY'S third annual longleaf pine seedling sale.

1998 SEA TURTLE STATISTICS SOUTH WALTON TURTLE WATCH

South Walton Turtle Watch volunteers rose to new challenges and responsibilities this year.

Lighting problems, non-existent five short years ago, are reaching a crisis level.

This year it became necessary to cage nests. This is a very labor intensive procedure that does not assure satisfactory results. If a nest is caged it must be checked and opened at daybreak. The cage is shut at sunset and must be checked again around midnight to release any hatchlings. Even utilizing cages does not guarantee that emerging hatchlings will go toward the water rather than towards the artificial lighting.

The only answer is dark beaches. Lights must be turned off during nesting and hatching season. The turtle friendly light ordinance must be enforced. More and more counties are adopting lighting ordinances and Walton County must work toward this goal. South Walton Turtle Watch will be increasing light enforcement efforts.

Please help us maintain dark beaches.



- 41 Nests were marked
- 11 False crawls investigated
- First nest laid 5/26/98
- Last nest laid 8/20/98
- 39 threatened Loggerhead nests
- 2 endangered Green nests
- 3 nests depredated by red fox in Inlet Beach and Seagrave Beach

- 2 nests caged due to depredation
- 2 nests screened due to depredation
- 2000 loggerhead hatchlings crawled out of nests
- 400 additional hatchlings were released by volunteers
- 47 Green hatchlings crawled out
- 150 additional Green hatchlings were released by volunteers when one Green nest was dug during Hurricane Georges and the hatchlings were released after the storm. This prevented the hatchlings from drowning in the nest during emergence.
- 7 nests had severe lighting problems
- 23 nests hatched successfully (56%)



- Hurricane Earl washed away 7 nests
- Hurricane Georges washed away 4 nests

Please continue your wonderful support for South Walton Turtle Watch.

NOVEMBER ADVENTURE

Our November adventure in the forest was a big success. A large contingent of all ages enjoyed the morning walk through the pine flatwoods into the "Hidden Forest."

Tom Beitzel, state forester, led the walk to the Hidden Forest, which is an old growth stand of longleaf pines. On the trail to the Hidden Forest, we crossed a small stream into a swampy area to observe a beaver dam. The walk over the stream was made much easier by a footbridge constructed by Boy Scout Troop Weeblo 562-Den 5.

Tom showed us two areas of forest that had been burned. He explained how fire rejuvenates the forest by encouraging certain plants to flower and seed. We learned to tell the difference between longleaf and slash pines. We identified gopher tortoise burrows and found one already identified and catalogued by personnel with the Florida Natural Areas Inventory.

Unfortunately, we also saw how a few people abuse our state forest by dumping trash in the woods. However, the beauty and value of our treasured state lands were more than enough to overcome a bit of unsightly debris. Thanks to Tom for a great morning in the forest!



BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

*We need your support!
Please show you care.*

volunteer • non-profit • member-supported

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

HOME PHONE _____

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student/Limited Income | 10.00/year | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate | 15.00/year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | 20.00/year | <input type="checkbox"/> Business or Association | 100.00/year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | 30.00/year | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor | 500.00/year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nice Person | 100.00/year | <input type="checkbox"/> Saint | 1000.00/year |

I would like to make a donation dedicated to the South Walton Greenway Network. Amount _____

I would like to make a donation dedicated to the South Walton Turtle Watch. Amount _____

Please make check payable to Beach to Bay Connection, and mail to P.O. Box 1129, Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

Membership dues and donations are tax deductible

IN THIS ISSUE

F·I·R·S·T· W·A·T·C·H

P. O. Box 1129

Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

- **Public Meeting:
Maintaining Ownership of
Our Preservation Land**
- **South Walton Turtle Watch
1998 Sea Turtle Statistics**
- **Spring Adventure in the
Parks and Forest Series**
- **Arbor Day Celebration**



F·I·R·S·T· W·A·T·C·H

VOLUME 3, February 1999

Newsletter

ISSUE 1

BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION, THE SOUTH WALTON COASTAL CONSERVANCY

volunteer • non-profit • member-supported