

F · I · R · S · T W · A · T · C · H

VOLUME 3, May 1999

NEWSLETTER OF BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION
The South Walton Coastal Conservancy

ISSUE 2

MALLORY SWAMP REWILDING IS INSPIRATION, MODEL TO SOUTH WALTON

— From the Editor

The Mallory Swamp Restoration Project is the largest private wetlands protection and restoration effort east of the Mississippi. Christine Small, Project Manager and Biologist, will give the presentation at our May meeting.

Natural land restoration, known as rewilding, restores land to its natural hydrological and habitat status by rectifying human caused disturbances.

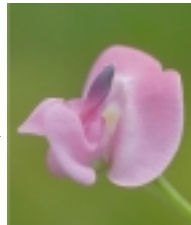
Comprised of 30,000 acres of forested wetland, the project is located in

Lafayette County in Florida's Big Bend Area, home to some of the last remaining large pieces of wild

land in Florida. The region contains great diversity and abundance of plant and animal species including the Florida

black bear, swallow-tailed kite, bobcat and wild turkey.

M.C. Davis is co-founder of the Mallory Swamp Project. Businessman and resident of South Walton, and wildland philanthropist, M.C. says, "For nature to have a reasonable chance of continuing to function as the source of all wealth and life for man, and all other species, then



our conservation planning and execution, when possible, must be on the landscape and ecosystem level. This

can be accomplished by drawing upon the skills of the entrepreneur, the power of the government, and the passion of the individual, with all directed by the knowledge of science. Mallory Swamp Restoration Project harnesses this team effort for conserving a total ecosystem and can serve as a model for large scale planning and conservation in South Walton and its surrounding region."



PUBLIC MEETING: MALLORY SWAMP RESTORATION - WILDLAND PHILANTHROPY

Wednesday, May 12, 1999

6:30 PM

Seaside Meeting Hall



TURTLE WATCH SEASON BEGINS

The 1999 sea turtle nesting season officially began on May 1, and continues through October 31. We expect that late May, June, and early July will see the majority of nests deposited, with nest hatchings continuing into the fall.

South Walton Turtle Watch volunteers

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.



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Celeste Cobena, Chair
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www.beachtobay.org

walk Walton County beaches daily throughout the nesting season looking for nests, which are then marked and monitored. The goal is to get as many hatchlings as possible safely into the water. This program is a great way to



take part in an on-going environmental project, and, as usual, we need volunteers to walk in the early morning hours, as many or as few days a week as your schedule allows.

This year we also would like to find a few night owls to survey the beaches after dark and help us to monitor the

lighting situation. Last year saw an increase in hatchling losses due to disorientation from beach lighting.

Our wish list for tax deductible contributions includes the following items: a Mac compatible scanner, a copy-capable fax machine, software for setting up a web page, and, of course, money.

When you are on the beach, please take care to pick up after yourselves. As Tillie the Turtle says, "Where you come to play, I come to lay my eggs." Chairs, toys, gazebos, etc., left on the beach overnight can become obstacles for mother turtle, who may then return to the water without successfully nesting.

Please fill in holes before leaving the beach; besides being hazardous to human walkers, a 350 pound turtle crawling on her belly can expend a great deal of energy trying to get unstuck from the bottom of a hole.

Lights disorient both nesting turtles and hatchlings, so please, keep your lights off and leave your flashlights at home. Dark beaches are best for sea turtles.

Remember, sea turtles share their beaches with us, so let's respect their needs. Thank you for caring.

For more information or to volunteer, call Sharon Maxwell, 897-5228.

Please continue your wonderful support for the South Walton Turtle Watch.

GREENWAY PROGRESS CONTINUES WITH NEW BRIDGES AND MORE TRAILS

Improvements continue on both the Blue Mountain-to-Grayton Trail and the Eastern Lake Trail System.

All three bridges on the Blue Mountain-to-Grayton Trail are complete. A special thanks is extended to Barbara Gilmer for donating the material for bridge # 2, and for coming out and helping with the construction.

Sandy sections of the trail are being solved by two methods. Where feasible, mulch is spread on the trail for a more stable surface. Coconut fiber matting is placed on some of the more remote sandy areas. The matting is biodegradable and allows the native vegetation to grow through.

Official marking of the trail has not been done. The blue flagging is still in place to mark the trail and the path is becoming more defined by use. Places where the trail intersects roads or animal paths may cause users to make a wrong

turn. Look ahead for flagging to stay on the marked trail.

The sights and sounds of wildlife can be found along the Blue Mountain-to-Grayton Trail. The deep bellow of two male alligators was heard along with the higher pitch tones of a female alligator near a cypress dome on the western side of the trail. An eastern diamondback rattler has been spotted



Bridge builders Barbara Gilmer, Ted Cobena, Anita Page and Peggy Sheehan.

and a panther sighting occurred on the trail early one morning.

The Division of Forestry conducted several control burns in the trail area this past winter. As a result, wiregrass and wildflowers are sprouting abundantly along the trail this spring.

Tom Beitzel, Point Washington State Forest Manager has been working steadily on improvements to the Eastern Lake Road and Trail System.

Fires and drought conditions have cut into the amount of time his staff is able to spend on the trail project. Trail improvements should be complete in the next several months.

All of the work on the Blue Mountain-to-Grayton Trail is volunteer labor. Consider joining in on the work party next fall when trail work goes into full gear. Call 267-2227 to learn where and when to participate.

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

ACTION ALERT-CLARY STRIKES AGAIN

State Senator Charlie Clary of Destin has included in the state's budget a proposal to take \$400,000 from state saltwater fishing license fees to fund the Baitfish Pilot Program.

Senator Clary's Baitfish Pilot Program allows special interest to get around the Save Our Sealife Amendment that Florida voters passed overwhelmingly in 1996.

This amendment prohibits the use of nets with more than 500 square feet of mesh area in

inshore Florida waters. Clary's baitfish pilot program gives special permits to seven fishhouses that use plastic tarp nets to catch baitfish.

Call or fax Governor Bush's office and tell him to veto funding in the budget for the Baitfish Pilot Program. Phone (850) 488-4441, or fax (850) 487-0801. Do it NOW! The budget will be signed within the next two weeks.

Remind the Governor he promised to veto the turkeys.

THE CHOCTAWHATCHEE BEACH MOUSE

First installment in *The Endangered Species of South Walton Series*

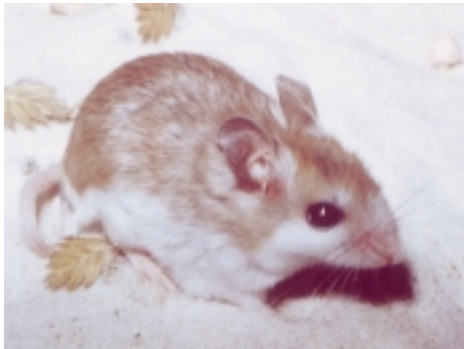
The Choctawhatchee beach mouse is listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Florida. Critical habitat is designated along 12.6 miles of coast in Walton and Bay Counties, including Grayton Beach State Recreation Area and Topsail Hill Preserve in Walton County, Shell Island and the mainland section of St. Andrew State Recreation Area in Bay County.

This is one of several Florida subspecies of oldfield mouse restricted to coastal sand dune ecosystems. These small, light-colored mice burrow and excavate nests within dune sand among sea oats, grasses, herbs and small shrubs. These burrows generally have a main hole and a second hole that is often used to escape a predator at or within the main entrance. Unlike the house mouse, beach mice are not known to live in buildings or frequent garbage sites.

Like many small mammals, the Choctawhatchee beach mouse is an important component of a complex food web. They are omnivores, feeding on both plants and animals. The beach mouse's diet

consists mostly of the seeds and fruits of plants that grow among the dunes, including parts of sea oats, bluestem, dune spurge, evening primrose, oaks, magnolias and Youpon hollies. Their diet frequently includes invertebrates such as beetles.

The Choctawhatchee beach mouse and its relatives have survived thousands of years since barrier islands were formed. The continued existence and recovery of the Choctawhatchee beach mouse depends largely on the conservation of a healthy



dunes ecosystem. A coastal zone development plan that includes dune preservation benefit both landowner and wildlife habitat.

The Choctawhatchee beach mouse, in turn, may be preyed upon by a wide variety of larger mammals, such as foxes, herons, owls and snakes. Feral cats in and adjacent to dwindling beach mouse habitat also contribute to the decline of beach mouse populations. Choctawhatchee beach mice are nocturnal and active at night – and are rarely, if ever, seen by beach visitors.

FRIENDS OF FLORIDA STATE FORESTS, INC.

On March 11, the "Friends of the Florida State Forests." (FFSF) was established as a direct support organization of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The non-profit organization will conduct programs and activities, and raise funds through grants and gifts for support of Florida's state forest and Division of Forestry programs.

Celeste Cobena, Beach to Bay Connection Chair, is a member of the statewide board of directors of FFSF.

Recreation will be one of the main areas of emphasis for the Friends organization. Other activities supported by the FFSF include environmental education, fire prevention, and forest management.

Members of the FFSF will be a part of improving the quality of programs and activities offered on state forest.

For more information, or to become a member of Friends of Florida State Forests, call 267-2227 in Santa Rosa Beach or (850) 488-7246 in Tallahassee.

Or write: Friends of Florida State Forest Inc., Florida Division of Forestry, 3125 Conner Boulevard, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1650.



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

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P. O. Box 1129

Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

- Public Meeting:
Mallory Swamp Rewilding
Wildland Philanthropy
- South Walton Turtle Watch
Season Begins
- Greenway Progress
Continues
- Member Alert -
Senator Clary's Baitfish
Pilot Program



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Newsletter

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BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION, THE SOUTH WALTON COASTAL CONSERVANCY

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