

Vistas

Issue 25: Jan/Feb/Mar 2014

Stronger Together: Parks & Natural Resources Become One



In October 2013, Manatee County's Parks and Recreation Department merged with the Natural Resources Department in order to form the Parks and Natural Resources Department. It's been almost six months since the big change, and we're proud to say that we have discovered that we are stronger together. What does the merger mean for the parks, preserves, and programs you've come to love? Read the article inside to find out more about our plans. *Continued on page three*



Photos clockwise: PNRD staff, Aedan Stockdale, PNRD Staff, Dotty Motta



Vistas Image of the Quarter: *Photographer Dana Reed at Robinson Preserve*



This month's Image of the Quarter was taken by photographer Dana Reed. at the southern end of Robinson Preserve. The photo captures a special glimpse of the site's two newest residents, baby bald eagles who are sitting snug in their nest high up in an Australian pine tree. Our volunteers are keeping a close eye on them to make sure that the eagles remain protected and safe. If you visit the southern side of the preserve, you may find our volunteers with the spotting scope set up to catch a glimpse of the babies. If not, keep an eye on our Facebook page and the Robinson Preserve Facebook page to see updates and more photos.

PNRD Brings New Programs to Conservatory Park

We are excited to announce the expansion of our Department's nature-based programming to include new offerings at Conservatory Park. Located just off of University Parkway, this "hidden gem" has lots to offer and will provide a great setting for exciting **new** programs such as "pioneer storytelling" and "sunset yoga." Thanks to volunteers from our partner organizations including Mary McFate from the Daughters of the American Revolution and yogi Betsy Anderson, we are able to offer these brand new classes as well as some old favorites like Tai Chi and guided nature walks. Keep an eye on our calendar as we expand the offerings and more programs are added to the already planned monthly events. Conservatory Park is open daily from sunrise to sunset, so if you'd like to go check it out on your own we invite you to see this beautiful spot too!



Photo by Aedan Stockdale



Department Merger Brings New Resources, Talents, and Ideas

Did You Know?

Both Natural Resources and Parks and Recreation have their own Facebook pages and will continue to do so. That way, followers can keep up on the parks news and the preserve news in two separate locations and choose what they see.

Parks

www.facebook.com/manateecounty.parksandrecreation

Preserves

www.facebook.com/manatee.natural.resources

It's important to all of us at PNRD that our new Department continues to provide the great services and programs you have grown to love. So whether you're planning on going for a swim at Marble Pool, or a run through Robinson Preserve, the services you know will continue to excel. We are excited to join forces, which have resulted in an expansion of services such as new fitness programs in the preserves, special themed summer camps, and environmental educational offerings in the parks.

Park users will find that many of their favorite locations will be receiving much-needed attention, thanks to a new special focus on local needs. While working within our established budget, we will be endeavoring to replace amenities that are aged and worn, such as batting cages and playgrounds. We are also incorporating the parks into the regularly scheduled volunteer workdays like the ones carried out throughout the County's preserve system. This gives the community an opportunity to support the parks and lend a helping hand to improve our neighborhood recreation areas.

Natural Resources and Parks based news will be provided via *Vistas* Newsletter, while the Recreation Division will maintain their own newsletter for updates on recreational programming and events. You can visit our new combined website at www.mymanatee.org/parks in order to receive the latest news and updates, and to register for pavilions using the Parks' RecTrack system. As we work together, we expand our potential to do great things for the residents and visitors of Manatee County. Stay tuned and watch us grow!



Art by Nezar



Those readers familiar with Manatee County's conservation properties probably already know that the preserves are packed with passive recreational amenities such as hiking, biking, and paddling trails, boardwalks, and observation towers. But what you may not know is that we also offer a host of unique resources just for kids, including educational programming and nature-based play areas, and are working to expand these offerings by building new play spaces and nature centers.

Recently, Manatee County was recognized by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as having not one but five great locations for youth to explore the great outdoors. Duette, Rye, Jiggs Landing, Emerson Point, and Robinson Preserves were all selected to be part of the Florida Youth Conservation Center Network (FYCCN), each serving as a nexus of outdoor activities for children of all ages. These five sites were chosen because they have unique amenities and programs that match the FYCCN's focus of traditional outdoor activities and conservation educational components. Each of these sites will continue to serve as hosts for great programming but will now also be included in the statewide network to share resources, which will allow the County to host new outdoor recreation based programs for youth. Using the FYCCN's resources, County staff will be trained to offer archery programs and will also be able to seek help from FYCCN volunteers to provide kid friendly volunteer-led kayak classes and workshops.

FYCCN is a new movement that is working to reconnect Florida's youth with traditional outdoor activities and create the next generation that cares about fish and wildlife resources. The nation's children are spending an increasing number of hours connected to technology ranging from smartphones to internet to video games, in some cases spending as much as 8 hours a day "plugged in." While it is important to have children who can utilize and navigate modern technology, it is also vital that they value the natural world and understand their connection to it. FYCCN aims to help re-introduce the natural world to the state's youth by utilizing traditional activities such as fishing, wildlife viewing, canoeing and kayaking, archery, and hunting to do so.

At a time when funding is limited, Manatee County's PNRD is working diligently to establish partnerships such as this one with FYCCN to not only enhance programming but to also share our own successes, helping other agencies and providing our staff with the opportunity to learn as well. We look forward to expanding our services through this partnership and working with the County's youth to share the great outdoors.

Preserves Recognized As Florida Youth Conservation Centers





The union of two Departments means good news for volunteers: now there's even more places to explore and lend a helping hand! With over 50 parks and 30,000 acres of natural land, there are lots of great places that could use a little volunteer love. And if you have a group of people, you can make a firm commitment to taking an active role in the health of these beautiful community locations through the new Adopt a Park Program.

The Adopt a Park program is more than just adopting a park. Through it your group can select to care for anything from a trail to a flower bed, to a section of beach or a park or preserve. The minimum commitment for the program is a quarterly workday, but if your group wants to check on the site more frequently that is welcome too. Groups who adopt a park will receive a certificate and special recognition in our Vistas Newsletter and on our Facebook pages and special recognition signage on the site after one year.

Originally intended for businesses, youth organizations, and school groups, families can participate in Adopt a Park too! Consider choosing a spot that has a special meaning to your family and making it a tradition to help out there during reunions, birthdays, and other holidays.

To Adopt a Park in your neighborhood, please contact Melissa at melissa.nell@mymanatee.org

Adopt a Park Program Means New Places and New Ways to Help

New Little Free Libraries Come to Manatee County Parks



If you happen to stop by Greenbrook Park or Bennett Park, you will notice a new feature in both locations. Thanks to the students at Nolan Middle School, each of these locations now has a brand new Little Free Library! The students designed, built, and installed the libraries as part of their Construction Challenge Team's assignment. They even selected different sites for each library, carefully considering possible users and traffic patterns to each location.



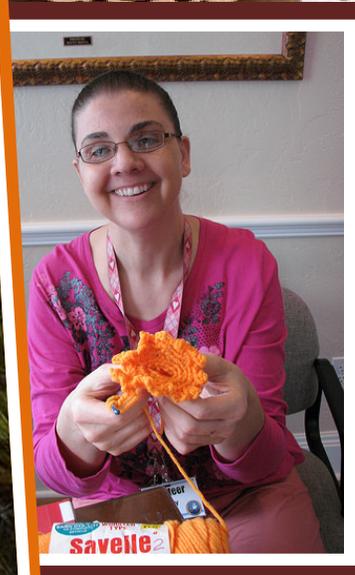
The middle school students began this project in November, and worked hard to create well built, creative libraries for each site. We wish them good luck at their competition and extend our thanks for their fantastic work creating these new resources. Great job students!

YOUR group can donate a Little Free Library too! We're always looking for volunteers who would like to help build a new library to install in a park or preserve. To learn more, please contact Melissa at Melissa.nell@mymanatee.org. You can also drop off your spare books at the library any time- there's no theme, just the idea of "Take one, Leave one;" if you take a book please leave one at some point for others to enjoy. PNRD is partnering with the Manatee County Library system to add books when necessary, but we hope that the community will also use these libraries as a way to recycle and share used books with others.



Manatee County's Conservation Lands and YOU!

nature



You never know who you might see in Manatee County's preserves. Check out the images above and to the left to see the exciting happenings within *your* conservation lands:

Photos left to right:

1. Staff and volunteers prepare to flush sparrows into mist nets for bird banding and tracking during the first annual Sparrow Drive at Duette Preserve in January.
2. A volunteers shows off her crochet coral in December preparing for the Artificial Crochet Coral Reef exhibit at the 2014 Manatee County Fair.
3. Incredible "nature zen drawings" created during December's Nature Journaling art class



Manatee County Parks & Natural Resources Department

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FREE Monthly Eco-Events!

Be a part of our newsletter! We're looking for photos that illustrate the spirit of our preserves. Submit a photo in JPG format to Melissa.nell@mymanatee.org and *your* photograph might be featured in an upcoming issue of *Vistas*!

PLEASE NOTE: Manatee County cannot return any photographs submitted to it. Submission of photographs or other images constitutes representation that the person making the submission has the legal authority to make the submission, and that Manatee County is granted permission to use the photographs or images without compensation in any of its print or web-based productions, including image databases and marketing materials. The County will make every effort to credit the artist, owner or photographer in such materials. Manatee County will not sell or market any individual image to the general public.

FREE Paddle Manatee Guide

This FREE publication features maps of the County's blueways, GPS coordinates, paddle tips, and much more. For a FREE copy, please call 941-748-4501 ext. 6039.

Wildlife Issues

Please report any sightings of injured or deceased wildlife!

For Emerson Point, Rye, Leffis Key, Robinson, and Riverview Pointe preserves call: 941-745-3723

For Duette Preserve call: 941-776-2295

Please leave a message if you are not able to reach a Ranger. Thank you!