

NATIVE NEWS

The Volunteer Newsletter of Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management's Environmental Lands Division.



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Amazing Growth in the Last Five Years

Laura Averill, Grace Gomez, Kristin O'Meara and Lynn Smith, Environmental Lands Division Administrative Team

In the past five years, Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management's Environmental Lands Division (ELD) volunteers contributed over 65,000 hours. ELD volunteers work with the public, educate and train citizens, and protect remnants of wild Florida in the state's most densely populated county.

The ELD Volunteer Program provides an invaluable service to the Division by attracting a dependable volunteer corps of adults and young people. It also leverages ever-diminishing public funds for Pinellas County government in an efficient and responsible manner of stewardship. The 400+ volunteers are active in every aspect of the ELD to support its mission of environmental leadership. They conduct surveys of flora and fauna, clean up trash and debris, and plant and restore degraded wildlife habitat. Some remove non-native vegetation while others prepare herbarium specimens. ELD volunteers lead educational hikes and canoe trips. They research questions associated with special species and ecosystems. Many help with the maintenance of firebreaks, fence-lines, signs, and buildings. Helpful volunteers also assist with clerical duties in our offices. They act as museum docents, camp counselors, amateur archaeologists, and roaming naturalists. Without the commitment of our irreplaceable volunteer corps, many of the ELD's recent successes would have been nearly impossible achievements in a time of pressing budget reductions.

Notably, the ELD Volunteer Program remains the fastest-growing section of volunteerism in Pinellas County government. The County currently boasts 1900 long-term volunteers. Over 25% (482) donate time, energy, and creative drive specifically to the ELD. In FY02, the ELD Volunteer Program had 63 adults attend orientation. These long-term volunteers contributed 4343 hours. By comparison, at the end of FY07, the number more than doubled to 154 new, long-term volunteers. The hours they contributed almost quadrupled to 16,424. Over the past five years, all ELD volunteers contributed 69,925 hours – a total equivalent to more than 33 full-time positions! At the current value of \$18.77 an hour, a standard of value assigned by The Independent Sector, the ELD volunteer corps contributed \$1,312,492 to conserve local wildlife and ecology.

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Planning for the Years Ahead!

H. Bruce Rinker, Ph.D., Environmental Lands Division Director



H. Bruce Rinker, Ph.D.

The Division is in the middle of its process of strategic planning. According to Wikipedia, strategic planning is an organization's way of defining its direction and then making decisions about the allocation of resources to pursue this strategy, including its capital and people. Our strategic plan will be governed by the *County's Comprehensive Plan*, Preserve Ordinance 2-6, BOCC-approved management plans, and other important documents; but it will spell out a general work schedule for accomplishing the Division's mission. In a sense, it will be a map for a common future – for staff, volunteers, residents, and visitors. Without this all-important map, the Division's work becomes reactionary or defensive rather than progressive and self-directed.

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Pulitzer-prize winning scientist and humanist Rene Dubos once wrote, "Think globally, but act locally." With our growing concerns about global climate change, extinction and pollutants, the ELD volunteers have a rich opportunity to make a difference for their local environment. Salt marshes, mangroves, and large seagrass beds surround Weedon Island Preserve. Brooker Creek Preserve boasts impressive forested wetlands, sandhills, and pine flatwoods. We also manage Shell Key Preserve, a barrier island system where volunteers take part in surveys on State-listed shorebirds. Ozona Management Area volunteers remove invasive air potatoes. Volunteers also regularly observe a native bird rookery in Mobbly Bayou Preserve while others pick up trash in the award-winning Allen's Creek Management Area. Volunteers monitor fence lines around the Lake Tarpon NE Management Area, a remnant old-growth forest highly valued for its rarity. Where else can a person work in so many diverse ecosystems? Since the ELD has properties and projects countywide in research, land management, education, operations, and administration, the number of volunteer opportunities available is enormously promising, accounting for the rapid rise of the ELD volunteer corps.

During the past five years, the ELD attracted volunteers from Pasco, Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. We encourage all volunteers to become involved as time allows. The opportunity to express love for the environment and to make such a tangible difference is what draws volunteers to ELD. We appreciate volunteers balancing our needs with their families, work, and school responsibilities.

Over the past five years, the ELD Volunteer Program has proudly held the standard for all volunteer programs in Pinellas County government. We were instrumental in developing the County's Volunteer Services Program (VSP) system for capturing such a high number of projects and volunteer hours. This system is fashioned after a Microsoft Access® database developed by the ELD. The ELD's Volunteer Site Coordinator Guide served as the model for the current Pinellas County Volunteer Site Coordinator Manual. Additionally, forms developed by the ELD were incorporated into the current countywide volunteer program. Our volunteer recognitions and awards are commensurate with the ELD's burgeoning volunteer efforts.

Since its inception in 1998, the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management's Environmental Lands Division Volunteer Program has been dramatically successful in serving the Division's mission and enhancing our visitor's experience. The ELD program, especially its volunteer efforts, is the benchmark for communities throughout the region that wish to make a difference for the environment for generations to come.

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The process is an essential, but not pain-free one for the Division as we prepare our budget for the upcoming fiscal year that begins on 1 October. It requires some tough decision-making in a climate of statewide budget reductions, part of an overall national climate toward public spending that will undoubtedly shape our day-to-day activities. However, the strategic plan should be able to stand on its own merits, regardless of the political climate, to guide us through the next five years and beyond.

An organization's strategic plan is not a crystal ball. It is, however, a tool for excellence or – to mix metaphors – a cornerstone for an organization's long-term stability. More information will follow as we complete our draft of the strategic plan. In the meantime, please let me know if you have questions or comments.

Volunteer Spotlight: Jamie Fridy

Holly Shiralipour, BCPEEC Manager



Jamie Fridy became a volunteer management intern last September at the Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center. She was required to complete an internship for her double major in Environmental Science and Policy and Studio Art at the University of South Florida. Jamie amazed us with her creative talents in constructing beautiful centerpieces for Center functions. She was instrumental in helping to plan the "Brooker Creek Preserve-Recollections Shared" event that included conducting oral history interviews. She is still conducting interviews and condensing them into short segments. Jamie also researched environmentally-friendly personal care products and prepared a Cypress Swamp Café presentation for the public. We owe many thanks to Jamie and congratulate her on her graduation from USF in December 2007!

Jamie Fridy, BCPEEC's volunteer management intern from USF.

Adaptive Management Supports Sound Stewardship

Steven J. Harper, Ph.D., Ecological Services Program Coordinator

As most volunteers know, a major reorganization recently took place within the Environmental Lands Division. Restructuring efforts included the merger of two programs, namely Research and Land Management, into one new program called Ecological Services. While staff and volunteers in these programs historically worked together closely, the merger resulted in a single team and provided an opportunity to focus our efforts.

What are our responsibilities? We manage and protect the publicly-owned natural resources under our care. This is a difficult task in the face of reduced staffing and funding levels, but we all recognize the need to remain diligently focused on conserving these unique natural areas, especially in a densely populated region. How do we accomplish sound stewardship given the inherent complexity of natural systems and the wide range of pressures placed upon them? We have formally adopted the use of “adaptive management” as our central strategy. Adaptive management is an approach where ecological monitoring and resource management practices are conducted hand-in-hand in an attempt to optimally achieve conservation goals. Sometimes characterized as “learning



Volunteer Ty Miramonti admires a very old cypress tree found in Lake Tarpon NE Management Area, an ecologically unique area currently conserved using adaptive management.

by doing,” adaptive management has been embraced by federal and state agencies as well as by major conservation groups. It recognizes and rewards learning through a variety of means, including common sense, practical experience, ecological surveys, and scientific experiments. It is intended to be flexible (hence the term “adaptive”) such that new management techniques can and should be evaluated for their utility. Adaptive management also is iterative; information gained through, for example, long-term monitoring surveys can and should be used to improve existing management techniques such as exotic vegetation control, fire management, and ecological restoration. This approach attempts to optimize the management of complex natural systems in that it embraces uncertainty as a way of building greater understanding.

How do volunteers fit into an adaptive management approach? Strong partnerships are essential for adaptive management to work, which includes the interactions among managers, scientists, and volunteers. While always valued, the contributions of volunteers become even more important in this time of reduced budgets. We simply don’t have the staff

or resources to do everything required, and thus rely on volunteers to help with the “heavy lifting.” So what does this all mean for our program? We will continue to do active management activities using best management practices, but these will be supported by defensible monitoring activities. Similarly, we will continue to monitor our natural resources, but these activities will be directed explicitly towards evaluating and supporting management practices. In other words, we will continue to manage actively the diverse ecosystems under our care as we strive to learn more about them so that we may continue to improve our conservation practices over time. We’re counting on volunteers to help us with these efforts every step of the way.

Volunteers Make a Difference at Weedon Island Preserve

Phyllis Kolianos, WIPCNHC Manager



Volunteers investigate looter pits prior to filling in the holes.

In November 2007, thirty-five volunteers assisted with a public archaeology project at Weedon Island Preserve. This intensive 3-day project investigated and restored the Shoreline Midden (8Pi11569) site in collaboration with the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN) as part of a grant commitment partially funded through the State Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources.

Some 250 sandbags were transported to the site by the Environmental Lands Division pontoon boat and, due to low tides, transferred to the site on Old Tampa Bay by a flat-bottomed boat. It took numerous trips to shuttle both the sandbags and volunteers to site using this one boat. Four major looter holes were cleaned, screened, and profiled prior



Volunteers screen artifacts during a public archaeology project.

to filling in with the sand from the sandbags and previously removed shell fill.

This was a major effort to restore some of the 21 looter holes that pit this ancient shell mound. Artifacts gathered from the disturbed and undisturbed profiles of the investigated looter holes will be analyzed and reported in the required State report to the Bureau of Archaeological Research. Accurate latitude and longitude coordinates were taken of the looter holes using a global positioning system (GPS). Pinellas County Communications Department, who spent one day recording much of the work, and our own staff captured this achievement through numerous photographs and videos.

Since this project is an example of not only a public archaeology project, but a land restoration management tool, it will be presented at professional conferences and in publications over the next year or so.

3rd Annual Volunteer Fire Circle

Phyllis Kolianos, WIPCNHC Manager

Thirty-four volunteers and ELD staff gathered on December 7, 2007 for the 3rd Annual Volunteer Fire Circle, an informal evening of food and fun at the Weedon Island Preserve. Instead of a night hike this year, staff prepared a video to music of all the great events held at the Preserve for the past year. Traditional s'mores were cooked as the fire flickered and our ELD Operations Manager, Keith Thompson, spun a memorable tale that kept the group entertained.



Lanterns light up the tables as volunteers enjoy the barbecue.

The Fire Circle was one of several Eagle Scout projects completed over the past few years at the Preserve. This project involved building a stage and nine raised benches around a large concrete ring in an open sand area behind the Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center. The Fire Circle also provides an additional outdoor classroom for programs.



Volunteer Chris Hardy, on right, and her sister, Carolyn, share the fun of the Fire Circle.

Volunteer Holiday Brunch

BCPEEC Staff

On Sunday, December 2, 2007, the staff at Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center (BCPEEC) invited our volunteers to join us in the auditorium for a Holiday Brunch. This event was planned as a small token of appreciation. It was a chance for the staff to thank personally volunteers for their contributions to the Center. In addition, it provided an opportunity to gather and share good food and camaraderie. For many, it was an opportunity to meet others who are equally enthusiastic about their love of nature, the outdoors, and especially Brooker Creek Preserve.

Invitees arrived and leisurely mingled before enjoying the holiday fare. Later, Holly Shiralipour, BCPEEC's manager, asked everyone for introductions. With much levity we all learned something new and surprising about each other. This fun exercise confirmed that we have a wonderful, talented group of volunteers! Our volunteers are the best! Holly reported on successful recent events at the Center. One event was "Brooker Creek Preserve-Recollections Shared" held on October 13, 2007. Co-sponsored in conjunction with the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, Inc., this program encouraged participants to share memories and photographs about living in this area. Some attendees came back to participate in a newly launched oral history project aimed at showcasing and preserving their individual memories. Additionally, Holly made several announcements regarding events that are being planned for 2008. The afternoon ended with everyone wishing each other a happy, healthy and safe holiday season.



BCPEEC volunteers at our Holiday Brunch, (l to r) Alice Collins, Aziz Shiralipour, Thurber Roff, Isobel Sapp, and Susan Wolf.

The Vultures are Coming

Jim McGinity, BCPEEC Sr. Environmental Specialist

The newest exhibit in the works at the Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center focuses on one of our least appreciated animals - vultures. This exhibit includes graphic panels, a life-sized vulture sculpture and animated videos of a black and turkey vulture talking about their day. A special surprise awaits those who look closely at the exhibit's sculpture. This exhibit opens to the public in early April 2008.



Two Turkey Vultures ([Cathartes aura](#)) picking at the remains of a White-tailed Deer ([Odocoileus virginianus](#)).

First Scout Day a Success

Jim McGinity, BCPEEC Sr. Environmental Specialist



Holly Shiralipour, manager of BCPEEC, leading Boy Scouts in an investigation of a watershed contour map.

On Saturday, December 15, 2007, the education section of the Environmental Lands Division held its first badge workshop day for 43 local Boy Scouts. The two badges offered were "Archaeology" and "Soil & Water Conservation." The morning was devoted to archaeology and included a number of engaging, hands-on activities. The boys made simple clay pots, conducted a small, simulated dig and sifted through "trash" to get a feel for how archaeologists learn about cultures.

During the "Soil & Water Conservation" workshop in the afternoon, scouts were divided into four groups. The groups rotated through stations that focused on erosion, different types of soils, the hydrologic cycle and watersheds. A fun



Boy Scouts at BCPEEC working on a mock archaeological dig as part of the requirements for the "Archaeology" badge.

Congratulations to the Graduates

April Frederick, BCPEEC Sr. Environmental Specialist

This fall marked the completion of the first training session for Hike Guides at the Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center. Volunteers interested in becoming Hike Guides and Roaming Naturalists attended several classroom sessions to help them develop new skills and discover key strategies for interpreting the natural wonders of the Preserve to the public. Once they completed the classroom workshops, trainees were required to “shadow” hikes led by staff and existing hike guides to learn how to put their new skills into practice.

After they completed the last of the requirements, these new recruits jumped right in to help. Volunteers now conduct all regular Saturday guided hikes. Roaming naturalists are engaging visitors along the trails. This “graduating class” included Alice Collins, Jim Crawford, Janel Fontane, Ty Miramonti, Gary and Sheree Scheuer, Don Shepherd, and Mark and Nancy Yeager. If you are interested in becoming a part of this “wild” volunteer group, contact April Frederick for more information on the next training session.

What’s So Special about 32?

H. Bruce Rinker, Ph.D., Environmental Lands Division Director

Actress Angelina Jolie may be 32 years old – or was at some point – and RAF squadron leader Jack Blair was 32 when he died in the Netherlands during WWII. The nationally-syndicated “Arthur Smith Show” ran for 32 consecutive years on television, including guests such as Johnny Cash and Richard Nixon, before it aired its last broadcast in 1982. The answer to the ultimate question about life, the universe, and everything à la Douglas Adams’ popular book, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, was not 32, but 42.

These are not the reasons, however, why 32 is so special.

The number, 32, is the relative per capita consumption rate of the estimated one billion people who live in developed countries. That is, relative to the 5.5 billion *other* people who constitute the developing world. Their relative per capita consumption rate is mostly down to 1!

You can read a rather jarring article about all this in a *New York Times* op-ed piece by Dr. Jared Diamond, professor of geography at the University of California in Los Angeles, at www.nytimes.com/2008/01/02/opinion/02diamond.html.

If India, China, and the whole developing world were suddenly to catch up with our high-consumption lifestyles in North America, Western Europe, Japan, and Australia, it would be as if the world population ballooned to 72 billion people. And who’s crazy enough to think that this ole’ world can support 72 billion people? That’s billion... with a B! B is also the first letter for words such as bilge water, biocide, bipartisan, breakdown, and Byzantine – words that seem to describe various aspects of our current global crises, all human-caused crises that have our burgeoning population and increasingly invasive technologies as their ultimate causes.

The letter, B, is also the first letter for such words as baloney, bluff, boondoggle, bugaboo, and bunk. These words figure notably among skeptics whose “head in the sand” attitude toward issues such as global climate change, acid precipitation, habitat fragmentation, and species extinction are simply exasperating for

us ecologists and environmental educators. We see the evidence firsthand every day in our professional lives. I, for one, am no longer interested in endless debate about their reality. Gravity works, living things evolve, natural resources are finite, and global climate change is NOW. It’s time for lasting solutions.

How about a look at just one tiny resource issue for us here in Pinellas County? Water. In particular, water in our toilets.

Toilets are the leading cause of household water leaks. The average toilet (that is, the older 5.5 gallon flush toilet) uses 13,000 gallons of fresh water per year. For this reason, the 1.6-gallon ultra-low flush toilets – despite their occasional fussy nature – are now required on new construction nationwide.

Wow 5.5 gallons per flush! As the most densely populated county in Florida, Pinellas County has about 1 million residents. Let’s assume that every person flushes at least once per day. That’s 5.5 million gallons of water literally going down the drain, not including water for lawns, water for car washes, water for laundry and dishes, and of course water for drinking. Add to this the water used by industry, businesses, municipalities, golf courses, and all the accoutrements of lifestyles in developed countries – and the human demand on fresh water as one of the world’s natural resources is GIGANTIC!

So let’s begin to use some “C” terminology such as common sense, conserve, cash, catalyst, and change:

It’s only common sense to conserve; to be a catalyst for change; to take a chance that, ultimately, this will save us cash, curb our appetites, and create a community of wise citizens. It begins with choice and a sense of personal conviction. And that’s COOL in a climate of global warming!

Pinellas County Government TV Launches New Name in the New Year: PCC-TV

Pinellas County Communications Department

Pinellas County's government access television station now has a new name to reflect the changing times and focus of connecting citizens with government: Pinellas County Connection Television, call letters PCC-TV. With the naming comes two new television programs, *Inside Pinellas Today* and *Inside Pinellas This Week*, delivering current headlines and features about Pinellas County government and the events and people making news around the county. This change reflects not only the name, but the significant changes local cable providers made to television channel lineups that affected all government and education channels in Tampa Bay. PCC-TV is found on Bright House Networks Channel 622, Knology Channel 18 and, coming later this year, on Verizon Channel 44.

Continuing its more-than-a-decade-long programming, the newly named PCC-TV presents gavel-to-gavel coverage of Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) meetings and work sessions, monthly BCC public hearings and monthly Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) public hearings. Commission meetings are replayed twice and streamed live on the Internet at www.pinellascounty.org/media/default.htm. In addition, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Pinellas Planning Council (PPC) and Tourist Development Council (TDC) meetings and hearings are aired live. During times of local emergency, PCC-TV brings viewers live updates from the Pinellas County Emergency Operations Center. For planning before storms, award-winning informational shows, like *Shuttering Your Home*, provide valuable step-by-step instructions to residents preparing for a hurricane.

When citizens select PCC-TV on their remotes, they will consistently find interesting and relevant localized programming. For a complete television program lineup of PCC-TV, please visit www.pinellascounty.org/tv_18.htm.



BRIGHT HOUSE 622 · KNOLOGY 18 · VERIZON 44

Welcome our New Long-term Volunteers!

Catherine S. Flegel, ELD Administrative Projects Coordinator

Join us in welcoming 11 new long-term volunteers to our ELD family. This cohort represents volunteers who, from October 1, 2007 to February 7, 2008, successfully completed Pinellas County Volunteer Services' orientation program. Their contributions, as well those of established volunteers, are vital to the longevity of our programs. We couldn't do it without you!

Jennifer D'Elia – Shell Key Preserve volunteer
James Bennett – BCPEEC volunteer
Moris Cabezas – BCPEEC volunteer
Katie Fisk – BCPEEC volunteer
Jamie Fridy – BCPEEC volunteer
Barbara Getz – BCPEEC volunteer

Quentin McAfee – BCPEEC volunteer
Paul Wagner – BCPEEC volunteer
Lou Weischedel – BCPEEC volunteer
Michele Bakacs – WIPCNHC volunteer
Ray Smith – Ozona volunteer

Please refer any friends who may wish to volunteer with us to call (727) 453-6900.





Children from Frontier Elementary School gather around the spirit vessel as volunteer Mimi Searle tells them about the pictures.

Docents Needed at Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center

Are you interested in ecology or archaeology? Do you like interacting with the people? How about becoming a docent at Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center? The new exhibit gallery is now open and we need volunteers to show our visitors around! Docent responsibilities include answering questions about the Center, programs or special events at the information desk, providing guided tours of the facilities, handling program registrations, monitoring the Division's radio frequency, interpreting the cultural and natural history of the Preserve for visitors in the exhibit gallery, assisting visitors with finding information in the resource center, or handling gift shop sales. Training will be provided for any of the above tasks.

If you have good communication skills and a positive attitude, this position is for you. A minimum commitment to a three-hour shift at least once a month is requested. For more information on becoming a docent, please call the Center at (727) 453-6500.



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If you are **interested** in **volunteering** at one of the **Preserves**, please contact **(727) 453-6900** for more information.

