



Not blind opposition to progress, but opposition to blind progress

DEC/2020 JAN/2021

**PROGRAM FOR JANUARY 2021**

**What:** General Meeting ( ZOOM Meeting)  
**When:** Thursday, Jan 14, 2021 7:00 PM  
**Where:** This will be a ZOOM meeting  
Members will be notified by email on how to connect  
**Speaker:** Joseph Bonasia  
**Topic:** Rights of Nature

Joseph Bonasia is Southwest Florida’s (SWFL) Regional Director for the Florida Rights of Nature Network and is also the Education Director for Lee County Rights of Nature. He is a founding board member of the SWFL RESET Center, a consensus-building hub inspiring collaborative actions to reset human impacts on global warming and regional ecosystems.



Education Director for the Fort Myers chapter of Citizens’ Climate Lobby, he also serves as legislative liaison to his member of Congress. As a member of the Sierra Club Calusa Group, he organized the first electric vehicle “see-and-ride” showcase at the National Landmark Edison and Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers for National Drive Electric Week 2019. As a retired teacher he brings over 30 years of teaching experience to his presentations.

Mr. Bonasia's presentation will explain why recognizing Rights of Nature is an idea whose time has come. He will discuss the passing of the historic Right to Clean Water / Rights of Nature (RTCW/RON) Charter Amendment in Orange County, why such laws are our best means of protecting the environment and securing human rights to clean air, clean water, and ecosystems, and how to advance RTCW /RON initiatives in SWFL, including Sarasota and Manatee Counties.

**A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR OF MANATEE-SARASOTA GROUP**

Hello Sierra Club Members and Supporters:

I hope this message finds you doing well and staying safe. Due to the continuing coronavirus pandemic, the current suspension of in-person meetings, outings and public events has been extended through February 28, 2020. Members will be notified of any changes or updates regarding when our Group will be able to resume in-person meetings, schedule outings and take part in public events. Typically in December, the Manatee Sarasota Sierra Club Group holds our annual holiday potluck and silent auction. This year because of the pandemic, we will not be able to hold our holiday get-together.

Until in-person meetings resume, the Manatee-Sarasota Group will hold general membership meetings online on the second Thursday of the month using ZOOM. Please join us for our next General meeting (via ZOOM) on Thursday, January 14, 2021 at 7 pm. (See Program Description above). Look for emails containing instructions and a link on how to sign up.

I would like to mention briefly the November 3 election. While we may not have seen the environmentally conscientious candidates elected locally in Sarasota or Manatee County or statewide as we may have hoped; Joe Biden is President-Elect, and that is promising for the environment on a national level and for the health of Americans. Moving ahead, we must hold the next administration accountable on its promises made regarding our environment. Also, we must continue to cultivate local and statewide candidates that will be environmental champions and we must work hard to get them elected.

Our Group is preparing for our own Annual Executive Committee election. Anyone looking to become more active in the Manatee Sarasota Sierra Club Group and potentially interested in becoming a member of our Group's Executive Committee; please reach out to me or any other member of our Executive Committee.

Finally, I want to wish everyone Happy Holidays! Please stay healthy, safe and enjoy the holiday season!

Warmest regards,

Krista Lohr, Chair, Manatee Sarasota Sierra Club Group



## **Manatee County Conservation Committee**

The Manatee Conservation Committee has no scheduled meetings. You may contact Don Croce (Committee Chair) at [donaldcroce@gmail.com](mailto:donaldcroce@gmail.com), 435-726-0994 for information about the times and venues for future meetings and agenda. Alternatively, you may view the M-S Group's [Meetup](#) Site for scheduling information concerning the Committee. Also, if you'd like to receive an occasional email on issues the Committee is following please contact Don as indicated above.

## **Sarasota Conservation Committee, Dec 20-Jan 21**

The Sarasota County Conservation Committee will meet via ZOOM on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 and on Tuesday February 16, 2021 at 6:30 PM. Call or text Gayle Reynolds at 941-587-9797 for agenda issues.

1) Update: 2018C, proposed Super Hamlet at Fruitville and Verna Rd, rezone petition CPA to increase density and provide county sewer lines, Citizen Initiated Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) to remove Hamlet designation on 6,000 acres, hearing/schedule, Citizen-initiated CPA to remove Hamlet designation on 6,000 acres, hearing/schedule, 2) Update on future plans for the Quad properties, 3) Sarasota County Redistricting update and hearing, 4) CPA to address the need for updated flood plain mapping and proposal for habitat and corridor mapping update county wide, 5) Hi Hat Ranch CPA to increase density 6 fold on 1000 acres on Fruitville Rd and the need for wildlife underpasses, 6) Bobby Jones, Conservation Foundation plan update, and 7) Toll Roads to Nowhere and MCORE scheduled meetings, and, 8) Kampachi fish farm and EPA permit, 9) Three hotel proposals on Siesta Key, affecting changes to the UDC county wide, and 10) High Hat Ranch development, rezoning 10,000 acres on east Fruitville Rd. Contact Gayle Reynolds at 941-587-9797, or by email at [greynoldsdesign@gmail.com](mailto:greynoldsdesign@gmail.com) with questions or to inquire about bringing a conservation issue to the committee.

### **2020 Executive Committee**

Group Chair: Krista Lohr 941-302-0610

[Kristalohr1975@gmail.com](mailto:Kristalohr1975@gmail.com)

Group Vice-Chair:

Gerry Swormstedt 941-366-9596

[gswormstedt204@comcast.net](mailto:gswormstedt204@comcast.net)

Secretary: Cathy Page 941-795-8973,

[pagecathy781@gmail.com](mailto:pagecathy781@gmail.com)

Manatee Conservation Committee Chair:

Don Croce, [donaldcroce@gmail.com](mailto:donaldcroce@gmail.com)

Sarasota Conservation Committee Chair:

Gayle Reynolds 941-587-9797

[greynoldsdesign@gmail.com](mailto:greynoldsdesign@gmail.com)

Programs: Krista Lohr (Acting),

Outreach/Tabling: Open

Political: Krista Lohr (Acting)

Membership: Open

Hospitality: Open

Publicity: Gerlinde Kohl 941-474-4712,

[kohlgerlinde@gmail.com](mailto:kohlgerlinde@gmail.com)

Treasurer: Bob Fellman 973-689-5556,

[rtf082446@Hotmail.com](mailto:rtf082446@Hotmail.com)

Fundraising: Gerry Swormstedt (Acting)

Newsletter Editor:

Bob Fellman, (Acting) 973-689-5556,

[rtf082446@Hotmail.com](mailto:rtf082446@Hotmail.com)

Ready for 100 Co-Organizer: Lynn Nilssen,

[Lynnsierra@nilssen.us](mailto:Lynnsierra@nilssen.us)

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### **Appointed Committees and Special Projects**

Outings: Marsha Wikle 740-352-5021

[Mw121150@gmail.com](mailto:Mw121150@gmail.com)

ICO Chair: Sarah Mitchell 941-725-1568,

[mitchell8manatee@yahoo.com](mailto:mitchell8manatee@yahoo.com)

Web Master: Don Croce,

[donaldcroce@gmail.com](mailto:donaldcroce@gmail.com)

Website:

<http://sierraclub.org/florida/manatee-sarasota>

Mailing Address: M-S Group, Sierra Club

P.O. BOX 3485, Sarasota, FL 34236-3485

Executive Committee meetings are held bimonthly. For dates and time contact Krista Lohr, Group Chair.

### **Boca Sierra Vol. XXIV Issue 6**

This newsletter is published by the Manatee-Sarasota Group of the Florida Chapter of the Sierra Club. We inform members and interested individuals about local activities and national environmental issues. The Boca Sierra is now available online. Emailed notices identifying the availability of the online Newsletter will be sent to subscribers, but hard-copy versions through the mail will no longer be sent.

# Outings:

January 2021



## **NATIONAL SUSPENSION OF OUTINGS CONTINUES INTO WINTER 2021**

Local outings leaders have received word that outings are suspended through the end of February 2021. Nevertheless I invite you to visit the preserves website for whichever county you live in or are near to. If you've seen all Sarasota and Manatee have to offer, check out Charlotte or Hillsborough Counties. Most have downloadable pamphlets or maps. Send me anything you think is worth an outing in the future [mw121150@gmail.com](mailto:mw121150@gmail.com) Marsha Wikle, Outings Chair.

### **"THE GROUND IS THE COMMON GROUND"**

Manatee Referendum Passes with 71% of a record vote

Manatee voters resoundingly approved a referendum on conservation land acquisition with 71% of the vote on November 3, with overwhelming majorities in every precinct in every district. Manatee has now joined over 25 Florida counties with some form of tax to fund a conservation program. Voters in Volusia and Lee counties also approved extensions of their land conservation programs in this election.

What happens next? The referendum was put on the ballot to show county commissioners how many Manatee voters supported a 0.15 mil property tax increase to build a fund dedicated to land acquisition and to purchase \$50 million in bonds. County staff will bring an enabling ordinance to the BOCC for approval. Three newly-elected commissioners will join four sitting commissioners to recommend the county tax assessor add the millage increase to property tax bills in the next billing cycle. County staff in the Department of Parks and Natural Resources will examine maps showing current public land and undeveloped parcels within the county. Parcels will be selected for further examination based on criteria such as proximity to water, wildlife habitat attributes and access. The Environmental Lands Management and Acquisition Committee (ELMAC), a voluntary citizens advisory committee whose members are appointed by commissioners, will review parcels proposed by county staff, forwarding their recommendations to the county commission for consideration. There are currently open seats on ELMAC and the application is available on the Manatee County website.

Manatee County last considered a referendum in 2004, when it failed by a small margin of votes. Members of the Manatee Fish & Game Association, Merrie Lynn Parker and Dick Eckenrod, met with Marsha Wikle, local Sierra Club Outings Chair, in the fall of 2018 to strategize a new referendum. This initial committee expanded with the expertise of Christine Johnson, President, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, and Wil Abberger, Director of Conservation Finance, Trust for Public Land. \$65,000 was raised locally for a public education campaign utilizing direct mail and social media in the time of COVID.

Florida counties average 33% of their land base set aside for conservation. Manatee County has about 13% in conservation land, including several wonderful and popular preserves. As an outings leader, I include naturalist-led tours of Emerson Point and Robinson Preserve in our outings program. We'll be watching as this new program progresses.

Members of Sierra are encouraged to follow the process and help ensure that the agreed upon referendum is implemented as defined in the ballot language:

#### **WATER QUALITY PROTECTION, FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT PRESERVATION, AND PARK AD VALOREM TAX AND BONDS**

"To finance the acquisition, improvement, and management of land to protect drinking water sources and water quality, preserve fish and wildlife habitat, prevent stormwater run-off pollution, and provide parks, shall Manatee County levy an additional 0.15 mill ad valorem tax and issue general obligation bonds in a total principal amount not exceeding \$50,000,000, maturing within 20 years, bearing interest not exceeding the legal rate, payable from such ad valorem taxes, with annual public audits."

By Marsha Wikle and Merrie Lynn Parker

## **BACK TO THE FUTURE**

Do we really want to close out 2020 with a review of 2020? It would seem to be a more (mentally) healthy approach not to look back, but instead look ahead. Ahead to a new presidential administration that recognizes the urgent need for a coordinated response to the pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis. Ahead to a new approach to environmental injustices that have served as tinder for the explosion of social injustice across our country. Ahead to a new initiative towards smart growth in Sarasota and Manatee counties and the quality of our water is only surpassed by the cleanliness of our air.

Okay, that last point is mostly untrue, but it's important to stay focused and keep pushing to make it a reality.

This year has been a double blind, placebo controlled study mother nature has been conducting to school us on the importance of recognizing the intricate relationship between the earth's environment and all its creatures sharing it. But, the message is not getting through.

Despite (1) such massive biodiversity loss it's referred to as the 6th mass extinction, (2) global warming to the point of melting the polar ice caps, (3) deforestation and agricultural practices that turn land into deserts, (4) food waste piling up while many people live with food insecurity, (5) plastic pollution expanding throughout the food chain and into our own bodies, and (6) air pollution killing as many as 7 million people a year, **the biggest challenge we face in dealing with environmental challenges is poor governance.**

And yet, in our own counties and state, when presented with an opportunity to install new environmentally-focused political appointees, we turned our back on mother nature. There was one notable exception in Manatee County—a long overdue referendum to raise property tax and issue bonds for the permanent preservation of land in the county.

So please, let's put 2020 behind us and look ahead to the future. A future where the "intricate relationship between the earth's environment and all its creatures sharing it" is cherished as much as the intricate relationships we need to have with one and other as stewards of this marvelous planet we call home.

## **IN MEMORIAM: MARY EMMA SHEPPARD**



On October 24, 2020 the environmental community lost one of its dearest and most effective activists, Mary Emma Sheppard. As a leader in the Sierra Club, a member of the Manatee-Sarasota Group's Executive Committee, she led many an adventurer on hikes and on camping trips throughout our community.

In a quote from the Sarasota Herald Tribune, dated November 13 and attributed to Arlene Sweeting, co-founder of WSLR 96.5 Community Radio, "Mary set an example for all of us—to not get so wrapped up in fighting to save the environment that we forget to get out and enjoy it. She loved exploring not only the trails, beaches and rivers of Florida but special places all over the globe."

During Mary's support of the Sierra Club, she won state awards for volunteering and dedication to the environment: the "Pine Tree" award (1986); the "Administration" award (1994); and the "Florida Chapter Medal" (1999). She has also won numerous other awards and accolades from various organizations at least yearly throughout her long and fruitful life.

Mary supported and won more environmental battles than we can name in this space. If there was a single word one could use to describe her approach it would be persistent. Mary applied a gentle zeal to her efforts and like the stream that erodes great mountains she often prevailed. The Sierra Club's Manatee-Sarasota Group will miss Mary and will always look to her example as a model of what active environmentalism looks like.

If you would like to honor Mary with a contribution, her favorite causes were the Sierra Club <http://sierraclub.org/florida/manatee-sarasota> and Earthjustice <https://earthjustice.org/give/donate-today>, or any environmentally proactive organization that takes environmental issues to the courts. In her later years, Mary was often heard to quote the slogan of Earthjustice: "The Earth needs a good lawyer." And to that we would add, another "Good Sheppard."