

The Pelican

The Official Newsletter of Sierra Club Florida



IN THIS ISSUE

FLORIDA LEADER ERICA HALL ELECTED TO SIERRA CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

GOPHER TORTOISE DAY AND DOCUMENTARY PROMOTE CONSERVATION IN FLORIDA

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RAYS STADIUM-GAS PLANT DEAL

SUNCOAST GROUP FUN-RAISER RAISES MONEY FOR CHAPTER PAC

STOP THE BURN-GO GREEN CAMPAIGN TAKES FIGHT TO D.C.

THE NEFL GROUP AND ITS RENEW JACKSONVILLE CAMPAIGN

VOTE LIKE OUR DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON IT!

WEEKI WACHEE RIVER SUMMIT EXPLORES CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS

ANNUAL SUGARCANE BURNING IN FLORIDA INVOLVES STARK INJUSTICES

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR SIERRA CLUB EMAILS

From The Director

by Susannah Randolph, Chapter Director, Sierra Club Florida

When I first started as Chapter Director in December, I made a commitment to visit with each of our groups around the state. My goal was to connect with our dedicated volunteers and learn about the unique environmental issues our state faces from coast to coast. I am extremely grateful for the relationships I have built along the way, and all of you who welcomed me with enthusiasm, hospitality, and kindness.

I am thrilled to report that I have met with 14 groups so far to date, and I look forward to another round of visits as we move into fall and winter. This summer, I will be hosting virtual coffee chats every Saturday so we are able to stay connected and provide a platform for our volunteers and supporters to share input, feedback, and most importantly: VICTORIES!

I have learned so much from you in these past few months as your director, and I am thankful for all your feedback, input, and honesty as I work with our staff to move Sierra Club Florida forward, and build power for our organization in an incredibly challenging state. Our ability to forge connections, build relationships, and learn from each other's work around the state is key to enjoying, exploring, and PROTECTING our state's unique natural environment.

See you soon!!

Susannah



Florida Leader Erica Hall Elected to Sierra Club Board of Directors

by James Scott, Chair, Sierra Club Florida Executive Committee

It is with great pleasure that we share the news of Erica Hall's election to the national Sierra Club's Board of Directors!

Erica – Sierra Club Florida Executive Committee Vice Chair, Suncoast Group member, and St. Petersburg resident – brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the Board. As a longtime Sierra Club leader and current Executive Director of the Florida Food Policy Council, Erica's work is built upon her unwavering commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice. Specifically, she has prioritized transitioning communities to clean energy, combating climate change, and building partnerships with frontline vulnerable communities.



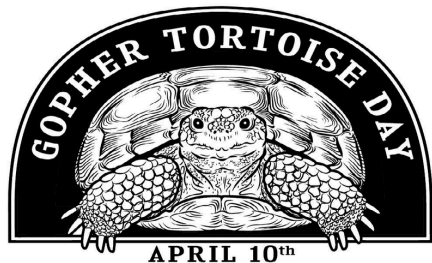
As a national board member, Erica will play a pivotal role in shaping the Sierra Club's conservation priorities, internal policies, and financial decisions. Her expertise in nonprofit management, legislative affairs, and environmental justice will be invaluable on this prestigious leadership body, and powering our organization's vision for a more sustainable and just future for all.

Please join me in congratulating Erica on this well-deserved honor. We are so grateful for all that she does for our Chapter and Sierra Club as a whole, and we look forward to her continued leadership and contributions both in Florida and beyond.

Thank you to all Sierra Club members who participated in the election, and congratulations to all the winners!

Gopher Tortoise Day and Documentary Promote Species Conservation in Florida

by Deb Burr, Big Bend Group; Linda Smithe, Chair, Loxahatchee Group



Each year on April 10th, communities around Florida celebrate Gopher Tortoise Day. Officially adopted by the Gopher Tortoise Council, the goal of Gopher Tortoise Day is to increase awareness and appreciation for these long lived, gentle reptiles. Many Sierra Club Chapters in Florida held local celebrations to promote conservation of this species and its habitat.

Gopher Games, an eye-opening 18-minute documentary directed by Brent Fannin, features volunteers and organizations who are working tirelessly to save gopher tortoises and their habitat from the uncontrolled development and destruction of Florida's landscape. The documentary is an entirely volunteer-made film with dozens of people donating their time, equipment, and expertise to make it happen. It's a project reflecting the collective heart of millions of people who love these animals and believe their story must be told.

Help promote conservation and awareness of the challenges of protecting gopher tortoises by [watching and sharing the YouTube video!](#)



We St. Pete Environmentalists Have These Questions About the Rays Stadium-Gas Plant Deal

by James Scott and Erica Hall, Chair and Vice Chair, Sierra Club Florida Executive Committee



On Thursday, May 16, the St. Petersburg City Council held its first workshop on the Rays-Hines \$6.5 billion Historic Gas Plant District development proposal. As America's largest and oldest grassroots environmental organization with a strong presence in Tampa Bay, we at the Sierra Club feel a responsibility to add our voice regarding the proposal's sustainability and resilience implications.

Read more at the Tampa Bay Times [here](#).

Suncoast FUN-raiser Raises Money for Chp. PAC

by Marcia Biggs, Suncoast Group

The Suncoast Group organized a lively and successful Art, Music & FUN-raising event to benefit the Florida Chapter PAC on March 21 at The Factory in downtown St. Petersburg. The event, which was held in St. Pete's popular Warehouse Arts District, raised \$8,194 for the Sierra Club Florida PAC. Attendees were treated to free admission to the Fairgrounds St. Pete interactive museum and the Wild Space Gallery at the headquarters of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation, both located in The Factory.



Live jazz music by The Young Lions came courtesy of the Clearwater Jazz Holiday Give Them a Stage program, while a silent auction offered a diverse array of great items, from artworks and fine wines, to theater tickets and a city mural trolley tour. A highlight of the evening was a performance from the St. Pete Academy Prep choir, who sang the Dane Myers song "Change" as part of the SeaUsRise "Boston to Boston" World Choir event. Dane Myers, a Florida climate change activist and musician/writer, won a Sierra Club National Ansel Adams Award for Video in 2022 for "Clouds of Different Colors."

Stop the Burn-Go Green Campaign Takes the Fight to Washington D.C.

by Al'Licia Pittman, Intern, Stop The Burn-Go Green Campaign

In March of this year, Stop The Burn-Go Green Campaign activists aged 18 to 77 from Belle Glade, Pahokee, South Bay, Lake Harbor, and Wellington traveled to Washington D.C. to tell our story and advocate on behalf of the Glades community.



We met with Congressman Maxwell Frost, Congresswoman Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, U.S. Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley, Representative Kathy Castor, and the Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), and had valuable exchanges in other Congressional and Senate offices and while walking the halls of Congress.

All of us took turns sharing how community members must face the health, quality of life, and the financial impacts that extend beyond the 8-month burn season. The resulting economic depression across the community is year-round, as is the fear-mongering and misinformation coming from local government representatives and the industry. Glades residents have it rough, but we made it clear that our fight for environmental justice is really just beginning. Federal decision-makers finally got the opportunity to hear directly from regular folks unaffiliated with the sugar industry, instead of the ever-present and notorious lobbying operations that spew the propaganda with which we Glades residents are very familiar.



Kathy Castor's positive reception reminded us that not only does our work matter, but that it is our passion and commitment that generates lasting change. Representative Castor welcomed all thirteen of us into her office, listened intently to each presenter, and allowed the presentation to go over time, warmly ignoring the sound of her timer. Castor was engaged, asked questions, and demonstrated true interest in a group of people that are well outside her district.

While touring, we also got to explore the National Museum of African American History where exhibitions documented the historic ties between the growth of slavery and the sugar trade in the new world. It was not lost on us that pre-harvest sugar field burning is a remnant of the historic exploitation perpetuated by the sugar industry, and our trip to the museum made clear that we are some of many who have fought the long battle to get racial and environmental justice for our people.

Our win-win messaging for environmental justice in the Glades was a hit in the halls of Congress. We returned to Florida energized and ready for whatever comes next.



To preserve a community, you must ensure a brighter future for it. The sugar industry withholds the power to enact a change that could uplift the Glades community permanently, willfully standing in the way of social, economic, and environmental progress. Companies like Florida Crystals and US Sugar capitalize on the educational and financial crises that affect many small communities. Glades citizens demand more. Glades citizens deserve more.

We refuse to be suppressed, manipulated, and ignored by a multi-billion-dollar industry or weak-willed politicians with a lack of vision. We recognize that the standard has long since changed and that our value outweighs the industry's profit. We, a group of people that are often reduced to a small collection of towns along the southern edge of Lake Okeechobee, are discontent and are ready to take the fight to wherever is required.



The Northeast Group and its Renew Jacksonville Campaign

by J. Logan Cross, Chair, Northeast Florida Group

Sierra Club’s Northeast Florida Group has benefited from a large and stable membership base which gives it broad reach in its tri-county area. It has also benefited from a committed and capable leadership group. These things have allowed the group to fulfill its core mission to engage in environmental advocacy and foster outdoor engagement throughout the region.

Having a highly functional group allowed the Northeast Group to launch and sustain its [Renew Jacksonville Campaign](#). It is an effort to get the City of Jacksonville to commit to operate on 100% renewable energy by 2050 or sooner. While such a campaign would have been unthinkable and futile in the past, the region has changed demographically and politically in a fashion making the lofty goal achievable. The campaign would have also been overly ambitious had the group operated in isolation and without external assistance, and has benefited from considerable assistance and support from the Sierra Club.

The early focus of the Renew Jacksonville Campaign has been efforts to get the Jacksonville Electric Authority (JEA), the city’s municipal utility, to modernize its energy generation systems to reduce its carbon emissions and the release of highly polluting liquid effluents. JEA has been in the early stages of implementing a poorly designed Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) posing a formidable challenge to the campaign. Regardless, the campaign has been strategic and assertive in its efforts to shape or stop implementation of the IRP. The recent resignation of the JEA CEO presented a unique opportunity to influence the trajectory of the utility. We will be making a concerted effort to shape the criteria used to select a new CEO, pause implementation of the IRP until a new CEO has been selected, and influence the new CEO. Until we receive confirmation implementation of the IRP has been paused, we are continuing our opposition efforts. A [recent Florida Times Union guest column](#) is an example of our opposition efforts.

In many ways, the Northeast Group and its Renew Jacksonville Campaign is an example of the logic and effectiveness of group empowerment. The human and material assistance the campaign has received from the Florida Chapter, the Beyond Coal Campaign, and Sierra Club Legal team have been instrumental in turning a fledgling campaign into one that is effective and hopefully successful in achieving its ultimate goal.

Vote Like Our Democracy Depends on It!

by Janet Stanko, Sierra Club Florida Political Committee

This year is critical to ensure your vote counts. Please keep these dates in mind to be sure you are READY TO VOTE!

ELECTION	REGISTER/CHANGE PARTY AFFILIATION	EARLY VOTING	VOTE BY MAIL BALLOT REQUEST DEADLINE	MAIL VBM BALLOT*	ELECTION DATE
Primary	7/22	8/5-8/18	8/8	8/13	8/20
General	10/7	10/21-11/3	10/24	10/29	11/5

*Only voters registered with a political party may vote in that party’s Primary Election. If you are not a registered Democrat or Republican, you must change your party to either Democrat or Republican to vote in the Primary on candidates. All registered voters, regardless of party affiliation, may vote on issues and nonpartisan races during a Primary Election.

**Allow 7 days for mail

Remember, even if you have voted by mail before, you must complete a new vote by mail request for 2024 elections. Early voting dates above are approximate and need to be checked with your county Supervisor of Elections.

If you have questions, please contact your Supervisor of Elections. In most cases you can search online for “Vote [county name]” and navigate to your county’s website.

Weeki Wachee River Summit Explores Challenges and Progress

by Denise Dookeran, Adventure Coast Group

On May 3, springs lovers, Weeki Wachee businesses, local residents, visitors, and others interested in springs protection gathered at the Weeki Wachee River Summit in Spring Hill, FL.

At the event, attendees discussed present and future conditions of the Weeki Wachee and learned about watershed initiatives being implemented. Conservation leaders and Hernando County and state agency representatives also shared the mosaic of watershed initiatives currently underway, as well as others planned to protect, maintain, and restore the Weeki Wachee River.

The summit was hosted by a consortium of Hernando County conservation organizations, including Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, Hernando Audubon Society, Florida Native Plant Society--Hernando Chapter, and the Weeki Wachee River Rescue Team. Hernando County staff, Southwest Florida Water Management District scientists and other agency representatives were on hand to provide updates on initiatives to reduce nutrient loading and improve habitat within the Weeki Wachee watershed.

Conveying this important work to the public and residents of Hernando County is vital for garnering support, showcasing solutions, and ultimately, achieving our goal to bring the river back to a sustainable condition.



The Annual Sugarcane Burning in Florida Involves Stark Injustices

by Cynthia Barnett, Sierra magazine

Black-gray smoke billowed into the sky and blocked the sun, forming a thick plume behind Florida's Pahokee Middle-Senior High School. As student Madison Jones watched flames rise from a nearby sugarcane field, it struck her how normal it seemed. Seeing cane fires flare up on a school day was as common as watching thunderheads gather on the same horizon. Sometimes the smoke clouds brought what her dad called "black rain."

Read more [here](#).



How to Manage Your Sierra Club Emails

by Ron Haines, Sierra Club Florida Communications Committee

The Sierra Club email system is a very important communications tool for the Sierra Club. This very Florida Chapter newsletter is coming to you through that system. News from your local group comes to you through that system. And messages from the National Sierra Club come to you through that system.

If you ever think you get too much email from us, there are two ways to manage the flow to make sure you get what you want.

1. Use the Manage Preferences option at the bottom of any Sierra Club email you receive. Don't hit Unsubscribe. That will cut you off from everything. We urge you to keep subscribing to My Chapter, the first option. As a member/supporter of the country's largest grassroots environmental organization it is important that you stay informed about what we are doing here in Florida.

2. You can also manage what emails you get by going to <https://myaccount.sierraclub.org/>. If you haven't set up your account there already, you can do so with your name and address. Scroll down to Communication Preferences. Once there, click on Manage Email Preferences and refine the email offerings to your heart's content.

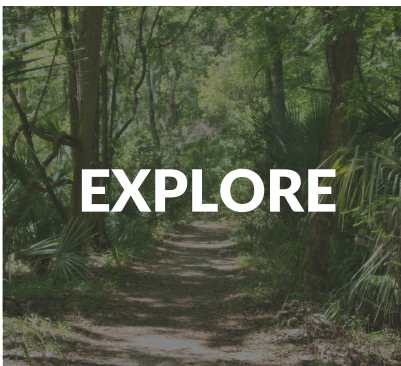
If you have any questions about your Sierra Club email preferences, contact Ron Haines at ronaldhaines@bellsouth.net. Please include your name and complete address.

Get Involved!

Sierra Club Florida is working tirelessly to protect wildlife and wild places, ensure clean air and water for all, and fight for environmental justice here in Florida. Whether supporting our campaigns, participating in an outing, or volunteering with your local group, there are so many ways to get involved and support our mission!



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