



Adventure Coast Group // Florida Chapter

## Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group October 2024 News, Events & Action Alerts

*Check out all that's going on!*

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**Withlacochee State Forest Land Swap**

**Speak for the Springs! FL DEP BMAP  
Meetings Wed. Oct. 2nd 10am & 3pm**

**Sierra Pasco Conservation Committee  
ZOOM Wednesday, Oct. 2nd**

**Adventure Coast Meetup Wed. Oct. 9th  
Gopher Tortoises with Amanda Hipps**

**Be an Environmental Leader! Nominations Open to  
Adventure Coast Group Executive Committee due Oct 30th**

**Vote No to Amendment 2  
Protect Wildlife and Fish Population**

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**Withlacochee State Forest Land Grab**  
**Opposition to proposed swap of 324-acres of Conservation Lands**



Withlacoochee State Forest parcel earmarked for land swap

On the heels of an ill-advised effort by the Florida Governor to develop golf courses and resorts on public conservation lands that has been dropped due to widespread public opposition, there's more. This past June, without any public input, nor any discussion on the part of its members, the Florida Governor and Cabinet voted to approve transfer of 324 acres of land within the Withlacoochee State Forest in Hernando County to Cabot Citrus OpCo LLC, a Canadian corporation.

Cabot wants the land to expand its adjoining luxury golf course/resort development in exchange for 861 acres of pine plantation in Levy County. It obtained approval earlier from the Hernando County Commission to build 1770 residential units and a large area of commercial development on the land it already owns. Prior to their purchase of the property, the prior owner had donated a portion of it to the state as part of the Annutteliga Hammock Florida Forever project.

The land swap is contingent upon review and approval by both the Florida Forest Service (FFS) and the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC). This parcel was purchased by the Florida Department of Transportation, and then transferred to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) as mitigation for impacts from expansion of the Suncoast Parkway. FDEP leased the land to FFS to be managed as part of the Withlacoochee State Forest. And so it should remain.





Eugene Kelly-- President of the Florida Native Plant Society and Adventure Coast Vice Chair (right)-- and Tom St. Clair President, Hernando Audubon and Adventure Coast Conservation Chair (left)-- have studied the land parcel and identified gopher tortoise burrows and other plants and animal species that confirm its value for conservation.

The Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, Sierra Club Florida Chapter, and many other conservation organizations have communicated our strong opposition to the Governor, Cabinet and members of ARC and even our local county commissioners, who recently approved Phase Two of the current development.

Our objections are based on three key issues:

- **The proposed land swap establishes a dangerous precedent for other public lands desired by developers.** It circumvents established protocols by enabling state conservation lands to be transferred by the Governor to private developers. F.S. 253.0341(1) mandates that state conservation lands can only be declared surplus and transferred when state experts have determined that it no longer provides conservation value. That has not been done.
- **The Withlacoochee State Forest Parcel has considerable conservation value due to its contiguity with other public conservation lands and its role as a link in the Florida Wildlife Corridor.** The corridor connection here is important for preserving connectivity for wildlife between the State Forest and the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area. The Withlacoochee State Forest Management Plan, page 18, states "All of the property within WSF is suitable for and necessary for the management of WSF. None should be declared surplus."
  - See page 18 of [Ten-Year Resource Management Plan For The Withlacoochee State Forest](#), Additional Acquisitions and Land Use Considerations, Surplus Land Assessment.
- **Value as a Groundwater Recharge Area: The parcel is known to have high recharge value and is located within the Chassahowitzka Springshed, a declared Outstanding Florida Spring.** The major water quality challenge in this area is reducing nutrient pollution that has led to water quality decline in the Chassahowitzka spring system. FDEP is currently revising the Basin Action Management Plan for Chassahowitzka to further reduce nutrient-loading. Development of the parcel will only lead to additional water quality degradation.

This land swap is contrary to good public policy and Government in the Sunshine. It is contrary to the goal of Florida Forever—protecting lands with significant natural resource values in perpetuity for all Floridians. It undermines a long record of successful conservation of Florida's valuable lands that protect our environment, support our tourist-based economy, and provide clean water to support both nature and people. Although the swap has not yet been approved by the Florida Forest Service, nor scheduled for review by ARC, we hope that input from the conservation community will encourage state officials to end this ill-advised gift to private development interests.

**Stay tuned!** When we learn more from the state regarding their intentions to either suspend further action on the land swap or move forward with the proposal, we'll let you know. If they do not stop it, we'll issue an action alert for you to take action.

- [Florida Phoenix](#) - "Kelly told me he and everyone else interested in land preservation were clueless about this secret land swap until the Times broke the story last month. He went to see the state forest property himself, hiking a portion of it from south to north. He counted more than a dozen gopher tortoise burrows."
- [Tampa Bay Times](#) - "Our big concern is the precedent it would establish," said Tom St. Clair, president and conservation chairperson of the Hernando Audubon Society. "My immediate reaction was, 'Oh my god' — that this could be done at the Cabinet level just at the request of the developer."

#### Audio Interviews

- [Radio St. Pete](#) - FNPS President Eugene Kelly on Proposed Land Swap 9-18-24
- [Florida Spectacular](#) - Episode 170: Woodpeckers, Withlacoochee, and Why the Land Swap?

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## Speak for the Springs! DEP BMAP Meetings October 2nd.



As required by the Clean Waterways Act, DEP must prepare updates to its nutrient BMAPs (Basin Management Action Plans) by July 1, 2025.

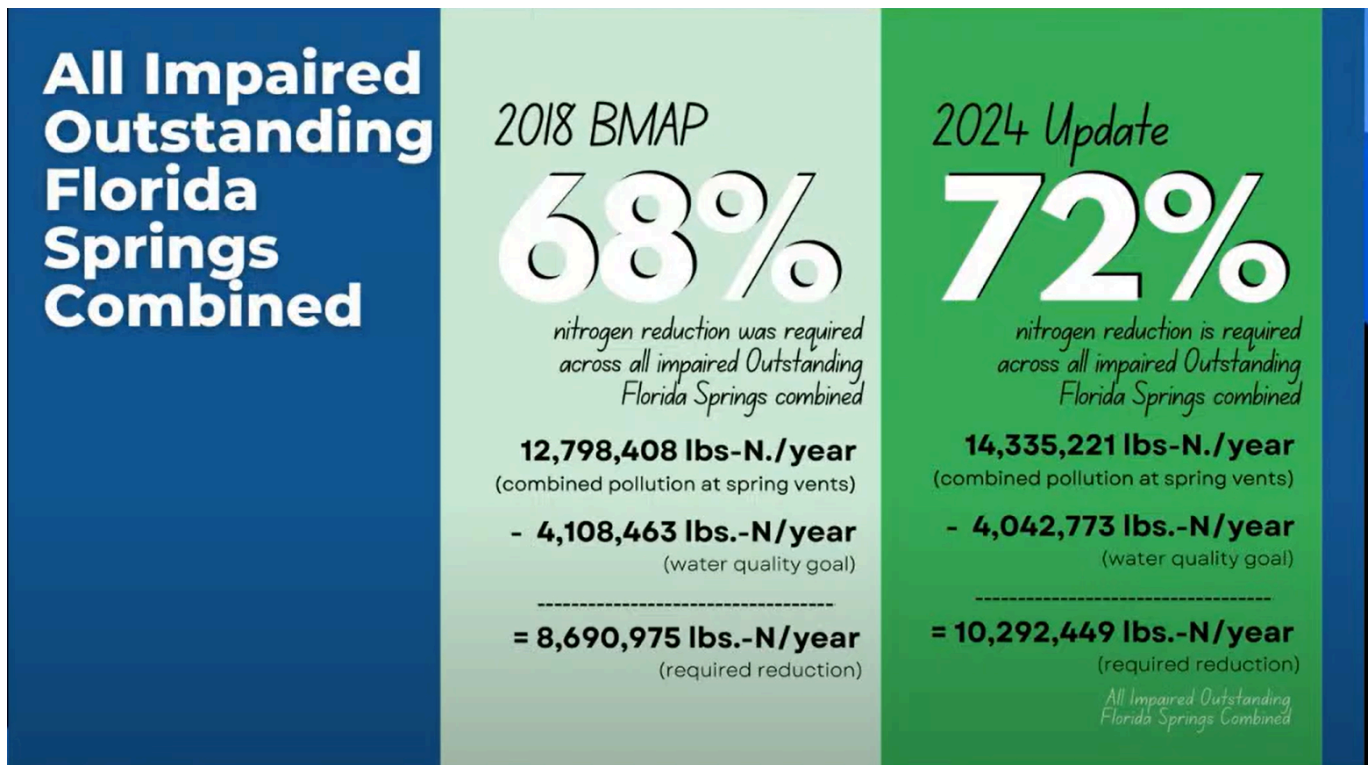
Share your insights on the Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), a vital framework for restoring water quality! This plan outlines a range of strategies aimed at achieving the pollutant reductions set by a TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load). These strategies include setting permit limits for regulated facilities, implementing best management practices in urban and agricultural settings, enhancing wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, and developing regional projects and conservation initiatives.

The success of a BMAP relies heavily on local input and collaboration, as it is crafted with the involvement of community stakeholders. Once finalized, BMAPs are adopted through Secretarial Order and carry legal weight. They utilize an adaptive management approach, allowing for gradual pollutant reductions while continuously monitoring and studying water quality and hydrological dynamics.



Your participation is crucial! See below the meetings for Weeki Wachee, Kings Bay/Crystal River, and Homosassa/Chassahowitzka:

<p>Kings Bay/Crystal River and Homosassa/Chassahowitzka Spring Groups Basins  <a href="#">Meeting Materials</a></p>	<p>Oct. 2, 2024 at 3 p.m. EDT                  Lecanto Government Building, Room 166                  3600 W. Sovereign Path, Suite 267                  Lecanto, FL 34461</p>
<p>Weeki Wachee Basin  <a href="#">Meeting Materials</a></p>	<p>Oct. 3, 2024 at 10 a.m. EDT                  Pasco-Hernando State College                  Spring Hill Campus Conference Center, Building B                  450 Beverly Court                  Spring Hill, FL 34606</p>



Via Florida Springs Council, see 39:39 [Springs BMAPs - Live Discussion](#)

### Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee ZOOM 8PM Wednesday, October 2nd



Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee is dedicated to preserving, protecting, exploring, and enjoying nature in areas of Pasco County. The Pasco Conservation Committee is working towards spinning off into its own Nature Coast Sierra Club Group. If you would like to join in leading the way to educate and protect Pasco's natural open spaces, please email [sashabuddha@gmail.com](mailto:sashabuddha@gmail.com).

You're invited to join our ZOOM meeting the second Wednesday of each month at 8:00 PM at this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7674695843> with the Zoom ID: 767 469 58843

# Sierra Club Adventure Coast Meetup

## Wed. Oct 9th on Gopher Tortoises with Amanda Hipps, Wildlife and Landscape Biologist



Amanda is a Florida native, earning her bachelor's degree at the University of North Florida where she researched nesting and emergence success of gopher tortoises. She earned her master's in biology at Florida Atlantic University; her academic journey culminated in a thesis focusing on invertebrate and vertebrate gopher tortoise commensals, showcasing her dedication to the conservation of a wide range of species. Amanda contributed to land conservation efforts in Florida and internationally. In her work with Wildlandscapes International, she played a pivotal role in securing millions to protect habitat in the Everglades and wildlife corridors in Kenya, Africa and Assam, India. In Amanda has served as a Gopher Tortoise Biologist, monitoring recipient sites and assisting private landowners to ensure quality habitat for relocated tortoises.



More info at  
[adventurecoast@florida.sierraclub.org](mailto:adventurecoast@florida.sierraclub.org) or call 352 277-3330.  
check out our website at  
[www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast](http://www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast).



Public welcome. Attend in person or remotely via Zoom. The meeting will run from 7–8pm at the South Brooksville Community Center, 601 East Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Brooksville, FL.

To participate remotely via Zoom, please register in advance at:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlqOCrrTotHtNoCSF5hp2reaOLaAz-aL4Y>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

The meeting will run from 7–8pm at the South Brooksville Community Center, [601 East Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard](#) in Brooksville, FL. Public welcome!

To participate remotely via Zoom, please register in advance at: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlqOCrrTotHtNoCSF5hp2reaOLaAz-aL4Y>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.





**SIERRA CLUB**  
FLORIDA CHAPTER

**Adventure Coast Group**



**Be an Environmental Leader!  
Nominations Open for Election to the  
Sierra Club Adventure Coast Executive Committee**

The Executive Committee (ExCom) of the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group includes seven dedicated members in our group territory of Hernando and Citrus Counties. They are elected by our members. This year's election is seeking nominees for 4 positions for a two-year term of office in 2025-2027.

Candidates must be Sierra Club members, passionate about protecting our local environment, willing to help promote Sierra Club's mission, Adventure Coast Group goals, and attend monthly meetings.

**Nominations will be accepted until October 30th.** We hope that you will step up to run in the election. Bring your ideas, thoughts, and commitment to Adventure Coast Group. To qualify, you must be a member of the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group and at least 18 years of age.

**To submit your nomination, send us your:**

- Name, Address, Email, Telephone
- Bio/resume
- Image of you for the ballot
- A 3-paragraph narrative of your qualifications for the ballot

Submit your nomination to the Election Committee at [AdventureCoastElections@gmail.com](mailto:AdventureCoastElections@gmail.com) by October 30th, 2024.

***Make a difference! Get involved in protecting our local environment!***

**Vote No to Amendment 2  
Protect Wildlife and Fish Population**



**Save Florida's Wildlife**  
**VOTE NO!**  
**on Amendment 2**



Florida law already recognizes that hunting and fishing are part of Florida's cultural heritage and traditions; albeit, in concert with the conservation and protection of those species and their habitats through science-based, hunting and fishing regulations promulgated and updated as needed on an annual basis by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

The proposed amendment includes ill-conceived elements that conflict with FWC's constitutional and statutorily mandated role to manage hunting and fishing and threatens the conservation of Florida's fish and wildlife and their habitats. **The Amendment would:**

1. Designate hunting as a preferred method of managing wildlife and appears to allow hunting at city parks, county parks, State Parks, and wildlife sanctuaries, undermining the ability of the state to manage Florida's wildlife species through science-based conservation management.
2. Create a constitutional right to hunt, appears to allow hunters to trespass on private property to exercise their constitutional right to hunt.
3. Allow "all traditional methods" of hunting appears to allow hunting bears with dogs.
4. Allow "all traditional methods" appear to allow the courts to overrule the existing net ban on the use gill nets and seine nets, and the devastating impacts on the fishing resources.

**For these reasons:**

Vote NO on Amendment 2! Say no to this ill-conceived and ambiguously worded constitutional amendment.

**How to Get Involved**

Email James Scott at [JScottNoto2@gmail.com](mailto:JScottNoto2@gmail.com).





The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3.5 million members and supporters. In addition to protecting every person's right to get outdoors and access the healing power of nature, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit [sierraclub.org](http://sierraclub.org).

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**For more information about Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, visit our website: [www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast](http://www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast), send an email to [sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclubadventurecoastcc@gmail.com), or call 352 277-3330. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).**

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