



Adventure Coast Group // Florida Chapter

Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group January 2025 News, Events & Action Alerts

Check out all that's going on!

**Adventure Coast Meetup Wed. Jan. 8th
With Beth Brady of Save the Manatees**

**Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee
ZOOM Wednesday, Jan. 1st**

**Florida Manatee Festival Jan. 18-19th
In Crystal River**

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**Adventure Coast Meetup Wed. Feb. 12th
With Amanda Hipps on Gopher Tortoises**

**Adventure Coast Meetup Wed. Jan, 8th, 2025
With Beth Brady of Save the Manatees**

SIERRA CLUB ADVENTURE COAST MEET UP

With Beth Brady of Save the Manatees

January 8th



Join us for a great evening! 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/tJEkc-uurj8uHtR8flZyc55jxxCslk3mpRRK>

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

Beth was born and raised in Pennsylvania and after a few years as a registered nurse, she realized her passion was marine mammals. She moved to Florida to complete a photo ID internship with Florida Fish and Wildlife, earned a master's degree at Nova Southeastern University, and a doctorate at Florida Atlantic University, with research on the vocalizations of Florida manatees. She has added multiple peer-reviewed publications on vocalizations of all manatee species. Currently, she uses drones for a variety of applications, including assessing the body condition of manatees. Beth's journey reflects her dedication to understanding and contributing to the well-being of manatees.



More info at adventurecoast@florida.sierraclub.org or call 352 277-3330, check out our website at www.sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast.

Join us for the January 8th Meet Up of the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group. Guest speaker will be Beth Brady, Senior Science and Conservation Associate for Save the Manatee.

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/tJEkc-uurj8uHtR8flZyc55jxxCslk3mpRRK>

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

Sierra Club Pasco Conservation Committee
Zoom Wednesday, January 1st, 2025



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

You're invited to join our ZOOM meeting the first Wednesday of each month at 8:00PM at this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7674695843> with the Zoom ID: 767 469 5843.

Florida Manatee Festival Jan. 18-19th In Crystal River

Coast to Coast HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING, LLC

FLORIDA MANATEE FESTIVAL CRYSTAL RIVER, FL

CITRUS COUNTY Chamber of Commerce

38TH ANNUAL FLORIDA MANATEE FESTIVAL
JANUARY 18TH & 19TH, 2025
 \$10 ADULTS | 12/UNDER FREE
 \$5 ENTRY SUNDAY ONLY WITH CHRONICLE COUPON!

GUIDED KAYAK TOURS | MANATEE BOAT TOURS | FOUR ENTERTAINMENT STAGES | FREE ENTRY TO THREE SISTER SPRINGS

FREE PARKING/SHUTTLE AT CRYSTAL RIVER HIGH SCHOOL

- FOOD COURT
- BEER & WINE GARDEN
- ART IN THE PARK
- CRAFT VENDORS
- KIDS ZONES
- STREET ENTERTAINMENT
- HIPPIE VILLAGE AT HERITAGE HOUSE

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Look for our tent at the 37th Annual Florida Manatee Festival in Crystal River at the intersection of Citrus

Avenue and U.S. 19. stretching up through the shops and restaurants of Heritage Village and surrounding areas, down to the waterside area along Kings Bay.

We'll be there Saturday, Jan. 18, 9 am – 5 pm; and Sunday, Jan. 19, 9 am – 4 pm. The cost is \$10 per person, age 12 and under free. Free parking is available at Crystal River High School with free shuttles to the festival gates. Volunteers welcome to join our tent! Contact Adventure Coast Group Membership Chair Kristi Strazzullo at krististrazzullo@gmail.com.

More info at: www.gomanateefest.com or www.facebook.com/FloridaManateeFestival, hosted by the Citrus County Chamber of Commerce.

Adventure Coast Group Executive Committee Election Results

CANDIDATE

★ BEN BERAUER ★

Ben Berauer is currently an EXCOM member, and is willing to serve for another term. He has been serving as Treasurer for 2023 and 2024, and is willing to continue in this position. Ben has a long history of organizing outings for Sierra Club. He has been a Sierra Club member since 1982, and an outings leader almost as long.



He has served as the outings chair for the Turtle Coast and Suncoast Groups, and is proud to now serve as Adventure Coast's outings chair. Ben loves nature, the outdoors, and open spaces, and firmly believes that we each must do what we can to protect our environment!


CANDIDATE

★ DEEVON QUIROLO ★

DeeVon is currently Chair of the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, a strong conservation voice in Hernando and Citrus Counties, Florida. In January 2015, she received the Black Bear Award from the Tampa Bay Group of Sierra Club and Activist of the Year Award from the Suncoast Group of Sierra Club for efforts to protect Hernando County's environment.

She is President of Nature Coast Conservation, Inc. a Florida not for profit 501(c)(3) organization based in Brooksville, Florida. She directed its Neighbors Against Mining Project to provide community grassroots oversight of major industrial pollution sites in Hernando County, FL including efforts to stop expansion of mining in Brooksville.

In July, 2014, DeeVon released the book Bring Back the Gulf, that she co-authored with Richard Charter in cooperation with the Ocean Foundation, where she is a member of the board of advisors. The publication analyzes emerging issues in the disposition of abandoned offshore oil rigs in U.S. federal waters and builds a strong case for why it is time to fully restore Gulf of Mexico ecosystems and fisheries to their former natural productivity.



She is the co-founder and immediate past Executive Director of REEF RELIEF, a Key West-based non-profit grassroots membership organization dedicated to "Preserve and Protect Coral Reef Ecosystems through local, regional and global efforts." In 1986, DeeVon, her husband Craig Quirolo, and a group of local boaters founded REEF RELIEF to install mooring buoys to protect Keys coral reefs from anchor damage. They retired from the organization in 2008.

DeeVon has testified before a committee of the U.S. Congress to defend the establishment of No Discharge Zones for boater sewage. DeeVon worked to improve water quality that resulted in adoption of advanced wastewater and stormwater treatment and a phosphate ban in Key West and the Florida Keys, creation of a Keys-wide No Discharge Zone for boat sewage, successive bans on offshore oil drilling, and the Key West Marine Park.

CANDIDATE

★ KRISTI STRAZZULLO ★

Kristi is currently the Membership Chair of the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group and a Project Manager at the Sustany Foundation where she has been instrumental since 2021 in coordinating partnerships and sustainability initiatives. In her role, she lead Sustany in joining Clean Air Tampa Bay to facilitate community engagement and stakeholder meetings for the Tampa-St. Petersburg Clearwater Metropolitan Statistical Area through the EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grants Program. In this role she also collaborated with PCGS to create the Florida Pollution Prevention Initiative and was awarded funding by the US EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grants program.

Kristi founded Resonant Ecology & Field Ecology, Inc. Resonant Ecology is a 501(c)(3) public charity and private research foundation during graduate studies to focus on climate mitigation and global sustainability solutions. Their projects centered around carbon sequestration, ecosystem service valuation/conservation, and sustainability education. Kristi created Field Ecology to further her experience in environmental consulting, with a focus on conserving Florida ecosystems through accurate wetland delineation and gopher tortoise permitting.



Kristi worked at Ecosystem Management, Inc. as an Environmental Scientist and Wetland Restoration Specialist. During her time in this role, she gained experience in natural resource management, wetland mitigation, invasive species removal, lake management via airboat/canoe, littoral shelf planting, erosion control/slope stabilization, and riparian restoration. This company's expertise in mitigation maintenance has enabled her to provide services for entities like Cardno-Entrix, Faller Davis & Associates, Central Florida Pipeline, Tampa Bay Water, the City of Tampa, Florida Department of Transportation, Hillsborough County Aviation Authority, and The Tampa Bay Rays.

In the United States Army, Kristi was a Satellite Communications Systems Operator/Maintainer. There, she received advanced training in electronics, digital communication circuits, computer networking, and tactical/strategic satellite communication.

Kristi's education includes a Master's Degree in Global Sustainability from the University of South Florida, where she concentrated on climate change mitigation and systems thinking. She also holds a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Policy & Management from the same institution, alongside specialized training in wetland delineation and certification in gopher tortoise transect surveys and permitting.

CANDIDATE

★ TOM ST CLAIR, PHD ★

During his 48-year professional career Tom served as an environmental scientist for several engineering firms with a wide range of natural resource experience, specializing in preparation of environmental impact statements, implementation of large-scale ecosystem restoration projects, and development of watershed management plans. For ten years Dr. St Clair served as team leader dealing with applied science aspects of Everglades restoration, including use of adaptive management principles.

Since retirement, Tom have worked as an environmental advocate trying to improve the management of publicly owned lands in Hernando County through the review of management plans and providing comment at public hearings and Board of County Commission meetings. Additionally, have advocated for improved environmental regulation, such as the rainy season fertilizer ban that was recently passed in Hernando County and the Springs Protection Zone for Weeki Wachee River.

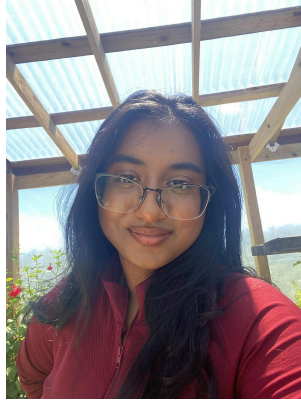


Tom currently serves as the Conservation Chair for Hernando County for Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group and the Conservation Chair of the Hernando Audubon Society. He also serves on the Sierra Club Florida Chapter Conservation Committee. Tom helped organize the Weeki Wachee River Summit which convened in May 2024 as an effort to better communicate the various initiatives being undertaken to improve conditions within the river and watershed by the County and various state agencies. Tom currently supports efforts to oppose a 324-acre parcel within the Withlacoochee State Forest from being declared surplus and allowed to be swapped for another parcel in Levy County.

The election results are in for our annual Executive Committee (ExCom) vote! Ben Berauer, DeeVon Quirolo, Kristi Strazzullo, and Tom St Clair have been elected. Thank you to all of the amazing ExCom candidates this year! The results were officially presented by the Election Committee to the ExCom at our Dec. 11th meeting for acceptance and announced at the following Holiday Party!

Congratulations to Ben, DeeVon, and Tom on their re-election, and congratulations to our new board member, Kristi! They will be inducted at our Jan. 8th meeting to serve a two-year term of office.

Denise Dookeran Elected to Sierra Club Florida Executive Committee



We are proud to announce that Denise Dookeran, Communications Director and Executive Committee member of the Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group, was elected to join the Sierra Club Florida Executive Committee at the quarterly meeting held this past Saturday, December 7th.

Denise brings her volunteering and interning experiences with Sierra Club and a strong educational background to the post. She will offer an excellent perspective as a Public Interest Communication graduate student. Denise will be seated in January. *Congratulations Denise!*

Saving our Springs: Outstanding Fla. Springs Rulemaking Underway



Weeki Wachee Springs floating algae/Image by D. Quirolo

Florida legislation was passed over a decade ago to protect Outstanding Florida Springs (OFS's). But it has been largely ineffective because the required uniform rules and standards for implementing the regulation of water consumption use permits for water were never defined. Since 2014, the water districts

have NEVER denied a consumptive use permit, despite the OFS's rule to avoid "significant harm to the water resources or ecology of the area." The Florida Springs Council has sued the state of Florida twice to take action.

Local springs including Weeki Wachee, Kings Bay/Crystal River and Homosassa/Chassahowitzka Springs Groups, and the wildlife that depends upon these springs, especially manatees, have experienced serious impacts and even mortality from increasing pollutant loads and excessive drawdown that is causing water quality decline, loss of healthy seagrasses, and reduced spring runs.

This decline is not restricted to our area. Eighty percent of Florida's springs are impaired. Florida is currently over-pumping 2 billion gallons of water per day. Springs flow is down 30% state-wide, contributing to a decline in water quality. Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) 2040 Water Plan predicts water shortages statewide by 2040 at current rates of consumption.

Nutrients, primarily nitrogen, from agricultural fertilizer are the leading cause of water quality decline, followed by urban fertilizers and septic systems/wastewater treatment plants. While strong fertilizer ordinances can rein in urban pollution, more must be done to address agricultural and wastewater pollution.

On December 10th, 2024, FDEP published a long overdue Notice of Proposed Rule for Outstanding Florida Springs Rulemaking. The public comment period on the draft rules ended December 31, 2024. A hearing is set in Tallahassee on Jan. 6th to discuss and possibly adopt them. The proposal defines the scope of the rule, conditions for issuance of permits and a uniform definition of Harmful to the Water Resources of the Area.

Sierra Club Adventure Coast strongly supports the long overdue rulemaking to define the term "Harmful to Water Resources" for purposes of water permits for Outstanding Florida springs and spring runs. However, the proposed draft rule is entirely inadequate. It does nothing beyond current consumptive use permitting to provide targeted protection to specifically prevent harm to our springs. It is time to go back to the drawing board and provide a more detailed and substantive rule.

Sierra Club is a member of the Florida Springs Council that has taken the lead to submit a stronger draft proposed rule to FDEP. Adventure Coast Group endorses and supports adoption of this draft rule instead of the one set for hearing on Jan. 6th. Let's hope we get it right this time.

Citrus County News



- On Dec. 10th, 2024, the Citrus County Commission postponed for 180 days an amendment to the Manatee Element of the Comprehensive Plan requested by Robert Batsel, Esq., 1728 Investments, LLC to work out concerns by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (F&W). Batsel seeks to revise how boat slips in cut basins are evaluated in

relation to how many slips are now allowed by the plan, that could increase the number of boat slips. This could reduce manatee habitat and increase boating activity in areas frequented by manatees, and conflicts with the current Manatee Protection Plan. This change would require approval by both FWC and F&W prior to consideration by Citrus.

- At the Dec. 10th meeting, the Citrus County Commission also held a public hearing to amend the Manatee Protection Zone. Signs in Kings Bay that were recently removed marking the zone will be replaced with uniform waterway markers to identify the manatee protection zones. The amendment will establish slow speed zones for manatee protection in Homosassa and Crystal River where “all vessels shall be operated at or below slow speed minimum wake at all times.” Other areas of these rivers will be established as no wake zones where “all vessels shall be operated at or below idle speed no wake at all times.” The amendment was approved by a unanimous vote of the Commission.

Hernando County News



- The land grab by Gov. DeSantis and his Cabinet to trade 324 acres of Withlacoochee State Forest in Hernando for timberland in Levy County to develop a golf course resort has slowed to a virtual stop. Final approval required by the Florida Acquisition and Restoration Council has not occurred nor is it on recent meeting agendas. Sierra Club Florida commissioned a survey of the property by gopher tortoise protection leader Chase Pirtle. He found 112 gopher tortoise burrows on the property—60 of them active. The state spent six million dollars for this valuable conservation land. Letters of opposition to the Florida Forest Service from Sierra Club and other conservation groups have gone unanswered.
- Gold Dust Farms, Ltd. has submitted a proposal to Hernando County for approval to build a 300-member golf course resort on 292 acres of forest bordering Hernando Audubon’s Ahhochee Hill Sanctuary and the Withlacoochee State Forest. A community meeting was held on Dec. 3rd attended by about 70 concerned neighbors who pointed out the many ways it would impact them, including loss of well water, access by emergency services and traffic safety issues. The landowner, local attorney and power broker Joe Mason, was urged to sell it to the state for conservation land but refused, saying that it is up to the new landowner, who also refused.
- Hernando County held a workshop on Dec. 18th to begin a shared vision for the county’s future through a five-year Strategic Plan. The facilitators were from Collaborative Labs at St. Petersburg College and the John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government. The room was full of participants who were positive and cooperative. We identified what we value about Hernando, issues of concern, and then guiding principles for participation. Many residents voiced their appreciation for Hernando’s natural areas, rural lands, and undeveloped character. Future sessions will be held before it is presented to the county commission in May 2025 for implementation later that year. More info at www.engagehernando.com.

- Sophia Watson, former Director of the Hernando County School District's Wilton Simpson Technical College, reports that plans to landscape the grounds of the new school with native plants are underway. This cooperative effort was proposed by Sierra Club Adventure Coast Group and the Hernando Native Plant Society. Native trees and plants have been ordered for planting in January. The original plan included new buildings for Hernando County and Pasco Hernando State College on either side of the School District site at the Brooksville airport, but that construction has been deferred. The school board's building is ready to move into in January. A grand opening for the new school is planned for early February.

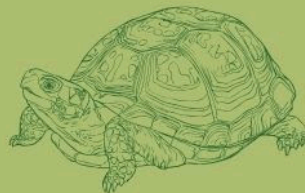
Adventure Coast Meetup Wed. Feb. 12th With Amanda Hipps on Gopher Tortoises

Sierra Club Adventure Coast Meetup

Wed. Feb 12th 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. 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 or call 352 277-3330.
check out our website at
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/tJlqdOCrrTotHtNoCSF5hp2reaOLaAz-aL4Y>

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



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.

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

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