



The Trust for Public Land conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.


Working from more than 50 offices nationwide, TPL helps agencies and communities:

- create a vision for new parks and conservation
- raise funds for parks and conservation
- complete conservation real estate transactions

TPL works to create city parks; preserve working farms, ranches, and forests; conserve historical and cultural sites; and protect rivers, streams, coasts, and watersheds – places where all Americans can experience nature close at hand.

Since 1975, TPL and its supporters have protected more 300 special places in Florida, from parks and historic sites to large expanses of environmentally sensitive land.

For more information, to support TPL's work, or to sign up for TPL publications, go to www.tpl.org.

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CONSERVING FLORIDA'S NATURAL LEGACY

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND



30 YEARS/30 STORIES

CONSERVING FLORIDA'S NATURAL LEGACY



THE TRUST *for* PUBLIC LAND
 CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE

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Foreword

In 1975 The Trust for Public Land chose Tallahassee, Florida, as the site of its first office outside San Francisco. The then two-year-old organization had completed only a handful of conservation projects, in California, but its leaders already had a keen sense of where its unique approach to conservation might be needed next. In the 1970s Florida, like California, was a big and beautiful state undergoing rampant growth that threatened to despoil the very natural wonders that were attracting new residents. The state was a logical place for TPL to expand.

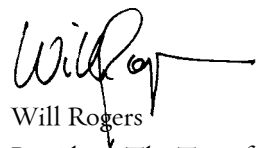
In the thirty years since, TPL has grown into the largest national conservation nonprofit working to protect land for people – conserving more than 2.2 million acres in 3,300 conservation projects nationwide. Over that time, the need for conservation in Florida has increased dramatically, and TPL has responded. In addition to its Tallahassee office, TPL has opened offices in Miami, Jacksonville and St. Petersburg.

Today Florida is the fourth most populous U.S. state, with nearly 18 million people. It is also one of the fastest growing states, its population projected to double by 2060. In the face of such growth, conservationists are scrambling to protect the state's drinking water, forests, beaches, and historic landscapes and to create new trails and parks for Florida's recreation-loving residents and visitors.

TPL is proud to be in the forefront of these efforts. Since 1975 we have protected more than 300 environmentally and historically significant Florida sites. We have also led the effort to create Florida Forever, one of the nation's most forward-looking state programs of conservation funding.

Floridians are fond of pointing out the state's great variety, from the staid southern charm of Tallahassee and down-to-business Jacksonville to the bustling tourist attractions of Disneyfied Orlando; from the international energy of Miami to the quirky Florida Keys. In thirty years, TPL has worked in all these Florida places and many more. We hope you enjoy this collection of stories about the people we've met along the way and the places we've helped to protect.

And we hope they will inspire you to help protect some of your favorite places in the Sunshine State. Because what was true in 1975 is just as true today: Florida's great beauty will last only as long as her residents work to conserve it.



Will Rogers
President, The Trust for Public Land



PHIL SCHERMEISTER



Critical Choices

Florida is a place of great natural beauty, rich culture, fascinating history . . . and almost 18 million people. No other state has changed so dramatically in such a short time. In just a generation or two, the Sunshine State has been transformed from a quiet, sparsely populated vacation destination with vast open spaces to the nation's fourth most populous state – a state where nine out of ten residents live in or near dense urban centers.

Almost overnight, it seems, parklands, waterfronts, and natural areas have disappeared. Already, for many Floridians, green spaces and gentle breezes have been overpowered by traffic, crowds, and noise.

To serve its growing population, Florida has added housing, schools, roads, shopping centers, office buildings, hospitals, and

universities. But we can't add land. The land we have today is the only land our families and our communities will have in the future. What we do with that land is a critical choice.

The Trust for Public Land conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. We believe it is not too late to save some of the special places that define Florida's unique natural and cultural heritage.

We work to preserve important natural areas, parks, historic sites, waterways, and coastal areas. During the past three decades, in partnership with private landowners, government agencies, entire communities, and individual neighborhoods, we have helped protect more than 300 environmentally and historically significant Florida sites. They range from a 50,000-acre addition to Everglades National Park to a one-acre historic site in Apalachicola.



One of Key West's cruise ship docks is located directly behind the historic Key West Custom House, leading to an intriguing juxtaposition of old and new. This type of scene is played out all across the state, as Florida struggles with preserving its traditional character while accommodating growth.

Palms line the beach at Matheson Hammock Park overlooking Biscayne Bay. Protecting the health of the state's water bodies by preserving the land around them is a key goal of TPL's work in Florida.



Florida has always been a national priority for TPL and was our organization's first regional location. Our Tallahassee office opened in 1975 and a Miami office in 1991. More recently we established offices in Jacksonville and the Tampa Bay area. Our efforts have led to the preservation of Cypress Gardens, the Key West Custom House, the historic DeSoto site in Tallahassee, the Marineland beachfront property near St. Augustine, Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, Tampa's Ft. Brooke Park, and the

Miami Circle archaeological site, among many others.

We also have helped preserve watersheds of the Ichetucknee River, Gemini Springs, the Indian River Lagoon, the North Fork of the St. Lucie River, the Miami River Greenway, and the Everglades, as well as pristine barrier islands in Lee County, Nassau County, and the Panhandle.

Key to these victories is our effort to ensure adequate public funding for parks and natural areas. TPL helped establish the Florida Communities Trust and

played a key role in supporting the landmark 1999 Florida Forever legislation, a \$3 billion land conservation program that demonstrates our state's environmental leadership. TPL has also spearheaded many local conservation finance initiatives, helping Florida counties and municipalities pass 16 ballot measures generating more than \$1 billion in new conservation funding.

Land conservation is not easy work. We know the next three decades will present even greater challenges. Florida's

growth and urbanization continue at a rapid pace, creating greater urgency but not necessarily more resources for conservation. Our work now takes place within the context of a more volatile economy, a more complex government and regulatory climate, and increasing public scrutiny.

We are committed to TPL's fundamental conservation approach. We preserve land through acquisition of property and conservation easements. We work to ensure greater public access to parks, and help commu-



MICHAEL WRAY

nities define and implement their conservation vision. We promote measures that increase public funding for conservation, and we support research and education to enhance public understanding of conservation issues, benefits, and techniques.

TPL's Florida staff members have extensive experience in land conservation and deep knowledge of the unique character of Florida. No other national organization has this scope of experience combined with our special focus on the human element of land conserva-

tion. We enjoy strong relationships with many organizations and individuals throughout Florida. We benefit from the thoughtful guidance of volunteer advisory councils whose members provide a variety of business, cultural, and community perspectives. We are fortunate to have the trust of government officials, landowners, environmentalists, and neighborhood leaders, as well as the financial support of local and national businesses, foundations, and individual philanthropists.

We take pride in our accomplishments in Florida over the past 30 years: completion of more than 300 projects and a significant contribution to establishing a strong statewide conservation mentality.

This volume celebrates TPL's three decades in Florida. Through words and pictures from talented writers and photographers who know and love this land, we offer an inside look at just one-tenth of our work – a

sampling of 30 stories about some of our most interesting, colorful, and significant projects. We have enjoyed looking back at these accomplishments and we hope you will share our commitment to conserving Florida land for people.

From the 2,000-year-old Miami Circle to this Civil War battlefield at Camp Milton in Jacksonville, TPL has played a role in preserving some of the state's most significant historic sites.



MARK GRANDIN

Local land trusts achieve on-the-ground conservation

By Julie Hauserman

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Introduction

You're driving down the road past a piece of woods that you've always taken for granted when you see it: the telltale yellow of a bulldozer and flagging tape around trees.

Some people just shrug their shoulders, figuring that wall-to-wall development is simply inevitable in a state that draws a thousand new residents every day. But some people are moved to take action to save the places they love.

In Florida, grassroots conservationists come together and work through local land trusts. Land trusts negotiate with landowners who want to donate or sell conservation easements (permanent deed restrictions that prevent harmful land uses), or they acquire land outright to maintain working farms, forests, parks, and wilderness.

That's what happened in the rolling quail-hunting plantation country north of Tallahassee, known as the Red Hills. It's the kind of landscape that inspires artists, with fat oaks and tall pines,

lakes, and moss-covered red clay banks along the roadsides. The Red Hills cover 25 square miles and 400,000 acres – one of the largest privately held conservation areas in the United States. More than 300 public roads run through the region. It's an historic landscape worth saving, and concerned residents were smart enough to realize it before development fractured the region.



BEATRICE QUERAL

The Red Hills Conservation Program started out as a small group of committed people meeting in plantation owner Kate Ireland's living room.

"More happened for conservation in this room than anywhere else in Leon or Thomas counties," Miss Kate says.

The first gathering called itself the Red Hills Consortium. It included Miss Kate, John

Flicker and George Willson of The Nature Conservancy, Dale Allen of The Trust for Public Land, a representative from the Tallahassee Trust for Historic Preservation, and one from an historic preservation group called Thomasville Landmarks.

The goal, according to Miss Kate, was to "preserve the best lands in south Georgia and North Florida."

At that time – in the late 1980s – most of the landscape was in the hands of only 120 families. The plantation families were very private.

Kate Ireland talks with Dale Allen in her living room, where the Red Hills Conservation Program began.

“Even getting them to talk to each other was difficult,” Miss Kate says.

But the four-laning of a regional highway, US 319, and the threat of massive clearing for a proposed oil pipeline led the plantation owners to ask themselves, what other changes are coming? They wanted to shape the Red Hills’ future – not just watch helplessly as it got developed, piece by piece.

After 319 was four-laned, Dale Allen of TPL approached Miss Kate and asked her if she would be willing to sell a conservation easement on the portion of her property that ran along the highway. While they were not able to work out a deal – she at one point told Dale he was crazy – it started Miss Kate thinking about the changes coming and how she could protect a landscape she loved.

Eventually, the Red Hills Consortium was able to convince Tall Timbers Research Station – a

small research facility that studies the region’s quail habitat – to create a program to hold conservation easements on the plantation properties. Today Tall Timbers holds conservation easements on 100,000 of the 300,000 acres that make up the Red Hills region.

The first meeting of land-owners in the late 1980s attracted 60 people.

“Now we have 220,” says Miss Kate. “What other people dream of, we have done.”

The rolling Red Hills conservation lands create a bonus for Florida’s capital city: dark night skies, clean air, and absolutely gorgeous views.

“The air out here is spotless,” Miss Kate says.

TPL was an integral player in the Red Hills conservation program from the beginning.

“Even though TPL is nationwide, Dale always spoke for the local area,” Miss Kate says. “He could point out the pros and cons of conservation easements,

and show us how to address issues as they came up. He always saw the big picture, but could bring it down to the local level. We always had fair and reasonable discussions.”

Will Abberger, who has served as director of TPL’s Land Trust Program, says working with grassroots people who want to set up local land trusts “plants some seeds throughout the state.”

Besides helping to get the Red Hills program off the ground, TPL helped start the Indian River Land Trust in 1990. The local group’s first project was to preserve the historic McKee Botanical Garden, an all but abandoned tourist attraction that is now one of the South’s finest public gardens.

The Indian River Land Trust gave people who cared about the quality of life in Indian River County real tools to make a difference. In 2004 the group helped persuade county voters to approve a \$50-million bond issue

to purchase conservation lands. This financial boost is critical. As the owners of valuable lands in the area die, their heirs have serious financial decisions to make. Developers are always waiting in the wings.

“If you have a special place in your family that you’d like to preserve for generations, land trusts offer a tool to do that,” says Janet Alford, former executive director of McKee Botanical Garden. “They provide a nervous landowner with the tools to give them confidence to look at alternatives to selling to developers.”



Northeast Florida

Ambition and preservation

Northeast Florida reveals the deep connection of nature and human history. Coastal beaches and the watershed of the northward flowing St. Johns River are the region's defining natural features. From the bustling Jacksonville metropolitan area south to the rural reaches of Putnam County, Northeast Florida offers rich ecological diversity – pinelands and hardwood hammocks, sparkling streams and springs, cypress swamps, and coastal dunes.

Equally rich is the region's cultural heritage. St. Augustine, in St. Johns County, was founded by the Spanish in 1565; it is the oldest permanent European settlement in North America. Nearby is Fort Mose, where runaway slaves created an early African-American community. Fort Caroline, near the mouth of the St. Johns River, was the first French settlement in Florida. And long before any European or African settlers,

native people lived amidst these woods and waters.

Preserving this natural and cultural heritage is not easy. More than a million people now live in the greater Jacksonville area. Flagler County, a little to the south, is today the fastest growing county in the nation. Conservation initiatives such as Preservation Project Jacksonville and the acquisition of key natural and historic sites are at the heart of TPL's contribution to protecting Northeast Florida's land and history.

MICHAEL WRAY



Facing page: Children play on the playground at the Palm Coast Linear Park's new trailhead. TPL helped the City of Palm Coast purchase seven properties along the popular greenway.
Above: Castaway Island Preserve is one of 23 sites purchased by TPL for Preservation Project Jacksonville.



Preservation Project: Ahead of the curve

By Patricia Wilcox

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Northeast Florida

Castaway Island Preserve captures nature's beauty and holds it gently for observation. Nature trails and picnic areas bring the marshland close enough to take in the salt air. While kayaking, you may hear the whistle of a crane in flight as it glides past your shoulder. An observation platform provides a wide-angle view of the Intracoastal Waterway. Both perspectives bring nature closer.

Miles away, the 72-acre Beach and Peach park is tucked into a dense urban neighborhood of modest homes. Just 150 yards from broad, congested Beach Boulevard, the park opens from a single empty lot on Peach Drive. It is the woods every child wishes were just up the street, with well-used dirt trails and a beautiful lake hidden inside.

Despite burgeoning subdivisions, rural quality remains where the 14.5-mile Jacksonville-to-Baldwin Trail winds through a countryside that still feels rural. The trail's 100-foot right-of-way

allows paved pedestrian and bicycle travel as well as softer equestrian ground. Perhaps the heart of the trail is where it stretches under covering trees past Camp Milton, an encampment site used by both sides during the Civil War. Before The Trust for Public Land intervened, permits had been issued to use the property as a disposal site for septic tank sludge. The thought

Preservation Project Jacksonville conserved a number of sites that ensure public access to the water, including a park on Goodby's Creek (below) and an addition to Dutton Island Park and Preserve (right).



MICHAEL WRAY





Land Saver: John Delaney

By Patricia Wilcox

A year of so into John Delaney's first term as mayor of Jacksonville, some of his buddies invited him to go fishing. It would be a fateful excursion.

Near the mouth of the St. Johns River, the fishing guide turned north into Sisters Creek, and Delaney entered a pristine piece of old Florida he had never seen before. He remembers

drifting by oyster islands and oak hammocks, with dolphins playing in the wake of the boat.

The mayor quit fishing and looked at the beauty around him. And then he started to worry.

"I had this image," he recalls, "of laundromats and gas stations and fast food restaurants." A vision, he knew, that was all too real in neighborhoods

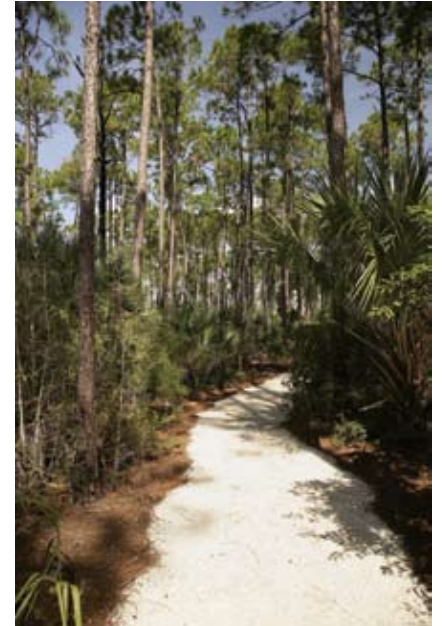
and communities all around the state. If this place and places like it were not protected, he realized, they ultimately would be lost.

Delaney's Sisters Creek epiphany prompted the creation of Preservation Project Jacksonville, a \$200 million land acquisition initiative designed to manage growth, protect the environment and make Jacksonville a better place to live. Before Delaney completed his second term as mayor, the Preservation Project had expanded park holdings in Jacksonville by more than 50,000 acres.

To achieve such success, Delaney built solid public support and enlisted partners. The Trust for Public Land was one of them, acquiring land for the program from 1999 to 2003 – a total of 23 sites. By the time Delaney left office in 2003, his land-banking had given Jacksonville the largest urban park system in the United States.



MARK GRANDIN



MICHAEL WRAY



Preservation Project acquired one-tenth of the city's land mass for conservation.



MARK GRANDIN

of how close Jacksonville came to losing this cultural and environmental asset is alarming.

The City of Jacksonville, covering 841 square miles, is the urban center of north Florida and home to 800,000 people. It's an ambitious community facing problems caused by rapid growth: traffic congestion, pollution, sprawl, and encroachment on environmentally sensitive lands.

Mayor John Delaney, with ambitions of his own, was determined to preserve the best of what the area offered in open space and natural areas. By the end of his second term, the city and its partners had acquired one-tenth of the city's land-mass for conservation and Delaney's environmental legacy was assured. This remarkable conservation initiative was Preservation Project Jacksonville. It was conceived by Delaney as a tool to manage growth, protect the environment, improve water quality, and create broad new public access to the vast

natural resources with which this city is blessed.

It was the quality and breadth of vision behind the program that saved sites such as Castaway Island Preserve, Beach and Peach Park, and Camp Milton.

There were other acquisitions, and some were also alarmingly last minute, sometimes only inches ahead of the curve. The mayor recalls arriving with papers to stop development when bulldozers were already being off-loaded. In such situations, he said, it was TPL's ability to act quickly that proved invaluable. But TPL also served in less dramatic ways. Delaney praised staffers' help in selecting which lands to acquire, doing the legwork on acquisitions, drawing plans for park development, and building political support. TPL led the way.

In all, TPL closed 23 Preservation Project acquisitions, securing 3,500 acres with a market value of \$62.2 million for only

\$54.4 million. That considerable savings helped Jacksonville secure even more natural lands. Wherever you are in the Jacksonville area, a natural green space is just around the bend, ahead of the curve.



Courthouse drama leads to preservation

By Patricia Wilcox

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Northeast Florida

Visitors to the River-to-Sea Preserve in Marineland are drawn to the wide new boardwalk along the Atlantic oceanfront. The more adventurous will cross historic Highway A1A and explore the broad sandy trails through deeply wooded lands to the banks of the Matanzas River, or paddle a kayak through the marshes to the far shore. It's safe to say that few of them could imagine the courtroom drama that led to the preservation of this 90-acre preserve.

The town of Marineland, a municipality incorporated in 1940, is the home of Marineland, the attraction, which opened in 1938. The state's most popular attraction for many years, Marine-

land boasts an impressive list of firsts. It was the world's first oceanarium, featuring a variety of sea life sharing one habitat. Flippy, the first trained dolphin, called Marineland home, and dolphins' use of echolocation was discovered here. But by the mid 1990s, snazzier attractions had eclipsed the original, and Marineland was struggling.

So was the New Yorker who owned much of Marineland, the

town. He was desperately seeking buyers for some 125 acres, and the people of Flagler County feared the type of development that might be in the offing. The county hoped to buy 10 acres or so for public use, but when the holdings went into bankruptcy, the court ruled that the property must be purchased as a whole. It was more than Flagler County could handle. Too much money and too many legal complexities were involved.



Marineland the attraction, site of the world's first trained dolphins, gave its name to Marineland the town.

MARINELAND ARCHIVES







MICHAEL WRAY

Peter Anderson, director of the University of Florida's Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience, uses horseshoe crabs to study how the eye responds to light. The purchase of Marineland enabled the lab to expand its facilities.

The county turned to The Trust for Public Land, which entered a bid for the property.

As the court battle progressed, more than a half-dozen developers competed for the Marineland property. One of them, a condominium developer from Orlando, outbid TPL. State Director Greg Chelius recalls that buyer walking into bankruptcy court with the cockiness of someone certain he had already won. With his silk shirt and gold chains, he was an unusual sight in the small, southern courtroom. "It was like a scene out of the movie *My Cousin Vinny*," says Chelius.

The judge was a stickler for financial documentation, which the developer hadn't bothered to bring. And he was not amused by the man's demeanor nor attire. "In my courtroom, you will wear a tie," the judge said. When he ruled in favor of TPL, the courtroom erupted in applause.

That outcome, says former county attorney Al Hadeed, "would have been impossible without TPL. There was no chance of our making this deal."

Flagler County eventually secured a grant from the Florida Communities Trust, which covered the purchase of 90

acres of the site, the portion that today is the River-to-Sea Preserve. A conservation-minded developer, Jim Jacoby of Atlanta, bought 25 acres, tore down derelict buildings and built the oceanfront boardwalk. Ultimately, he also bought Marineland, the attraction, and has improved and expanded the facility.

TPL also sold three acres to the University of Florida's Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience, making it possible for that respected research center to pursue a long-dreamed-of expansion.

As a gateway to a vast natural area, the River-to-Sea Preserve supports the Whitney Lab's mission, says Lab Director Peter Anderson. "There are 30,000 acres of publicly owned land within a few miles of our dock," he says, which are home to every marine ecosystem in Florida except coral reefs and red mangroves, making them a unique "teaching platform."



Farewell to the Beach Lady

By William Poole

MaVynnee Betsch, the “Beach Lady” of American Beach, was an artist, performer and opera singer by training with a passionate voice for environmental and historic conservation in northeast Florida. Betsch was the great granddaughter of Abraham Lincoln Lewis, president of the Afro-American Life Insurance Company. Lewis helped found the seaside town of American Beach in 1935 as a haven for his African-American workers at a time when most Southern beaches were closed to them.

Located on Amelia Island, north of Jacksonville, American Beach attracted working-class visitors, black homeowners, and the black cultural elite through the 1950s with its hotels, restaurants, and nightclubs. More recently, development has encroached on the town, and Betsch called on all her eloquence and theatrical style to protect it. She marshaled supporters and partners, including



REGIS LEFEBURE

The Trust for Public Land, and promoted her cause on the pages of newspapers and magazines across the nation.

Before her death in September of 2005, Betsch managed to see the last remaining large dune at American Beach transferred to the National Park Service’s nearby

Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. (She had named the dune NaNa, which means “grandmother” in the West African Twi dialect.) And she knew that the Evans Rendezvous, the town’s most noted nightclub, had been acquired by TPL and would be transferred to local Nassau

County for use as a cultural center and historic park.

“Death will not take me from my beloved NaNa,” she once wrote in a local newspaper. “I wish my ashes to be part of the eternal softness of sand – a magic world that makes my life a constant joy at American Beach.”





Bowls of liquid light

By Bill Belleville

Native Americans knew these little springs first, camping here under a thick hammock of live oaks, their limbs heavy with Spanish moss. The twin springs appeared as pools of turquoise, radiant in the dark forest canopy. Their runs flowed into a broad, sandy bottomed lake nearby that the Creeks called Wepolokse. The lake was a dilation in the larger river system known as Welaka.

Although geography remains the same, names change. The springs became known as Gemini, the lake as Monroe and the river as the St. Johns. In the 1800s, early settlers cut timber, grew citrus and tapped the longleaf pines for turpentine. The Padgett family later ranged cattle and grew sugar cane. Trains on the way to

The Trust for Public Land worked with Volusia County to preserve Gemini Springs in 1994.

MICHAEL WRAY

Enterprise on Lake Monroe would stop so passengers could buy cups of sugar juice.

By 1969 the Gray family bought 210 acres around the springs, building the weir that allows the runs to pool. They also constructed the arched bridges, the stone barbecue building and the spring house. On the land surrounding the springs, they raised prize Santa Gertrudis cattle. Like others before them, they reveled in the rare aesthetic of the place. Author Marjory Stoneman Douglas once called springs “bowls of liquid light” and that enchantment was not lost on the Grays. It was they who named the twin springs Gemini.

At one point, the Grays considered developing the land, and permits allowing 202 homesites were granted. Instead, in 1994, they embraced a concept that would forever protect the springs. Clay Henderson, an attorney specializing in land conservation, helped facilitate the negotiations

to make that happen. “Charlie and Sandra Gray appreciated the land for what it was. They thought it deserved to be a legacy for all the people of Florida to enjoy.”

Today, thanks to a complex purchase plan, the springs are the centerpiece of a Volusia County Park named for them. Trails wind back through the subtropical hammock of live oak and palmettos – and one 1.3-mile spur leads to the nearby restored DeBary Mansion. Thousands visit Gemini Springs each year to hike and bike, to paddle the spring run to the river, and to picnic.

The twin springs, each arising from a wooded cleft in the soft limestone, remain as magical as they have always been.



Doris Leeper Spruce Creek Preserve rewarding life, honoring founder

By Herb Hiller

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Northeast Florida



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Volusia County attorney Clay Henderson was a founding member of TPL's Florida Advisory Council and serves as president of the Friends of Spruce Creek.

Far more than its mere 12 miles suggest, Spruce Creek balances people's urge to conserve with their need to play. People paddle and fish this waterway. They hike and cycle trails atop bluffs that rise 60 feet or more within sight of barrier island condominiums.

Humans and wildlife – black bear, bobcat, indigo snake, wood stork – thrive in the watershed's overlap between tropic and temperate zones, the last of the red mangroves and the onset of needlerush.

Not far away, Florida Hall of Fame artist Doris Leeper inspired conservation of the Canaveral National Seashore as a way to preserve a cherished barrier island.

Then, on the mainland, Leeper (known as "Doc" for the medical student she once was) sought to create a conservation buffer between the popular coastal towns of Daytona Beach and New Smyrna Beach. She knew the

bluffs of Spruce Creek as a center of Timucuan culture and the vicinity as the rich archaeological site of the 18th century Turnbull colony, the largest English settlement attempted in Florida. The realm inspired her to create the Atlantic Center for the Arts along the lower creek shore and to turn her sights toward preserving the Spruce Creek watershed.

To ensure her vision, Leeper created the Friends of Spruce Creek. Conservation leader Clay Henderson joined early and today serves as the Friends' president.

"Doc was a wonderful taskmaster," Henderson recalls. "She carried a collection of mid-1980s aerial maps on which she had drawn the boundaries. She was always pulling it out to remind us that we hadn't done enough to finish the acquisitions."

Along the way, Leeper and Henderson led Volusia County to pass Florida's first conservation

TPL has preserved three sites along Volusia County's Spruce Creek.

lands acquisition referendum. That, in turn, inspired a much larger state program, Florida Forever, which every year since 1990 has committed \$300 million to funding land acquisition and maintenance.

That Spruce Creek Preserve has now almost completely filled in its 2,300-acre boundaries is due in large part to TPL, which more than once stepped in at a critical moment.

Acquisition of the last 400 acres will mark a posthumous gift to Leeper, who died in 2000 and for whom the preserve is named.

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MICHAEL WRAY



The presence of the forefathers

By Patricia Wilcox

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Northeast Florida

In the marshlands north of St. Augustine lie the remains of Fort Mose (pronounced Mo-zay), the first chartered community of free black people in what is now the United States. The land is open now, but not empty. It is filled with history.

“You can feel the presence of the forefathers,” Lorenzo Laws says softly. “It is a humbling experience to realize all they endured to gain their freedom.”

A founder of the Fort Mose Historical Society, Laws has worked more than a decade to preserve the site of that long-ago community and to tell its story. Fort Mose was free, he explains, “before there was any freedom. This was the beginning.”

The story of Fort Mose opens with the drama and danger of an underground railroad that pre-dated not just the U.S. Civil War but the American Revolution. In the early decades of the 1700s, Africans enslaved in the English colony of South Carolina braved

treacherous swamps and vicious slave-hunters to escape. They moved southward, with Native American assistance, to freedom and sanctuary among the Spanish in Florida.

In 1738 the Spanish established Fort Mose two miles north of St. Augustine as a defensive outpost. It was manned by a free black militia, and a free community of black families made their lives there.

When the English invaded in 1740, the militia fought fiercely against their former oppressors,

and though the fort was lost, the English were beaten back. A second Fort Mose was built in 1752.

In 1986, on a small woody island rising slightly above expansive marshes, University of Florida archaeologists found the walls of that structure, its moat and many artifacts of life at the fort. Salt marshes have taken the rest.

The State of Florida purchased almost 34 acres to preserve Fort Mose as a historical park. But that included only enough solid land for a single marker describing the site’s significance.

MARK GRANDIN



In 1995 Laws and other interested citizens formed the historical society and began to press for further land acquisition. By 2003 St. Johns County had agreed in principle, but the prime tract adjacent to the state park was in the hands of a developer who was poised to build more than 30 homes.

The Trust for Public Land negotiated with the developer, bought the land, and held it until the county could buy it. There will be a museum, interpretive trails, and re-enactments of life at Fort Mose.

Lorenzo Laws (pictured, right) is founder of the Fort Mose Historical Society, created to preserve the site of the first chartered community of free black people in the United States. TPL’s purchase of additional land for the park in 2003 will enable the building of a museum.



MARK GRANDIN



Chasing the Tomoka lights

By Anne Nelson

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Northeast Florida

“The Timucuan brave was determined to visit his love – daughter of the chieftain of a neighboring tribe. Defying his father, the young man made a torch from the knot of a pine tree and struck out into the darkness. As he pushed his way further and further into the dense Florida scrub, he lost his way. As morning light spread through the pine grove, there was no sign of the brave. He never found his maiden or her camp, and he never returned home. It’s said that the spirit of this Timucuan brave still roams the woods of Tomoka, searching for his love. If you follow his light, you too will be lost.”

On a bright fall day in Tomoka State Park, it’s easy to believe the tale of a lover lost in the forest. The woods spread all around, creating a dense canopy that extends even over the two-lane loop road that follows a trail blazed hundreds of years ago through the Florida wilder-





ness. The road harkens back to a simpler time, and the community has fought hard to preserve this remaining wilderness in a rapidly growing part of the state's east coast.

The tale of the Tomoka lights doesn't end with the native warrior. Talk to anyone who grew up in Ormond Beach in

the 1950s and 60s, and you'll likely hear stories about some other mysterious lights – balls of orange fire that split into red, green and yellow and

Located near the convergence of the Tomoka and Halifax rivers in Volusia County, Tomoka State Park encompasses more than 1,600 acres where early Native Americans once lived off the fish-filled lagoons.

back again, seeming to play with the teenagers who chased them in souped-up cars. More than one teenager died on the stretch of road made infamous by the lights, a three-mile long straightaway edged with large trees dripping with a heavy layer of Spanish moss.

The legend of the Tomoka lights is also one of the stories you'll hear from local historian Marian Tomblin, who has spent the past 25 years collecting legends about the area surrounding Ormond Beach in Volusia County in a series of books aimed primarily at children. The Tomoka lights legend is included in her book, *Bull on the Beach*.

"We didn't fully appreciate what we had, growing up here," Tomblin says. "This is not only a beautiful part of the state, but also an historic one."

History and wilderness come together in Tomoka State Park, a 1,600-acre regional park known for its bird-watching and historic sites. Native Americans

once dwelled here, living off fish-filled lagoons. The park protects a variety of wildlife habitats and endangered species, including the West Indian manatee. Tomoka is a bird-watcher's paradise, with over 160 species sighted, especially during the spring and fall migrations. Visitors can stroll a half-mile nature trail through a hardwood hammock that was once an indigo field for an 18th century British landowner. A museum features artworks by artist Fred Dana Marsh, wildlife displays, Native American artifacts, and exhibits about Florida's history. A boat ramp gives boaters and canoeists access to the Tomoka River for paddling and fishing.

The Trust for Public Land has worked with the state to acquire four sites for Tomoka, one of which preserves over a mile of frontage on the loop road. If the native warrior were to appear today, he might still recognize these woods as the place he wandered, searching for his true love.





Bald Point State Park

By Susan Cerulean

“Is this a clothing-optional beach?” asked the twenty-something curly-headed man climbing from a cherry red rental in Bald Point State Park.

“Not really,” I said. “Though I’m sure you can find a deserted stretch of shore here if you really want.”

He hurried down an oak-shaded path toward the water, and I called after him, “But it might not be the greatest nude swimming out there.” As I packed my birding gear into my car, I thought of all the reasons Bald Point probably wouldn’t suit this visitor’s purposes. The bay is often murky, which makes spotting resident stingrays and horseshoe

crabs a pretty tough task. There’s no surf to speak of, except in a tropical storm. And he’d have to be in the mood for a lengthy naked wade, because at low tide the water wouldn’t top his knees for hundreds of yards.

Still, Bald Point, one of two enormous paws of landscape that cradle the conjoining of the Ochlockonee River and Apalachee Bay, is one of the most glorious places in this part of the state. Within this last grasp of land, the two water bodies come at each other with salt tide and sweet water flood, fashioning between them an estuary a bristle with oyster bed and golden sandbar. All manner of life thrives on this Gulf outpost

where nutrient-rich Georgia clay dissolves into Apalachee Bay.

Generations of people from Franklin and Wakulla counties have personal relationships with both Bald Point and Mashas Sand across the bay. These beachy outposts were among the few remaining places where the locals could watch the sun set, go fishing, take their children to wade — and not have to fight for access.

But when a private developer who owned the Bald Point beachfront put up exclusionary gates in the late 1990s, the public became aware that this really wasn’t public land at all. In August 1999, The Trust for Public Land purchased Bald Point for the

Located on Alligator Point where Ochlockonee Bay meets Apalachee Bay, Bald Point was threatened with development in 1999. The Trust for Public Land worked with the state to preserve more than 1,300 acres as a public park.

DAVID MOYNAHAN



Bald Point State Park's coastal marshes, pine flatwoods, and oak thickets shelter a variety of biological communities that make the park a popular destination for birding and wildlife viewing.

state, 1,348 acres for \$8.5 million. Closing shortly before the current real estate land value bubble, Bald Point's acquisition seems pure miracle. Even a year or two later the state could not have afforded the beachfront price tag.

Bald Point is for nesting sea turtles and fiddler crabs and

birds, as well as local residents. Dedicated birders patrol the Point daily, knowing this is the first land reached by far-flying warblers, hawks and hummingbirds when they cross the Gulf in spring.

The Point's vast salt marshes provide all the right things for the nurturance of its creatures, including rich hatchings of two-winged insects just when migrating birds require provisioning. But unprotected tender human skin doesn't always feel as welcome. That's why I had to smile as the butt-naked

boy-man hustled back to the parking lot, flapping his towel at the yellow flies dogging his legs, hastily pulling on his shorts. Maybe one day he'll return to visit Bald Point on its own magnificent terms.



Miccosukee Canopy Road Greenway

Shady canopy roads are the defining natural feature of the Tallahassee area. Huge live oaks, sweet gums, and hickory trees arch overhead, sheltering not only people on bikes and horseback, but also a rich diversity of plants and wildlife. The Miccosukee Greenway parallels six miles of one of Tallahassee's historic canopy roads through forests, pastures, park lands, and rolling hills. Made possible by The Trust for Public Land in partnership with state and local government and a group of dedicated community volunteers, this land is now protected for the enjoyment of generations to come.



RUSSELL GRACE





JONATHAN ALLAIN



Land Saver: Tom Barron and Lake Overstreet

By Julie Hauserman

Mountain bikers rolling through the gorgeous hills along the Lake Overstreet trails at Tallahassee's Maclay Gardens State Park have no idea that they owe a debt of gratitude to a local kid who once took a job working summers on a Wyoming dude ranch.

The kid was Tom Barron. After college in the mid-1970s, the ranch's owner, John Mettler, offered Barron a place to stay on a plantation he owned in Tallahassee. Mettler offered Barron his Cypress Cottage for 90 days. Barron stayed for eight years.

Barron, now the president of Capital City Bank, a large regional banking group, says his time at

Tallahassee banker Tom Barron was instrumental in preserving the Lake Overstreet addition to Maclay Gardens State Park.

Cypress Cottage grew a friendship. When Mettler died in the 1990s, Barron was trustee of his estate, which included large tracts of plantation land.

Tallahassee conservationists saw the Lake Overstreet land as a key connector of public lands, including the 300-acre Alfred B. Maclay State Gardens. In the mid-1980s, The Trust for Public Land sent Mettler a letter, asking if he might be willing to sell his land for a greenway.

The salty Mettler – who had had a bad experience with eminent domain in another state – wrote a letter back that said, in effect, “no way will you buy this land,” recalls Dale Allen, TPL's southeast regional director.

After Mettler's death, Barron found the rejection letter and called TPL, setting in motion one of the most important conservation purchases in Florida's capital.

“We began looking at this big inventory of land and saying, what are we going to do here?”

Barron says. “We recognized that TPL was a resource for expediting these kinds of sales.”

Purchased in 1994, Lake Overstreet was the final puzzle piece to complete Tallahassee's first major greenway, the Phipps-Overstreet-Maclay Greenway, which today stretches over five miles and nearly 2,000 acres.

“This community owes a huge debt of gratitude to people like John Mettler and other owners and holders of these large properties,” says Barron. “Through their stewardship, they have maintained these large holdings in the face of development. If it hadn't been for that stewardship, this would be a very different community than it is today.

“It was an attractive legacy for the Mettler family to leave to this community,” Barron says. “Through all his gruffness, John Mettler may have been one of the kindest people I've ever met.”



Central Florida

Land of great escapes

Once the heart of Florida's huge citrus industry, Central Florida today is better known as a world capital of tourism and family entertainment. Yet long before the mega-attractions of Walt Disney World and Universal Studios, the elegant Cypress Gardens offered a gentler essence of Florida vacation: sweeping landscapes of gardens and lakes, lovely southern belles, water ski shows and family fun. Opened in 1936 in Winter Haven, Cypress Gardens almost disappeared before TPL stepped in to negotiate a conservation partnership in 2003 with Polk County, the State of Florida and creative private interests.

Central Florida has seen dramatic growth in the past three decades, but still the region is characterized by visitors' enjoy-

ment of gardens, waterways, and historic natural lands. Ichetucknee Springs State Park, near Gainesville, is a popular spot for canoeing and tubing in its cool, clear waters. Further southeast, in Vero Beach, McKee Gardens is yet another historic garden treasure.

RUSSELL GRACE



From the southern charm of historic Cypress Gardens to the crystalline waters of the Ichetucknee River and Springs, Central Florida truly represents the heart of Florida.



Makinson and Paradise Islands, Lake Tohopekaliga, Kissimmee

The Islands of Lake Toho

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Central Florida

Situated at the upper part of the Kissimmee River system, Lake Tohopekaliga is the second largest in a chain of lakes that flow southward to Lake Okeechobee and ultimately the Florida Everglades. Affectionately known as Lake Toho, the picturesque water body is consistently ranked one of the top ten bass fishing lakes in the country and hosts several large bass fishing tournaments every year. Its location within 10 miles of Disney World, EPCOT Center, Universal Studios, and other major central Florida attractions also makes it extremely attractive to visitors and potential new residents.

In 1999 and 2000 TPL worked with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to preserve the lake's two largest land masses – Makinson and Paradise islands – averting the development of a resort hotel

and residential community that would have not only changed the character of the islands, but endangered the long-term health of the lake. Today Makinson Island is a county park, popular as a hiking and picnicking spot, and used regularly as an outdoor classroom by Osceola County schools. Paradise Island is managed by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as a wildlife and educational preserve.

Lake Toho is consistently ranked one of the top ten bass fishing lakes in the nation.

Preservation of the lake's two largest islands averted intensive development, helping to ensure Toho's long-term health.

SKIP STOWERS







Land Saver: Linda Chapin and the West Orange Trail

By Bill Belleville

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Central Florida

John Muir – the conservationist who loved long-distance hikes – was not the first to follow the paths railroads blazed across Florida, but he was arguably the most famous. Muir once wrote: “I started to cross the state by a gap hewn for the locomotive, walking sometimes between the rails, stepping from tie to tie, or walking on the strip of sand at the sides, gazing into the mysterious forest . . .”

Later, as railroads lost their cachet, tracks like those Muir followed sometimes became public trails. After all, they provided a grid that transected a quiltwork of private and public lands, and linked historic villages and towns.

One of the state’s most popular multi-use trails follows the vintage tracks of the old Orange Belt railway, covering 22 miles of abandoned rail line near the scenic southern shore of Lake Apopka. That path today is the West Orange Trail, used by as many as 70,000 hikers, rollerbladers, bikers, and horseback



MICHAEL WRAY

riders monthly. Yet, making it happen required an heroic effort.

The defunct Orange Belt line – which once took on crates of citrus at stations in Apopka, Ocoee, Winter Garden and Oakland – was abandoned in the 1980s. Several dozen property owners bought contiguous segments, making the old trainbed private and fragmenting the corridor. Complicating the issue were concerns that a public corridor might somehow bring litter, crime, and transients into local communities.

Linda Chapin, then chair of the Orange County Commission, provided the leadership that helped convince county and city officials the trail would be to the community’s advantage.

Chapin, in turn, says she was inspired by former Orange County commissioner Vera Carter, who first promoted the rails-to-trails concept. When Carter left office, Chapin put her heart into the project, bringing together county departments, property owners, and elected officials in the small communities that would be linked

by the trail, with The Trust for Public Land lending an experienced hand to the process.

Today, the well-used trail has helped revitalize the old-time citrus towns. At the same time, it has afforded citizens the chance for healthy outdoor exercise, as well as allowed a connection with the heritage of vintage Florida. Interpretive signs along the trail identify the historic value of each community as it passes next to them. As a result, trail users become more aware of the vital “sense of place” that once defined Florida towns and villages. Those searching for a connection with the remaining authenticity of Florida can realize it on the West Orange Trail.

Chapin, now the head of the Metropolitan Center for Regional Studies, reflects on the work behind the trail: “It’s one of my proudest accomplishments . . . One of the best things we did in the county in the 1990s.”

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Land Saver: Janet Alford and McKee Garden

By Julie Hauserman

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Central Florida

There is something mystical about the way Florida light falls on the deep green of a subtropical garden, about the loamy jungle smell, about sprinklers hissing and jeweled drops falling from shiny leaves.

Janet Alford, former executive director at McKee Botanical Garden in Vero Beach, can't get enough of it.

"We've got to have beauty in our lives," she says. "The world is a complicated place. We've got to take a break and breathe in the beautiful fragrance."

In the 1920s these gardens were a roadside attraction, an ornamental jungle sprawling over 80 acres with one of the world's finest collections of water lilies and orchids hidden in a dense subtropical hammock with streams, ponds, and trails. But by the 1980s development had swallowed all but 18 acres. And those 18 acres were overrun with invasive exotics. McKee was in need of some serious work.

"I felt like I could get my arms around that 18 acres," Alford said. "There was so much enthusiasm in the community."

Alford, a third generation Floridian, was first drawn to McKee at a gardening conference,

when she saw garden volunteers wearing T-shirts that said: "Save Our Secret Garden."

A year before she took the job supervising the garden, local volunteers had worked to save the site, with the help of The Trust



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McKee Botanical Garden has been named a “Secret Garden of Serenity and Surprise” by *National Geographic Traveler* magazine. Former garden director Janet Alford worked with TPL to preserve the 18-acre garden in 1994.

for Public Land, the Indian River Land Trust, and a local group formed to manage the garden.

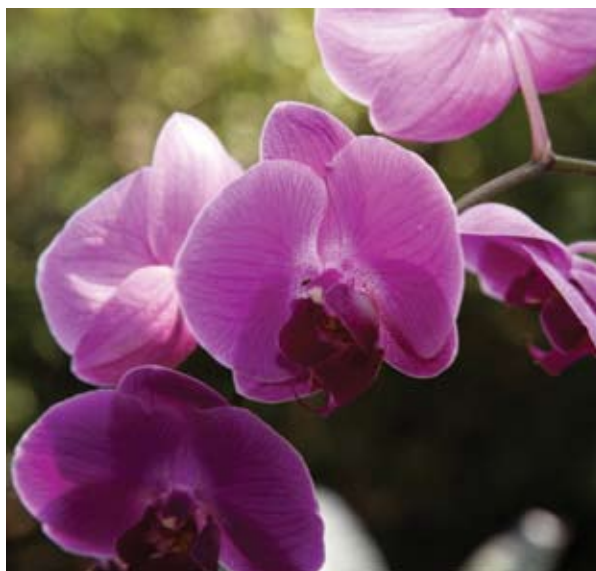
“It was an affirmation that this project was important to the Treasure Coast and to the state because historic landscapes are vanishing rapidly,” says Alford. “It is a magical, mysterious place.

All these years later, *National Geographic Traveler* magazine named McKee as one of twenty-two “Secret Gardens of Serenity and Surprise” in the U.S. and Canada – the only one in the southeastern United States.

Ask Alford to pick a favorite specimen at McKee and she doesn’t hesitate. She loves the towering royal palms, and calls them “my stately soldiers.”

“They have been beacons standing through all these hurricanes,” she says.

A garden like McKee can be a teacher, Alford believes. “We want to show successful examples. We want to demonstrate that it can be done, and not get stuck at: “Oh no, they’re going to mow it all down!” Alford says. “We need to show this to children so that they know you can still save precious places.”



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