



Winter 2009

Message from the President

At last, we are ready to begin detailed plans for opening and using our Environmental Education Center at the preserve! While we, like everyone else, face difficult financial problems, we have been able to build an excellent facility and we plan to offer as many programs as possible, all aimed at educating students and adults about our environment and history.

While our economy faces cyclical ups and downs, our obligations to educate do not – we are obligated to do as much as we can with what we have and I hope every member of ONP, Inc. understands this and offers all the help possible. Environmental education is sadly lacking in the Orange County school system. We have seen first hand the results. Many children, even older students, as well as adults, are very afraid to leave the pavement. Research shows that today's students spend 50 percent less time outdoors than they did 20 years ago. There is little opportunity to develop sensitivity and appreciation for natural systems and this is the gap we would like to fill.

Education is not our only goal. We want this preserve to be a recreational experience as well. Many people already enjoy the quiet walks on the boardwalk and along our upland trails. We are also getting more people involved in our restoration programs as we attempt to convert former citrus groves back to a sandhill plant community and we are all learning more about this new science as we experiment with different techniques.

Our plans include interpretations of our cultural as well as natural history and plans for the new building include good educational exhibits of both. We have years of historic articles of Lake Apopka and many artifacts left from our ancestors. We plan to include an excellent library where people can find information on the natural history of our area. The things we can accomplish are endless if we just have more and more community support.

This preserve has been accomplished through the volunteer efforts of many people and the tremendous community support we have received. Please help us continue to expand these efforts by donating what you can in funding and in volunteer work. Help us find new members and supporters. Plan to attend our grand opening on Saturday, January 31 to see what a great project this is.

**Volunteers have invested over 16,226
hours to create and sustain the
Oakland Nature Preserve.**

Pardon Our Looks

By Jackie Rolly

If you have been out to Oakland Nature Preserve lately you probably noticed a roped off sandy area on the east side of the new log education building that has some dead trees. This area is under restoration in an effort to return it to its original habitat, called Florida Sandhill.

An ongoing process in the restoration back to a Sandhill, the slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) and cherry (*Prunus* spp.) trees have been removed because they are not part of this habitat. However, parts of the slash pine trees were left as they make great habitat for woodpeckers and other tree cavity nesting birds and animals. You might also notice that a number of young trees are there – turkey oak (*Quercus leavis*), longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), chickasaw plum (*Prunus angustifolia*), and bluejack oak (*Quercus incana*). These species are all found in a natural Sandhill habitat.

So what is a Sandhill?



“...[E]arly settlers, explorers, and even naturalists in written accounts have described Florida’s environment and land as ...desolate and worthless. The continuous expanses of sandy hills were monotonous, strange and sterile.” (Dr. Walter Kingsley Taylor, Florida Wildflowers in their Natural Communities).

Sandhills are also known as Pine-turkey oak or turkey oak barrens, not very pleasant descriptions of one of Florida’s most recognizable upland communities. They are located on high, dry ground, often on gently rolling hills. Trees are widely spaced, the sandy soils are relatively sterile, and the understory consists of low growing woody shrubs such as blueberry (*Vaccinium* spp.) and saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). Also found are several species of grasses and wildflowers. Now is a good time to look at the varied flora in the restoration area because the grasses are young.

These grasses and wildflowers are slowly being reintroduced to this area of Oakland Nature Preserve, thanks to the efforts of the Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS). These

grasses and wildflowers cannot be found at nurseries (except a few at Biosphere Consulting and other native nurseries), but come from Tarflower members’ rescue efforts at construction sites. Look closely and you will see little white signs (sometimes flags) indicating where these different plants are located.

The wildflowers will start blooming in the March/April timeframe. Look for the Dayflower (*Commelina erecta*), Buckbrush or Wild Lavender (*Ceanothus microphyllus*), Roselings (*Callisia graminea*), Twin flower (*Dyschoriste oblongifolia*). The summer will bring other blooms such as the Prickly Pear Cactus (*Optunia humifusa*), Adam’s needle (*Yucca filamentosa*), Phoebanthus (*Phoebanthus grandiflora*), Piriqueta (*Piriqueta caroliniana*), Elephants foot (*Elephantopus elatus*), Penstemon (*Penstemon multiflorus*), and Greeneyes (*Berlandiera subacaulis*) to name just a few

One thing I know everyone has noticed is what looks like snow and large grayish green sponges on the ground. These are various types of lichens. The large sponge-like ones are called Deer Moss but it is actually a lichen in the genus *Cladina*. They are brittle and crunchy underfoot when dry, but soft as cotton when moist. Lichens are good indicators of air pollution like canaries in mines. The other smaller branched ones are called British Soldiers in the genus *Cladonia*, distinguishable by the small red blooms on their tips (when they are blooming).

ONP Deer Habitat Planned

Because of our small size and urban setting we are unable to support a natural deer population. Since they were very prevalent residents in the past, we want people to be able to see them.

Jeff Voss, one of our supporters has been able to purchase the property adjacent on the east side of the preserve (much to our great relief since it has been proposed for development in the past). He has agreed to create a natural habitat, about two acres in size, for a few white-tailed deer. He has also agreed to care for them and we will include them in our interpretive program. We will obtain the necessary permits and are hoping to find deer that have been reared in rehab facilities that cannot be released into the wild.

Weed’Em and Reap

As we continue our restoration areas our greatest problem is controlling the weeds that out-compete our restoration species. These weeds must be controlled by hand-pulling in most areas where herbicides can’t be used. Usually the problem is most significant during the first few months of the program and becomes less and less a problem as our planted species begin to dominate.

We need lots of volunteers to do this tedious job so please plan to give us at least a few hours a month to tackle it. We will train you to recognize the species we need to target. So, help us weed’em and reap the good feeling you get when you realize what a significant project we are undertaking.

Grand Opening of the New Environmental Education Center Scheduled

The day has finally come when we will be able to show off our long awaited Environmental Education Center.

We have scheduled an all day open house on Saturday, January 31 to welcome visitors into our new building.

Come enjoy the interesting displays featuring a demonstration of knapping, showing how the earliest residents made strong, sharp arrowhead points and how they made bows, arrows and atlatls.

Guided tours throughout the preserve will be given from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

Plan to attend this long-awaited occasion.



Each volunteer group that works at ONP makes a valuable contribution toward the goals of Educating, Preserving and Restoring. Thanks to the **West Orange Leadership** members (*left*) who helped with boardwalk and trail maintenance (*Photo: Krista Carter*). Volunteers from **Windermere Preparatory School** (*below right*) spent a morning of removing non-native plants - their fourth work day at the Preserve. Girl Scouts of **Citrus Council Dr Win Service Unit** members (*below left*) removed more than 1200 pounds of non-native air potatoes. Lori Mund coordinated this effort, their second volunteer work day at the Preserve (*Photo: Tom Rodriguez*).

Volunteers Make it Happen!



Visit our website at www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org for up-to-date information on activities at the preserve, and to see a printable color version of the newsletter with additional articles.

Membership Application for Oakland Nature Preserve

Name _____

Business/Organization _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone / Fax / email _____

Volunteer / Interests _____

- _____ Student or Youth—\$10.00
- _____ Individual—\$35.00
- _____ Family—\$50.00
- _____ Sponsor, Corporation or Organization—\$75.00
- _____ Patron—\$125.00 or more

Please mail this form with your check. Your interest in **Oakland Nature Preserve** is vital to the ongoing restoration effort.

Make check payable to: ONP

Mail to: Oakland Nature Preserve
PO Box 841
Oakland, FL 34760



Calendar Notes

Art Show to Benefit ONP February 7 & 8, 9 A.M. - 5 P.M

A special wildlife art show and sale will be held on February 7 and 8 from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., presented by Driftwood Gardens and GreenGalleries.com. **Bill Tippitt, a supporter of ONP and owner of Driftwood Garden**, will present a collection of wildlife art inside his beautiful greenhouses at 2001 Binion Road, which is located at Binion and Harmon Road, near Magnolia Park.

The show will be held the same weekend as the popular Mount Dora Art Festival so the Driftwood Gardens show will be a good stop on the way to or from Mount Dora. The art display will be very interesting and the beautiful bromeliads and other plants serving as a backdrop will be spectacular. All proceeds from the show will benefit the Oakland Nature Preserve and the Friends of Lake Apopka.

Insect Workshop Scheduled Saturday, February 14 at 10:30 A.M.

Our first educational programs in the classroom of the ONP Environmental Education Center is a workshop aimed at learning about the importance of insects, and beginning a collection of "The In-

sects of West Orange" to be housed in our museum. Entomologist Christian Miller has volunteered his time to teach us about insects, including how to collect and preserve them. This workshop is free and we hope to attract students as well as adults to participate. Routine meetings and field trips will be planned as we develop a good collection for permanent display in the museum

Master Naturalist Program February 23 - March 12, Mondays & Thursdays

A concentrated in-depth naturalist program for educators, docent volunteers and people interested in learning more about central Florida habitats, has been approved for Orange County, largely through the efforts of ONP volunteers. The 6-session program, sponsored by IFAS, focuses on Upland Habitats during both classroom and field trip sessions.

The course will be taught by principal instructor Jennifer Ramos of IFAS assisted by ONP Board member Peggy Lantz. Classroom work will be held at the Orange Co. Cooperative Extension Office, Magnolia Room, 6021 S. Conway Rd, Orlando. Field trips will be held at ONP and future classroom work will be scheduled at the preserve.

The cost is \$225.00 and further information can be obtained at the website www.MasterNaturalist.org (click on Course Offerings and then on Uplands).

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