

PAYNES PRAIRIE  
PRESERVE STATE PARK

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 11/26—People of the Prairie, 2pm @ Visitor Center
- 12/3 Overnight Back-packing Trip, 10am
- 12/10—Early Bird Walk, 7am
- 12/17—Rim Ramble Hike, 8am
- 12/24—Wildlife Walk, 10am
- 1/7—Overnight Back-packing Trip, 10am
- 1/14—Florida Crane and Nature Festival
- 1/21—STARGAZING AT HICKORY RANCH, 7pm
- 1/28—Rim Ramble Hike, 8am

Call the Visitor Center at  
(352)466-4100 to sign up  
& for more information.

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# PRAIRIE PRESS

PAYNES PRAIRIE’S  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

FALL 2011

## Park Manager’s Message

Finally, the hot dry summer is behind us and the wildfire on the prairie basin is out. As always, we look forward to the return of migratory wildlife that everyone enjoys. In preparation for winter and spring prescribed fires, and to improve wildlife habitat, we have been mowing firelines while the basin is dry enough to operate equipment without sinking in the marsh.

In addition to our normal activities, we just received our land management review (LMR) that occurs every 5 years on state-managed lands. The purpose of the review is to verify that we are accomplishing the management objectives established in the Park’s Unit Management Plan. The review involves representatives from numerous land management agencies, including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Forest Service, local government, and the private sector. The review team tours the property with Park and District staff, and completes

a formal review document addressing areas of accomplishment, concern, and needs. This review was very timely for the Prairie as we are also in the process of updating our 10 year Unit Management Plan. This plan outlines current and future operational needs and guidelines for Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Both of these reviews and plans help to set the course for future management of the preserve and make us better stewards of our public lands while ensuring accountability.

Be sure to take advantage of the cooler temperatures by getting outside and enjoying a trail, campsite, or the Visitor Center.

Thanks to all who help make each Visitor’s experience at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park a memorable one.

Prairie Life is Good,  
Davis Jowers, Park Manager



★★★ FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9TH 6:00 PM ★★★



## FRIENDS OF PAYNES PRAIRIE ANNUAL MEETING

at  
The Paynes Prairie Visitor Center



We look forward to seeing you!  
Please RSVP by Tuesday, December 6th  
Send an email to [info@prairiefriends.org](mailto:info@prairiefriends.org) , or call 352-466-4966.

*"...once it was built it cut off half of the water that should have been flowing to the Prairie."*

## "Whiskey's for drinkin' and water's for fightin' over!"

In the last three Prairie Press we've looked at the role of water in the Prairie wetland. We saw that the quantity and quality of the water feeding a wetland is critical to making a healthy wetland. We also saw that dry periods are as important to wetlands as are the wet periods. We looked at where the water on the Prairie comes from and found that it flows off watersheds and that not all of the watersheds that contribute water to the Prairie are equal. We saw that what we do to watersheds, how we build on them, how we treat them can make the water we need for our life our enemy.

and natural watersheds husband the water that flows through them. A healthy watershed slows the flow of water with twisting and turning creeks and has ponds and wetlands that first capture water and then slowly meter it out but even understanding this about the Prairie Creek/Newnan's Lake watershed we're missing water. In fact we're missing a bit more than half of the water that comes out of Newnan's Lake and down Prairie Creek to the Prairie.

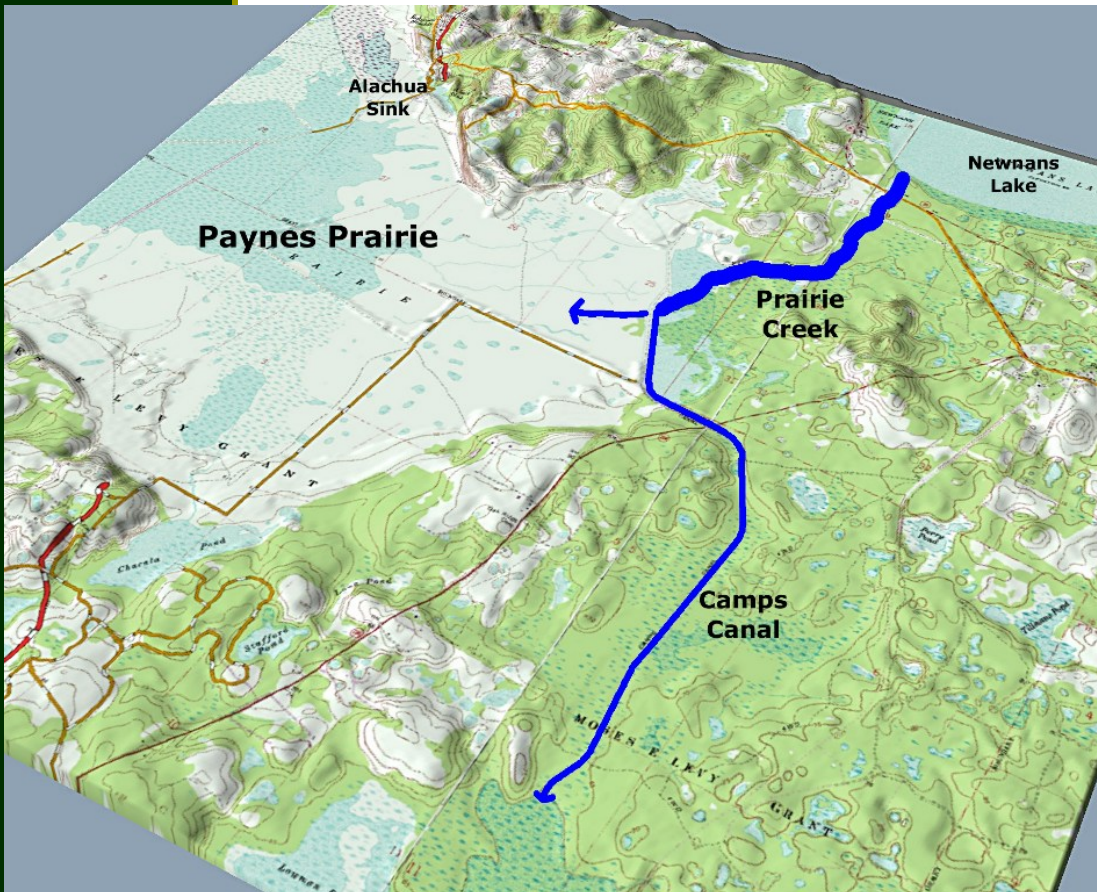
The state purchased Paynes Prairie from the Camp family that ran the Prairie as a large

cattle ranch. Some time in the early 1920's the camp ranch dug a large levee and canal on the east end of the Prairie to first block the flow of Prairie Creek water onto the prairie and to second divert the water two miles to the southeast into the River Styx Swamp where it eventually finds it's way to Orange Lake and the Ocklawaha River. This is of course what we call Camps Canal and you can see it were County Road 234 crosses it between Rochelle and Micanopy.

Camps Canal was the first of what ended up

In our last issue we saw that while the Prairie Creek watershed occupies 65% of the total Prairie watershed it only contributes about a third of the water to the Prairies water budget. Now some of this is to be expected as the Prairie Creek watershed is in a fairly natural state

as maize of dikes, canals and levees on the Prairie. Not only was it the first but it was the most important as once it was built it cut off half of the water that should have been flowing to the Prairie. For the cattlemen this was good as they were trying to make the Prairie



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# “Whiskey and water” *continued*

safe for cows and not run a natural wetland. For the Park Service that started managing the property in the early 1970's it was a very big problem.

The first is of course that the Prairie needed that water, it was very nice as a cattle ranch but needed the water to be a real wetland but other people had been getting that water for a long time and highways had been built in the Prairie floodplain. Getting that water back was not going to be easy. As they say out west “Whiskeys for drinking and waters for fighting over.”

- Jim Weimer, Preserve Biologist



## President's Letter

Greetings Prairie Friends!  
 Fall is here and with it we come closer to the end of another exciting year for the Friends of Paynes Prairie. I hope that you will all consider attending the Annual Meeting or the Friends, to be held Friday, December 9th from 6-9pm at the Paynes Prairie Visitor Center.

Our Membership Renewal Drive showed us once again how many proud supporters of this special place are willing to show financial support in these tough economic times. 320 members have renewed their membership. There is still time to renew or join the Friends, online ([www.prairiefriends.org](http://www.prairiefriends.org)), by mail, or at the Annual Meeting. Thank you!

This summer, Preserve staff and Friends completed design work on new interpretive panels to be placed along the La Chua Trail. The Friends obtained funding for this project from a \$25,000 Tourist Development Tax Grant from the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners in conjunc-

**“There is still  
 time to renew  
 or join the  
 Friends”**



tion with the Alachua County Tourist Development Council. It's a great example of how the Friends of Paynes Prairie supports the mission and goals of Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Look for the new panels to be in place around the New Year. I've provided a couple sneak previews below.

As always, thank you for being a part of Friends of Paynes Prairie. “We Make A Difference!”

-Bill Andrews,  
 President  
 Friends of Paynes Prairie

**The Top Predator** *Millions of years at the top of the food chain*

A fast, powerful predator, the adult American Alligator fears only larger alligators. When in alligator habitat, we reconnect with our place in nature—and here it is not at the top.

**We need to remember that alligators...**

- Eat small animals**  
They swallow their food whole at all times. Never feed an alligator. When alligator associates people with food, they become aggressive and must be destroyed. Remember, a fed alligator is a dead alligator.
- Ambush their prey**  
They identify their walking trails, turtle tracks, etc. They can use their tail to make an explosive jump, and run up to 11 miles per hour. Stay away from the water's edge, the alligator that attacks will be the one you never see.
- Hunt at night**  
In the dark, an alligator hunts every noise it hears. Always be careful in the dark, and especially cautious at dusk.
- Need water**  
They do have air sacs in their bodies, but they need a swimming pool. During droughts, alligators wade on their bellies which make it difficult to stay afloat. They rely on water for themselves and other animals.
- Aren't lazy, they are basking**  
Alligators are cold-blooded, so they must use the heat of the sun to warm their bodies. That's how they spend basking in the sun more than they emerge to hunt, mate, nest and more. Don't be fooled... they can move with sudden speed.

**Temperature Matters**

- 90% or above = all eggs hatch into males
- 80% or below = all eggs hatch into females
- 90% survival of all eggs hatch as females
- 90% or above = they head out often
- 90% or below = they stay home

**Osteoderms are bony plates which armor the alligator's back and collect heat from the sun.**

**Wildlife Bill of Rights**

Wildlife are the citizens of Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park.

- Wildlife have the right to eat only natural food.
- Wildlife have the right to drink fresh water free from litter or pollution.
- Wildlife are allowed to see people if they choose.
- Wildlife are allowed to avoid people if they choose.
- Wildlife have the right to use park trails.
- Wildlife have the right to undisturbed space.

Signed by:

**What can YOU do to protect wildlife rights?**

- Never feed wildlife.
- Watch and enjoy wildlife from a safe distance.
- Never touch or chase wildlife.

Remember, these animals are WILD, they are not like animals in zoos, ranches or farms.

# Volunteers and Americorps

## Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed for the following positions at Paynes Prairie:

### Visitor Center & Ranger Station—

The busy season is here! We need extra help in the Visitor Center and in the Ranger Station, especially Fridays through Sundays.

### Outreach at the La Chua Trail & the Farmer's Market—

The La Chua Trail Outreach station is open for business, and we need volunteers to serve there as well. And twice a month we do community outreach at the Union Street Farmers Market.

*These jobs involve greeting visitors, sharing information about the park, and where in the park they might want to go, and helping them understand this special place.*

**Web Master**—The Friends of Paynes Prairie website needs some updating and TLC. Do you have web design skills? We could use your help!

**Other Opportunities**—There are things to do on trails, doing repairs, painting, cleaning helping with special events, and more! If you're interested, let us know.

For more information, contact Andi Christman at (352)466-4966 or by Email:

[Andrea.Christman@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Andrea.Christman@dep.state.fl.us)

## "Americorps-ner": Farewell Prairie, Hello Branch

In case you haven't heard the news, my second year of Americorps service has drawn to a close. In total I served over 22 months and 3400 hours. Working at the prairie made me feel like I was making a difference and contributing something to the community, whether it was restoring natural communities by removing invasive exotic plants, leading groups of volunteers on projects, or interpreting the preserve's natural and cultural resources to visitors.

As I look back and reflect on my two years here, I keep returning to when I first started and saw Dominick Martino's photos. I only met him a few times, and knew him mostly through his pictures, but he left a big impression on me, and it kept me motivated when the work got hard. After my time in the Florida Park Service as an Americorps member, I've been fortunate to turn that into a full-time position as a park ranger at nearby Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park near Keystone Heights. I still live in Gainesville, though, so if you can't visit me in the sandhills, maybe you'll see me near the prairie. In parting, I'd like to thank all the staff and volunteers for their time and support these last two years, I couldn't have done it without y'all. Feel free to drop me a line, ask Andi for my contact info.

*-Craig Littauer*

*Park Ranger and former Americorps staff member.*

Take a drive to Gold-Head Branch State Park and say "Howdy" and "Thanks" to Craig. (Seen here at Americorps graduation with (L to R): A representative from Volunteer Florida, Bureau Chief Clif Maxwell, and Park Service Director Donald Forgione.)



# WILD BEHAVIOR: TALKING TURKEY

*Every morning at dawn, a group of wild turkeys flies down from the branches of a tall oak tree at the corner of my back yard, and lands near my deck. They move through the yard, clucking and foraging for insects, and pass by my window as I drink my morning coffee. Over the past year, I've watched some of them grow from tiny 4-inch-high poults, and now they are nearly full-grown. It's been one of my daily pleasures to see these birds. With Thanksgiving here, I thought it would be a good time to talk turkey about our native Osceola turkeys, a species unique to the Florida peninsula, and common at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Happy Turkey Day!*

- Andi Christman, Park Services Specialist

**Turkey Biology**— Wild turkeys are native to North America, and two of the 5 turkey subspecies can be found in Florida. The eastern wild turkey is the most common and ranges the entire eastern half of the United States. The Osceola, or Florida wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo Osceola*) is only found on the Florida peninsula.

**Turkeys are beautiful!** Most of the feathers exhibit a metallic iridescence, with varying colors of red, green, copper, bronze and gold. The gobbler, or male turkey, is more colorful, while the hen is a drab brownish or lighter color to camouflage her with her surroundings. Between 5,000 and 6,000 feathers cover the body of an adult turkey. These feathers provide a variety of survival functions, keeping them warm and dry, allowing flight, and in the case of males, showing off for the females.

The head and upper neck are featherless, but if you look close, you can see little bumps of skin on the bare area. This bare skin on the throat and head of a turkey can change color from flat gray to striking shades of red, white, and blue when the bird becomes distressed or excited. It's amazing to see!

Two major characteristics distinguish males from females: spurs and beards. Males grow a pointed, curved spur up to 2 inches long at the back of their leg. Males, and about 10% of females will also grow beards, which are hair-like modified feathers that grow from the chest.

Mating season runs from February through April, and courtship usually begins while turkeys are still flocked together in wintering areas. After mating, the hens choose a nest site and lay eggs. In most areas, nests can be found in a shallow dirt depression, surrounded by moderately woody vegetation that conceals the nest.



Hens lay a clutch of 10 to 12 eggs over a two-week period, usually laying one egg per day. Once the last egg is laid, they will be incubated for 28 days. After hatching, the poults (or chicks) must be ready to leave the nest within 12 to 24 hours to feed. Poults eat insects, berries and seeds, while adults will eat anything from acorns and berries to insects and small reptiles. Turkeys usually feed in early morning and in the afternoon.

Wild turkeys feed and mate in open areas, and use forested areas as cover from predators and for roosting in trees at night. A varied habitat of both open and covered area is essential for wild turkey survival.

Wild turkeys have excellent vision during the day but don't see as well at night. They are also very mobile. Turkeys can run at speeds up to 25 mph, and they can fly up to 55 mph.

**Turkey Population Trends**—At the time of European settlement, wild turkey populations were found in most forested habitat of the eastern United States. However, by the 1800s they had been eliminated or greatly reduced in numbers across most of this range. Overhunting was believed to cause much of the decline, but habitat changes associated with deforestation and early agriculture practices likely contributed to this decline in many locations.

Florida was unique during this early turkey population decline because inaccessible swamps, inhospitable insects, and colonial history did not favor development. In fact, during 1860 it was estimated that there were more turkeys than humans in Florida. But these things changed, and by the mid 1900s, the population had declined to around 26,000 animals. Today, there are an estimated 250,000 Osceola turkeys. Come out to the Prairie to see some!

# Happenings Around the Prairie:

## FLOOD, DROUGHT, and FIRE make Paynes Prairie what it is, BUT...

If you haven't been out in the prairie basin over the last 8 months, then you might be shocked to see how dry it is.

With very little rain over our "wet summer months" we've fallen further and further behind "normal" rainfall levels. Our predicted hurricane season didn't even yield one nice tropical depression to drop gentle rain on the prairie for a couple of days.

### So what does this mean?

- ◆ The basin is DRY.
- ◆ Alachua Lake is non-existent.

◆ At the La Chua trail, there is no water past the juncture of Sweetwater Dike and the trail itself.

◆ In August, there was a summer wildfire in the prairie basin for the first time in recent history.

◆ Wildlife behavior has been affected by the water levels. In the summer we observed alligator cannibalism, and this winter we're not sure how the cranes will respond to the dry conditions (they roost in standing water at night).

### BUT...

The dry conditions have also enable preserve staff and co-operators to operate equip-

ment in the prairie basin that would have gotten stuck in the mud under "normal conditions".

As a result, we have been able knock back hardwoods invading from the surrounding forest, and establish firelines on the west side of the prairie in areas that have been previously inaccessible with our tractors and other equipment.

### AND...

We were fortunate to have co-operators from the Florida Forest Service Wildfire Mitigation Team bring out some equipment to knock back heavy hardwood growth in an area of the prairie basin immediately adjacent to a neighborhood. This provides better access for wildfire response and prescribed burning.



Tree-covered floating islands in front of the Visitor Center. In the bottom photo, the areas outlined in blue are the invading hardwoods. In the top photo, the center island has been removed, while the left and right islands are dropping their leaves and will soon be dead.



# Baby it's Dry Outside!

September 8, 2011—The Last Water on the Prairie



An alligator hole near Prairie Creek in the northeastern part of the prairie basin. The low vegetation in the top middle shows where water from Prairie Creek heads west to Alachua Lake. Look closely for the alligator skull on the far edge of the puddle.



A fireline (above) with adjacent roller-chopping of invading hardwoods (below) performed by the Florida Forest Service Wildfire Mitigation Team. This area on the west side of the Prairie basin was more overgrown than our equipment could handle. Preserve staff sends a big “THANK YOU” to the Mitigation Team.

# New Arrivals (and Departures) at the Prairie

In September, we were finally able to fill our Administrative Assistant position with a permanent hire. Not only do we feel lucky to have filled the position, but we feel very lucky to have Simone DeVane, join our staff in this role. Simone is Micanopian (?) and is balancing her job here at the preserve with finishing her degree in finance.

**When you see Simone, give her a big prairie "Hello".**



In November, our 2-year Americorps staff person, Craig Littauer graduated from the Americorps program, and successfully landed a position at GoldHead Branch State Park.

**Way to go Craig!**



And, on December 1st, Park Ranger Daniel Willis will be leaving the prairie for a position as the Assistant Park Manager at Silver River State Park.

**Congratulations Daniel!**



Until next quarter,  
*Andi Christman, Park Service Specialist*  
*Prairie Press Editor*

[www.prairiefriends.org](http://www.prairiefriends.org)  
[www.FloridaStateParks.org](http://www.FloridaStateParks.org)

## Prairie Friends Renewals and New Members: Thanks for Joining Us!

**A Huge THANK YOU to all the renewing members of the Friends of Paynes Prairie! Your membership and involvement is what helps us continue to support the management of this National Natural Landmark.**

**New members this quarter:**

Jere Steele  
Tim Weisgert  
Mike Ward  
Keith Wetmore

**OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS**

**Always Noteworthy!**  
Blue Highway Pizzeria  
GRU  
Top Restaurant  
Wetland Solutions

