

**PAYNES PRAIRIE
PRESERVE STATE
PARK**

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 1/22/11—Stargazing at Hickory Ranch
- 1/29—Alligator Walk, 1pm
- 2/3—Gentle Walk 9am
- 2/12—Wildlife Walk, 8am
- 2/12—Primitive Weapons and Tools of the Prairie, 2pm.
- 2/16 - **Moonlight Walk**, 4:45pm
- 2/17—Gentle Walk, 9am
- 2/19—Rim Ramble, 8am
- 2/26—Ranger's Choice Walk
- 3/3 -Gentle Walk, 9am
- 3/4 and 3/5—**FIRE FEST 2011**: Prescribed Fire Awareness Festival.
- 3/4—Overnight Backpacking trip
- 3/12—Ranger's Choice Walk

Call 466-4100 to sign up & for more information.

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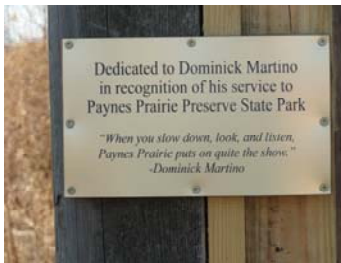
**PAYNES PRAIRIE'S
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER**

WINTER 2011

Park Manager's Message

The sounds of thousands of cranes assure us that winter has indeed arrived. If there was any question, the frigid temperatures assure us it's true.

Thank you to all who were able to attend the dedication of the La Chua Observation tower in memory of Dominick Martino. The day was beautiful and we were serenaded by the whooping cranes as the ceremony began.



We also appreciate the public interest in

our livestock management plan. The Public Meeting held in November was very well attended, and the Florida Park Service is assessing the public input as we re-visit the draft plan. Hopefully an updated version will be completed in the next several months.

Now that the holidays are over, make time to come see the multitude of wildlife that makes Paynes Prairie the treasure that it is.

As always, thanks to the paid and unpaid staff who work so hard to make each visitor's experience a truly memorable one.

Prairie Life is Good,
David Jowers, Park Manager



Stargazing at Hickory Ranch: This Saturday!

Have you ever looked up at the night sky and thought, "I wonder what THAT is?"

Whether "THAT" thing that captured your imagination was a star, a planet, a constellation, or other heavenly body, you might just get your answer at the Prairie's annual Stargazing event at Hickory Ranch. The Alachua Astronomy Club will provide the telescopes, and the expertise.

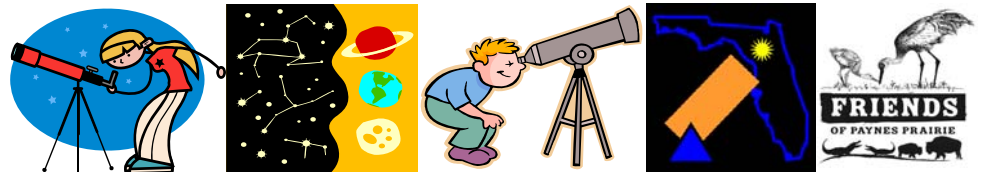
Enjoy sitting around a campfire while sipping hot chocolate & making smores. Take a hayride around Hickory Ranch. Bring your family, friends, and chairs for relaxing.

The forecast is for a chilly but clear evening. Perfect for some stargazing fun!

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE?

- ★ Saturday January 22, 2011
- ★ 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- ★ \$5 per person
- ★ Free for kids 6 and under
- ★ Free for FRIENDS with membership card. (Membership has its privileges ☺).

RSVP to: info@prairiefriends.org
Or call : (352)466-4966



Water, water everywhere...anywhere...?



or poor in nutrients or other chemicals or pollutants.

We're now in a drought and the Prairie is very dry. So dry in fact that just a trickle of water is coming off it and into Alachua Sink. Some people knowing how important water is to the Prairie are concerned that the drought will damage or somehow destroy it but the really funny thing is that drought can make it better. There are of course different kinds of wetlands and the Prairie is a kind of wetland called a marsh.

Extreme drought exposed the limestone bedrock at the swallow hole at Alachua Sink in November 2001. District Biologist Dan Pearson stands in a spot normally far beneath the surface.

Photo by Jim Weimer

"...if somehow or for some reason you lose the water then you've lost your wetland."

The Prairie is a very large complicated place. The preserve is 22,000 acres and within the preserve is 13,000 acres of the 16,000 acre Paynes Prairie Basin. If the size isn't daunting enough there are the thousands of different kinds of plants and animals not to mention the 250,000 human visitors a year.

Yet with all this buzz and hum of people and animals and comings and goings managing the Prairie is in certain respects pretty simple. Like I tell the students "You only need to get three things right to manage the Prairie. The first is the water, the second is the water and the third is...the water." When you manage a wetland it's all about the water. A wetland is land shallowly covered by water. Too wet to be dry ground to dry to be a lake or river. It's the land in between the two.

I'm not saying that prescribed burning the Prairie isn't important or that controlling invasive exotic plants isn't also terribly important but if somehow or for some reason you lose the water then you've lost your wetland. The funny thing is that all water is not equal. So what kind of wetland you get depends on things like how much water there is and when in the year it arrives. It also depends on what we call the quality of the water. Is it hard or soft, is it rich

In a marsh there are soft grassy and broadleaved plants rooted in the bottom and emerging from the standing water. If the wetland is continuously flooded, that is if it doesn't dry out occasionally like in a drought, then the density and diversity of the wetland plants will decline. It's an idea that kind of flies in the face of reason but the seeds of plants that spend their entire lives growing in 1-3 feet of water can't germinate under water. All the pickerel weed and American Lotus and grasses and sedges growing out in the Prairie came from seeds that germinated during drought, germinated during dry times.

So drought is an important part of the Prairie water cycle, is an important part of all wetland cycles. We need a little but not too much.

As I said not all water is equal.

Jim Weimer,
Preserve Biologist



President's Letter

President Bill Andrews takes a pause from his weekly shift at the La Chua Trail Information station.



Greetings Prairie Friends and Happy New Year!

2010 was a happy year on the Prairie. The Prairie and its flora and fauna continued to produce magnificent scenes and action once again. The frequent visits by Whooping Cranes to their cousins, Sandhill Cranes, brought lots of visitors out to see these very interesting creatures. The Sandies themselves put on quite a show. The bison, cracker horses, deer, birds of every description were visible frequently from the La Chua Trail and Visitor Center observation tower. In spite of admission fees being imposed at the La Chua Trail, the number of visitors increased in 2010. The pickerel weed blooms in summer and marsh marigolds in the fall marked the change of seasons with brilliant color and contrast.

On a sad note, Harold Nugent, a long time and ardent volunteer to the Prairie, passed away in October 2010. Harold, a retired teacher, became an expert on alligators and took this knowledge into area schools to teach students about this amazing creature and the importance of protecting our environment. Harold will be missed by everyone. A memorial honoring him will be placed on the La Chua Trail soon.

On a happier note, Barbara Mollison, the long serving volunteer manager of the Visitor Center bookstore, retired this year. She deserves many thanks and high accolades for her years of service and the outstanding way she managed the bookstore. Fortunately, three volunteers stepped up to take Barbara's place. Fairlie Bagley, Jeannie Bobroff and Jere Herrington now share the management duties of the bookstore. While on the subject on the bookstore, Friends volunteers staff the Visitor Center and bookstore seven days a week, all year, including all holidays. We appreciate their dedication.

Volunteers also did major repairs and renovations to the Gainesville/Hawthorne Trail. Using a root rake purchased by Friends, they cut the roots growing under and disrupting the pavement, and after the roots had decom-

posed, they packed the pavement back down and patched the cracks. This resulted is marked improvement in the comfort and safety of riding the trail. We appreciate their imaginative remedy and hard work and dedication.

Friends has many other volunteers in other parts of the Park. Volunteers staff and information table on the La Chua Trail on weekends. Volunteers participate in many activities such as removal of exotic plants, cleaning up trash and debris in Sweetwater Branch, planting long leaf pine trees and wire grass plugs, and maintenance of other trails in the Park. We appreciate their work and dedication.

Three new directors were elected to the Board of Directors at the Annual meeting. They are Chris Flagg, Jere Herrington and Kaley Krick. We welcome them aboard and look forward to their participation in Friends governance.

Looking forward, we believe that 2011 will also be a good year for the Prairie. Our membership is approaching 500, and visitors to the Park are increasing. We invite all our members to find an area of interest and volunteer. Its fun, it's interesting, and everyone you meet is in a happy mood.

On March 18, Bill will be honored as one the Alachua Conservation Trust's Conservation Stewards for 2011.

Bill Andrews,
President, FOPP

Friends of Paynes Prairie 2010 Accomplishments : Celebrating 25 years of supporting Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

Revenue Projects

- Membership dues
- Bookstore operations
- Firewood sales for the campground
- Donations
- Ranger-led programs and special events
- Grant development and administration
- Endowment fund development

Public Education Programs

- Staffed and funded the outreach and education booth on the La Chua Trail.
- Participated in alligator programs for schools and other groups
- Hosted Stargazing evening
- Continued the Gentle Walk and Talk program
- Staffed information booths at local community events, funded booth fees
- Staffed an information booth at the Farmers Market in Gainesville

- Supported Literacy Month program
- Hosted public meetings for visitor center exhibit redesign
- Funded the reprint of the Gainesville Hawthorne Trail self-guide ride brochure
- Funded taxidermy of a new bobcat
- Funded refurbishment of the bittern, otter, and alligator
- Purchased office supplies for the visitor center
- Funded volunteer recognition events and dinner

Park Development Programs

- Participated in the redesign project of the visitor center exhibits
- Participated in creek clean-up programs
- Supported the Old Florida Heritage Highway program
- Funded restroom rental at the La Chua Trail
- Provided parts & repairs to the EZ-GO & Gator vehicles

- Purchased feed for cattle & supplies for horse herd
- Maintained membership in Chamber of Commerce
- Purchased office supplies for the visitor center
- Funded volunteer recognition events and dinner
- Funded promotion of Paynes Prairie through Florida's Eden, the Environmental Film Festival, and others
- Funded Gainesville Hawthorne Trail root raking, crack repair, equipment retail, inmate crew support, and other improvement projects
- Funded & installed lighting along visitor center walkway

Citizen Support Organization Service Programs

- Maintained membership at over 400
- Completed an internal audit of the corporation accounts
- Completed annual report filings with the State
- Completed the 4-year Citizen Support Organization Review with the Florida Park Service
- Recognized Corporate Members with photo presentation
- Improved membership benefits and membership cards

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed for the following positions at Paynes Prairie:

La Chua Trail - Volunteers are needed to staff the outreach and interpretation station on the la Chua trail on weekends through April. Shifts are 4 hours, in the morning or afternoon, and you get to share an incredible place with park visitors. It's awesome!

Visitor Center and Ranger Station—The busy season is here! We need extra help in the Visitor Center and in the Ranger Station, especially Fridays through Sundays. These jobs involve greeting visitors, sharing information about the park, and where in the park they might want to go, and

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

SAVE THE DATES!

1/30/11—New Volunteer Orientation
RSVP by 1/28/11

2/12/11—Exotic Plant Work Day

3/4&5/11—FIRE FEST: Prescribed Fire Awareness Event.

3/12/11—Volunteer Appreciation Picnic @ Stephen Foster State Folk Culture Center

3/19/11—Exotic Plant Work Day

4/9/11—Exotic Plant Work Day

5/21/11—Exotic Plant Work Day

For more information, contact Andi Christman at (352)466-4966 or by Email: Andrea.Christman@dep.state.fl.us.



Left: Volunteers Pat and Fred Meng share the excitement of the Prairie with a family of visitors from Pennsylvania at the La Chua Trail Information trailer. This is a fun volunteer activity. You can still join in and reach out to the community in this beautiful place. Call (352)466-4966 for more information.

Right: Coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*) plants hang to death in the branches of hardwood trees along the north rim of the prairie. Volunteers from Santa Fe College and other groups have worked with our Americorps volunteer Craig Littauer to fight the continuing invasion of these unwanted exotic plants in the sensitive hammocks in this area.



The Prairie's 2010 Volunteer of the Year, Jan Powell, was recognized at a holiday potluck lunch at the Visitor Center. Stop by and see Jan on Fridays at the Visitor Center, or join her for a Gentle Walk on Thursday mornings. When you see Jan, ask her about her award-winning ham! Photo by Kim Stinger



Hungry Friends gather in anticipation as Ivor Kincaid and Dan Dickson serve up the Low Country Boil at the FOPP Annual Meeting and dinner at Prairie Creek Lodge. A big "Thanks" to our hard-working chefs! Photo by Emily Schwerin

TALE OF A RELUCTANT BIRDER

My interest in bird watching started when I was a boy spending time with my mother watching birds in our backyard. As I got older my interest moved on to other things believing that bird watching was for “little old ladies” and “tree huggers”.



I was reintroduced to bird watching when I joined the Park service several years ago. While working as a Ranger at Bahia Honda State Park I was constantly asked, “What kind of bird is that?” After a while I realized I couldn’t always answer. “I don’t know but I’ll find out and get back to you”. Not what a Park visitor expects to hear from a Ranger.

With the help of other Rangers and a good field guide I became a little better at identifying a few birds’ species. I did this as a job requirement not thinking of it as a hobby. It wasn’t until my friend and fellow Ranger Maria asked me to help her develop a beginning birding walk that I realized how much fun and truly challenging birding can be.

I soon began to understand all the variables that can assist you in identifying birds. You really have to be patient and extremely observant. Attention to detail is a must in this hobby. Everything from the bird’s shape, color, the habitat it’s in to its behavior can give clue’s to help you identify the bird you’re watching.

One of the great things about birding is you can take it as far as you want. You can be a casual observer to a serious “life list” birder or somewhere in between. It’s my opinion that it’s not so important to identify the species, as it is to spend time with the bird in its environment. Bird watching if you let it forces you to slow down and enjoy your surroundings.

I normally take a general field guide with me when I’m birding so that if I feel I have to identify something I can at least ID the tree the birds perching in or the flower blooming next to me. Understanding the habitat you’re in by identifying the plant life around you can give you valuable clues about the birds that live there.

On top of all that birding is a relatively inexpensive hobby. To start all you really need is a decent pair of binoculars a field guide, and a notebook. I suggest the first couple times you go out that you leave your field guide in the car so you can really watch the bird instead of flipping through the pages trying to find it. Remember to slow down pay attention to your surroundings and be patient and you just might find out that birding is not just for “little old ladies” and “tree huggers”. It’s for anyone with a desire to learn more about the environment while spending time in the great outdoors.

Paynes Prairie offers several interpretive programs on birding from beginning birding walk & talk and early bird walk at LaChua trail along with others. Give our visitor center a call for times and locations, (352)466-4100. The Alachua Audubon Society is another great birding resource in the local area.

-Tony Sutera,
Park Ranger



Ranger Tony Sutera ponders birds and other wonders on a recent guided walk on the prairie. Photo by Kim Stringer.

Upper left, : Barred Owl at Paynes Prairie, Photo by Dominick Martino

“Americorps”ner: Americorps at Paynes Prairie

“In 2010 I was privileged to serve as the Americorps member at the preserve, one of approximately 60 such people around the state parks. I’m lucky to have the opportunity to continue for another year. Mainly, my responsibilities involve natural and cultural resource management. During my time here I’ve reinforced many things I learned while at the university. However, my experiences last year were novel, and my education could never have completely prepared me for them. For example, I learned first-hand how to identify the symptoms of heat stroke.

I’d like to thank the staff, volunteers, and friends of the Prairie for their help and support, because otherwise I wouldn’t have made it through to see my term of service completed. As an Americorps member, I received a Segal Education Award by logging a minimum of 1700 service hours. I’m sincerely enthused about 2011 and look forward to promoting the mission of the Florida Park Service. See ya ‘round the Prairie.”

-Craig Littauer,
Americorps Volunteer, Paynes Prairie

Want to learn more about Americorps? Ask Craig!



GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA FLGA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - DECEMBER 19, 2010

Centered over Paynes Prairie, the 2010 Gainesville Christmas Bird Count was a record-setting count. Volunteers from the Alachua Audubon Society, and other area birders joined together to record every species of bird they could positively identify from dawn to dusk on this cold blustery day. A new record of 157 species were found. The official count results are seen below.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 114	Killdeer 533	European Starling 134
Ross's Goose 1♦	Greater Yellowlegs 24	American Pipit 8
Tundra Swan 1♦	Lesser Yellowlegs 7	Cedar Waxwing 656
Muscovy Duck 64	Least Sandpiper 26	Orange-crowned Warbler 96♦
Wood Duck 928	Dunlin 1	Northern Parula 1
Gadwall 17	Long-billed Dowitcher 14	Yellow-rumped Warbler 4,269
American Wigeon 55	Wilson's Snipe 176	Yellow-throated Warbler 48
Mallard (12 wild, 28 feral♦)	American Woodcock 12	Pine Warbler 135
Mottled Duck 118	Bonaparte's Gull 605♦	Prairie Warbler 2
Blue-winged Teal 882	Ring-billed Gull 1,376	Palm Warbler 493
Northern Shoveler 125	Herring Gull 9	Black-and-white Warbler 93
Pintail 42	Forester's Tern 31	Ovenbird 21♦
Green-winged Teal 2,089	Rock Pigeon 99	Northern Waterthrush 11♦
Ring-necked Duck 20	Eurasian Collared-Dove 8	Common Yellowthroat 219
Lesser Scaup 6	Mourning Dove 822	Wilson's Warbler 1
Bufflehead 3	Common Ground Dove 3	Yellow-breasted Chat 1
Hooded Merganser 250	Barn Owl 7	Summer Tanager 1
Red-breasted Merganser 1	Eastern Screech-Owl 15	Eastern Towhee 142
Ruddy Duck 84	Great Horned Owl 35	Chipping Sparrow 686
Wild Turkey 198	Barred Owl 43	Field Sparrow 6
Northern Bobwhite 28	Whip-poor-will 1	Vesper Sparrow 49
Pied-billed Grebe 81	Ruby-throated Hummingbird 2♦	Savannah Sparrow 268
American White Pelican 6	Hummingbird sp. 1	Grasshopper Sparrow 10
Double-crested Cormorant 898	Belted Kingfisher 37	Henslow's Sparrow 1
Anhinga 142	Red-headed Woodpecker 34	Song Sparrow 59
American Bittern 7	Red-bellied Woodpecker 326	Fox Sparrow 6♦
Great Blue Heron 152	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 83	Lincoln's Sparrow 2♦
Great Egret 374	Downy Woodpecker 174	Swamp Sparrow 502
Snowy Egret 88	Northern Flicker 68	White-throated Sparrow 68
Little Blue Heron 158	Pileated Woodpecker 151	White-crowned Sparrow 23
Tricolored Heron 25	Eastern Phoebe 294	Dark-eyed Junco 2
Cattle Egret 54	Ash-throated Flycatcher 1	Northern Cardinal 910♦
Green Heron 6	Loggerhead Shrike 32	Indigo Bunting 1
Black-crowned Night-Heron 42	White-eyed Vireo 78	Painted Bunting 1♦
White Ibis 1,250	Blue-headed Vireo 64	Red-winged Blackbird 5,253
Glossy Ibis 136	Blue Jay 319	Eastern Meadowlark 395
Wood Stork 106	American Crow 615♦	Rusty Blackbird 120
Black Vulture 631	Fish Crow 42	Common Grackle 3,061
Turkey Vulture 852	Tree Swallow 8	Boat-tailed Grackle 1,235
Osprey 4	Carolina Chickadee 282	Dickcissel 1♦
Bald Eagle 92	Tufted Titmouse 416♦	Brown-headed Cowbird 1,530♦
Northern Harrier 52	Brown-headed Nuthatch 1	Baltimore Oriole 27
Sharp-shinned Hawk 9	Brown Creeper 1	House Finch 161♦
Cooper's Hawk 14	Carolina Wren 425	American Goldfinch 422
Accipiter sp. 1	House Wren 160	House Sparrow 32
Red-shouldered Hawk 137	Winter Wren 4♦	♦= High Count Number
Red-tailed Hawk 53	Sedge Wren 16	Total Individuals <u>57,809</u>
American Kestrel 47	Marsh Wren 28	Total Species Count <u>157</u>
Merlin 2	Golden-crowned Kinglet 12	
Wild Turkey 198♦	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 464	
King Rail 31♦	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 94	
Virginia Rail 10	Eastern Bluebird 111	
Sora 48	Hermit Thrush 83	
Common Moorhen 217	American Robin 10,762	
American Coot 659	Gray Catbird 290	
Whooping Crane 4	Northern Mockingbird 199	
Sandhill Crane 5,581	Brown Thrasher 17	



Howard Adams,
Park Ranger

New Arrivals (and Departures) at the Prairie

In December, Butch Hunt, a longtime fixture at Paynes Prairie, and recently our law enforcement officer, left the Prairie for the pleasure and relaxation of retirement. After a boyhood spent growing up on the Camp Ranch, and years of service to the Florida Park Service and DEP Law Enforcement units, Butch's retirement is well-earned. We wish Butch Hunt and his family the best of luck in this new adventure!

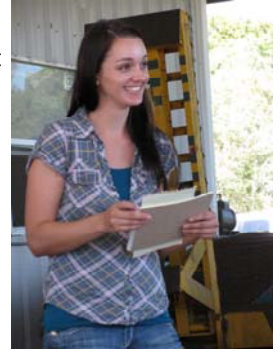
Butch's departure opened the door for a new law enforcement officer, Mike Acevedo, to come to the promised land of Paynes Prairie. Expect to see Mike around the prairie, but also at San Felasco, and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings State Parks.

"I'm originally from Gainesville, my family lives here in town. I transferred up from DeLeon Spring Central District, where I worked at DeLeon Springs, Tomoka, and Blue Springs State Parks. I was in Army National Guard for six years and was deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 and 2006. I've worked as a law enforcement officer with the DEP for four years. I'm happy to be home, and look forward to working with you and the rest of the Park Service."

-Mike Acevedo
DEP Law Enforcement

If you see Mike, please say "Hello" and "Welcome to the Prairie!"

In December, the Prairie's Administrative Assistant, Emily Schwerin left the preserve for a position as the Florida Park Service Americorps Program Coordinator. We wish Emily the best of luck in furthering the important program of Americorps in the Florida state parks.



Unfortunately, we can't announce Emily's replacement as immediately after we conducted interviews, the agency went into a hiring freeze. Keep your fingers crossed for an early thaw! In the meantime, we are very thankful for the assistance provided by the District 2 Administrative staff!

On the subject of Americorps, we are very lucky to have received funding for an Americorps Individual Placement position at the prairie again this year. Craig Littauer, or Americorps volunteer from 2010 has signed on for a second year of hot, sweaty, fun times at the prairie. Read Craig's thoughts on his first year of service on page 5 of this newsletter.

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

www.prairiefriends.org
www.FloridaStateParks.org

New Prairie Friends this quarter: Thanks for Joining Us!

New members this quarter:

Keith Herndon
Robert Freese
Deborah Cohen
Amy Gooden
John Winn
James Funk
John Skelley
Karen Edison
Issac Greene
Sidney Wade
Dawn Ayers
Jerry Barshov
Vera Rabino

Richard Dickson
Ganesh Viswanathan
Albert Rogers
Jerry Hill
Susan Nugent
Anne Seaman
Mayra Bisnow
Galia Bimstein



OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS

Always Noteworthy!

Alachua Conservation Trust
Blue Highway Pizzeria
Davis, Monk, and Company
Gainesville Cycling Club
GRU
Pearl Country Store
Top Restaurant
Wetland Solutions