

Choctawhatchee Chat

Chapter Newsletter

Issue 1

Fall/Winter 2022



Mission of the Florida Trail Association

The Florida Trail Association develops, maintains, protects and promotes a network of hiking trails throughout the state, including the unique Florida National Scenic Trail. Together with our partners we provide opportunities for the public to hike, engage in outdoor recreation, participate in environmental education and contribute to meaningful volunteer work.

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Message from the Chapter Chair

It's finally cooling down and we are ready to get back out on the trail, but before we log more miles we need your feedback for future activities. We want to see more boots on the trail; so, please take a few minutes to complete our [Choctawhatchee Chapter Survey](#) to share your preferences and ideas for future hiking activities.

This past year has been an inflection point for our chapter and we wanted to capture those experiences in our first newsletter. The negative impact on our chapter cannot be overstated. Chapter participation and membership have declined over the past few years; therefore, membership renewal is extremely important to maintain our trails. One overall benefit from the pandemic, was the re-establishment of how important the natural world is to our psyche. Chapter meetings, informative speakers, interesting trail hikes, and kayak events have done a lot to restore our chapter.

We have even bigger plans for the future! The FTA has given us the green light for the official [IDIDAHIKE](#) in 2024. In the past, this project has been quite successful in fund raising and membership enrollment; however, it requires a lot of participation from members. So please join us in rebuilding the Choctawhatchee Chapter by participating and contributing your unique and special talents. Also, please tell your friends and family about the Florida Trail Association and encourage them to join us for a hike and become a new member. The trail is not a place, it's an experience!



Sincerely,
Jim Wilson

[RENEW YOUR FTA MEMBERSHIP HERE!](#)

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

NOKUSE STEEPHEAD

January 29, 2022 - We started the year off with a hike on the Nokuse (pronounced no-go-see) Steephead trail. If you are not familiar with a steephead, it is formed when ground water leaks through porous sand onto a sloping surface. Steepheads remove sand from the bottom of the slope, causing the sand above to slump down and get carried away by the stream. Through this process, steephead ravines are continuously lengthened as the seeping water erodes from the bottom up. On this 6-mile hike we were treated to a cookout by chapter members Wallis and Paul Mayo, JP Husted, and John and Marsha Hooten.



ALAQUA BASIN

April 16, 2022 – The spring blooms did not disappoint on our hike through the Alaqua Basin. The mountain laurels, anise, and wild azaleas were on show as we made our way to Demon Bridge. A short rain shower, two snakes, and two bridges were just a few highlights from the trail.



Photo credits: Bob Deckert, Michelle Duncan, Ben Janke, and Jim Wilson

TURKEY HEN CREEK KAYAK

JULY 9, 2022 – Although it was hot, the temperature was just right to meander down the cool waters of Turkey Hen Creek and Shoal River. We were treated to an amazing riverside cookout by Wallis and Paul Mayo.



Following our lunch break, as we made our way down the river we encountered logs that made the river impassable, but thankfully we had trail maintainers who came prepared and cleared the way!

Photo credits: Michele Harris LeFevre and Wallis Mayo

SHOAL RIVER KAYAK

AUGUST 6, 2022 – The 12-mile stretch between Highway 90 and Highway 85 of the Shoal River offers scenic high banks and white sandy beaches. This provided the perfect backdrop for our lunch break. It was great to see members of the Panhandle chapter join us for this event!





Photo credit: Wallis Mayo

All future events and additional photos from past events are available by clicking on the Meetup icon below!



We encourage you to sign up on our [Meetup](#) page to get notified of new events. Would you like to be notified of events by email instead? Please fill out our survey so we know your preferred communication.

NEED EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS?
[CLICK HERE](#)

TRAIL MAINTENANCE HIGHLIGHTS

The “trail hogs” have done an outstanding job of keeping our trails clear and safe. We would like to thank our volunteers Keith and Michele LeFevre, John and Marsha Hooten, Paul and Wallis Mayo, Bruce Varner, Bob Deckert, JP Husted, Tom and Anne Daniel, Don Kelter, James Parker, Eric Jackson, and Jim Wilson for their dedication and ingenuity in removing obstacles. Dead and fallen trees are common on the trail, but our maintainers have been equipped for it all.

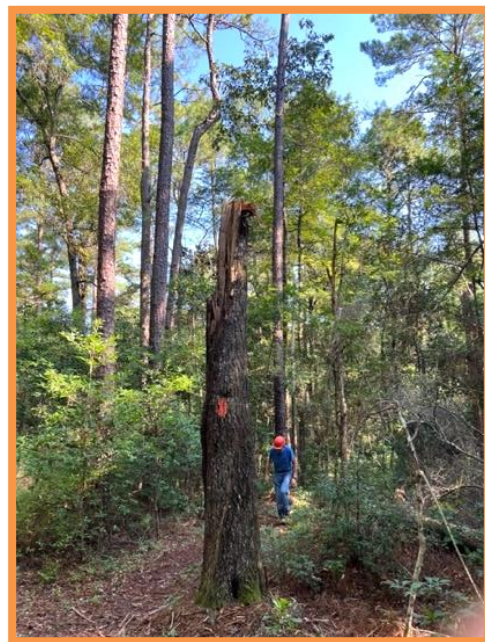




Photo credits: Wallis Mayo, Keith LeFevre and Jim Wilson

Our trail maintainers have played a significant role in maintaining the trails throughout the Nokuse Plantation nature preserve. For their efforts, they were featured in Volume 38 Issue 3 of FTA's Footprint Magazine!

[READ ARTICLE HERE!](#)

On June 12th, trail hogs Keith and Michele LeFevre and Paul and Wallis Mayo completed the Demon Bridge project by installing signs provided by the USDA Forest Service. The bridge was an extraordinary accomplishment for our chapter and we are grateful to all of our members who volunteered to see this project to completion!



Another trail hog project took place on July 5th, with the removal of a root system in a very muddy area near Oakie Creek. The installation of new puncheon boards will now allow hikers to navigate this muddy area safely.





We would like to especially thank Bruce Varner (pictured above) for his dedication to helping the Florida Trail Association. Bruce has been a true trailblazer for our chapter and we will miss him, but wish him well in his new adventures!

We are always in need of help! If you are interested in joining the trail maintenance team please see the upcoming maintenance dates on page 10. If you would like to join another time, click on the “join the trail hogs” below and indicate which days of the week you are available.

JOIN THE TRAIL HOGS HERE!!

CHAPTER ACHIEVEMENTS

COFFEEN NATURE CENTER

February 12, 2022 – Chapter members got the opportunity to tour the [Coffeen Nature Preserve](#), located near Topsail State Park in Santa Rosa Beach. The area was previously used as a military testing site during World War II and remnants of those activities can still be seen today. The preserve offers guided tours, four hiking trails, a

coastal dune lake, and an abundance of wildlife (by appointment only).



Photo credit: Wallis Mayo

E.O. WILSON BIOPHILIA CENTER

March 26, 2022 – The March chapter meeting was held at the [E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center](#), which is a non-profit environmental education center whose mission is to educate on the importance of biodiversity and promote conservation of longleaf ecosystem. We were provided with a private tour of the center’s exhibits by CEO Paul Arthur.





Florida Trail Association. The work was featured in the [June 2022 FTA E-Blaze](#). Along with a kiosk, hand built by Bob Deckert, volunteers painted orange blazes on posts and trees and planted native shrubs and flowers.

[READ ARTICLE HERE](#)

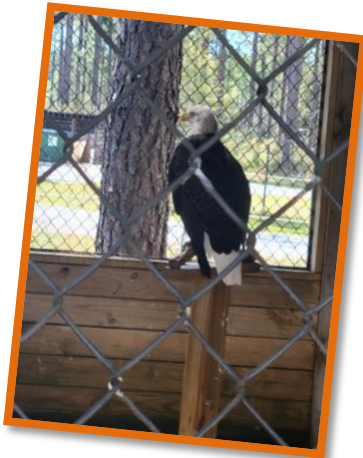


Photo credit: Eva Bailey

EMERALD COAST SCIENCE CENTER

May 24, 2022 – With funds received from a grant, the [Emerald Coast Science Center \(ECSC\)](#) was able to recreated the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) right in their back yard! To complement the exhibit, chapter members installed a new kiosk to educate visitors about the FNST and the



TOPSAIL HILL PRESERVE STATE PARK

June 11, 2022 – Our guest speaker, Master Naturalist and Gardner, Bill Kuenstler provided a guided plant identification tour throughout the park. Over 40 species of plants were identified and members were able to get answers to frequently asked questions. If you would like a list of the identified species please email James Wilson at trouttrail1912@gmail.com.



Thanks to Eva Bailey and Bruce Varner for planning this event! Thanks to all chapter members who volunteered to assist this great community organization, focused on preservation and education.

Photo credit: Eva Bailey



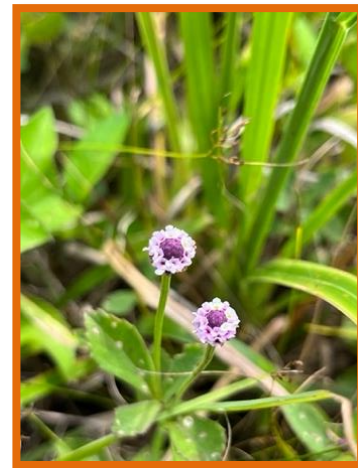
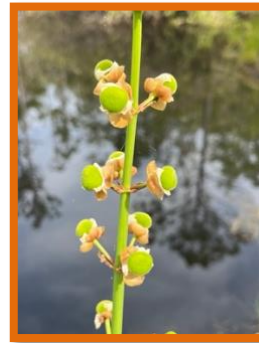


Photo credits: Michelle Duncan and Jim Wilson

Can you identify any of these plants?



Check out our Chapter Meetup, to see when we will be on the trail identifying more native plants!



TRAIL MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

PLEASE NOTE: Bring your own hard hat, gloves, eye protection, plenty of fluids, rain gear, insect repellent and a lunch. Long pants and good closed toe shoes are HIGHLY recommended. NO PETS ALLOWED. PLEASE READ & BE FAMILIAR WITH THE FTA'S COVID-19 PROCEDURES AND JOB HAZARDS ANALYSIS PRIOR TO WORKDAY.

Contact activity leader Keith LeFevre (850) 612-2231 with any questions.

All event details are available on



November

November 1, 2022 - Lafayette Creek Trail Assessment Hike 8:15 – 15:30

November 5, 2022 – Nokuse/CRS Sections Trail Maintenance 8:15 – 16:00

November 8, 2022 - Eglin Trail Maintenance 8:00 – 12:00 (Eglin permit required)

November 12, 2022 – Veteran's Day Soggy Bottom 5-mile Hike and Cookout 9:00 – 14:00 (Eglin permit required)

November 15, 2022 - Eglin Trail Maintenance 8:00 – 12:00 (Eglin permit required)

November 22, 2022 - Nokuse/CRS Sections Trail Maintenance 8:15 – 16:00

November 29, 2022 - Eglin Trail Maintenance 8:00 – 12:00 (Eglin permit required)

December

December 6, 2022 - Eglin Trail Maintenance 8:00 – 12:00 (Eglin permit required)

December 13, 2022 - Eglin Trail Maintenance 8:00 – 12:00 (Eglin permit required)

⚠️ PLEASE READ ⚠️

Everyone must possess a valid Eglin permit and photo ID when entering the Eglin Airforce Base reservation. Permits can be purchased in person, by phone, or online. Jackson Guard in Niceville at 107 Hwy 85 North; (850) 882-4165 or (850) 882-4166

<https://eglin.isportsman.net/default.aspx>

Read FTA COVID-19 Policies Here

Read General Trail Maintenance Job Hazard Analysis Here

Read Mower and Brush Cutter Job Hazard Analysis Here

Read Chainsaw Job Hazard Analysis Here

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP

Chapter Chair - James "Jim" Wilson

Vice Chair - Bruce Varner

Secretary - Faye Smith

Treasurer - Paula Kersten

Activity Coordinator - Eva Bailey

Membership Coordinators - Wallis Mayo and Michelle Duncan

The Choctawhatchee Chapter of the Florida Trail pays tribute to the Muscogee People, the original stewards of the land. We honor the Muscogee by continuing to protect the trail for future generations. The Choctawhatchee Chat newsletter was created and edited by Michelle Duncan and James Wilson and is published twice a year. If you would like to provide a story or have an idea please share by clicking below.

SHARE YOUR IDEAS HERE!



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