



Newsletter of the
Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

May-June 2009

Dear Friends,

This newsletter is full of information about a variety of “hot topics” concerning Brooker Creek Preserve today.

First: Please make your voice heard in regard to the budget cuts being forecasted for the Environmental Lands Division and the Preserve. The draft cuts are severe and, if adopted, will adversely affect your ability to enjoy and access the Preserve, the Education Center, and programs, as well as threaten the ecological health and sustainability of the Preserve. Please see the budget article for details and ways you can help!

Second: Please join us on June 6th to celebrate National Trails Day and the recent acquisition of the Wilde Tract for the Brooker Creek Preserve. Besides being a day of celebration for the addition of new habitat and increased connectivity within the Preserve, it will be a perfect opportunity to show Pinellas County decision-makers the beauty of the Preserve, the value of the Education Center, and the need for researchers, scientists, and caretakers. We can also visibly illustrate the multitudes of people who gently enjoy “our wildest place.”

Finally, the land use amendments were recently adopted by the County Commission. Please read this issue’s article on the Preserve’s land use history; it describes the multi-year journey of the Friends through this issue, culminating in its resolution on May 5th.

Thank you for your continued support for the Preserve! We look forward to seeing you on June 6th!

Allyn Childress
Chair, FOBCP



Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

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This newsletter is published every other month.

Submit articles to:
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727-781-0745

The Board of Directors meet every other month on the second Thursday evenings and occasionally every month.

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To contact the Friends

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727-934-2680

Leave a message and your phone number or see our website:

**www.
friendsofbrookercreek-
preserve.org**

“Providing a Healthy Environment for People and Wildlife”

Saturday, June 6, 2009
10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Pinellas County is having a celebration of National Trails Day and the acquisition of the Wilde Tract for the Brooker Creek Preserve! Please join us for this special event!

The Friends will be on-site, selling beverages and snacks. Please contact us if you would like to volunteer!
fobcp@tampabay.rr.com

Auditorium Presentations:

11:00 am – Celebration of Wilde Tract Acquisition (to honor Fred Marquis)
1:00 pm – Bald Eagles in Pinellas County (Barbara Walker, Clearwater Audubon Society)
2:30 pm – Real Florida (Jeff Klinkenberg, Author and Journalist)

Activities:

Eco-Bus Tours of Wilde Tract
Exhibitions
Interpretive Trail Scavenger Hunt
Trail-Side Interpretive Stations
Live Music



Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

Budget Crisis Hits Brooker Creek Preserve

A County “working document” dated May 14th contains devastating draft cuts to the Environmental Lands Division:

Eliminate 15 positions:

- 6 positions that are shared between 3 programs and related expenses (\$377K): Weedon Island Preserve Cultural & Natural History Center, Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center, and Ecological Services;
- 3 positions and related operating expenses at Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center (\$224K);
- 2 positions and related operating expenses at Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center (\$138K);
- 4 positions and related operating expenses in the Ecological Services program (\$307K).

Anticipated impacts of these reductions include:

- Reduce education center hours from 5 days to 3 days per week (Fri-Sun or Sat-Mon); 35% reduction in attendance at education centers. Currently access to Brooker Creek & Weedon Island Preserves, excluding the education centers, is 7 days per week - will be reduced to 4 days per week;
- Facility rental availability reduced; Eliminate 350 staff led programs, serve as room hosts for outside presenters; Very limited evening and school programs; Community outreach reduced; Elimination of 4 annual events.
- Reduced general maintenance & appearance of public use areas such as education centers @ 42,650 sq. ft., trails, boardwalks, etc.
- Reduced ecological planning, monitoring, and restoration work.
- Lack of volunteer oversight, wildlife identification surveys, 200 interpretive hike guide programs and 27 miles of trail maintenance will be reduced.
- End of collaborative studies with colleges, universities and other external organizations resulting in loss of information to best manage the natural resources.
- All print publications minimized - move to more reliance on affordable web based distribution.

Management of 19 environmental lands @ 15,000 acres will be impacted.

These reductions will have a devastating impact on the Preserve and the public’s ability to enjoy a healthy, safe ecological gem and access unique environmental educational programs. The quickest way to lose public support for environmental lands is to restrict access to these public places and simultaneously reduce maintenance. We need to let the County know the proposed cuts will have repercussions far beyond the impacts they have identified.

Contact your Commissioners by going to www.pinellascounty.org. Choose the “Contact Us” tab, then click on “Contact your County Commissioners”. From there you can email any or all of the commissioners, as well as County Administrator Robert LaSala. More budget information is available at the County website (<http://www.pinellascounty.org/budget/default.htm>).



Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

LAND USE IN BROOKER CREEK PRESERVE May 2009

By Chair Allyn Childress, Vice Chairs Cathy Foster, & Barbara Hoffman

1990-1998: The question of what should and should not be allowed within Brooker Creek Preserve was first asked in 1998. Until then, nobody knew – the Preserve staff, the Friends, the citizens of Pinellas County – that Pinellas County Utilities purchased 40% (3,623 acres) of the preserve. We were told at that time that Utilities could do whatever they wanted with their portion of the property. We were shocked. This information surprised not only us, but also the county staff employed as caretakers of the preserve.

It is important to first understand the history prior to 1998. Utilities began buying up property in the East Lake area in the 1980's with revenue from user fees. They used it for potable water production wells until the early 1990's when saltwater intrusion required the wells to be closed. After that, they viewed the land as valuable for protecting public potable ground water sources outside the preserve.

Purchasing this land was a *good* thing, as ALL of it was slated for further East Lake housing developments. The county followed suit, purchasing contiguous property as green space in the 1990's with money from Penny for Pinellas and state grants. Neither the county nor Utilities wanted the land developed, and all of it was put under the umbrella of "Brooker Creek Preserve."

Biologists were hired to manage the land, The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve was established in 1994 as a watchdog group, truckloads of trash were removed, a huge toxic dump was cleaned and restored, hiking trails were mapped out and built, exotic plants and animals were eradicated. Then we were told in 1998 that Utilities had some non-preserve plans for their portion of the preserve. "What do you mean *their* portion?" we asked. And the trouble started.

1999: In September 1999, the Board of County Commissioners of Pinellas County unanimously voted to adopt *Resolution 99-196*, reestablishing the board's commitment to protection and management of Brooker Creek Preserve. The resolution states "that all activities, needs and construction projects affecting Brooker Creek Preserve that might impact either the ability to provide a dependable potable water supply or the preservation and management of the Preserve's unique natural resources, be planned with open communication and cooperation in order that potential issues impacting the goals and management of Brooker Creek Preserve or the wellfield may be satisfactorily resolved".

2000-2004: The Environmental Education Center is planned to allow the public to learn more about this piece of natural Florida.

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2005: The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve formed a land use committee when we learned of some new “non-preserve” land uses that were being considered. The Friends are not screaming, outrageous, tree-huggers. We do battle carefully, quietly, and deliberately. We research all the facts. We hire legal help. We survey all the options and choose, by committee, the best path. We successfully have won conflicts over potential preserve projects including a private horse facility, pumping water for a private golf course, and the location of ball fields.

2006-2009: The most recent battle has been over the revision of county documents regarding land use in Brooker Creek Preserve. Our Land Use Committee has been involved in this throughout the lengthy process. Our strong commitment to having a seat at the table and having our input heard required us to become familiar with all the documents, consult with county officials and staff, as well as our own board of directors and lawyer. The end result is that Pinellas County Utilities will indeed be able to use portions of Brooker Creek Preserve for specific types of water-related projects. The much-debated 260 acres north of Keystone Road that is designated for future Utilities vertical structures, if needed, is confined to a very specific area, rather than the original plan for *any* Utilities purchased acres in the entire Preserve.

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve have given our OK for this. In doing so we have said we made a deal with the devil, but we did not sell our souls. To the contrary, we feel we made the right decisions for the wildlife, the people, the Preserve staff, the Pinellas County Commission, and Utilities. These decisions were made through years and years of negotiations. Utilities knew back in the 1980’s when they first began purchasing the property that there would be utilities-type needs over time. They didn’t know what those needs were then – they couldn’t predict the future – nor do they know their future needs now. Will they ever need a 5-story building? A reservoir? They don’t really know. If they do, however, they can build it:

1. only on their apportioned 260 acres in the northeastern corner of the Preserve
2. only if it is a water-related project and the water is intended for human consumption only
3. only after an additional layer of public review for any vertical structure provided it is located in the site that is least detrimental to the environment.

Until then, the land remains open space for wildlife. The rest of the preserve, all 8,000 + acres, will remain intact forever, including those lands that utilities purchased, as well as the land north of Keystone Road the county recently purchased from the Wilde family, adding another 700+ acres to Brooker Creek Preserve. The Friends view this as another battle *won*.

A glass can be viewed as half full or half empty. The Friends firmly believe the Brooker Creek glass is about 97% full. We are thankful and appreciative that Pinellas County, including the Utilities Department, rescued this land from its destined, planned urban sprawl. We are sorely disappointed that Utilities gets to use 260 acres, but they have given up 3,363 acres, a huge win for the environment. The Friends’ Land Use Committee will continue to be vigilant and aware of any land use issues that arise in the future.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve



A Walk through Brooker Creek

By Kathleen Nichter

Every time you take a walk in Brooker Creek Preserve, whether on the trails or the boardwalk, you are sure to see something interesting. Brooker Creek Preserve changes with the seasons, and yes, we do have seasons in Central Florida, just not as pronounced as some other places. Sometimes just a walk from the parking lot past the buildings to the back parking lot can be an adventure.

This Peninsula Ribbon Snake was sunning itself on a saw palmetto right next to the boardwalk outside of the Exhibit Hall. Notice the whitish stripe on each side of the body, and the distinctive white mark just in front of the eye. He is long and slender. The tail on this snake is 1/3 of his body size, and the average adult is 20 – 28 inches long. He very leisurely twisted and turned his way around the leaf, and looked up on occasion when he was pointed out to other visitors passing by.

Walking along the boardwalk toward the auditorium, butterflies were visiting the butterfly garden just in front of the auditorium. A Zebra Swallowtail landed briefly, and then was on its way. This very distinctive butterfly is black and white striped, with long slender tails. A couple of Gulf Fritillary butterflies stayed a bit longer, enjoying the flowers.

Just past the butterfly garden, I heard a noise. I looked closer and a Gopher Tortoise was just off the boardwalk, making a nice lunch (or maybe dinner) of some of the vegetation. He looked up from his chewing with a bit of flower in his mouth, just long enough to determine we weren't of interest to him, and went back to eating.

Remember, walk slowly and quietly, and look all around you. You just never know what you will see!

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

Dragonflies!

By Kathleen Nichter

Do you love watching dragonflies? Would you like to learn more about them? Here is an opportunity at Brooker Creek Preserve to do just that. In June, the Friends of Brooker Creek will be sponsoring another Adult Ecology Workshop. This one is on Dragonflies and will be held on a Saturday, so if you ever wondered why these programs are so popular, but have been unable to attend due to work or other scheduling considerations, this is your chance.

Here are the details from the Brooker Creek Education Center Events Schedule for June:

Adult Ecology Workshop: Dragonfly Behavior, Identification and Ecology

Saturday, June 20, 2009 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Grigorios Delaportas, St. Petersburg College, Biology Department

The Adult Ecology Workshop offers a unique opportunity to explore focused topics in natural history under the guidance of noted authorities. The workshop presents college-level instruction and is designed to accommodate participants with a broad range of experience. The only pre-requisite is a keen interest in the topic. This workshop offers dragonfly lovers a chance to learn about these distinctive insects. We begin in the classroom with an introduction to dragonfly anatomy and identification. Information about physiology, behavior, life cycle, and flying techniques will also be included. During the field portion, we explore the Preserve in search of a variety of species to observe dragonfly behavior and practice our newly-learned identification skills. Pre-registration is required and space is limited. Bring a sack lunch and snacks. This program is sponsored by The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, Inc. Admission: \$40 per person; Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, Inc. members receive a \$10 discount. **Best for adults.**



Adopt-A-Mile, Keep Pinellas Beautiful.

We feel really rewarded about doing something good for our community & Brooker Creek Preserve. These clean up mornings are like a nature walk with a benefit to our planet. Won't you join us on **June 27, 2009 at 8:00 A.M.** We will supply you with the orange vests, gloves,

and plastic bags. Contact us at: fobcp@tampabay.rr.com.

Subject line "Adopt-A-Mile"

Stars of the show on April 4 were Jon Burr, Cathie Foster, Barbara Hoffman, Hank Dykstal, Scott Moorhead, Karen Moorhead, and Ken Rowe

Friends  of Brooker Creek Preserve

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