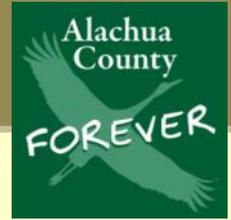




# TOUCHSTONES



Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, Land Conservation Division  
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www.alachuacountyforver.us ▪ landconservation@alachuacounty.us ▪ 352-264-6800

## Grand Opening Success: Levy Loop Trail, Barr Hammock Preserve

By Kelly McPherson, Sr. Environmental Specialist

On the morning of February 2, staff pulled into the parking area over an hour and a half prior to opening time. Excited visitors were already there. Staff bustled about getting the sound, hot chocolate, display tables and hayrides ready. Meanwhile, the trickle of visitors became a flood. There was a solid showing of about 200 people once the event started. The community was out full force to claim their newest hiking trail. Over a month later, we are still seeing significant traffic at the site.

Rightfully so. The 6.5-mile Levy Loop trail encircles a restored marsh with expansive vistas, and opportunities to see everything from songbirds, waterfowl, sandhill cranes, otters and bobcat to mention a few. The north levee provides views and sunshine to warm visitors on cool mornings, and the south levee provides a more shaded experience with a peek of what the rest of Barr Hammock has to offer in the future. Commissioners Mike Byerly, Lee Pinkoson, and Robert "Hutch" Hutchinson, County Manager Rick Drummond, Environmental Protection Department Director Chris Bird were joined by representatives from ACF's partners: the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Conservation Trust for Florida, and the Florida Trails Association. CTF and FTA assisted with the opening by greeting visitors and leading trail hikes.

Neighbors and citizens, adults and children, environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts braved the cold morning so they could hit the trail. Staff and volunteers guided walks but many folks struck off on their own. There were hayrides for those who wanted to see the entire loop, but did not have time to make the 3-hour walk. Cyclists tested the trail that morning as well, completing the circuit faster than the hayrides. The abundant morning sunshine warmed us all and I speak for staff in saying we were all warmed by the overwhelming support and enthusiasm shown by colleagues, partners and citizens for one of Alachua County's special places.

### Inside this issue...

Grand Opening Success:	1
ACF Dashboard	1
Winding Down	2
Critter Corner	2
ACF 2013 Hikes and Events	2
Off to a Hot Start	2
View from the Fire Tower	2
Kill-a-Weed	2



Maryvonne Devensky leads a group for Sierra Club's Inner City Outings at Barr Hammock Levy Loop Opening, Feb 2. More pictures on Page 3

### ACF Dashboard

Acquisition List protected:	21,736
With Direct ACF funding:	18,154
Remaining on List:	28,206
Under contract:	1,003
Value of land protected:	\$ 96,543,269
County share:	\$ 36,117,306
Partner share:	\$ 60,425,963
Managed by County:	10,246
Managed by Partners:	11,490
Open or Opening soon:	16,730
As of March 31, 2013	

This is an electronic newsletter distributed to anyone interested in following the Alachua County Forever Program. To be added to the distribution list, please click [here](#).

The information in this Newsletter is available in alternate formats upon request.

*"What is the extinction of the Condor, to a child who has never known a wren?" – Robert Michael Pyle.*

## Winding Down

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor



Above: The Santa Fe River from the Bradham Property near SR 121. Below: flatwoods on Cox & Moore

Alachua County Forever (ACF) is entering likely its last year of meaningful land acquisition. I think we're going out with a bang. In March, the Commission approved the acquisition of the 93-acre Bradham property which is adjacent to Alachua Conservation Trust's (ACT) 98-acre River Creek Preserve on SR 121. ACT will manage the property as a unit of the River Creek Preserve. This public-private partnership between ACF and ACT continues a fruitful association that has resulted in over 3,000 acres of the County's Acquisition List being protected. In December, ACT closed on a conservation easement on the Simons property, one of the highest ranked parcels on our acquisition list (congrats and thanks!). A few days earlier, the County closed on the 207-acre conservation easement on the Running Over Ranch up on the Santa Fe River. These purchases protect significant wetlands and wildlife corridors associated with the Santa Fe River – arguably one of our most significant environmental areas. We are working on closing the 460-acre Cox & Moore parcel in the primary and secondary protection zones of the Murphree well field, and is located within one-quarter mile of existing production wells. Finally, we are working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to protect over 400 acres of productive ranchland in the Lochloosa Creek area, including the only working cheese-making creamery in Alachua County.

A lot of good land remains on the Acquisition List, but we cannot buy it all. Several conservation-minded landowners have approached us about donating conservation easements to us or leaving property to us in their wills. This will be the bread-and-butter of our land acquisition business for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, come out and enjoy what we have protected.



More pictures from Barr Hammock opening



## Critter Corner

An occasional series about the wildlife with which we share the land

By Susie Hetrick, Sr. Environmental Specialist

Sometimes considered a nuisance by hikers, freshly harrowed fire breaks are a perfect medium for capturing animal tracks. Observant visitors may notice tracks or scat of white-tailed deer, turkey, raccoon, and other animals that forage or travel along secluded preserve roads.

This winter at Lake Alto Preserve, EPD Land Conservation staff spotted several Florida black bear tracks in the newly turned fire breaks. The Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) is a threatened species in Alachua County, and is ranked imperiled in Florida because of rarity by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory. The size, frequency, and location of the tracks suggest there are two bears – perhaps one female adult and one juvenile – moving around together in the north end of the Preserve! It is very gratifying to know that this species – a large mammal with a large home range – is making good use of the flatwoods and swamp habitats in Lake Alto Preserve.



Black Bear Prints at Lake Alto

## View from the Fire Tower

By David Hoyt, Prescribed Fire Coordinator

The Alachua County Forever Prescribed Fire Program is having a busy winter doing what we like to do best. Since December 2012, we have performed 9 prescribed burns for a total of 512 acres. We have treated a variety of habitats with fire including; mesic flatwoods, sandhill, depression marsh, and hardwood swamp. Our efforts have ranged throughout our Alachua County Preserves from Lake Alto near Waldo, to Watermelon Pond south of Newberry, to Barr Hammock west of Micanopy and Phifer Flatwoods near Hawthorne.

We have encountered a lot of support along the way. People like that we are actively managing our preserves in this manner. Folks who love living in the country understand that using prescribed fire to reduce the amount of built-up fuels in the natural landscape will help protect their homes, farms and property in the event of a wildfire. Still others are excited to see the effect prescribed fires have on the landscapes. They recognize that some historical plant communities native to Florida such as long leaf pine and wire grass depend upon fire to thrive. They smile and remember that as a child, they walked with a parent or grandparent among an open expanse of flatwoods flushing with wildflowers and bushes drooped with blueberries. They know that when they see a fox squirrel, hear the explosion of a covey of quail taking flight or contemplate the tracks of a Florida Black Bear beside their own, that what we do is having a direct impact on wildlife and its need for the ancient habitat it is adapted to.

These are treasures that we hold in our place and in our time. If we care for them well, one day we will have these treasures to share as we walk with those who have yet to experience what we so dearly love.

## 2013 – Off to a Hot Start

Site	Date	Acres
Phifer 1J	12/19/2012	17
Lake Alto 1H	1/16/2013	22
Lake Alto 3B	1/23/2013	39
Lake Alto 1F	1/29/2013	27
Lake Alto 1D, 1E	2/5/2013	62
Lake Alto 3C, 3D, 3E	2/12/2013	41
Barr Hammock 2D, 2F	2/20/2013	70
Watermelon Pond Metzger	3/1/2013	179
Barr Hammock 2G	3/7/2013	59



Above: ACF's fire team monitoring a prescribed fire at Barr Hammock.

Below: The prescribed burn at Barr Hammock working its way across the ground.



### ACF 2013 Hikes and Events

Date	Location	Event	Partner
4/6/2013	Turkey Creek	Nature Walk	FTA
4/7/2013	Barr Hammock	Nature Walk	Gainesville Ecotours
4/21/2013	Lake Alto	Earth Day Work Day	ACF
5/4/2013	Mill Creek	Nature Walk	FTA
5/11/2013	Barr Hammock	Nature Walk	Gainesville Ecotours
6/1/2013	Barr Hammock	National Trails Day Nature Walk	FTA

**More information:**

Florida trail Assoc. (FTA) hikes at [www.floridatrail.org](http://www.floridatrail.org),  
 Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) hikes at [www.fnps.org](http://www.fnps.org)  
 Gainesville Ecotours hikes at [www.gainesvilleecotours.com/](http://www.gainesvilleecotours.com/)

## Kill-a-Weed

An occasional series to help our neighbors steward our public places

By Bob Kennedy, Environmental Specialist

*Ardisia crenata*, often referred to as coral ardisia, is native to the Asian continent and was introduced to the US as an ornamental in the early 1900's. The seeds are highly viable forming dense colonies that block sunlight to native ground cover. The result is a monoculture of ardisia with a decrease in native plant diversity.

The characteristics of ardisia make it easily identifiable: glossy, dark green, crenate margined leaves, and red fruits present throughout the year. Most commonly found along the margins of wetlands; also found in upland hammock and disturbed areas.

Small infestations can be removed manually, making sure to remove plant roots and collect all seeds. Larger scale infestations may require herbicide treatment. Recommended treatment is triclopyr amine 44.4% diluted with water to form a 3% solution with 1% nonionic surfactant. Follow up to collect seeds and retreat or hand pull seedlings. For more specific information about treatment of ardisia and many other invasive exotics consult the UF IFAS extension publication *Control of Nonnative Plants in Natural Areas of Florida*.



Coral ardisia are easily identified: glossy, dark green, crenate margined leaves, and red fruits present throughout the year.



Post treatment of a monoculture of ardisia at Sweetwater Preserve. Compare the treated area on the left to the untreated on the right of the photograph.

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Turkey Creek Hammock

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*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

[www.alachuacountyforever.us](http://www.alachuacountyforever.us)

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**Alachua County Commission**

Mike Byerly, Chair  
Lee Pinkoson, Vice-Chair  
Susan Baird  
Charles "Chuck" Chestnut IV  
Robert "Hutch" Hutchinson

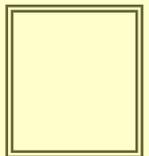
**Administration**

Richard Drummond, County Manager  
  
Chris Bird,  
Environmental Protection Dept. Director

**ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER MISSION**

*Approved in November 2000 by the voters, to acquire, improve and manage the county's environmentally sensitive lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.*

*Alachua County Environmental Protection  
Department, Land Conservation Division  
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