

# Access for All – Building a Boat That Everyone Can Ride

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*The first wheelchair accessible glass bottom boat for Florida State Parks*

TALLAHASSEE, FL, UNITED STATES, January 13, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida State Parks Foundation has completed the design for the first wheelchair-accessible glass-bottom boat at Silver Springs State Park. Because of a major grant from the Felburn Foundation, it is hoped the boat will be in service before the end of this year.



Soon no one will get left behind on the dock just because they can't walk."

*Paula Russo*

Glass bottom boat tours have been operating at Silver Springs since at least the 1920s. The current fleet, built in the 1960s and 1970s, is not wheelchair accessible and it isn't feasible to retrofit the vessels.

The Florida Park Service took over the Silver Springs attraction in 2013. It was very run down and the expense of repairing and revitalizing infrastructure combined with coping with hurricane damage done in 2018 (the roof of a just-built educational pavilion was seriously damaged) prevents the Park Service from undertaking the expense of a new accessible boat on its own.

"These boats are a beautiful unique design but people using mobility devices such as wheelchairs and scooters are excluded from the tours because the passenger must be able to step in and out of the boat. The only solution is to build a brand-new boat which is a worthy but costly undertaking," said Julia Gill Woodward, Foundation CEO.

"Thanks to the tremendous generosity of the Felburn Foundation we can now plan to begin construction this Spring," added Paula Russo, the Foundation's project's coordinator. "Soon no one will get left behind on the dock just because they can't walk," she added.

The accessible glass-bottom boat is expected to cost between \$450,000 and \$500,000. Contributions have also come from the Friends of Silver Springs State Park, Lay, Pitman & Associates and the Cape Leisure Corporation. To ensure the project's timely completion Florida State Parks Foundation is encouraging others to donate.

The Florida State Parks Foundation supports the work of Florida's award-winning 175 state parks and the more than 20,000 volunteers who donate 1.2 million hours of their time annually. Florida's state parks attract millions of visitors every year and have a statewide economic impact in the billions of dollars.

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