

Florida State Parks Foundation Celebrates Historic 2022 Parks Improvement Budget from the Florida Legislature

Florida's state parks and trails are one of the state's greatest success stories.

TALLAHASSEE, FL, UNITED STATES, March 14, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida State Parks Foundation today applauded the Legislature's decision to massively increase funding for Florida's award-winning state parks improvement budget.

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The Florida Park Service had originally requested \$54.16 million for facility improvements, land management, ADA and building maintenance projects. A record \$232.9 million was allocated in the budget for maintenance, repair, and

park improvements.

This includes:

- \$130.5 million to address the backlog of state park repair and renovation projects.
- \$86.1 million for new development projects in specific counties.
- \$11.2 million for resource management.
- \$5 million total for projects at Paynes Prairie Preserve, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve and Ichetucknee Springs State Parks.

“When you compare the \$233 million that has been allocated with the \$4.4 billion in economic impact that the state parks generate, it is hard to think of anything else that is a better return on the investment,” Gustafson said.

“Florida's state parks and trails are one of the state's greatest success stories. They contribute to the state's tourism industry while preserving many of the jewels of our natural environment and Florida's significant historical and cultural sites,” said Foundation CEO Julia Gill Woodward.

“State parks and trails located in small towns and rural areas are sometimes the only economic driver in the community. Visitors coming to these parks spend dollars for lodging, and in restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, bait shops and more. If not for state park operations, these businesses might not otherwise exist,” Woodward added.

Over the last two years, despite the impact of COVID, many state parks saw record visitation as people sought to recreate and exercise in safe outdoor environments. State parks and trails serve more than 29 million visitors annually, generating \$4.4 billion in direct economic impact to local communities statewide while creating more than 61,000 jobs.

“The demand for these open spaces will continue to increase, as Florida’s population is expected to top 23 million by 2025 and tourism numbers grow,” said Woodward.

“To meet this growing demand, it is important that state parks continue to provide exceptional value in terms of visitor experience and the range of outdoor pursuits available. It is also important that these pursuits are available to the widest possible audience both in terms of accessibility and diversity,” she added.

The Foundation, founded in 1993 as Friends of Florida State Parks and renamed in 2018, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation whose mission is to support and help sustain the Florida Park Service, its 175 award-winning parks and trails, local Friends groups and more than 20,000 park volunteers.

It does this through programs that preserve and protect state parks, educate visitors about the value of state parks, encourage community engagement and active use of state parks, and advocacy. The volunteer Board of Directors represents private and public sectors as well as local and statewide interests.

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