

Florida State Parks Foundation Celebrates Historic, Momentous 2022

Achievements include record-setting fundraising and new specialty license plate.

TALLAHASSEE, FL, UNITED STATES , December 19, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida State Parks Foundation launched a major historical construction project, debuted a new specialty

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Tammy Gustafson, Florida State Parks Foundation President

license plate, supported park staff and volunteers in the wake of Hurricane Ian and secured an unprecedented amount of more than \$2 million to preserve, protect, sustain and grow Florida’s state parks in a momentous and memorable 2022.

“It is a joy and a privilege to support our state parks, and I am amazed to look back and see everything the Florida State Parks Foundation has achieved over the last 12 months,” Foundation President Tammy Gustafson said.

“We are grateful for all the work and accomplishments from this year, and I cannot wait to see the incredible

things we will do with our donors and partners to make our award-winning Florida State Parks even better in 2023.”

The Foundation’s 2022 highlights include:

- Receiving a grant of nearly \$1 million from the Florida Department of State’s Florida African American Cultural and Historical Grants Program to build a representation of the 1738 Fort Mose at Fort Mose Historic State Park in St. Augustine. The fort is scheduled to break ground in 2023 and will bring to life one of Florida’s most inspiring stories of courage and freedom.
- Launching the new “Explore Our State Parks” specialty license plate in April. In only nine months, the plate has sold more than 6,000 units and ranks 76th among 150 specialty license plates in Florida.
- Creating a \$50,000 relief fund for Florida State Parks staff and volunteers who endured hardships as a result of Hurricane Ian.

- Installing more than 120 refillable water bottle stations at state parks across Florida. The stations were funded in part through specialty license plate sales and are the first phase of an initiative to expand sustainability practices in Florida's state parks.

- Funding training, professional development and certification opportunities for Florida State Parks staff.

"Our work this year has made an impact in all aspects of Florida State Parks," Gustafson said. "While many of our projects focus on preserving Florida's history, improving the present and sustaining the future, I am especially proud that we were able to jump in quickly to help our Florida Park Service family recover after a devastating storm."

Additionally, the Foundation teamed up with community partners to fund dozens of projects that address park needs.

First, the Foundation expanded on its commitment to making state parks accessible for all by providing accessible electric trams at Oscar Scherer State Park (Sarasota) and Henderson Beach State Park (Destin), all-terrain motorized wheelchairs at Lake Kissimmee State Park (Lake Wales), Blue Spring State Park (Orange City), Wekiwa Springs State Park (Apopka), Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park (High Springs) and William J. "Billy Joe" Rish Recreation Area (Port St. Joe), and Mobi-mats and associated equipment at St. Andrews State Park, Grayton Beach State Park, Deer Lake State Park and Topsail Hill Preserve State Park in the Florida Panhandle.

Several coastal parks also received beach-accessible floating wheelchairs and Wakulla Springs State Park near Tallahassee received funding for a new accessible playground.

To aid Florida State Parks' land and resource management efforts, the Foundation helped secure funding for new all-terrain and utility-terrain vehicles for park staff and wildlife monitoring teams, as well as a new "Bobcat" vehicle to aid in preserving habitat for endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park in Fellsmere. The Foundation's Plant a Pine campaign enjoyed another successful year and anticipates meeting its goal of raising \$100,000 to plant 100,000 native longleaf pines by Earth Day 2023.

The Foundation also made strides for the next generation of park rangers and nature enthusiasts by providing Spanish-translated Junior Ranger materials for the first time to 17 participating parks in South Florida. Florida State Parks' Junior Ranger program provides opportunities for young people to learn about, serve and share in Florida's natural and cultural resources.

Additionally, the Foundation helped to complete the restoration of the Educational Mangrove and Reef Aquarium Life Support System at the John D. MacArthur Beach State Park Nature Center in North Palm Beach and funded interpretive panels to accompany the fort representation project at Fort Mose Historic State Park.

To enhance visitor experiences, the Foundation contributed to the first 360-degree, underwater livestream in Florida at John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo and also secured funding for accessible viewfinders that will overlook scenic landscapes at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park near Naples.

"It is inspiring to know that there are so many organizations and individuals who believe in doing all we can to support Florida's state parks," Gustafson said. "Their generosity has created immediate and long-lasting positive impacts that will be enjoyed for years to come."

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The Florida State Parks 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. These projects were completed by the Florida State Parks Foundation Services LLC, which is a limited liability company affiliate of the Foundation.

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