

Florida State Parks Foundation announces 2023 Small Grants Program awardees

Funded projects support accessibility, hurricane recovery and environmental sustainability

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, May 17, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida State Parks Foundation today announced the 10 awardees to receive funding through its 2023 small grants program.

Nine Florida State Parks citizen support organizations (CSOs), often known as Friends groups, as well as one state park without a CSO, will receive awards of up to \$5,000 to advocate for or support their parks.

This year's winners are Blackwater Heritage Trail, Inc., Friends of Anclote Key State Park & Lighthouse, Friends of Blue Spring State Park, Friends of Cape Florida, Friends of Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park, Friends of Lake Louisa State Park, Friends of the Myakka River, Inc., Friends of Oleta River State Park, Three Rivers State Park and Friends of the Withlacoochee State Trail.

The Foundation's small grants program began in 2021 and has distributed more \$100,000 to 26 parks and CSOs.

"We have dozens of CSOs all over Florida, and they are all composed of amazing, dedicated people who love their state parks," said Tammy Gustafson, president of the Florida State Parks Foundation. "We are proud to play a part in supporting these organizations as they pursue their goals and work to enhance and improve their parks."

- Blackwater Heritage Trail Inc. (Milton) received \$5,000 for new safety and maintenance equipment. This will allow staff and volunteers to improve trail shoulders, create more overhead clearance for equestrian users and support efforts to remove nonnative plants.

- Friends of Anclote Key State Park & Lighthouse (Tarpon Springs) received \$5,000 toward the purchase of a new tractor. Anclote Key Preserve State Park is three miles offshore and accessible only by boat. The tractor will help park rangers with routine tasks such as mowing, moving large objects, removing downed trees and cleaning up beaches.

- Friends of Blue Spring State Park (Orange City) received \$5,000 to enhance its all-terrain

wheelchair program. The park recently received an all-terrain wheelchair and will use the grant funds to purchase an enclosed trailer that will allow park staff to easily store, charge and transport the wheelchair to guests around the park.

- Friends of Cape Florida (Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park, Key Biscayne) received \$5,000 to create a new, updated interpretive video. The video will share the significance of the park's history, culture and natural resources, including the Cape Florida Lighthouse, and will add new information such as the park's recovery after Hurricane Andrew in the early 1990s and its recent Underground Railroad designation.

- Friends of Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park (Homosassa) received \$5,000 to replace its fleet of 12 wheelchairs. Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park attracts visitors from around the world and features about two miles of trails, boardwalks and sidewalks.

- Friends of Lake Louisa State Park (Clermont) received \$5,000 toward renovations to the fishing and observation pier at Dixie Lake. This will include replacing worn railings and walkway planks, as well as providing cutouts at wheelchair height to enable unobstructed viewing and fishing from a lower vantage point.

- Friends of the Myakka River, Inc. (Myakka River State Park, Sarasota) received \$5,000 to purchase two cargo bikes that will support its "Bike Myakka for Good" program. The cargo bikes will replace two fossil fuel-based vehicles and provide greener, environmentally friendly transportation that will allow staff and volunteers to complete service projects around the park.

- Friends of Oleta River State Park (North Miami Beach) received \$5,000 for new waste management receptacles that will keep the park clean and beautiful for visitors. The park annually serves more than 300,000 visitors and provides valuable outdoor recreation opportunities to the busy North Miami area.

- Three Rivers State Park (Sneads) received \$5,000 to support "Operation Shadetree," an initiative created to replant the hundreds of large, native hardwood trees that were lost when Hurricane Michael devastated the park in 2018. Most of these trees will be planted in the park's day-use area along Lake Seminole.

- Friends of the Withlacoochee State Trail (Inverness) received \$5,000 to update and expand its popular "Postcards from the Trail" mural series. The funds will serve to renovate an existing mural at the Inverness Trailhead and create a new mural at the Ridge Manor Trailhead.

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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 grants are through the Florida State Parks Foundation Services LLC, which is a limited liability company affiliate of the Foundation.

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