

On ADA anniversary, Florida State Parks Foundation celebrates accessibility in Florida's award-winning state parks

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, on the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Florida State Parks Foundation celebrates the accessible features found in Florida's award-winning state parks, trails and historic sites, and encourages everyone to explore our state parks regardless of their disability or mobility level.

"Supporting Florida State Parks in their efforts to provide access for all is one of our Foundation's core values," said

Florida State Parks Foundation President Tammy Gustafson. "We are proud of the accessible features and amenities that are currently available, and we are committed to enhancing and expanding these features whenever possible."



An accessible pier at Oscar Scherer State Park offers areas of lowered rails so that seated visitors have unobstructed views and may cast fishing lines.

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Julia Gill Woodward, Florida State Parks Foundation CEO

In recent years, the Foundation has collaborated with Florida State Parks and a wide variety of community partners to introduce several accessible amenities in parks across the state. Highlights include:

- The first accessible glass-bottom boat at Silver Springs State Park in Ocala. Since its launch in August 2021, the Chief Potackee – Betty Mae Tiger Jumper — named after the first and only female chief of the Seminole Tribe of Florida — has provided an opportunity for thousands of people who use wheelchairs to enjoy an iconic Floridian experience for the first time ever.

- Beach-accessible wheelchairs are available, free of charge, at every state park along Florida's coastline.
 - Eight all-terrain wheelchairs are available at some of Florida's most popular state parks. These chairs can navigate sand, mud and rugged trails.
 - Ten floating wheelchairs, which allow visitors to experience both sand and water, are available at seven coastal state parks.
- Wheelchair-accessible electric trams are available at some parks in the Panhandle, southwest and southeast regions.
- An accessible fishing pier is available at Oscar Scherer State Park near Sarasota that features areas of lowered rails so that seated visitors have unobstructed views and may cast fishing lines.
 - Beach matting has been provided at three coastal parks in Northwest Florida, which allow for easier movement over sandy landscapes.

Additionally, in 2022, Florida State Parks reopened William J. "Billy Joe" Rish Recreation Area on Cape San Blas in the Florida Panhandle. Rish Recreation Area is a 100-acre natural oasis designated for people with disabilities, their families and caregivers. The park offers access to both the Gulf of Mexico and St. Joseph Bay, as well as a canoe/kayak launch, Olympic-sized swimming pool and overnight accommodations.

"One of the goals of Florida State Parks is that everyone be able to enjoy them," said Chuck Hatcher, Director of Florida State Parks. "I am thrilled that we continue to lead the way in our commitment to people of all abilities to participate in the many nature-based recreational activities available at our state parks."

"Florida's state parks are the best in the country, and their commitment to accessibility is a big reason why," said Julia Gill Woodward, Florida State Parks Foundation CEO. "The natural wonders and world-class outdoor experiences found in state parks should be available to all visitors, and we remain dedicated to the pursuit of this goal."

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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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