

# Florida State Parks Foundation and Live Wildly host screening of 'Path of the Panther' at Wekiwa Springs State Park

*More than 100 attendees, including producer Carlton Ward Jr. and director Eric Bendick, participate in film screening and environmental discussion panel*

APOPKA, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, October 6, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida State Parks Foundation and Live Wildly on Thursday welcomed more than 100 people, including Rep. Doug Bankson, Rep. Jennifer Canady and Florida Supreme Court Justice Charles Canady, for a screening of the feature film "Path of the Panther" at Wekiwa Springs State Park.

Following the film, Florida State Parks Foundation board president Tammy Gustafson hosted a discussion panel with conservation photographer and film producer Carlton Ward Jr., and director Eric Bendick, as well as Live Wildly CEO Lisa Shipley, Foundation board member Don Philpott and Dr. Daniel Smith of the University of Central Florida's Department of Biology.

The panel discussed the Florida Wildlife Corridor, the significance of land conservation in central Florida and how Florida's award-winning state parks play a crucial role in providing habitat and safe passage for the state's imperiled wildlife.

Ward and Bendick also shared insights about the making of the film and accompanying "Path of the Panther" book.

"We had a simply incredible evening, and I think everyone left feeling inspired to do all they can to protect and preserve the land that our precious wildlife needs to thrive," Gustafson said.



A panel of environmental experts, including photographer Carlton Ward Jr., discuss the Florida Wildlife Corridor during a screening of the film "Path of the Panther" at Wekiwa Springs State Park.

“Holding an event like this at Wekiwa Springs State Park, which is such a wonderful natural space in the Orlando area, made it that much more special.”

Added Shipley: “‘Path of the Panther’ has inspired millions of people to learn and act so that our wild areas and the wildlife that call them home are preserved for future generations. And, of course, having Carlton and Eric on-hand to share their perspectives and answer questions really made for an enriching experience.”

Thursday’s event was the first of two announced “Path of the Panther” screenings to be held in one of Florida’s state parks. A second screening will take place at Camp Helen State Park in Panama City Beach on Nov. 30.

Wekiwa Springs and Camp Helen state parks are two of 75 Florida State Parks to fall within the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

“After seeing the turnout and reaction to our first ‘Path of the Panther’ event, we are even more excited to share this important film with as many people as possible,” said Julia Gill Woodward, CEO of the Florida State Parks Foundation.

“We are looking forward to bringing this experience to Camp Helen State Park and, beyond that, amplifying the role that our state parks play in supporting Florida’s native wildlife wherever possible.”

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.



Attendees watch the feature film "Path of the Panther" during a screening event at Wekiwa Springs State Park.



L to R: Tammy Gustafson, Dr. Daniel Smith, Don Philpott, Lisa Shipley, Carlton Ward Jr., Eric Bendick.

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. This project has been completed the Florida State Parks Foundation Services LLC, which is a limited liability company affiliate of the Foundation.

Live Wildly was launched to create a movement in building value and appreciation for nature in Florida. To do so, Live Wildly taps into the sense of pride Floridians have about their state and what makes Florida, Florida for residents and visitors.

Live Wildly and the Florida State Parks Foundation invite individuals, artists, corporations, and organizations who share their vision to join this transformative partnership and support the critical work being done to safeguard and protect wild Florida.

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