

Florida State Parks Foundation Unveils Hybrid-Electric River Boat 'Great Blue Heron' at Wakulla Springs State Park

'Great Blue Heron' is one of four in a fleet of new boats at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park

WAKULLA SPRINGS, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, November 17, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida State Parks Foundation and Florida State Parks on Friday joined Sen. Dennis Baxley at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park to celebrate the launch of "Great Blue Heron," a fully accessible hybrid-electric river tour boat.

"Great Blue Heron," designed and built by Trident Pontoons, Inc. of Tavares, Florida, is one of four in an all-new fleet of boats offering the park's signature Wakulla River tour.



The Florida State Parks Foundation and Florida State Parks staff cut the ribbon on the 'Great Blue Heron' hybrid-electric river boat at Wakulla Springs State Park.

The Florida State Parks Foundation purchased "Great Blue Heron" and associated materials for a total cost of approximately \$250,000 using funds generated by the "Explore Our State Parks" specialty license plate.

"The river boat tour at Wakulla Springs State Park is one of the iconic experiences in north Florida," said Kathleen Brennan, board president of the Florida State Parks Foundation. "The Foundation is grateful to have played a role in supporting this spectacular new fleet of boats and ensuring that future generations are able to enjoy the incredible sights and native wildlife found along the Wakulla River."

Following a brief program, attendees boarded "Great Blue Heron" for the boat's first official tour. The group encountered manatees, alligators, anhinga, white ibis and other wildlife on the 30-minute voyage.

“Wakulla Springs has a perfect mix of outdoor recreation and native habitat protection,” said Chuck Hatcher, director of Florida State Parks. “A tour down the Wakulla River followed by a swim in the park’s cool springs and an ice cream cone in the Wakulla Lodge is a great way to spend a day in the real Florida.”

Rep. Allison Tant and Sen. Baxley co-sponsored the bill creating the “Explore Our State Parks” specialty license plate in 2021, and the plate officially launched in the spring of 2022. Earlier this year, the Foundation launched its Greener Initiative to direct funds generated from the license plate toward projects that help make Florida’s state parks more environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Previous efforts include the purchase and installation of 144 water bottle refilling stations at 98 parks across the state, as well as the installation of energy-efficient LED lighting at five pilot parks.

“It’s been amazing to see what has been achieved through the ‘Explore Our State Parks’ license plate in a relatively short period of time,” Tant said. “Our state parks are the best in the nation, and this plate has created a source of revenue that will help ensure that they stay that way.”

Added Sen. Baxley: “I love seeing the license plate on cars all over the state of Florida, and it was great to be here today to see its impact in a real, tangible way. ‘Great Blue Heron’ is a beautiful boat, and I’m glad to know that the license plate helped bring it to life.”

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Florida State Parks Foundation board president Kathleen Brennan speaks at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the "Great Blue Heron" hybrid-electric river boat at Wakulla Springs State Park.



The "Great Blue Heron" river boat debuted at Wakulla Springs State Park on Friday, Nov. 17.

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

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