

# Florida State Parks Foundation Receives SportsAbility Alliance's 2024 Active Leisure for Life Award

TALLAHASSEE, FL, USA, April 19, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In recognition of its commitment to providing and enhancing accessible experiences in Florida's award-winning state parks, the Florida State Parks Foundation on Friday received the SportsAbility Alliance's Active Leisure for Life Award during a ceremony held at Tallahassee Community College.

The Active Leisure for Life Award is given to an individual or organization that embodies the SportsAbility Alliance mission: "to enrich lives through accessible, inclusive recreation and active leisure."

Previous recipients include Cordell Jeter/EcoRover Chairs, SpiritClub and Disabled Sports USA.

"Helping to provide access for all in state parks is one of our core values," Foundation board president Kathleen Brennan said. "We are thankful to the SportsAbility Alliance for this incredible honor, and we vow to continue our pursuit of accessible experiences and amenities so that everyone may enjoy the beauty and wonder found in our state parks."

Added SportsAbility Alliance founder David Jones: "This year we are pleased to honor the Florida State Parks Foundation as our Active Leisure for Life Award recipient. The Foundation has embraced accessibility and inclusion in their selection of projects funded in state parks through Florida to remove barriers and create enhancements that benefit all visitors."

More than 200 people gathered Friday for an event featuring resource exhibits, indoor accessible recreation opportunities and performances by the Pyramid Studios dancers and the Hart & Soul



SportsAbility Award with David Jones, Kathleen Brennan and Paula Russo

band from Gretchen Everhart School in Tallahassee.

Representative Allison Tant presented the keynote address.

“Florida’s state parks provide amazing opportunities for residents and visitors to experience world-class beaches, springs, waterways, trails and cultural and historical sites,” Tant said. “Thanks to organizations like the Florida State Parks Foundation and the SportsAbility Alliance, Florida is also leading the way in providing accessible amenities and ensuring that no one is left behind when they visit their favorite state parks.”

In recent years, the Foundation has partnered with the Florida Park Service and a variety of community and corporate partners to enhance accessibility in virtually every aspect of park experiences.

Example projects include two fully accessible river tour boats – including the first ever accessible glass-bottom boat at Silver Springs State Park in Ocala, an accessible fishing pier at Oscar Scherer State Park near Sarasota, beach wheelchairs at every coastal state park, and accessible trams at eight parks across the state.

Staff from William J. “Billy Joe” Rish Recreation Area, a park in Cape San Blas designated for people with disabilities, were also on-hand to share information. The Florida Park Service assumed management of Rish Recreation Area in 2021.

“A lot has been done to improve accessibility in state parks, but there is a lot more that we have left to do,” said Paula Russo, the Foundation’s grants and programs administrator and a longtime advocate for accessibility in outdoor recreation. “We are proud to be recognized by the SportsAbility Alliance, and being included in their annual Expo inspires us to keep moving forward toward access for all.”

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

The volunteer Board of Directors represents private and public sectors as well as local and statewide interests.

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