

Florida State Parks Foundation, Partners Plant nearly 1,000 Longleaf Pines at Wakulla Springs to Celebrate Milestone

~Foundation's Plant a Pine program has planted more than 500,000 longleaf pines in Florida's state parks since 2020~

WAKULLA SPRINGS, FL, UNITED STATES, January 21, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Surrounded by iconic natural communities near one of the world's largest and deepest freshwater springs, the Florida State Parks Foundation today joined the Florida Park Service and Tallahassee's Bass Pro Shops store to celebrate an unprecedented milestone for tree and ecosystem restoration in Florida.

The Foundation's [Plant a Pine program](#), which seeks to restore native longleaf pine populations in Florida's state parks, recently surpassed 500,000 seedlings planted in parks across the state.



The Florida State Parks Foundation joined the Florida Park Service and Bass Pro Shops to plant nearly 1,000 longleaf pines at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park on Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026.

To commemorate the achievement, the Foundation teamed up with park staff, rangers and biologists, as well as representatives from Bass Pro Shops, to manually plant nearly 1,000 longleaf pine seedlings at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park near Tallahassee.

Bass Pro Shops has contributed \$200,000 to Plant a Pine since the program launched in 2020. Every \$1 donated plants one longleaf pine seedling in a state park.

"We are amazed that Plant a Pine has restored more than half a million trees in our state parks, and we are so grateful to Bass Pro Shops and all of our incredible Plant a Pine donors," said Julia Gill Woodward, CEO of the Florida State Parks Foundation. "It's a proud day for the Foundation, and we are celebrating the best way we know how — by planting more trees in a state park."

Originally conceived in response to Category 5 Hurricane Michael, which destroyed approximately 500 million trees across the Florida Panhandle in 2018, Plant a Pine has become one of the Foundation's signature campaigns.

A popular gift for holidays, birthdays and special occasions, nearly 2,500 grassroots supporters have contributed to Plant a Pine since its debut. Plant a Pine donations may be made in honor of a friend, family member, pet or community group, and every Plant a Pine donor receives a printable Certificate of Tree Planting.

The Foundation has also partnered with Bob Ross Inc. to participate in the Run for the Trees: Happy Little 5K in each of the past three years. Inspired by the iconic artist Bob Ross — who often referred to “Happy Little Trees” in his paintings — the Happy Little 5K encourages registered participants to complete a 5K race in an outdoor setting of their choosing any time between Earth Day and Arbor Day (April 18-26, 2026).

Registration fees include a t-shirt, race bib, finisher's medal and sticker, and \$10 from every registration designated for Florida is donated to Plant a Pine.

“Today's event at Wakulla Springs is a great example of what makes Florida's state parks so special — a project to restore a critically important ecosystem within one of our favorite places to swim, hike and enjoy the outdoors,” Foundation Board President Matt Caldwell said. “That so many people and partners have donated to Plant a Pine over the years is a testament to just how much our state cares about its natural spaces.”

Capable of standing well over 100 feet tall, longleaf pines once dominated landscapes across the Southeastern U.S., but now span just 3% of their original footprint.

Mature longleaf ecosystems support more than 30 endangered and threatened species, including red cockaded woodpeckers, gopher tortoises and indigo snakes. Longleaf pines are fire-adapted — park staff conducted a prescribed fire to prepare for today's planting — and regular fire enables longleaf pines to create rich, stable ecosystems.

“The longleaf pine is a keystone species found in many of our parks,” Florida State Parks Director



Florida State Parks Foundation Board President Matt Caldwell plants a longleaf pine during a tree-planting celebration at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park on Jan. 21, 2026.

Chuck Hatcher said. "We're not just planting trees today. We're restoring habitat for our state's native plants and animals to thrive for future generations."

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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, 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 projects are completed by 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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The Florida State Parks Foundation's Plant a Pine program has planted more than 500,000 trees in state parks since 2020.

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