

# May PRAS Conservation Report

## Features:

- CHNEP Climate Summit April 7-8
- EVCO April 7 Quarterly meeting
- FL Audubon President's Zoom call April 26
- New Wildlife Underpass on I-4
- Red Hills Conservation Area Florida Forever Project
- Ocklawaha River and Rodman Dam
- Birds without Borders Video In lieu of May program
- PRAS Native Plant Giveaway
- PRAS joins CHEC for Earth Day Festival
- Katherine Rose, Sea Grant agent, Charlotte County extension of the U of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services doing **seagrass surveys** May 3-17
- New Representatives
- RCC member Rhonda Roff needs support for Florida Youth & Seminole's Climate Goal Letter



David Hartgrove HRA is trying to get the HR2773/SB2372 Recovering American Wildlife Act Passed  
Link: <https://www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-acts/alliance-americas-fish-and-wildlife>

## Two Amusing Stories:

1 Ecowatch article and video by Cristen Hemingway Jaynes  
<https://www.ecowatch.com/ivory-billed-woodpecker-sightings-extinction.html?fbclid=IwAR1iuy5LHD4sgJ20eLeKVCLi0DdljckakOnRjWlYCMc4ErSi11RDVgtvRWM>

2 Dandelion Story - Not just a weed, it has edible flowers

**1000 Friends of Florida** 3d · 🌐

"You may not even notice it as you speed westbound on I-4 toward Orlando, but a new wildlife underpass being built in Polk County will reconnect wilderness that was bisected by six lanes of road in the 1970s.

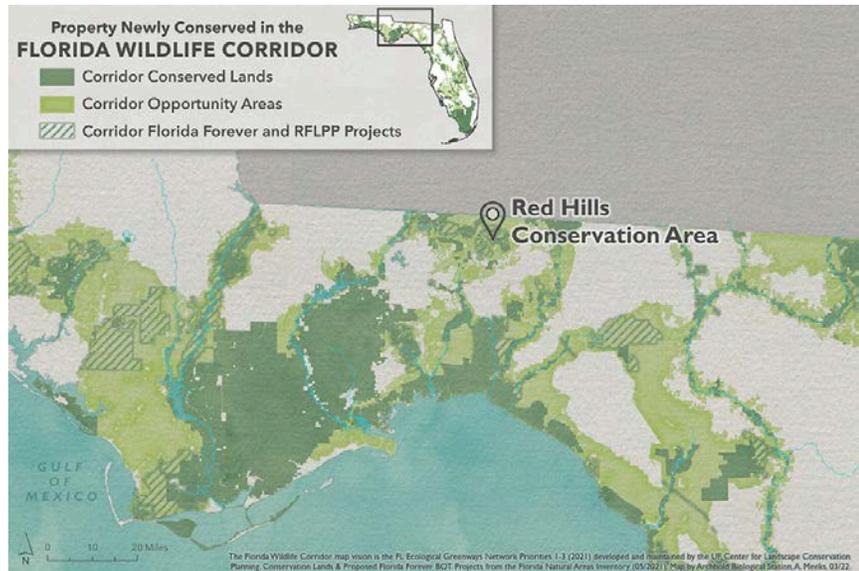
Why it matters: It could prove vital to the biodiversity and survival of migrating animals like black bears and Florida panthers.

When it's completed next year, the tunnel under I-4 — about 21 feet wide and eight feet tall, with a canal connecting wetlands and providing passage for aquatic animals — will stitch together bisected pieces of the Hilochee Wildlife Management Area in the Green Swamp, the hydrological heart of Florida.

The Hilochee WMA is part of the 18-million-acre Florida Wildlife Corridor, the network of preserved greenbelts snaking the length of the state that provide safe migratory routes for animals."

New wildlife underpass to help preserve Florida's biological diversity

AXIOS.COM  
**Wildlife underpass coming to I-4**  
A new wildlife underpass being built in Polk County will reconnect wild...



## Path of the Panther Florida Wildlife Corridor

A newly-approved conservation easement in the Red Hills Conservation Area Florida Forever Project will protect biodiversity, natural forests, and wetlands systems in Leon and Jefferson counties. With open pine savannah, rolling hills, and miles of shoreline on Lake Miccosukee, this 4,132-acre conservation easement, which was approved at the March 29, 2022 meeting of the Governor and Cabinet, is the first acquisition in this critical project area within the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Thank you to the leadership of Tall Timbers, the landowner, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection who came together to make this opportunity possible.

## FREE THE OCKLAWAHA RIVER BY THE BREACHING OF RODMAN DAM

The dam was originally constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers as part of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal. While the construction of the canal was halted in 1971 by then-President Nixon due to environmental concerns, the Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam remains in operation with deleterious effects upon this beautiful river. The Rodman dam blocked the natural flow of the Ocklawaha River, damaging the river's sensitive ecological balance, covering up freshwater springs, disrupting fish and wildlife migrations, and disconnecting critical habitats.



## PRAS Arbor Day Event

On April 29th PRAS joined the University of Florida/IFAS Extension Charlotte County annual Arbor Day Expo from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. PRAS utilized a FPL/Audubon Grant for a Native Plant Giveaway. Rob Mills, giveaway coordinator summarized, "We gave away 765 native plants to 153 registered property owners at Charlotte County Extension Centennial Park. The Native Plant Giveaway included trees, bushes and grasses. The Port Charlotte High School Environmental Club volunteered to help with the giveaway.



Erie Bird Observatory

6h · 🌐

👉 It's a boy! 🐣

#didyouknow It's impossible to sex Piping Plover chicks based on plumage alone, instead one must wait until the following spring when they begin to transition into their breeding plumage for the first time.

Pictured below is "red dot," one of our fledges from the 2021 season. The top photo was taken by Cheri Hollis this past winter on the Gulf Coast of Florida and shows this bird appearing similar to how we last saw them, with sex still undeterminable. However, the bottom photo taken more recently by FL shorebird biologist, Audrey Albrecht, confirms that "our" kid is in fact a male, and a quite handsome and dapper one at that! 🐣👉

We wish "red dot" the best of luck this breeding season, wherever he may choose to nest. And may his offspring go on to further the lineage of this federally endangered population of Piping Plovers.

Great Lakes Piping Plover Recovery Effort #migrationmonday #birds #shorebirds

## Apalachee Audubon

### Birds Without Borders Video

In 2015, bird nerd Noah Strycker of Oregon became the first human to see more than half of the planet's bird species in a single, year-long, round-the-world birding trip. Anything could have happened, and a lot did. He was scourged by blood-sucking leeches, suffered fevers and sleep deprivation, survived airline snafus and car breakdowns and mudslides and torrential floods, skirted war zones, and had the time of his life. Birding on seven continents and carrying only a pack on his back, Strycker enlisted the enthusiastic support of local birders to tick more than 6,000 species, including Adelie Penguins in Antarctica, a Harpy Eagle in Brazil, a Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Thailand, and a Green-breasted Pitta in Uganda. He shared the adventure in real time on his daily blog ([audubon.org/noah](http://audubon.org/noah)), and now he reveals the inside story. This humorous and inspiring presentation about Strycker's epic World Big Year will leave you with a new appreciation for the birds and birders of the world. Click the black link above or go to Apalachee Audubon You Tube Channel or type <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shNQCKVDQ70>

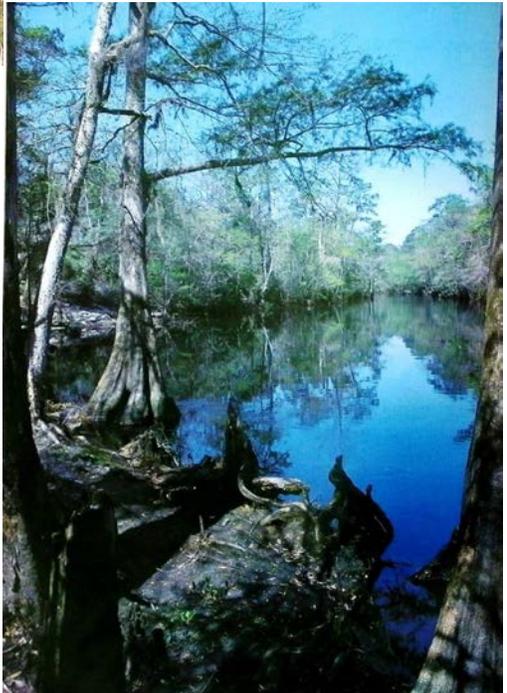
## Earth Day Festival at CHEC



On April 23 some PRAS volunteers hosted a booth at the CHEC Earth Day Festival on Burnt Store Road. Left to right are Shannon McGinnis, Sue French, Patty Linn, Phyllis Cady and Sue Galvin who had fun interacting with visitors promoting future generation conservation concepts in games, creative art and a lottery. 'Build a chick' with reused Easter eggs and recycled egg carton nests brought many creative art ideas and broad smiles from many kids! Bren Curtis held a fun mammal track identifying contest that puzzled many of the visitors. After a plaster casting demonstration of a large Grizzly Bear track, the winner of the most correctly guessed tracks received the casting.

### **PORT CHARLOTTE – Eyes on Seagrass monitoring program in Charlotte County.**

The program will document the health and status of seagrass in upper Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay. "Seagrass is a vital nursery habitat to many of Florida's commercial and recreational fisheries," said Katherine Rose, Sea Grant agent with the Charlotte County extension of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services. "Seagrass has a lot of important linkages to water quality," she added. "The structure of the leaf blades and the rhizomes — they are a little different than roots but provide a similar function in this case — trap and store suspended sediment in the water. This benefits many organisms and the seagrass since like other plants, it needs sunlight to survive." Rose helps oversee the survey program, which is scheduled to take place during a two-week window from May 3-17, 2022 with a follow-up sampling to be conducted between July 11-25, 2022. She said when seagrass dies, not only does it decompose and feed algae, but it also releases the sediment it was storing back into the water. "This all reduces the water clarity and quality, which makes it harder for remaining seagrasses to survive and the whole process snowballs," Rose said. The Eyes on Seagrass program began in 2019 after locals expressed concerns about a growing macroalgae abundance in both Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay, according to Rose. "Macroalgae competes with seagrass," she said. "Macroalgae growth is exacerbated by increased nutrient input into our waterbodies." She said nutrient-rich run off and water quality are big concerns for Floridians regarding the state's ecosystems given the intensity of algae blooms over the last five years. "Having a clear idea of the trends for both plants allow regulatory



bodies in Florida's government to identify concerns and implement policies to address them faster, which is necessary to protect ecosystems during a crisis," Rose said.

Between 1950 and 2000, Charlotte Harbor lost 29% of its seagrass coverage, she added, but there has been a recent, dramatic decrease in seagrass area in Charlotte Harbor.

"Between 2018 and 2021, the harbor lost 23% of its seagrass on average. Lemon Bay only decreased by 12%, but the east wall (of the harbor along Punta Gorda) lost 50% of its seagrass," Rose said.

Program volunteers teams need to consist of three to four individuals. Participants are required to provide their own boat, kayak, canoe, or paddleboard transportation to their assigned monitoring site.

They will also need to provide their own water shoes, mask, snorkel and fins.

Monitoring gear, a dive flag, and a cooler for samples will be provided. Gear will be distributed during a required training session.

"Participants get to spend a fun day out on the water and contribute to the conservation of their local environment," Rose added.

"What's not to love?"

For information, contact Rose at [kate.rose0210@ufl.edu](mailto:kate.rose0210@ufl.edu) or call 941-764- 4346. By Dan Sutphin Email:

[daniel.sutphin@yoursun.com](mailto:daniel.sutphin@yoursun.com)

## Dandelion Story



"Hello, I'm a dandelion.

A lot of people call me a weed but I'm a friend and come to help you! When you see me, remember that I'm the ONLY one who wants and can grow in that particular spot.

Because: Either the soil is too compact / hard stomped and I want to loosen it for you with my roots.

Or there is too little calcium in the soil - don't worry, I will replenish that for you with the dying of my leaves.

Or the soil is too acidic. But I will also improve that for you if you give me the chance.

Or a mixture of the above reasons, of course. 😊

I'm here because your soil needs my help so best you let me grow without disturbing me! When everything is fixed, I will disappear again, I promise!

Are you trying to remove me prematurely with my root? However meticulous you are, I will return 2x as strong! Just until your soil is improved.

You can even tell by my growth at which stage my help is at. If my leaves are flat on the ground then I'm far from ready but if they all reach up then I'm already a long way on my way.

Something completely different is that I am 1 of the first bloomers in spring so I will announce spring / summer for you.

During the day when it's hot, I open my flowers but in the evening when it cools off I close them again quickly. In fact, if it's not hot enough during the day I won't open them at all! 😄

My flowers are the first food for insects after hibernation and unlike most other plants, I have pollen AND nectar, not merely one OR the other! And I am generous with them!

My flowers are even delicious for you people by the way, did you know? I used to be called "honey (or gold) of the poor" because my flowers are so sweet in e.g. jam, sauce or salad! The internet is full of recipes - check them out. But wait until the end of May or later before you start picking and even then, don't pick everything yet!

The biodiversity and bees will be very grateful!" 😊

## New National and State representatives

As a part of Audubon's expansive chapter network, you are currently represented on Audubon's national board of directors by **Steffanie Munguía** of Tropical Audubon Society, as the Pan-Flyway Regional Director. Steffanie represents the interests of Audubon chapters and members nationwide (we have a specific local regional director, Stephen Bucynski). We are very grateful for Steffanie's years of fruitful service on the Audubon board, including her service on the International and Climate Committees, EDIB task force, and recent election to the Executive Committee. Steffanie's first full three-year term on the board will end in February 2023, and she is eligible to serve another three-year term. Such a commitment requires coordination between members, chapters, staff, and the national board, across all four flyways. Steffanie has indicated her willingness to stand for reelection and continue representing Audubon chapters and members in all flyways.

A native of Puerto Rico, she grew up in central Florida, where she first became involved in middle school with Audubon through her local chapter and volunteering for the Center for Birds of Prey. Over the past 15 years, she has dedicated her efforts to increasing youth and minority engagement in Audubon, co-coordinating the state's Conservation Leadership Initiative for several years, being involved in the Youth Environmental Summit 2020, and presenting at Audubon conventions. As a biologist, Steffanie has conducted research across the United States, participating in songbird research in the Great Plains and New England, and is currently studying the management of important stopover sites in coastal wetlands of the Caribbean. Through these diverse experiences, she has learned that Audubon is not just about the birds—it is about the people. The committed members who dedicate their time and energy to conserving birds and their habitats so that generations to come may be as enthralled with them as we have been since the Society's formation. Now pursuing a doctoral degree, she is excited to bring this energy to increasing student and young professional opportunities in Audubon across the flyways. Steffanie hopes to contribute meaningfully to efforts to bring more communication and integration to our chapters and members as we look toward the future of Audubon while honoring the legacy of our rich history.

Heather Starck  
Vice President, Grassroots Capacity Building  
National Audubon Society

**Kelly Cox**, Audubon Florida's Director of Everglades Policy, is the new co-chair of the Everglades Coalition. The coalition was established in 1968 for the purpose of advocating for the restoration of the Greater Everglades from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes to Florida Bay, and today engages representatives from more than 60 nonprofits from around the state and beyond.



Kelly Cox, Audubon Florida's Director  
of Everglades Policy



Rhonda Roff's plea for support for Commissioner Nikki Fried's 4/21 Proposed rule announcement  
21 days for comments between 4/21-5/12 Please support Florida Youth's effort for climate  
rulemaking which will adopt definitions, establish statewide renewable energy goals, require electric utilities to send their 10-year site plans, prepared pursuant to section 186.801, F.S., to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and require the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to take certain internal actions regarding renewable energy. Summary: Adopts definitions, establishes statewide renewable energy goals, requires electric utilities to send their 10-year site plans, prepared to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and requires the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to take certain internal actions regarding renewable energy.

Sample Letter or submit Comment to [https://www.flrules.org/Gateway/View\\_notice.asp?id=25791832](https://www.flrules.org/Gateway/View_notice.asp?id=25791832)

Dear Commissioner Fried and Energy Director Burk,

My name is Bren Curtis and I am writing today in support of the proposed rule, announced by Commissioner Fried on April 21st, that sets goals for Florida utilities to provide 100% renewable energy by 2050.

I am very concerned about the climate crisis because of the present conditions of our planet & Florida's population growth. I was relieved to see that, if this proposed rule is enacted, FDACS would be taking significant action to reduce Florida's greenhouse gas emissions and transition our utilities to clean, renewable energy sources, protecting the lives of current and future generations of Floridians.

Florida must rapidly transition to renewable energy sources. Energy experts have concluded that it is economically and technically feasible to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2050 and the time is now!

I am also encouraged by the hundreds of young people in Florida who submitted their petition for rulemaking to your agency and I am grateful to FDACS for using language proposed by the youth in the proposed rule. I stand in solidarity with these young Floridians as they seek to secure a safer climate future in Florida.

Thank you for reading my comment of support for this proposed rule. I hope it will be adopted as soon as is legally permissible.  
Bren Curtis, Port Charlotte