


Newsletter of the
Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

July - August 2011

Chairman's Message

By: Barb Hoffman

I am giddy with excitement over the results of the ANCA Peer Consult which took place May 5-7. The team, composed of four nature center administrators from Arkansas, Colorado, and Florida, toured the Education Center and conducted numerous interviews with staff, Friends, volunteers, and other stakeholders. Their final report is over 30 pages long, but here are the best parts - the observations and recommendations:

- The Preserve and the buildings and facilities of the Environmental Education Center complex are first class and would be the envy of many nature/environmental centers across the nation. The preserve is a very valuable and significant ecological resource that offers a variety of trails and research and educational opportunities. The Center has great classroom and lab facilities, captivating exhibits, a wonderful conference/meeting center and an interesting and valuable education/ interpretive trail.

- Visitation and program participation are at healthy levels and are similar if not better than many nature/environmental centers...

- The majority of board members, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders that the consult team talked to had positive attitudes about the organization. This also included supportive and positive attitudes from the one of the County Commissioners and the Director of Parks and Conservation Resources.

- A recent Pinellas County citizen survey and several University of Florida Extension (IFAS) listening sessions revealed positive and strong support for parks and the environment.

- The organization has many dedicated and passionate volunteers that contribute many hours of valuable service.

- BCP has a dedicated and passionate Friends organization that has and will play a key role in the success of the organization.

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The consult team saw many ways to capitalize on the excellent work that the organization has already accomplished, as well as opportunities for organizational sustainability... Given the overall economic and political realities in Pinellas County, it is unlikely that the County can devote the necessary resources to the proper management of the center. Yet, the future of BCP hinges upon an efficient, streamlined leadership group whose sole focus of attention is on the management of BCP. The consult team feels there are really three possible scenarios for management of Brooker Creek Environmental Education Center and Brooker Creek Preserve in the future:

1. Leave the organization as is with multiple management partners- i.e. Pinellas County, the University of Florida IFAS/County Extension program, the School District, Florida Division of Forestry, and the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve.
2. Seek another operational entity through a Request for Proposal Process to take over overall management of the center.
3. Create a new self supporting independent 501(3)(c) organization that would assume the primary responsibility to manage Brooker Creek Environmental Education Center and Brooker Creek Preserve. The consult team feels that this is probably the best scenario and recommends that the current Friends Organization become Brooker Creek Inc. (or other appropriate name) and assume the leadership role for the organization. This will mean that this group will have to take a more active role and will need to build the capacity of this organization.



ANCA Peer Consult Team, from left:
Jason Kindall, Associate Director, Ozark Natural Science Center, Huntsville, Arkansas
Pat Welch, Executive Director (retired), Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, West Palm Beach, Florida
Tim Sandsmark, Team Leader, Director, Lookout Mountain Nature Center, Golden, Colorado
Holly Dill, Executive Director, Environmental Learning Center, Vero Beach, Florida

When I read those words in the report, I felt several emotions - thrill and terror being the top two. The next step for the Friends is to meet with the core stakeholders of the Education Center and decide as a group with which recommendation to move forward, if any. Many nature centers, museums, and galleries throughout the country are run by non-profit organizations. It is not new ground, and the ANCA organization provides books and guidelines about how to go through the evolution and how to function once you get there. This is an exciting time for the Friends!

Barb

**Friends of Brooker Creek
New Mailing Address
3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon
Springs, FL 34688. Please use
this on any correspondence
from this time on.**

Many thanks to Kathleen Nichter who has volunteered to take on management of the Friends Gift Shop. Kathleen plans to have it up and running by October! We will be selling "gifty" items - t-shirts, hats, water bottles, notecards, field guides, field pamphlets, photography, inexpensive toys, and science items. If you have an idea for our gift shop, please email Kathleen at FOBCPgiftshop@gmail.com.

Preserve News

By: Steven J. Harper, PhD
Director, Environmental Lands Division

As long-time Friends know, some areas within the Preserve have a history of use and abuse dating back decades prior to their acquisition by Pinellas County. Some impacts are primarily aesthetic, such as the careless dumping of tires and other debris, while others are more severe in that they alter the structure and functions of ecosystems. For example, some ditches that were dug to improve drainage have impacted local hydrology by preventing natural sheetflow and disconnecting wetlands from surrounding areas. As part of our stewardship of the Preserve, we have proposed in the management plan a number of projects to address these impacts and restore the land. One mechanism for completing some of these projects involves the use of wetland mitigation and floodplain compensation associated with construction projects being conducted elsewhere in the county. The widening of Keystone Road has initiated two such wetland restoration projects within the Preserve, one located north of Old Keystone Road and the other in the southern part of the Preserve. Funds for these projects are incorporated into the budget for the road widening, resulting in no impact to the operating or capital improvement funds designated for the Preserve. When completed, these projects and other restoration efforts will result in significant improvements to the Preserve, helping to ease the impacts of scars introduced long ago.

Off the Beaten Path: Swamp Hike, June 26, 2011 By: Barb Hoffman

This hike promised to be wet, and boy did we get wet! A hardy group of thirteen adventurers braved a relentless rain and thoroughly enjoyed a two-hour meander through one of Brooker's most beautiful places. We had planned on getting wet from what should have been about two feet of standing water, but the swamp was dry due to the unseasonal drought. So we got wet, as promised, by a much-needed steady rain that provided cool temperatures, a well-received reprieve from the repressive summer heat. Our leader, Dr. Craig Huegel, provided a wealth of natural history information and funny stories, leading us single-file on a leisurely ramble amongst tall, tall cypress trees and scattered black gum (a.k.a. tupelo). We saw bromeliads in bloom, several patches of butterfly orchids, two tiny jinglebell orchids (*Harrisella filiformis*) -- roots only, they have no leaves -- and only one reptile, a small, non-venomous, banded water snake. Afterwards, we relaxed and ate lunch at the nearby Oldsmar city park, and made plans for the fall *Off the Beaten Path* hike to a stunning pine flatwoods that should be loaded with the endangered Cateby's lilies in full bloom, as well as a profusion of other fall wildflowers. There is room for 20, so please come along!



June 26 -- a very wet, soggy, but satisfied group of diehard swamp hikers! Left to right: Susan Rhein, Merle Hubbard, Barb Hoffman, Tom Reese, Jeff Hubbard, Brad Wilkins, Julie Wade, Roger Triplet, Cathie Foster, Laurie Angyn, Tiffany Custer, Adam Conner. Behind the camera: Craig Huegel, hike leader.

Off the Beaten Path: Sandhill Hike, March 27, 2011

By: Craig Huegel

The Friends kicked off our series of hikes to the special places in Brooker Creek Preserve on Sunday March 27. Dr. Craig Huegel led a dozen of us north of Keystone Road to an area of xeric (dry) uplands that includes some of the best remaining sandhill habitat in Pinellas County. Driving through well-field land recently acquired by the County, wild turkey scattered in front of us and into the surrounding pinelands. It was a perfect March day, sunny, but not too warm and we parked at the end of the well-field roadway and started out into the uplands. Dr. Huegel spoke on the ecology of these sensitive uplands and pointed out numerous wildflowers in bloom, including tarflower and sky-blue lupine. The fuzzy heads of last fall's summer farewell were in evidence still. Eventually, we reached the true sandhill ecosystem. Here, large longleaf pines and turkey oak provide a canopy over an understory of wiregrass and wildflowers. Gopher tortoise burrows were scattered throughout this region and Dr. Huegel explained that this area is the only place in the Preserve (and likely the County) where the rare gopher frog is also still present. After about two hours, it was time to circle back and make our way on the trail back to our cars. But, our return was made more exciting by the appearance of a fox squirrel who gave us all a good look before disappearing into the pines. Our day ended at a beautiful small cypress dome where we ate our lunches and shared stories before heading home. *Off the Beaten Path* is a series of hikes to some of the most beautiful places in the Preserve - all not generally open to the public. It is a wonderful fundraising opportunity for the Friends and a fun way



Lunch on the trail

for all of us to see places in the Preserve we are committed to support. (See page 5 for more info about the remaining *Off the Beaten Path* hikes.)

Off the Beaten Path hike, March 27. Enjoying a gorgeous hike to the sandhills! Back row: Paul Blotz, Nancy Yeager, Mark Yeager, Susan Rhein, Brad Wilkins, Dixie Mills, Mona Gardner. Seated: Barb Hoffman, Cathie Foster, Annie Blotz, Tom Reese, Julie Wade. Behind the camera: Craig Huegel



Off the Beaten Path Hike Series **at Brooker Creek Preserve!**

Please join us for our nature-based fundraising hike series, *Off the Beaten Path!*

Description: Two hikes remain in this series of four hikes that take place in beautiful areas tucked away within Brooker Creek Preserve in sites that are closed to the public. Our guide, Dr. Craig Huegel, can identify everything, from the tiniest moss to the tallest tree including animal prints, bird calls, lichens, and more. He is full of stories and very patient in answering questions. The hikes will be not only educational, but a lot of fun as well! The hikes will begin at 9:00 a.m. and are about 3-4 hours long. Bring water and lunch.

Cost: \$25 donation per hike with a 10% discount for members of Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve

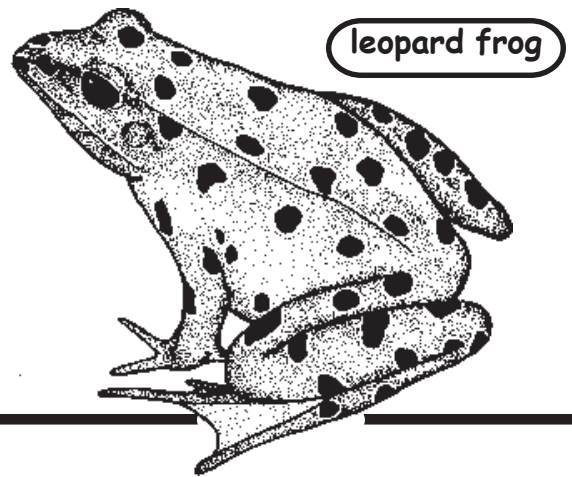
Remaining Hikes *Off the Beaten Path:*

Sept. 25 - Pine Flatwoods Catesby's Lily Site
Located in the eastern part of the preserve, this site features the endangered Catesby's Lily (aka, pine lily) in full bloom along with a profusion of other fall wildflowers.

Jan. 22, 2012 - Anclote Spur

This site was once part of the preserve but is now a preserve in itself. We will start in Brooker Creek Preserve, then traverse from woodlands into saltmarsh to a secluded spot along the beautiful Anclote River.

Reservations Required: Reserve your spot. Email fobcp@tampabay.rr.com. Sign up early! Only 20 spots are open for these fabulous hikes *off the beaten path!* Questions? Email fobcp@tampabay.rr.com or call 727-934-2680.



leopard frog

One day at the Education Center...

On Saturday, June 25, we were all amazed to find a newcomer in the man-made pond between the exhibit and classroom buildings - a three-foot alligator! There amongst the pig frogs and leopard frogs (adults and tadpoles), this little gator provided lots of entertainment for the eight volunteers on duty that day, as well as a host of preserve patrons! This species is not new to the preserve, but definitely new to the pond! He was joined by some more typical fellow reptiles. Within fifteen feet of the pond, a beautiful cottonmouth water moccasin lay in full view just off the boardwalk. Next to the pond, also in full view, was a young Florida water snake! Then just down the boardwalk, a pygmy rattler lay in coil in full view! What a day for reptiles!

Notes

Friends Trail is open again! The bridge is fixed and ready for hik-
Mark your calendar! Fall Wildflower Festival - Saturday, October 15!

News from the Butterfly Garden

By: Pam Brown

In May, four Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve worked the Butterfly Garden, dead-heading the many plants that have bloomed. We also took out quite a number of the ever present weeds. Lois Webber brought several Red Salvia for the garden plus some butterfly larvae for us to see. She is the consummate butterfly teacher. Dale Armstrong from the Extension Florida Yard's & Neighborhoods program provided two compost bins for us to use to create some valuable organic matter to enrich the butterfly garden. They are already full and composting. I provided a short pruning lesson by cleaning up two Beautyberry shrubs that had lots of crossing and dead limbs. This is the first shrub in our soon to be developed native shrub demonstration area next to the butterfly garden.

Remember, we meet on the last Saturday of each month to work on the butterfly garden and the native shrub demonstration area. We meet from 8 until 10 a.m. during the summer to try and beat the heat. Light refreshments are served to keep energy levels up. It would be really helpful if we could get a few strong men or women to come and help clear out the shrub demonstration area. Everyone is welcome to join us. Please bring your own gloves and gardening tools! Call 934-2680 for questions or to join our work crew.

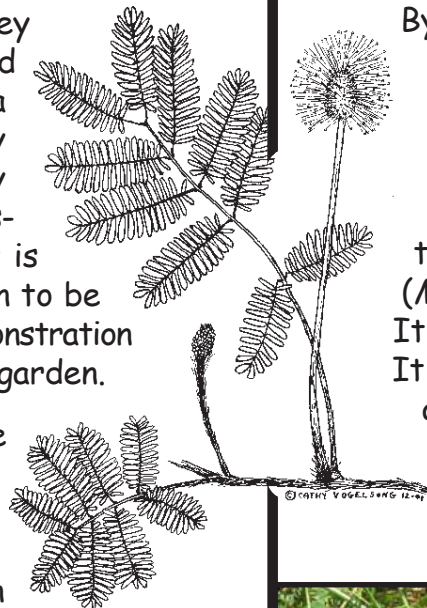
Palmetto skipper nectaring on a Florida paintbrush (*Carphephorus corymbosus*)



Pam's Gardening Tip of the Month

By: Pam Brown

The hot dry start that we had to our summer has left lawns a bit stressed. If you find that you have insect damage or bare areas due to lack of adequate water, consider planting Sunshine mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*) into the bare spaces. It will spread and fill in the bare areas. It can be mowed right along with the grass and if all of your grass finally dies, you will have a wonderful native groundcover already established.



Sunshine mimosa and St. Augustine grass

St. John's-worts

By Craig Huegel

St. John's-worts (*Hypericum* spp.) are yellow-flowering woody herbs indigenous to Europe as well as much of North America. Thirty one (31) separate species have been described in Florida and many are found in Brooker Creek Preserve. The common name comes from its traditional flowering and harvesting on St John's Day, 24 June - a holiday in Great Britain. In Britain, a "wort" is another name for "plant" and a great many "plants" were named that way as the early colonists saw our flora and tried to provide common names to them. Thus, we have spiderworts, liverworts, butterworts, etc. as well as the St. John's-worts of this article. The genus name *Hypericum* is derived from the Greek words *hyper* (above) and *eikon* (picture), in reference to the traditional use of the plant to ward off evil, by hanging plants over a religious icon in the house during St John's Day. Plants in this genus have been used medicinally for a great many centuries. Even today, much attention has been focused on them for various uses, though the species most studied is the European *Hypericum perforatum* - not a species native to Florida. St. John's-wort is widely known as an herbal treatment for depression. In some countries, such as Germany, it is commonly prescribed for mild depression, especially in children and adolescents. A constituent chemical, hyperforin, may be useful for treatment of alcoholism and has been found to have antibacterial properties against gram-negative bacteria.

Regardless of their potential medicinal value, St. John's-worts are attractive wildflowers and occur in a variety of upland and wetland habitats in Brooker Creek Preserve. The wetland species are most common in sunny locations, such as the wetlands along the powerlines and in open marshy systems at the outer edges of swamps. A few are very commonly encountered in pine flatwoods. Look for these along any of the trails south of Brooker Creek. I do not believe that any of

the really xeric species occur in the Preserve's extremely sandy uplands, though a few are common statewide.

The species below are those most likely to be encountered along the public nature trails. Most bloom extensively in late spring in Florida, but they also bloom sporadically throughout the summer into early fall. Look closely and see how many you encounter on your next hike.

St. Andrew's-cross (*Hypericum hypericoides*)

St. Andrew's-cross occurs statewide and throughout much of the eastern U.S., though it is endangered in New York and Massachusetts. It is an upland and wetland species, and can be found nearly anywhere in Brooker Creek Preserve, except at either extreme of moisture or drought. St. Andrew's-cross is a lanky evergreen woody shrub. It may eventually reach a height of 5-6 feet, but it remains fairly narrow even at maturity. The bark is reddish and peels off the main stem in thin threads.

This is not the most beautiful foliage plant, but well-grown specimens are attractive. The leaves are simple and linear with a blue-green cast. Flowering occurs from late spring into the fall. Each is a lemon yellow and comprised of 4 petals arranged like an "x" instead of equidistant from each other. Flowers occur across the top of the plants, not in distinct clusters, like many other species.



St. Andrew's-cross
Hypericum hypericoides
Photos by the author

Four-petal St. John's-wort (*Hypericum tetrapetalum*)

As its common and Latin names reveal, this species also has flowers with four petals. This primarily wetland species is common throughout Florida in a wide variety of wetland-edge and moist-pineland settings, but is largely confined to Florida. It is fairly rare in Georgia and occurs there only in some southeastern counties. It can be seen regularly in Brooker Creek Preserve in wetland settings and in moist pockets within the pine flatwoods.

Four-petal St. John's-wort is a rather lanky, uneven, evergreen shrub that may reach about 3 feet tall at maturity. Its thin main stem is reddish brown and numerous side branches arise from it - all ascending and forming a fairly narrow aspect to the plant. The foliage is blue-green and the opposite leaves are broadly ovate and clasp the stem. Flowering occurs from late spring until fall. The petals normally are light yellow, a bit wider than in St. Andrew's-cross, and each is equidistant from the others.

Sandweed (*Hypericum fasciculatum*)

Though burdened with an awful common name, this beautiful St. John's-wort is common throughout the edges of freshwater marshes and open swamps. Mature specimens may reach nearly 3 feet tall. The bark of the main stem is cinnamon brown in color and the outer bark tends to peel away in thin sheets - giving it additional aesthetic qualities.

Sandweed is evergreen and the needle-like leaves are shiny and deep green in color. Large numbers of canary yellow flowers occur mostly in spring at the tips of its many branches. Each flower has five petals.

Coastalplain St. John's-wort (*Hypericum brachyphyllum*)

This species has similar flowers and foliage to sandweed, but it occurs mostly in wet pinelands and the edges of open wetlands and it rarely stands taller than about 18 inches. If you look closely, the needlelike foliage is different from

Four-petal St. John's-wort
Hypericum tetrapetalum



Sandweed
H. fasciculatum



Coastalplain St. John's-wort
H. brachyphyllum

that of sandweed; the leaves curl inward and are not flat. This species is sometimes overlooked because of its stature and resemblance to other species, but it is common statewide in the right habitats.

If you wish to read more about these and other members of this genus, I have posted more extensive entries with more photographs in my wildflower blog: <http://hawthornhillwildflowers.blogspot.com/>.



Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center Upcoming Events

Register at least 24 hours prior by visiting www.pinellascountyextension.org, clicking on the "Online Class Registration" button, then clicking on "Brooker Creek" tab. For more information about upcoming events call (727) 453-6800. For registration information, call (727) 582-2100. All programs are presented by Education Services Volunteers, unless noted.

July - August Guided Hikes

Most Saturdays (July 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, August 6, 13, 20, 27) from 9:00 to 10:30 am, led by Education Services Volunteers, Environmental Lands Division. Join us for this 0.75-mile walk as we look at how the land has changed over time and discuss the ecological footprints left by those changes. Water, hat and closed-toe shoes are recommended. Please register by noon on the Friday before the hike by calling (727) 453-6800. Free. All ages welcome - **children younger than 6 may find this hike challenging.**

BCPEEC July Programs

Book Time at Brooker Creek

Thursdays, July 14 and 28, 10:30 - 11:15 am. This program is designed to introduce pre-school children to the wonders of the natural world through stories and hands-on activities relating to the story that is read. Pre-registration is required. Free. Recommended **ages: 3 - 5.**

The Owl Cast Café

July 9, 2011, 11:00 am - Noon
Silent flight, fantastic vision, fast reflexes and piercing talons are all adaptations making Florida's owl a noble nocturnal predator. From

small screech owls to large horned owls, learn from Sensing Nature biologists how these stealth hunters benefit both nature and us through their chosen diets. Then enjoy an owl investigation by dissecting one of their casts to determine its previous meal. Pre-registration required. Free

BCPEEC August Programs

Book Time at Brooker Creek

Thursday, August 11 and 25, 10:30 - 11:15 am. This program is designed to connect pre-school children to the wonders of the natural world through stories and hands-on activities relating to the story that is read. Pre-registration is required. Free. Recommended **ages: 3 - 5.**

Mark your calendar! Fall Wildflower Festival - Saturday, October 15!

Join the Fun at Toad-ally Terrific Field Camp at Brooker Creek Preserve

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is offering a one-week field camp for young adventurers ages 9 - 11. Each day we will venture outdoors to a different area of Brooker Creek Preserve. Every day provides a different adventure! Campers will make casts of animal tracks, scout out clues to animal activities, witness the habits of insects and aquatic creatures, and discover their own connection to these special places.

Dates: July 11-15

Time: 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Ages: children ages 9-11

Registration: \$150.00/camper

For more information or to register:
info@friendsofbrookercreekpreserve.org
or call 727-934-2680.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Mission Statement

The mission of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve is to provide public support for the Preserve through fund raising, volunteer programs, and education to ensure that the Preserve remains a natural wilderness for future generations.

Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve - Land Use Position Statement

The Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve support land uses within the boundaries of Brooker Creek Preserve which have a main purpose that furthers the preservation, conservation, restoration or protection of the land and resources of the Brooker Creek Preserve.

Current mission statement of the Parks Department - it is at least three years old and does not reflect the many changes in staffing and resources over that time. The newly formed Parks and Conservation Resources Department has not yet developed mission/vision statements.

The mission of the Pinellas County Park Department is to provide a continuing program of acquisition, development, maintenance, and protection of park areas for healthful outdoor activities.

Friends of Brooker Creek website:

www.FriendsOfBrookerCreekPreserve.org

To contact The Friends:

Email: fobcp@tampabay.rr.com

Phone: (727) 934-2680 (please leave a message and your phone number for a return call)

Brooker Creek Preserve:

Phone: (727) 453-6900

Website: www.brookercreekpreserve.org

The Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center is located at 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, Florida, 34688.

Phone: (727) 453-6800

Center Hours: Thurs. - Sat. 9 am - 4 pm

Preserve Hiking Trails open 7 days a week (except for day after Thanksgiving and Dec. 25), 7:00 am to sunset.

Horse Trails open 7 days a week, all year, sunrise to sunset.

Friends Trail is now open. The bridge is fixed and ready for hikers!

Friends of Brooker Creek Officers

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This newsletter is published every other month. Please submit articles to Newsletter Editor Dr. Craig Huegel (727) 422-6583 or email Huegelc55@aol.com

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