

# florida chapter news

## Hatchineha Ranch Lives On



Hailed as one of the Florida Chapter's most exciting land acquisitions ever, the 5,134-acre Hatchineha Ranch

offers habitat for rare Florida panthers, Florida scrub-jays and gopher tortoises. Equally important is its role in normalizing water flow to the Everglades.

The central Florida ranch had been the proposed site of nearly 5,000 homes and a golf course, despite being strategically located within one of the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered species in the country. The Conservancy, determined to protect the ranch, finalized a deal in November 2008.

Hatchineha Ranch is located in the Everglades watershed, a vast area that begins in Orlando. Water once gently flowed through the watershed, down the Kissimmee River into Lake Okeechobee and across the "River of Grass." But massive drainage changes in the 1920s nearly destroyed the ecosystem.

To help restore the Everglades, the Conservancy works in the upper region to keep large natural lands intact and connected to others. Hatchineha Ranch joins an extensive conservation landscape of more than 55,000 acres — including The Disney Wilderness Preserve located just across the lake — and a wildlife corridor that

stretches hundreds of miles.

The Conservancy and the ranch's co-owner, Hatchineha Ranch LLC, will seek private funds and pursue multiple strategies to fully finance the purchase and manage the land. These include wetlands mitigation, conservation banking for imperiled species and the sale of parcels as additions to protected parks.

Water flow will be restored over time by filling agricultural drainage

ditches and removing roads that also threaten the tract's lush cutthroat grass seeps — an imperiled natural community that exists only in peninsular Florida. These and other habitats may also be improved for native species by the return of natural fire cycles.

But right now, natives of the human species are happy. "I can't believe it," one local exclaimed. "You saved so many lives. So many little, little lives."



© Eric Blackmore

The Nature Conservancy has protected a central Florida ranch that's critical to the northern Everglades watershed.

# Florida Forever Threatened by Weak Economy



Conservationists statewide rejoiced last spring when Florida Forever — the nation's foremost conservation

land-buying program — received unanimous legislative support and was extended through 2020 at \$300 million per year.

Voters followed up in November by passing Amendment 4, which gives powerful conservation tax incentives to private landowners. County ballot measures passed as well, and — together with federal and private dollars — now provide matching funds for state conservation spending.

Then things changed quickly due to the weakening Florida economy. The Florida Legislature reduced more than \$2 billion in the budget during January's special session; more cuts are likely when the Legislature reconvenes in March.

Governor Crist vetoed a substantial Florida Forever reduction in the current budget. The Conservancy, working closely with the Florida Forever Coalition, supported the governor's action and is urging the Legislature to continue authorizing the necessary bonds each year. At approximately \$10 million, these can generate \$300 million annually for the program.

It's not just about saving Florida's legendary plants and animals. A 2007 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission analysis estimated the statewide economic impact from recreational expenditures at more than \$11 billion, including 119,904 jobs. And the "ecosystem services" of protected lands — clean water and fresh air — offer untold value to all.

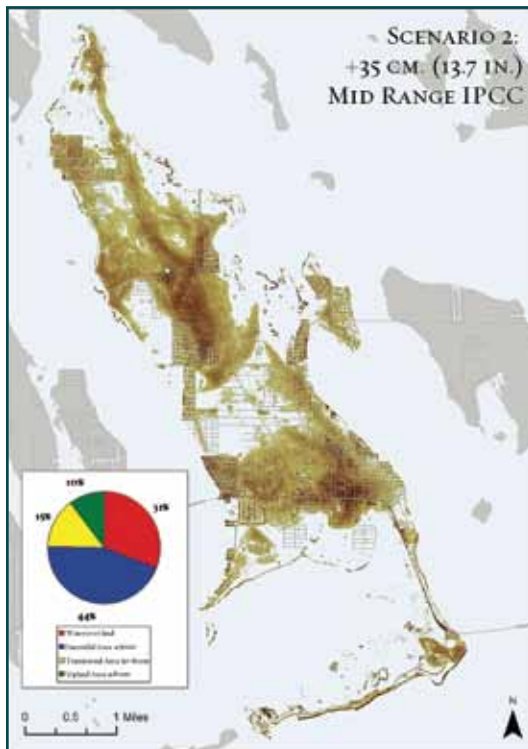
Florida Forever remains vulnerable in the current economy. But Florida's natural and recreational lands are disappearing at an alarming rate, along

with the native species they sustain. To learn how you can help, please visit [www.supportfloridaforever.org](http://www.supportfloridaforever.org).



© Eric Blackmore

A fully funded Florida Forever program is essential to protecting wide open spaces, water resources and wildlife habitat.



## Sea Level Rise Impacts the Keys



Low-lying natural areas on Big Pine Key will be under water in a matter of decades, according to a recent Nature Conservancy study on sea level rise. The worst case scenario: The entire island may go under water within a century due to this effect of climate change.

Second largest of the Florida Keys, Big Pine is best known as home to the endangered Key deer. The Conservancy has made substantial land protection and management investments on the island. With an average elevation of only 3 feet above sea level, Big Pine Key was selected for this novel study that will inform conservation decisions and shed new light on how coastal areas adapt to change.

Conservancy scientists will share the study with local governments in

Florida and around the Caribbean. Its results may help create new strategies that allow species to adjust to the effects of climate change. On a larger scale, it will contribute to the Conservancy's efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions — the major cause of global warming.

Islands are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise, and some change is inevitable. But as NASA climate scientist Dr. Gavin Schmidt said, "There's a scientific reason to be concerned, and there's a scientific reason to push for action. But there's no scientific reason to despair."

The Conservancy's science-based experience makes it a natural leader in the global response to climate change. Projects like this will provide strategies used far beyond the shores of Big Pine Key.

*You can help! The back page of this newsletter tells you how.*

This map shows that much of Big Pine Key could be flooded in 2100, even if projected population growth and changes in technology meet the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) most middle-of-the-road projections for the coming century.\*

\*IPCC Special Report on Emission Scenarios (2000)

## Land Protection

The Conservancy has recently:

- Purchased 1,379 acres of critical in-holdings within Apalachicola National Forest, one of the largest contiguous blocks of public land east of the Mississippi River.
- Negotiated the purchase of a 622-acre parcel in the Miami-Dade County, encompassing an entire section strategically located between urban areas to the north and wetlands to the south.
- Facilitated several Alachua County conservation easements:

A 283-acre ranch, part of Kanapaha Prairie Crane and Wildlife Refuge, through a Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) grant.

136 acres, also acquired through the FRPP, adjacent to Lochloosa Wildlife Conservation Area and including Orange Lake shoreline.

197 acres, considered one of the most desirable and pristine tracts in the area, located along the Santa Fe River and adjacent to O'Leno State Park.

- Donated 129 acres to Brevard County and facilitated \$1 million in grants used to help the county acquire more than 1,500 acres within a planned wildlife corridor.
- Facilitated more than 5,000 acres of Wetlands Reserve Program conservation easements in the northern Everglades, including 1,800 acres on Arbuckle Creek and 2,610 acres on the Kissimmee River.
- Transferred to state protection a 1,057-acre tract known as Wood Sink in the headwaters of the St. Marks River, plus more than 1,000 acres of Blackwater River State Forest inholdings.
- Donated approximately 3,000 acres to the University of Florida Foundation to expand the Ordway-Swisher Biological Station in Putnam County.

## An Ounce of Prevention

Invasive, non-native plants can wreak havoc on natural habitats and agricultural systems. And, they cost Floridians millions annually. Chapter scientist Doria Gordon is a leader in the Conservancy's effort to reduce these impacts by preventing the introduction of new invaders.

Gordon published three papers in 2008, showing that a screening tool can predict which plant species might become invasive. Ideally this tool would be used before a new species is imported, but it can also



© Eric Blackmore

A new agreement between The Nature Conservancy and University of Central Florida will further research into fire management and restoration of longleaf pine and savannah habitats.

evaluate if species already here might become invaders in the future. Gordon is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its Canadian counterpart to investigate the utility of this system at a national scale.

As alternative energy sources are developed, this screening tool can also be used to evaluate the likely invasiveness of plants proposed as biofuels. Gordon is testing a suite of potential biofuels to help Florida identify such plants.

## Red-cockaded Woodpeckers Settle in New Home

Ten endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers were reintroduced at the Conservancy's Disney Wilderness Preserve in late 2007 to establish a new breeding population. Seven of these birds remain. Several mated and nested in spring of 2008, although no chicks survived.

The Conservancy released 10 more young birds last October. Bluebird nest boxes were first placed nearby to discourage the territorial squabbles that may have prevented chick production last year. Scientists will soon evaluate which woodpeckers remain, which have nested, and if any nestlings survive. Additional birds — carefully trapped in Apalachicola National Forest as part of a cooperative relocation plan — will be released and monitored over time.

The red-cockaded woodpecker had been locally extinct from this ancestral home since the mid-1900s. After 15 years of restoration, The Disney Wilderness Preserve's native longleaf pine forest is again ready to support the woodpecker and 20 other federally listed species.

## Expanding a Beautiful Friendship

The Conservancy recently formalized an understanding with the University of Central Florida designed to establish cooperative conservation and ecological science programs at The Disney Wilderness Preserve.

Biology department chair Ross Hinkle encouraged the action, which provides

the university with an ideal, 12,000-acre research landscape. The Conservancy is eager for the opportunity to improve its science-based conservation program and distribute the resulting information among the conservation community.

Both groups are interested in fire management, restoration of longleaf pine and savannah habitats, population dynamics of native species, and carbon-based climate issues. By collaborating and sharing resources, they will more effectively produce research important to the protection and long-term management of conservation lands and waters.

"Working with The Nature Conservancy will help the university position itself as a national leader in sustainability science," said Hinkle. "This new understanding should mark the beginning of a productive, long-term association."

## Royal Caribbean International Supports Oyster Restoration

Consistent support from Royal Caribbean International has buoyed Conservancy efforts to restore oyster reefs in Mosquito Lagoon, a successful, joint endeavor of the Conservancy and University of Central Florida.

At sea, cruise line employees have volunteered their time to painstakingly drill holes in individual oyster shells. The shells are later attached to mesh mats used in oyster reef habitat construction.

Royal Caribbean recognized Mariner of the Seas as "Environmental Ship of the Year" in 2005 and 2006. In 2007, Freedom of the Seas received the award. Both ships donated their cash awards, totaling \$35,000, to the Conservancy.

Their generosity helps fund a Conservancy coordinator to organize community events at which oyster mats are created and then set in the lagoon to make new reefs. To date, the project nears 10,000 volunteers and has restored almost 20 acres of reef.



The future  
is watching

The Nature  
Conservancy   
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 1246  
Orlando, Florida

Please act now

© Larry Lipski

**Florida needs our help.** Every acre of land and mile of coast the Conservancy protects will be affected by climate change.

What can we change? We can research new strategies that help natural habitats adjust to the effects of climate change. We can support improved policy.

Two Florida Chapter trustees have initiated a call to action through donations totaling \$175,000. Please join us now. Your gift can make positive changes happen.

To help, visit [nature.org/future](http://nature.org/future) or use the envelope inside this newsletter.

[nature.org/florida](http://nature.org/florida) or call (407) 682-3664

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

## Jean Henriksen

### Tallahassee Artist and the Conservancy are a Natural Match

Legacy Club member Jean Henriksen is an accomplished artist who loves the land. Working at home with oils and palette knives, she paints realistic three-dimensional landscapes — from memory. Most are of Florida sites she has visited; many depict areas that vanished long ago.

Born in upstate New York, Jean came to Miami in the 1950s. She enjoyed painting ocean scenes and was a rare outsider allowed inside Miccosukee and Seminole villages. She moved to Tallahassee in 1976 to refine her primary artistic focus — Florida's freshwater springs. To locate the most beautiful sites, she often asked locals where they swam.

She was once rebuffed by a shotgun-wielding property owner. Another angrily made his stand in front of a shack covered with rattlesnake skins — each with a clean bullet hole.

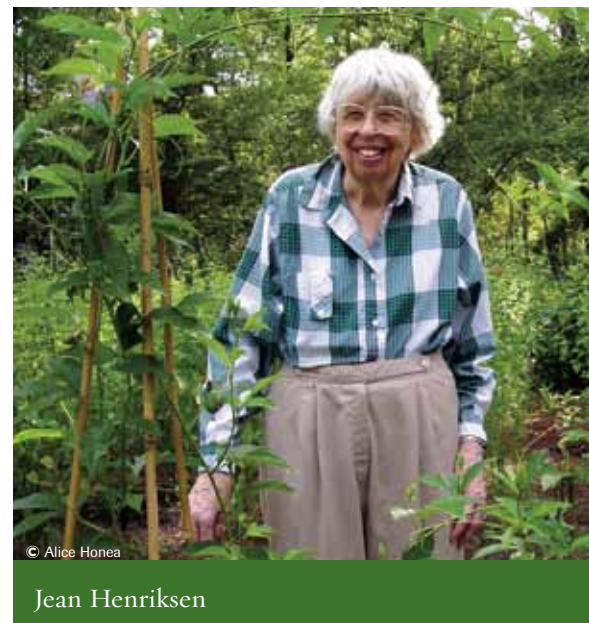
When Jean's beloved Peacock

Springs was slated to be developed and surrounded by condos, she introduced its owners to the Conservancy. The Live Oak-area property was ultimately protected and is now a popular state park.

"The Conservancy is the only group except the state government that really protects the land, and not just here in Florida," said Mrs. Henriksen. "Conservation problems are worldwide."

Jean's paintings have graced the Florida Capitol Building, originally at the request of Gov. Bob Graham, for almost 30 years. Sometimes she has replaced a painting with one of an area she feels most needs protection. Two important exhibitions of her work have influenced public opinion on conservation.

A Conservancy member for 27 years, Jean joined the Legacy Club in 2008 — bequeathing half of her estate and most of her personal paintings. Although



© Alice Honea

Jean Henriksen

passionate about Florida, Jean will leave an undesignated gift to be used for the Conservancy's highest need.

To view a sampling of Jean's paintings, visit [nature.org/florida](http://nature.org/florida).