

# POLK GROUP

Issue: 07-04

## FROM THE CHAIR...Al Greulich

**Activist Wanted for Highlands County.** Recently I received a call from a Highlands Sierran; we had a productive conversation about environmental concerns in his area. Of major importance was a small tract of 28 acres near his home that contains mature scrub; it is slated for destruction with 40 new homes to be built on it. He explained that this property is heavily used by scrub creatures such as gopher tortoise, indigo snakes and sand skinks - all classified as threatened species. These creatures have been observed by him and his neighbors, one of whom is certain she spotted a Florida Panther while walking her dog. I fully believe she did see a panther. The only one I have ever seen was in Highlands County at the Archibald Biological Station a couple of years ago. My father also saw one in Highlands back in 1949. No botanical assessment has been made of this scrub, so its destruction could well include some of the rare and endangered plant species that only live in mature scrub. What a tragedy for a little piece of property so rich in threatened species to be lost to development.

I noted to this retired gentleman, a recent transplant from up North who certainly appreciates natural Florida, that Highlands County badly needs an environmental lands preservation program which Polk and many other counties have. Highlands is "ripe" for this method of land protection where small tracts rich in species could be saved with local dollars. Concerned citizens like him often are the first to discover important habitat slated for destruction. With such a program, action could be taken quickly and the land saved.

Perhaps the proudest accomplishment of Polk Sierra has been the implementation and success of Polk's Environmental Lands Acquisition Program. Long time members John and Marian Ryan were instrumental in establishing the program in Polk. I was appointed to the program's citizens advisory board and enjoy this work. I have never worked for a realtor but maintain an active real estate license and have knowledge of how County Land Acquisition Programs are initiated. I would like to have some Highlands Sierra members meet with me and discuss the possibility of our local Group spearheading a drive to establish an environmental lands program for Highlands. It would be a tremendous amount of work and would have to be brought to the voters in 2008.

*(Continued on page 2)*



SIERRA  
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APRIL 2007 NEWSLETTER

serving DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands and Polk County

## PROGRAM FOR APRIL 12, 2007

Lynne Flannery, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Volunteer Coordinator - **Ridge Rangers**, will describe how people of all ages, backgrounds and skills work together to help wildlife managers protect habitat, manage wildlife populations, conduct important research and educate others about the rare qualities of the Lake Wales Ridge. Over a dozen public and private organizations support this program.

## CROOKED LAKE WEST

At 14,500 acres Crooked Lake West is one of the largest parcels that the technical advisory group (TAG) of Polk County's Environmental Lands Program has ever evaluated. It is located on both sides of US 27 between Lake Wales and Frostproof with the bulk being to the west. To be sure, many different agency partners must be involved in this enormous acquisition. Two parcels had already been evaluated by the TAG so I will concentrate on the remainder of the project. The heart of Crooked Lake West is two large relatively intact parcels of high quality ancient shrub at an elevation of over 150 feet. One is in the northern section of the proposed project while the other is in the central area. Typically they have been used to dump roofing material and trash for many years but that is easily remedied. Actually, it's not so easy but it's certainly doable. Many sand roads weave through the project but again they are repairable. The important thing is that most of the flora and fauna one would expect is still present in abundance. Because plants and animals that live in our sand scrub are found literally nowhere else in the world it must be our highest priority to preserve them from extinction. The only way to be sure is to acquire any of the scrub we find for sale. When it's gone it's really gone. I say this because there is a problem with this property. Years ago, the scrub we are interested in was divided up and sold in small lots of around one

*(Continued on page 2)*



**April 14 10AM - 3PM.** Enjoy Polk's best Earth Day type celebration at the IMC Park next to the Bartow Civic Center, 2250 S. Floral Avenue. There will be a safari event featuring a Florida panther, kite making, wildlife art, tree climbing for kids, a butterfly tent, Sierra's button and magnet making as well as demonstrations such as nesting box construction. Learn more about Polk's parks and environmental lands and plants and animals native to Central Florida at this free community event.

(Continued from page 1) *From the Chair*

Highlands Sierrans, you are very important to us! You reside in a county with very important scrub and other habitats that warrant protection. The Group has met in Sebring in the past to try to involve you more; we will set up a meeting there again if you will just call and indicate an interest. My phone number is 863 967-6783 and I would welcome your call.

(Continued from page 1) *Crooked Lake*

acre each. There are about 650 owners that must be dealt with and they are scattered throughout the United States and abroad. Many of these folks have been contacted and would like to sell but dealing with them all will take up an enormous amount of staff time. Nevertheless, even if we cannot purchase all of the lots it will be worth the time, expense, and effort.

....*Charles Geanangel*

## **VOLUNTEER CONSERVATION HELP WANTED WILL TRAIN!**

**Growth Management Activists:** Work with citizens on growth concerns, help formulate proposals for land development code and comp plan changes, advocate for more responsible growth and environmental protection.

**Environmental Investigations:** Investigate violations of environmental regulations (dredge & fill, wetlands destruction, endangered species, contamination, etc.), advocate for environmental protection in rule and law - possible administrative and legislative lobbying.

**Water Resources Advocates:** Monitor water management district rules and activities, participate in public workshops and hearings, prepare to be able to effectively represent the conservation community on a water policy committee or board.

**Public Lands Advocates:** Participate in the development and/or review of land management plans, educate yourself on local and state land acquisition programs and related topics, prepare to be able to effectively represent the conservation community on a land acquisition/management committee.

**Smart Growth Advocates:** Learn and share Smart Growth techniques, work with sustainable and Smart Growth organizations to educate citizens and elected officials on this subject.

**Transportation Activists:** Participate in FDOT, TPO, Expressway Authority and possible future Regional Transportation Authority on transportation planning processes to include highway and intermodal transportation systems (light rail, hard rail, busses, bicycle trails, etc.). Work to encourage development densities that would facilitate mass transit systems.

**Researcher:** Investigate statutes, rules, regulations, scientific studies and technical information to help develop or defend environmental or conservation positions.

**Public Outreach Coordinator:** Develop or assist in developing activities, programs and/or educational materials to share the message of conservation and our region's unique ecosystems with the general public, minority groups, children and new residents.

Your help will be greatly appreciated, email [mryan@pipevines.net](mailto:mryan@pipevines.net)  
....*Marian Ryan*

<b>Richard L. Coleman</b>	\$ 25,000
<b>Endowed Scholarship Fund</b>	20,000
<b>at New College reaches \$18,000</b>	15,000
In the last three years most of the donations have been made through the nesting box project.	10,000
Call Bob 863-439-2251 to order yours.	5,000
	0



## **ENDORSEMENTS FOR NATIONAL SIERRA BOARD**

Sierra policy permits Chapters (not Groups) to endorse candidates in the annual Board of Directors election. The Florida Chapter Executive Committee has recommended a vote for Clark Buchner and Jerry Sutherland. A member is permitted to vote for a maximum of five candidates but a vote for less than that number will not make the ballot invalid. Most members received their ballots around March 17th. However, newer members may not have received one; if you are a current member who has not received a ballot in the mail, one may be obtained by calling 1-866-720-4357 or by contacting [sierraclub@electionservicescorp.com](mailto:sierraclub@electionservicescorp.com). All ballots must be received by noon EDT April 23, 2007. ....*Frances H. Coleman*

## **FLORIDA HOMETOWN DEMOCRACY**

FHD is a proposed constitutional amendment which would mandate that all comprehensive plan amendments approved by a city or county commission must be submitted to the electorate. The language on the petition prior to July 2005 was rejected by the Supreme Court; if you signed a petition to have FHD placed on the ballot before that time, you need to sign a new petition (the language of which has been approved by the Court). The August 2006 Polk Newsletter contained a new petition which you may have utilized. If you did not and you feel that this matter should be submitted to the electorate, use the petition found on page 13 of the spring Pelican, your Florida Chapter publication.  
....*Frances H. Coleman*



Photo by John Ryan

Marian Ryan was recognized as a Water, Wildlife and Wilderness Ambassador for her dedicated service to the Polk County Environmental Lands Program during a volunteer recognition event and celebration held at the Circle B Bar Reserve on March 10, 2007. Gaye Sharpe, Natural Areas Manager for Polk County's Natural Resources Division, made the presentation.

# EVENTS PAST

## COLT CREEK IN FEBRUARY



Photos by Frances H. Coleman

Participants in the Sierra outing thought the best 'sighting' was two otters frolicking in a pond - until two hundred sandhill cranes flew over in v-formation. Birders and non-birders were awed. Spectacular sightings can't be guaranteed but non-participants will never see anything - join the next outing!



Photo by Frances H. Coleman

## LOWER KISSIMMEE CHAIN OF LAKES PUBLIC USE WORKGROUP

Gary Zipper, Landowner, and Kent Wimmer, FL Trails Association, are two of the eighteen stakeholders represented at the public use workshop recently held to determine recommendations to be made to the South Florida Water Management District and the FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regarding recreation in the Lower Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. The eighteen stakeholders represent affiliations ranging from county officials, to airboaters, to hunters, to the Sierra Club. Much of the district lands in the lower chain have been historically the province of airboaters and hunters. Sierra and the Trails Association are advocating more passive recreation such as canoe and kayak trails (as in the Ten Thousand Islands) and a hiking trail that would link to those in the Green Swamp. The tremendous increase in birders, hikers and kayakers argues that more opportunities for these forms of recreation are what the public will most use. Passive recreation areas need to be shielded from airboaters and hunters. A study of District lands is being conducted to assist in determining which areas will be most appropriate for which uses. If you want to make comments or recommendations, contact [fcoleman@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:fcoleman@tampabay.rr.com) or call 863 956-3771.

....Frances H. Coleman

## OUTINGS/ACTIVITIES

If you have suggestions for outings or if you wish to lead an outing, call our Outings Coordinator, Gail Bagley at 683-3334. For more activities/events, please visit our web site at <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

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|----------------|---|
| <b>Apr. 7</b>  | <b>Chain of Lakes Festival Winter Haven.</b> Enjoy a delightful community activity from 8AM until noon at Lake Silver Park. Admiral Eycleshimer's Cardboard Boat Race is always a hoot and the children will be delighted with an Easter Egg Hunt. Sierra and other environmental groups will have educational exhibits and activities. |
| <b>Apr. 14</b> | <b>Water, Wings and Wild Things - Bartow.</b> See front page for details.   |
| <b>Apr. 21</b> | <b>Highlands Hammock State Park - Sebring.</b> Celebrate Earth day by joining Ridge Rangers at 8AM for invasive nonnative plant removal. Call Lynne Flannery at 863 699-3742 for details.   |
| <b>May 5</b>   | <b>Tiger Creek Preserve - Babson Park.</b> Join the Ridge Rangers at 8AM for a stewardship project. Call Lynne Flannery at 863 699-3742 for details.  |
| <b>May 12</b>  | <b>Circle B Bar Reserve - Lakeland.</b> Join the Ridge Rangers at 8AM for stewardship. Call Lynne Flannery at 863 699-3742 for details.   |
| <b>May 19</b>  | <b>Historic Bok Sanctuary - Lake Wales.</b> Join the Ridge Rangers at 8AM for invasive nonnative plant removal. Call Lynne Flannery at 863 699-3742 for more details.   |

In order to participate in one of the Sierra Club's outings, you will need to sign a liability waiver which will be furnished at the beginning of the outing. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver prior to the outing, please see <http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/> or call 415-977-5528. In the interests of facilitating the logistics of some outings, it is customary that participants make carpooling arrangements. The Sierra Club does not have insurance for carpooling arrangements and assumes no liability for them. Carpooling, ride sharing or anything similar is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. Participants assume the risks associated with this travel. Please note that some of the above listed activities are events that we think you will find interesting and fun, but they are not official outings.



**Sierra Club**  
**Polk Group - Florida Chapter**  
 P.O. Box 7544  
 Winter Haven, FL 33883

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Members should send **changes of address** to: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80322-2968  
 or [address.changes@sierraclub.org](mailto:address.changes@sierraclub.org)

**APRIL MEETING**  
 Thursday, April 12, 2007

**PROGRAM:**

**Ridge Rangers**  
**Guardians of the Lake Wales Ridge**

By

**Lynne Flannery**  
**Ridge Ranger Volunteer Coordinator, FWC**

*General Meeting and Executive Committee Meeting Run  
 Concurrently*

Join us for our pot-luck suppers at 6:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of every month. Bring a dish to share, a drink and your utensils. Dress is casual. **The meeting will start around 7:15 p.m.**

**Meetings are held at the Audubon Nature Center, 115 Lameraux Rd., Winter Haven.** From the traffic light at the intersection of Hwy. 540 (Cypress Gardens Blvd.) and Cypress Gardens Road (look for the Shell station and Blockbuster Video) - Turn east onto C.G. Road and follow around sharp right hand turn & then sharp left hand turn. After left hand turn, Lameraux is fourth road on left, two blocks west of Garden Grove Elementary School. Distance from the light to the Nature Center is about 2.3 miles. (Phone 324-7304)

Web Site: <http://florida.sierraclub.org/polk/>

**Sierra Membership Application**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional): ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ F94Q W3311 1

- Check One Individual Joint
- Introductory  \$25
- Regular  \$39  \$47
- Senior  \$24  \$32
- Student  \$24  \$32



Annual dues include subscription to Sierra (\$7.50) and chapter publications (\$1). Dues are not tax-deductible.

Please mail your check and this form to:  
**Sierra Club, PO Box 52968, Boulder, Colorado, 80322-2968**

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