

Calusa Land Trust

and Nature Preserve of Pine Island, Inc.



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Newsletter #92
Founded 1976

June -July 2015
www.calusalandtrust.org

FROM THE BIRDS' NEST John Kendall, President

THE LAZY, HAZY DAYS OF SUMMER

May and June are perhaps my favorite months on Pine Island...the weather is warm (not hot yet), the critters are announcing their reproductive rituals and, yes, the snowbirds have departed. However, your Calusa Land Trust remains active. Here are a few varied updates:

Wigert-Barron Preserve Our Acquisition Committee chair, Rad Hazen, has previously reported our purchase in Bokeelia of a 10-acre parcel which includes a rare coastal uplands environment (and a viable gopher tortoise colony). Longtime CLT members and contiguous landowners, Jon and Annette Wigert, have announced their intention to gift some 21 acres of adjacent property. This will thus provide a 31-acre preserve for nature's benefit in perpetuity. Since our plans are to create a passive use trail system, we are cooperating with Lee County, in order to finalize this project.

Helvenston Preserve For those who relish in genealogical challenges the puzzle to consummate the gift of 41.1 acres of mostly mangrove forest (adjacent to our existing 40-acre Coker/Slager Preserves at center island) is nearing

fruition. The multiple donors are able to trace family ownership back to 1892. Many kudos to CLT's attorney, Mel Brinson, in piecing this together.



Figure 1. Helvenston Preserve south of Smokehouse Bay

Smith-Dewane Gateway and Ward Family Bridge Projects This new St. Jude Nature Trail access is designed to afford the public with a low impact gathering area leading to a convenient pathway to our 395-acre St. James Creek Preserve. Exotic removal has been finished and our engineer has applied for Lee County permits for two small tiki huts, parking, and the pathway/bridge onto the existing trail. The site will also include an osprey

nest constructed by BSA Troop 20 Scout Justin Chura (completing his requirements for Eagle Scout) with installation courtesy of our electric cooperative, LCEC.

Summer student internship With the generosity of Cheryl Hanson of St. James City CLT has been able to fund a land conservancy student intern. This summer Pine Islander Monica Ditch, a sophomore at the University of Florida, will be serving us with her ingenuity and sweat while laboring at many of our Preserves.

Finances CLT's financial condition is both cash flow positive and rock solid. Your Board of Directors accepts its fiduciary duties very seriously. We are presently finalizing our endowment plans with the assistance of qualified professionals. Fundraising, membership dues/donations and bequests encompass CLT's lifeline.

Your support For most of you your sole CLT support is payment of your annual dues. That's OK! We need and appreciate it. We recognize that most of us spread our charitable money among multiple worthy organizations. You need to be convinced that your gifts are well spent. Rather than be deluged by paid solicitors and expensive advertising let me suggest this. Sometime yet this year take a Sunday drive around the Island and casually observe some of our accessible Preserves (note our map at calusalandtrust.org); you don't even need to exit your car. This will allow you to absorb the solace and beauty of these Pine Island lands preserved forever for nature.

Thank you for your support. I trust your summer will be lazy, hazy and fun!

NEWS FROM THE PAST - TWENTY YEARS AGO

The Walbridge Otto (Bill) Fritts Park 1995

On May 10th (1995) we closed on our \$10,000 purchase of a 1½-acre uplands parcel just south of the Pink Citrus mobile home park near Bokeelia.

Immediately north of the parcel (across Beach Daisy Lane) is an existing drainageway that connects to an old mosquito control ditch system which then flows into our Big Jim Creek Preserve. This site is an excellent location for picnics and meetings and we hope as a base for canoe outings into Big Jim Creek and Pine Island Sound.

Despite untold hours of research over many months by Rich Larkin and his Land Acquisition Committee, we don't have definitive assurance that we can launch canoes directly from this site into the drainage system. The title and easement history of this drainage system is truly baffling. Our option to buy this parcel was expiring, so after considerable debate, the Board decided to go ahead with the purchase. The Board of Directors has hired title professionals to take over the research and get to the bottom of this situation. We will keep our members posted on what we learn. We managed to pay cash for this purchase in order to take advantage of the opportunity, but there goes our emergency fund again. We also have an option to purchase an adjoining acre to expand this park and so must decide whether to pursue the expansion or not. Further details will follow.

A celebration for this newest parcel is being planned but first we must complete our obligations under the contract including exotic plant removal, putting up suitable memorial signage, and planting a native plant hedge to separate us from the former owner. The Land Management Committee discussed the Trust's obligations for improvements to the new Walbridge Otto (Bill) Fritts Park on Beach Daisy Lane. These include the immediate removal of all Brazilian pepper trees and the partial removal of Australian pines. Selected Australian pines will be retained for shade until our newly planted native vegetation can serve that purpose. We have committed 170 hours of volunteer labor on this property by mid-August.

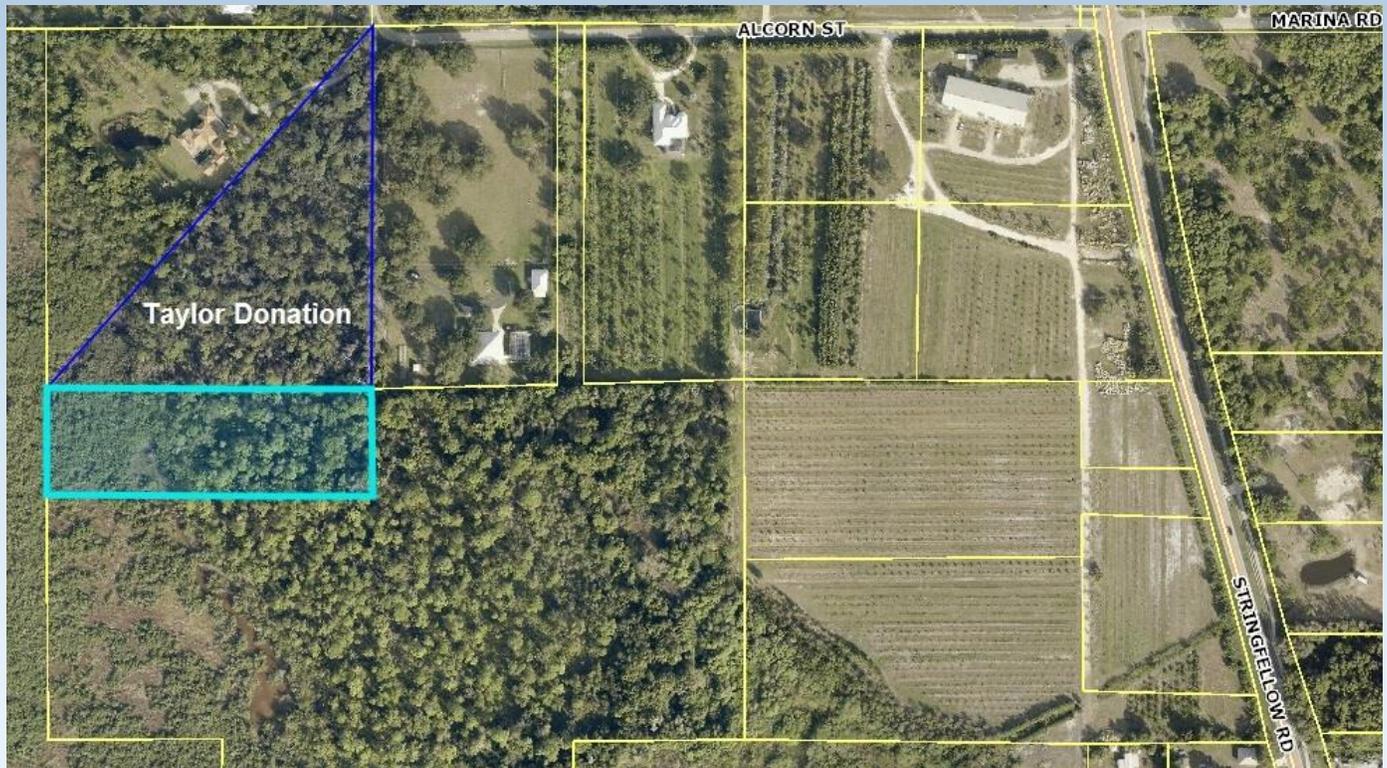
AND WE ARE STILL GROWING ...

As of May 8 of this year (1995), the Calusa Land Trust had 411 names on its mailing roster, 197 of which were current with their dues. (*Editors note: we now have over 600 current members!*) This is an increase of 19 new members since our last

newsletter. Membership is tracked one year from the date of a previous donation; when that period has passed, an asterisk (*) is printed after the member's name on the mailing labels. While we added 19 new members, many existing members have not yet renewed, so please consider this newsletter as your friendly reminder. *(We now use the Pink Label System to remind members to stay current with their annual dues, a task maintained by our Membership chair)*

From the Acquisition Committee (2015) Rad Hazen Acquisition Chairman

CLT has owned an approximately three acre parcel near the end of Alcorn Street for several years that has not had a viable access. Our hope has been that someday we would be able to tie this property to another parcel and create a larger, accessible preserve. Well, thanks to the generosity of a wonderful Pine Island couple, that dream has become reality. Mike and Kathy Taylor have donated a five acre parcel at the end of Alcorn St. to the Calusa Land Trust. This property is adjacent to our three acres which creates an eight acre preserve with access from Alcorn. The parcel has an active eagle's nest, many oak trees (unusual for Pine Island), and few invasive species. It will provide access to an interesting salt flat. Our plan is to eventually provide a trail into the parcel as the current palmetto underbrush makes the property impenetrable. The active eagle's nest means trail use will need to be managed.



The Taylors have no desire for recognition but we will be naming this The Taylor Preserve. They have made their presence known in many positive ways in our community and are truly amazing people. Our appreciation for this wonderful gift to all Pine Islanders cannot be overstated.

Land Stewardship Report Ed Chapin, Chief Ranger

Work Parties: On Saturday March 14th our CLT volunteer rangers worked on our new Barron Preserve on east Barrancas Ave. in Bokeelia. We had a great turnout with 22 volunteers attending. We worked from 9 am to noon, removing invasive exotic plants, removing trash that was dumped on site and blazing trails. We accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time. This is our newest preserve and the CLT is working on an addition to this preserve that would make it over 30 acres!



Figure 3. The Barron Preserve at Aura Land and Barrancas Ave, Bokeelia

On March 18th and 20th Jerry Krall, Ken Sterling and myself worked on the paddling trail from Fritts Park in Bokeelia through to our Big Jim Creek Preserve which empties into Pine Island Sound just south of Burgess Bay. We did a total of 10 hours work and we were able to get out to the Big Jim Creek Preserve. This paddle



Figure 4. Big Jim Creek Preserve and nearby Fritts Park, Bokeelia

should be done on medium to high tides due to the shallow water in the creek. We plan to be back out there on our July work party.

On Saturday April 11th our CLT work party was held at the Bud House Calusa Canal Preserve. This is a small preserve of about 3 acres on Meadow Lane which runs off of Harbor Drive east of Pineland. This preserve has remnants of the Calusa Canal which once bisected Pine Island from Pineland in the west to Indian Field Island to the east in Matlacha Pass. We worked on invasive exotic plant removal, trail maintenance and continued repairs

on the old wood fence. A lot of volunteers go north for the summer at this time of year so we had only 7 volunteers on this day.

We did a good days work & lot accomplished!
Thank you CLT Volunteers.

Upcoming work parties: (all 9am to noon)

- July 11th – Big Jim Creek Preserve (meeting at Fritts Park, Bokeelia)
- August – a well-deserved VACATION (Yea!!!!)

The Fall work schedule in being worked out and will be available in the the next newsletter edition.

For more information call Head Ranger Ed Chapin (239) 218-7531.

Treasures of the Trail — Photo & Text by Judy Ott

Can You Hear the Fiddlers Playing at St Jude Trail?



Have you heard the magical staccato of the Fiddler crabs scurrying to their burrows as you walk quietly along St. Jude Trail? Or listened for the quiet beat of the male Fiddler crabs drumming on the openings of their burrows as the tide retreats, serenading the female Fiddler crabs as they return home with food? This is just part of the summer symphony that you'll hear if you stand quietly along the trail and let your ears take in the subtle sounds.

Fiddler crabs are common along St Jude Trail throughout the year, but are easier to see in the summer months when fewer people walk the trail. You'll first notice the crabs' tiny holes in the damp earth as the tide falls. The Fiddler crabs close their burrows as the tide comes in and reopen them again as the tide retreats – leaving little sand balls ringing the burrow openings. If you look closely under the fallen leaves and among the mangrove roots, you'll see hundreds of these small crabs looking up at you. Fiddler crabs have keen eye sight because their eyes are on flexible stalks and they can see in many directions. They live near the water's edge because they breathe through gills, which need to be kept moist to allow oxygen exchange.

Fiddler crabs are about 1 1/4" across and they have a square carapace (exoskeleton) which ranges from tan to reddish purple in color. They molt their exoskeleton regularly as they outgrow it. You'll notice that only some of the Fiddler crabs along the trail have the large "fiddle" claws – these are the male crabs. Interestingly enough, the male Fiddler crabs can be right or left clawed and they can regrow the large claw if it is lost.

Both male and female Fiddler crabs have 5 pairs of appendages – 1 pair is specialized for gathering food and feeding and 4 pairs are used mostly for their rapid locomotion. They eat algae and detritus (decomposing material) found among the sand grains by picking up small amounts of sediment and scraping it with their mouth parts, leaving behind "feeding pellets" scattered on the ground. Male Fiddler crabs can't eat with the large claw, so they eat really fast with the small claw.

Male Fiddler crabs use their large claw to mark their territory, defend their burrows and attract mates during courtship. The claw is used as a sound box, which is waved in the air and rattles. Their highly ritualized territorial behavior involves arm-waving, body bobbing and standing upright. They are brave and will defend their territory against humans, but rarely get into actual combat. Mostly the fiddle claw is used to attract females during courtship, which is very elaborate – at least for crabs. During their breeding season (most of the summer), the males build and defend larger mating burrows are relatively close to their neighbors. As the females return from foraging during low tide, the males line up in their burrows and wave their claws at the passing females. If the female stops and stares, the male drums the claw along the borrow opening to invite her in. If the courtship is successful, the female will join the male in the burrow for two weeks and return to the surface to release the eggs in the water. The eggs develop into swimming larvae and megalops stages (for about 6-8 weeks) before settling on the bottom to begin their benthic life style.

Fiddler crabs can live up to 2 years if they are lucky and careful to avoid predators. They are a favorite food of snook, redfish, ibis, yellow-crowned night herons, raccoons, and many other predators, including humans – who catch them for fishing bait. They play an essential link in our estuary food web by eating the decomposers (bacteria and fungus) with the detritus and passing the energy up the food chain to their predators. Their burrows help aerate and turn over the minerals in the soil.

Their population numbers reflect how productive our mangrove swamps can be, and they serve as good indicators of how healthy our wetlands are. They are sensitive to habitat loss, over harvesting and environmental contaminants, such as insecticides. Though their populations are not currently considered threatened, localized populations have been declining, giving good reasons to help conserve their habitat and reduce their harvest.

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Full financial details, including federal tax returns, can be obtained by contacting the Land Trust's Treasurer at (239) 283-3871 during working hours. Federal Employer Identification Number: **59-1782265**. The Calusa Land Trust is an exempt Organization under section **501(c)(3)** of the IRS code. Florida Dept of Agriculture & Consumer Services registration number **CH3439**. No portion of donations received by the Trust is paid to any professional solicitor. 100% of all donations are received by the Trust. **June 2015**



Work Parties – Everyone Welcome

They are on the second Saturday of each month except August.
9:00am to Noon We need your help.

- July 11th – Big Jim Creek Preserve (meeting at Fritts Park, Bokeelia)
- August – a well-deserved VACATION (Yea!!!!!!)

Future work parties, check with Ranger Ed 239.218.7531



Corporate Gift Matching Programs

Many larger corporations have programs where they will match employee donations to eligible charities. The Calusa Land Trust qualifies for these matching contributions. If you are an employee or retiree of one of these corporations, remember to follow up and ask for the matching gifts for your recent and future donations. This is a great way to augment your charitable giving and make a significant impact on CLT funds.



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P.O. Box 216
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The Calusa Land Trust Mission Statement

The purpose of the Calusa Land Trust is to protect the natural diversity and beauty of the Pine Island region by acquiring, managing and preserving in perpetuity environmentally sensitive or historically important land and to foster appreciation for and understanding of the environment and our past.

The Land Trust is a broad coalition of individuals, families, and businesses who agree that the acquisition and protection of natural land is important if we are to retain the quality of life which makes the Pine Island region so attractive to people and to wildlife. The Land Trust is supported entirely by people who donate their time, talent, and financial support to protect irreplaceable natural resources. The Land Trust does not engage in political activity or lobbying and takes no position on zoning or regulatory matters. The Calusa Land Trust represents people's willingness to put their money and time where their hearts are to make a difference.

