

Spring

2022



# Newsletter

Together, we're protecting  
and sharing Myakka's Magic



From the editors:

Miri Hardy (Executive Director) Zack Westmark (Park Ranger)

Wildflowers such as oakleaf fleabane, lyre-leaf sage, and threatened rain lilies sprinkle Myakka's park drive, signaling spring is upon us. The river level is low, prescribed burning has commenced, and some of our esteemed Florida Park Service volunteers have departed on new adventures.



*Threatened rain lilies (Zephyranthes simpsonii) can be found on road shoulders this time of year*

Read on to learn more about these seasonal conditions and new amenities offered at the park. And this time of year, before visiting the park, please call the ranger station to check the status of boat tours, primitive campsite water wells, and possible closures due to prescribed fire.

--Zack

Spring has been a time for major growth and change, not only in the park, but for Friends of Myakka River as well. During the past few months, we've introduced new programs, such as our popular "Bike Myakka! for Good", and new fundraising opportunities. Thanks to our Giving Tuesday Facebook Fundraiser, we opened the park for free on Earth Day, and with our recent 2022 Giving Challenge, we raised substantial funding for our new Outreach and Environmental Education Program. We've also introduced new faces. Read on to learn more about Bob Frank, our newest member of the Friends Board of Directors, and our incoming president. Because, yes, this Spring, we've also said "farewell" to two dedicated long-term members of our board: Dick Pfaff, and, Miles Millwee. We are extremely grateful to both for their service, and wish them well in their future endeavors. And, we look forward to continuing to grow our organization, on the solid foundations they leave behind.

-- Miri

## Also in this edition...

Park Update - Friends Updates - Friends Spotlight - FPS Staff Spotlight - Dedicated Donation Don't be the Door Prize - Rx Fire - Friends Member Spotlight - Park Service Volunteer Awards

# Park Updates

## Upper Myakka Lake Restoration and Amenities to Reduce Visitor Impacts

by Zack Westmark



*Water now flows from Upper Myakka Lake as it did before the weir (dam) was constructed in the 1930's and 40's.*

Myakka's Weir removal project was completed in April. Construction fencing remains in place to allow native plant establishment, which will enhance wildlife viewing opportunities. Please help us keep this area protected!

This restoration effort helps visitors experience the *real* Florida by returning this portion of the Wild and Scenic Myakka River to a more natural condition.



*New bike parking docks near the Ranger Station provide visitors a safe, secure location to lock their bikes.*

Thanks to the Friends of Myakka River, bicycle parking docks are being installed by staff and volunteers at new locations throughout the park.

The Friends purchased bike docks to help thousands of visitors who embrace this low impact way to explore the park. Providing dedicated bike parking reduces the need for visitors to lean their bikes on buildings and trees, which can damage the park's natural resources and structures, as well as obstruct walkways.

Did you know that the tens of billions of plastic water bottles produced are mostly not recycled? In fact, about 20 billion plastic water bottles wind up in landfills each and every year!

To encourage the use of reusable water bottles, AND make refilling those trusty reusable vessels a whole lot easier, as well as touch-free, two water bottle refill stations have been installed in high use areas at the park.

You'll find them by the Ranger Station restrooms, and by the Myakka Outpost Restrooms at the Upper Myakka Lake.



*Water bottle refill stations help visitors reduce their environmental impact.*

# Friends Update

## Be the One to Share Myakka's Magic!

by Miri Hardy

During the 2022 Giving Challenge, we raised over \$38,000 to support our new Outreach and Environmental Education Program.

In April, Friends of Myakka River participated in the 2022 Giving Challenge, a 24-hour community wide fundraising event, presented by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, with giving strengthened by the Patterson Foundation. We specifically raised funds to support our new Outreach and Environmental Program, which augments the park's offerings, through use of social media, print media and in-person programming.

Using the theme "Be the One to Share Myakka's Magic", and with YOUR support, we raised \$38,078, thanks to donations from 145 donors, matching funds from the Patterson Foundation, as well as two dedicated Friends of the Friends, and prize money from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and local sponsors. Due to our fundraising success, we were included in the top 20 Small Organizations Leaderboard.

Speaking of prizes, we are extremely pleased to report that before, during and after the 2022 Giving Challenge, Friends of Myakka River won \$11,100 in awards, which you can see pictured to the right, including the coveted First Place for Best Overall Campaign - A \$5,000 prize!

And click the image to view our 2022 Giving Challenge Video Commercial, highlighting our new Outreach and Environmental Education Program, which was one of 10 selected from over 40 applicants as a recipient of a \$1,500 Best Video Commercial Prize.



# Friends Update

We also won \$2,000 prizes for *Best Giving Challenge Turnaround*, awarded to the organization with the best turnaround performance from the 2020 Giving Challenge, and for *Best Use of Social Media*. And thanks to our online voters, our Giving Challenge Photo submission (pictured below), which used evocative photos from our social media campaign, and screen captures from our video commercial to illustrate how we Share Myakka's Magic through our new Outreach and Environmental Program, was one of 20 to receive the most public votes, and a \$500 for *Best Giving Challenge Photo*!



We are extremely grateful to our members, volunteers, the community at large and our local philanthropists, whose incredible support helped make this fundraiser such a huge success! And we are thrilled by this resounding support for our new program.

We look forward to continuing to increase the Friends of Myakka River's impact in the areas of outreach, community engagement and environmental education moving forward! And if YOU would like to get involved in our new program, we'd love to hear from you.

For more information about our new Outreach and Environmental Education Program, visit our [Giving Partner Profile](#) or contact [Miri Hardy](#).

# Friends Update

## Miles Millwee steps down as Friends of Myakka River's President of the Board.

by Miri Hardy

After 10 years of service to Friends of Myakka River as a board member, the last 5 as president, Miles Millwee recently resigned from our board of directors. We are extremely grateful for Miles' many contributions, and for the dedication, enthusiasm and countless hours he has given to the Friends, and the park. Most recently, largely thanks to his leadership, we have been working to expand the Friends' impact, especially in the areas of outreach, community engagement and education, through our new Outreach and Environmental Education Program.

"The Friends of Myakka River are in a unique position to benefit the preservation of this amazing ecosystem that is right in our back yard" Miles reflected. "It was an honor to serve on the board, and I'm proud of all the work and passion that has contributed to making the Friends the successful organization that it is today, and one that can continue on with this important work in the future." Long-time volunteer and outgoing board member Dick Pfaff noted "Miles' legacy speaks for itself." - a sentiment shared by us all.

Reflecting on their time together "I always appreciated his calm, unflappable demeanor in guiding the board." said Sandra Bernardi. "And, I will always be grateful to Miles for getting me back into camping...When my husband Joe and I moved to Florida, we sold our camping gear, thinking those days were behind us...but one day, out of the blue, Miles asked me if I would like to buy his unused 'Big Agnes' tent. I have used that tent on many occasions and think of him each time I set it up...Never too old to sleep on the ground under the stars!"

Please join us in thanking Miles for his many years of dedicated service. Though we will miss his steadfast leadership on the board, we look forward to working with Miles as a FPS Volunteer in the future.

Miles will be succeeded as president by Bob Frank, PhD, who joined the board in February. For more information about the transition, please see our news release [HERE](#). And for more information about Bob, read on for our Friends Spotlight!



*Miles Millwee and Bob Frank (our incoming president) enjoyed a friendly Caesar's Weed showdown at our recent Bike Myakka! for Good event. Photo by Miri Hardy*



*Miles volunteering alongside Friends members Paul and Mary Sullivan. Photo by Miri Hardy*

# Friends Spotlight

## Meet Bob Frank: Friends of Myakka River's new President of the Board.

by Sandra Bernardi and Miri Hardy

On behalf of the Friends of Myakka River Board of Directors, we'd like to extend a warm welcome to our new president of the board, Bob Frank. Bob joined the board in February, 2022 and has clearly hit the ground running! We're enjoying getting to know him, and we thought that you would too!

Bob joined the board because he wanted to support the park in a significant way. He thought his executive and fund raising experiences could be an asset for the Board. "I can also pull invasive weeds and help park cars if that is needed" he told us with a smile!

The environmental education aspect of Friends of Myakka River's mission especially resonates with Bob. He looks forward to supporting projects that help inform more people about the value of the park and the remaining natural areas in Florida. And he is excited to, together, work to ensure that Myakka River State Park and places like it, are here to inspire future generations. To that end, Bob has participated in all four of our very popular Bike Myakka! for Good service rides thus far (read more about this new program on page 7). He loves to bike in the park, and that, to him, is part of the draw. Like for many of our participants, though, the community the Friends are building with this monthly event also very much appeals "I meet the most interesting people at these events" Bob said. "The event draws an eclectic mix of people who, like me, enjoy biking in the park, and also enjoy giving back to their community. I also value the opportunity to meet the dedicated park staff and volunteers. I admire the work they do very much...It is a very satisfying experience." And we couldn't agree more!



*A frequent visitor to the park over the past 25 years, Bob has hiked and biked Myakka's many trails. But his first love is the park's wildlife. Photo courtesy Bob Frank*



*Participants, including Bob, were all smiles at the end of a recent successful Bike Myakka! for Good Service Ride (spot Bob in the safety yellow shirt) Photo: Miri Hardy*

Like many of us, Bob has numerous favorite spots at Myakka River State Park. He especially enjoys all the places where wildlife congregate along the river, particularly near the former weir where the Upper Myakka Lake and the Myakka River meet. He also likes to visit the Bird Walk. And he finds Deep Hole at Myakka's Wilderness Preserve especially spectacular.

In late December of 2021, Bob hiked out to Deep Hole and along the way saw feral pigs and red-headed woodpeckers. "Deep Hole was loaded with alligators, roseate spoonbills and snowy egrets" he told us.

"The alligators were catching armored catfish, the spoonbills were roosting in a tree overlooking Deep Hole and starting to sport their breeding plumage, and the snowy egrets were fishing between the alligators, dragging their legs in the water to scare the small fish. What a show!"

We are excited to have Bob take on a leadership position on the board, as is he. "It is an honor to serve as president, and I am grateful to Miles for his superb leadership of the organization for so many years." he said. "Myakka River State Park and the Wild and Scenic Myakka River are treasures that must be supported and protected both now and in the future. It is a privilege to be part of the dedicated team working to ensure a bright future for the park and river." And, he added, "We are looking forward to continuing to work on programs that will help us share Myakka's magic with more people more often."

To learn more about Bob's background, click [HERE](#). And if you happen to see Bob while visiting the park, do stop and say hello. He'd love to hear what you personally love about Myakka River State Park and the Wild and Scenic Myakka River, and what Friends of Myakka River's mission to protect and share Myakka's Magic means to YOU!



*An American Alligator with an armored catfish. Photo: Bob Frank*



*Snowy egrets fishing between the alligators at Deep Hole. Photo: Bob Frank*

Becoming a Friends of Myakka River board member can be a meaningful way to apply your experience and expertise to help us advance our mission. [Email us](#) if you are interested in applying or want to discuss further.

# Friends Update

## Bike Myakka! for Good

by Miri Hardy

**Our new monthly community-oriented service rides are a great success!**

As many of us know, biking at Myakka is good for the body, mind and soul. And, as a low impact form of transportation, biking is also good for Myakka. Bike Myakka! for Good, our new Friends of Myakka River monthly service rides, offer our Greater Sarasota community an opportunity to give back to this beautiful place, while learning a bit more about Myakka's delicate ecosystems, and history, in the friendly company of like-minded individuals.

Each month, we ride together, learn a bit about Myakka's rich history and ecology, complete a service project together, so as to leave Myakka better than it was when we arrived, and finally, we break bread together, enjoying a free lunch, sponsored by Friends of Myakka River.



*New Friends members Tom and Rosenda, with a truck-full of Caesar's Weed, hand pulled by our participants at Clay Gully. Photo: Miri Hardy*



*Team work, smiling faces, and bags full of Caesar's Weed are par for the course. Photo: Juan Hidalgo*

As evidenced by the big smiles, participants in this popular event have a great time! And, thanks to 94 hard-working participants in 4 rides so far this year, by removing 71 bags of Caesar's Weed, a highly invasive plant species which disrupts native plant communities, our efforts have had a positive impact on Myakka too!



*A brief history lesson about All Weather Road, the original park "drive", and the crucial role of fire in Myakka's dry prairie, on the way to a service project at the Horse Camp. Photo: Zack Westmark*

Friends of Myakka River Members receive advance notification about our Bike Myakka! for Good rides. Not a member yet? Join us [HERE](#).

# Friends Update

## Sharing Myakka's Magic on Earth Day

by Miri Hardy

388 park visitors experienced Myakka's Magic for free, thanks to our Giving Tuesday Facebook Fundraiser.

On April 23, 2022, we held our very first Earth Day Celebration at the park. And on that day, thanks to the generosity of our 2021 Giving Tuesday Facebook fundraiser donors, we are able to cover park admission fees for 167 cars (and 1 bike!), for a total of 388 very happy park visitors!

Event participants enjoyed a range of free nature connection activities, suitable for all ages, including a photo scavenger hunt, "Hero The Heron" Storytime with authors Jan Williams and Rich Skaare, a guided plant-focused nature walk with Ranger Zack, a reptile learning station with Ranger Matt and much more!

Many of our participants were visiting Myakka for the first time! They had a great time, and learned a lot! And, what with such a meaningful introduction to Myakka's Magic, we're excited to have set a fantastic foundation for many future positive nature connection experiences, at Myakka and beyond. Thanks again to our donors, and thanks to everyone who made the event a great success!



"Hero The Heron" Storytime with authors Jan Williams and Rich Skaare was popular with all ages.

Photo: Miri Hardy



One of our youngest first-time visitors to the park, making magical Myakka memories. Photo: Miri Hardy



Ranger Matt shared important information about native, and invasive, reptiles. Photo: Miri Hardy



Ranger Zack led a fascinating plant-focused hike through the hammock. Photo: Miri Hardy

# Friends Update

## New Monthly Wild Florida Feature in The Observer

by Miri Hardy

Sharing Myakka's Magic through Print Media, with our new monthly feature "Wild Florida - An exploration beyond the Pavement", is part of our new Friends of Myakka River Outreach and Environmental Education Program, and an exciting way for us to dramatically extend our impact on our local community!

So if you live in Sarasota, Siesta or Longboat, be sure to grab an Observer on the second week of each month, and have a read! Or, you can always find the articles online [HERE](#).



## In Memory of Uncle Kobbi

My donation to Friends of Myakka River is dedicated to my uncle Kobbi Achiam, who passed away in February, 2022.

Kobbi was an avid fisherman, and some of my fondest memories with him were at Myakka State Park, where he taught me to fish with my sister and cousins.

I hope this donation can be used to maintain and conserve the park for future families to make similar memories.

- Rob Leon, New York



Uncle Kobbi taught me how to fish at Myakka



Uncle Kobbi with my sister Rebecca



My aunt told me that Uncle Kobbi loved those days when we went to Myakka and was thrilled when we caught fish!



If you would like to dedicate a donation in memory or in celebration of a loved one, please leave a comment with your online donation.

# Park Service Staff Spotlight

by Zack Westmark

## Ranger Marielle Higgins

Ride over the park bridge or walk out to the historic weir area and you may encounter a ranger enthusiastically educating visitors about alligator behavior, and shortly thereafter educating them about her family of chickens and ducks. You may have encountered a wild Marielle.

"Taking care of the animals is rewarding, but taking care of the land they depend on is especially important," she explained.

As a young sprout, Marielle was no stranger to livestock, growing up on farms between Myakka and Venice. One crisp evening as she was tending a chicken coop, she looked up to see a deer limping along. Except this was no average deer. It was Bam Bam, a young buck with only three legs, that became the reason she has volunteered at the Wildlife Center of Venice since 12 years old.

Marielle has rehabilitated bobcats, otters, foxes, raccoons, and yes, possums, with equal tender loving care.

Marielle graduated from Venice High School, where spearfishing and surfing were as important as literature and trigonometry. An artistic mind, with native wildlife as her focus, she was an active participant of several conservation clubs during her college years.



*With her palpable passion for all things Myakka, Ranger Marielle epitomizes the "Ranger First" philosophy. Photo: Miri Hardy*



*Ranger Marielle helped participants in our first Bike Myakka! for Good Service Ride understand that, by removing 18 bags of invasive plants that day, they supported not only our native plants, but native wildlife too! Photo: Miri Hardy*

Marielle is the ranger we often call on when an injured or sick animal is discovered in the park (except for alligators.) If she could, she would likely take them all home, but usually helps triage before they go to rehabilitation.

She started at Myakka in 2018, first mastering ranger station operations; not an easy task. Marielle loves good housekeeping and is always looking for a new project. We hope she continues in her niche for many years to come!

# Don't Be the Door Prize

by Nolan Hepburn

## Bicycle Safety and Tips

Biking at Myakka is one of the most popular things to do. Incredibly, hundreds bike Myakka each month! Maybe you have even participated in a Bike Myakka! Event, meeting other cycling enthusiasts, giving back to the park and enjoying Myakka's Magic. The Park Drive and many trails are some of the most beautiful rides in Sarasota! With great beauty comes great popularity, which as a biker can mean a busy and hazardous ride. But there are biking scenarios you can avoid. There is an incident called The Door Prize: It occurs when a parked car door opens into a cyclist. This could easily happen near the canopy walk parking area or anywhere you see a parked car on the roadside. Don't be the door prize! Be aware and proceed around parked cars with caution.



*Proper etiquette while biking along Myakka's park drive facilitates a good experience for all. Photo by Zack Westmark*

The next incident that can happen along Park Drive as a cyclist is called Overtaking-Motorist Drift. This occurs when a car drifts across the road toward a cyclist. Unfortunately, this can happen in Myakka when a driver is distracted viewing wildlife in the park.



*Wildflowers along the "Path of the Panther" bike route. Photo by Zack Westmark*

As cyclists, we need to be hyper-aware especially, when the park is busy. I find the park is best to bike early in the morning, late afternoons watching beautiful sunsets or mid-week when the park traffic is slower. All these incidents can be very dangerous. Learn more [HERE](#) and take a safety quiz [HERE](#).

Ready to head out and Bike Myakka? There are many great road and trail rides for you to explore. You can take a ride down *Myakka's Memory Lane*, a 3 mile ride if you start at Powerline or Ranch House Roads or 7 miles if you start from the park entrance. The Powerline path is full sun while the Ranch House Road path is shaded hammock. Stop at the old Meadowsweet Pastures Historical Site and enjoy a shaded walk through Myakka's history. *Path of the Panther* is a stand alone ride or can be picked up off of Myakka's Memory Lane, a real adventure into the backcountry! But if this is your first cycling experience at Myakka, the 14 mile Wild & Scenic Road Ride might be for you.

Continued on page 13

It takes you along the paved Park Drive, stretching from the park entrance to the North Gate (only open weekends and holidays). With abundant wildlife and beautiful river & lake views, you can stop at the Canopy Walk, the Upper Myakka Concession, The Birdwalk and the shaded river-side picnic area at Clay Gully. Conveniently, you can find the Bike Myakka! maps for all these routes, along with more information about the trails, including which bikes they're suitable for, on the Friends of Myakka River website [HERE](#).

#### Safety Reminders:

- Bikes are only allowed on the Park Drive and dirt backcountry roads, not on hiking trails.
- Bikes of all classes are NOT permitted in the Wilderness Preserve or Deep Hole Trail.
- Hurt your helmet, not your life. Helmets are recommended for all cyclists. Florida State law requires all riders under 16 years old to wear helmets.
- Obey all traffic laws and posted speed limits.
- Be prepared with water, sunscreen and bug spray.
- Share the road, ride single file on paved roads with traffic.
- On dirt roads or trails follow trail etiquette.

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## Rx Fire

## A Prescription for Myakka's Magic

by Hadley Hepburn

Did you know Florida is the lightning capital of the United States? Wildfires start with lightning, spread by wind and can be very dangerous near populated areas, like here in Sarasota. Starting in 1944 Smokey the Bear's "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires" campaign taught the U.S. wildfires are dangerous to the environment. Because of this wildfires were, and in some places still today, are seen as a threat and quickly extinguished. Through education and studying our environment we have learned that prescribed burns, are highly beneficial. In fact, Florida plants and animals depend on fire to survive. Indeed, for over fifty years the Florida Park Service has been effectively using prescribed burns to manage and preserve their lands. These burns benefit the ecosystem and improve recreation activities in parks like Myakka so you can enjoy the wildlife and magical Myakka scenery.



*Prescribed fire in Big Flats Marsh on December 17, 2021*

*Photo by Cortney Hepburn*

Maybe you have been hiking or biking at Myakka and seen a bright orange road sign that says, "Prescribed Burn Do Not Report".

Long before these signs go up your Myakka River State Park Burn Bosses have been preparing. According to Park Ranger and Burn Boss Michelle Keirse, "Just like a doctor writes a prescription for you, we write one for fire. We look at conditions of the land, vegetation heights, weather and fire behavior, as well as preparing fire breaks, equipment and meeting with our crew. Good leadership makes sure everyone on the crew is safe and comfortable."



*Big Flats Marsh on May 5, 2022. Fire facilitates large swaths of Coreopsis, Florida's state wildflower, during the spring.  
Photo by Miri Hardy*

Long before roads and development were here, natural lightning struck and wildfires would burn for days or weeks. Now with development and changed landscapes prescribed burns are essential for the land and people. Prescribed Burn season at Myakka is May-July when it is dry and thunderstorms begin forming. Of Myakka's 37,000 acres they attempt to use Prescribed Burns on 8,000-15,000 acres per year. That is a lot of fire!

Amazingly, wildlife returns quickly after fires to lick the char, curious raccoons return and as soon as one week later, grasses are re-growing and saw palmetto shoots emerge. Burn boss Michelle Keirse is encouraged, "by seeing the benefits of new plant species coming back like the Pine Lily, that only grows in frequently burned areas." So the next time you see the orange prescribed burn signs remember park staff are helping bring new life to Myakka for you to explore and enjoy.

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## **CAN'T GET TO THE PARK AS OFTEN AS YOU'D LIKE? WANT TO STAY ABREAST OF THE LATEST EVENTS AT THE PARK?**

**Scan the QR codes and follow the Friends on social media!**



**/FriendsOfMyakkaRiver**



**@FriendsOfMyakkaRiver**



**Tag @FriendsOfMyakkaRiver for a chance to to be featured!**

# Friends Member Spotlight

## Stacey and Mike Gilkison

by Miri Hardy

Stacey and Mike Gilkison, who live in Myakka City, joined as members after greatly enjoying our Bike Myakka! Day in May 2021, and wanting to be able to contribute to Myakka more. Since then, their big smiles and generous spirits have enhanced many a Friends initiative and event. And, to further up her impact, Stacey recently became a FPS Volunteer!



Stacey and Mike frequently enjoy to Bike Myakka! Photo: Miri Hardy

### How long have you been visiting Myakka?

Both Stacey and Mike are long time visitors to the park: Stacey has been visiting Myakka for 47 years, Mike for 30.

### How often do you visit?

Stacey now visits at least once a week, while Mike visits a couple of times a month.

### When you think about Myakka, what comes to mind?

Stacey conjures up images of Myakka's vast and untouched back country, while a general sense of peace and relaxation are top of mind for Mike.

### Do you have a favorite spot in the park?

Stacey's new favorite spot has become the Bird Walk at sunset (after experiencing its magic during a recent full moon bike ride) while Mike is partial to the bridge.

### What are your favorite Myakka memories?

Stacey fondly recalls visiting as a child with her oldest sister on a school project, observing and documenting the foraging habits of ibis & egrets. A much more recent favorite memory is our Bike Myakka! Day Scavenger hunt, when she enjoyed a picnic in Bee Island with friends. Mike's favorite memory is of taking the boat ride with friends from out of town.

### A perfect day at Myakka for us is...

...getting to the park early in the day, before it gets crowded, going for a run, and seeing all the wildlife. Then volunteering to pull invasive plants.



Enjoying storytime during "Sharing Myakka's Magic on Earth Day". Photo: Miri Hardy



With these two on the job, invasive plants don't stand a chance! Photo: Miri Hardy

Thanks so much for your support, Stacey and Mike!

Not a member yet? To learn more about the benefits of becoming a Friends of Myakka River member, and to join, click [HERE!](#)

# Park Service Volunteer Awards

by Nancy Meyer-Kingsley

On March 3, in Weeki Wachee Springs State Park, an amazing group of park staff and volunteers from District 4 came together and hosted a fun filled day, celebrating all of us Florida Park Service Volunteers, and our many accomplishments this year.

We were dazzled by the enchanting, world famous, iconic mermaids, as they glided and twirled their tails through the crystal clear spring water bubbling up from the deep caverns below, enjoyed the relaxing “Wilderness Riverboat Cruise”, which was led

by a very experienced Ranger who shared his knowledge and expertise on the natural splendor of Florida wildlife, flora and fauna and we learned about local reptiles in the “Ranger Experience Wild Life Animal/ Reptile Show”. It was fascinating to hear just how important all these creatures are to the environment and the part they individually play.

As lunchtime approached, a crowd gathered for an outdoor BBQ lunch with all the fixin's, followed by the “Volunteers Appreciation Awards Ceremony.” Congratulations to our Myakka 2021 award recipients, for sharing your ideas, energy and dedication in helping to preserve Myakka’s Magic:

**Nolan and Hadley Hepburn** - 2021 Youth Volunteer of the Year Award for Visitor Services

**Barry and Rosalie Coddington** - Volunteer Team of Two of the Year Award for Protection

**Friends of Myakka River for Bike Myakka! for Biodiversity** -  
Special Event of the Year for Resource-Based Recreation

**Friends of Myakka River, FPS Volunteers and Staff for Bike Myakka! Day** -  
Special Event of the Year for Nature-Based Recreation

Click [HERE](#) to read more about these awards.

As a busy season winds down and we have said our good byes to friends, old and new, I reflect on the days events and just how fortunate we are to be part of such a unique team and community of volunteers who continue to work diligently together in varied positions to protect and preserve Florida State Parks. See you in the Fall!



*Congrats to our youngest volunteers, Nolan and Hadley Hepburn, for their well-deserved award!  
Photo: Nancy Kingsley*

# Contributors



## **Zack Westmark - Editor & Writer**

FPS Park Ranger

Zack is a fan of native edible weedy plants and Myakka's glorious backcountry, especially from the bike saddle.



## **Miri Hardy - Editor & Writer**

FPS Volunteer and Friends of Myakka River Executive Director

Miri loves exploring Myakka's "off the beaten track" areas, especially the backcountry, oftentimes on her bike, and capturing Myakka's Magic with her camera. She recently rediscovered the joys of tree climbing.



## **Sandra Bernardi - Writer**

FPS Volunteer and Friends of Myakka River Board Member

Sandra loves hiking Myakka's trails--from the open dry prairie to the oak hammocks--and there are many yet to be explored. The Deep Hole hike with an umbrella (the brighter colored the better) is a must-do!



## **Hadley Hepburn - Writer**

FPS Volunteer and Campground Host

Hadley loves riding her bike at Myakka, "the best backyard!", and enjoys meeting new dog friends.



## **Nolan Hepburn - Writer**

FPS Volunteer and Campground Host

Nolan loves bike adventures in the park, capturing sunsets over Big Flats and meeting new friends he gets to be pen pals with throughout the year.



## **Nancy Meyer Kingsley - Writer**

FPS Volunteer and Friends of Myakka River Member

From kayaking the many twists and turns of the Wild and Scenic Myakka River, to exploring the backcountry on foot or by bike, Nancy enjoys it all. "It's truly nature at its best!"

**Interested in contributing to our next newsletter?**



**We'd love to hear from you!**



**Submit your ideas for Myakka related articles, poetry or photo essays to:**

**Ranger Zack or Miri Hardy.**