

Winter

2022



Newsletter

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



From the editors:

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

A new year is often a harbinger of change, and growth. And, indeed, in this first issue of 2022, we're excited to introduce you to new faces, new roles; as well as beloved, if slightly older, faces...and some very young ones too! We're also thrilled to share with you a number of new programs we'll be introducing this year.

As a Citizen Support Organization, Friends of Myakka River exists to support Myakka River State Park, and the Wild and Scenic Myakka River. Together with our Florida Park Service Staff and Volunteers, our members and the community at large, we protect and share Myakka's Magic, to the benefit of future generations, and our own. And with this newly configured newsletter, our goal is to keep you abreast of current events in the park, while also illustrating how we all work together to protect our beloved Myakka, and how you too can get involved. I look forward to seeing many of you in the park this year! -- Miri

After a spectacular fall wildflower show, visitation from our avian and terrestrial migrating friends have swelled, and unofficial record breaking counts of bikes along the park drive have been observed.



Clearing invasive grass using prescribed fire in Big Flats Marsh on December 17, 2021. Photo by Laurie Ann Milne

Exciting restoration projects lay on the horizon, and Myakka has been fortunate in welcoming several new staff to the team, who demonstrate ranger first attitudes consistently. But most importantly, we are grateful to welcome back our FPS resident volunteer team, who make the Myakka experience throughout winter, and help the park accomplish it's myriad goals.

-- Zack

Also in this edition...

Park Update - Friends Update - Friends Spotlight - FPS Staff Spotlight - Wildlife Spotlight
Friends Member Spotlight - Cache Myakka! - FPS Volunteer Spotlight - Bike Myakka! Updates

Park Update

Upper Myakka Lake Restoration

by Zack Westmark

The original weir on the Upper Myakka Lake was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1938 with good intentions; to create an oasis where boating and fishing could continue through the dry season (typically March to early June) when lake water levels would normally otherwise drop. But over time, with careful observation, we have learned the ecological consequences of its addition to the Myakka River and that the benefits of maintaining it do not outweigh the costs.



Though popular with Myakka's birds, due to its detrimental impact on Myakka's plant and animal communities, the deteriorating concrete weir will be removed. Photo by Miri Hardy.

In her book, *Myakka*, P.J. Benschhoff succinctly summarizes the weir's ecological impacts: "Without a drawdown, wading birds and ducks abandoned their winter feeding grounds. Aquatic plants could no longer flush out to the gulf with rising water levels. They just sank to the bottom of the lake and rotted. The lake's sandy bottom turned into muck."

Hydroperiod, or the number of days per year that the soil is wet, has a very strong influence on wetland plant composition. Native plants that insects and birds depend on suffered, while invasive plants like hydrilla and paragrass flourished.

Concerned over observed changes in plant and animal communities, biologists began advocating for a strategy to mitigate the negative impacts early on, and eventually large culverts were installed in 1974 to let water flow through. While it was an improvement, it did not result in the expected drawdown. Thus, support for weir removal became official in the park's 1986 Unit Management Plan (UMP) and is scheduled for completion this spring.



A high-water event washout restricted access to the observation deck, which is in poor repair. Photo by Miri Hardy.

Structures in the river inhibit movement of saltwater game fish like snook and tarpon. Federally protected West-Indian manatees can become trapped in the river's cold winter water, as was the case in January 2014, when a rescue near Downs' Dam required a tremendous inter-agency effort. Removal of the weir will reduce the manatee stranding hazard and could potentially improve fishing on the lake.

In 2016, a high-water event resulted in a washout that has effectively bypassed the weir and culverts; partially emulating conditions pre-1937. The washout restricted access to the observation platform, and the old culverts are deteriorating.

Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions (Wood) conducted hydrological modeling on the lake, predicting seasonal low water level averages of only

3.6 inches below current conditions if the weir is removed and only 2.4 inches higher than current conditions if the structure is restored to its 1974 condition. Wood estimated that removing the weir could create about 70 acres of additional wetland habitat from open water; that's 70 acres of additional native plants, insects, and animals.



*A Great Egret forages near a deteriorating culvert at the Weir.
Photo by Miri Hardy.*



By removing the weir, the Upper Myakka Lake restoration project will create valuable additional natural wetland habitat for our native flora and fauna. Photo by Miri Hardy.

Friends Update

by Miri Hardy

Sharing Myakka's Magic on Earth Day.

Our first ever "Giving Tuesday" Facebook Fundraiser was a success!

"No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced", noted Sir David Attenborough. So, to allow as many visitors as possible to experience Myakka's Magic firsthand, we decided to offer a special day of FREE nature-activities at Myakka River State Park, on Saturday, April 23rd, 2022, in honor of Earth Day.

We launched our fundraiser on Giving Tuesday, which is held on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving each year. Whether by sharing acts of kindness, or giving their voice, time, money, goods, and advocacy to support communities and causes, this is a day when people around the world come together through generosity in all its forms.

Our goal was to be able to open the park for FREE to at least 200 Vehicles during our event. And, thanks to the generosity of our community, we were able to meet our goal!

During our "Sharing Myakka's Magic on Earth Day" event, we hope to offer a wide range of free, fun nature-connection activities throughout the park, to allow park visitors to experience Myakka's Magic to the max. And YOU can help! Make a donation to help support this event, by clicking the "Donate" icon and include "Earth Day 2022" in your comments. Any contribution would be much appreciated!



We are also looking for volunteers to help during planning stages, as well as to help us Share Myakka's Magic in person during the event, at creative and naturalist field stations in the park. For more details, please contact [Miri Hardy](#).



THANK YOU FOR YOUR "GIVING TUESDAY" DONATIONS :

Batya A Goldstein
Sandra Bernardi
David Bottomley
Amanda C Ross
Rosalie Coddington
Jeanie Costello
Jennifer Fowler
Miri Hardy

Bill Jones
Harold Joslin
Michelle Keirse
Jill Leverett
Dani Lynn
Stacey Mazza-Gilkison
Anne Meyer

Nancy M Kingsley
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Octavio Perez
Dick Pfaff
Sandy Mahoney

Susan Schoettle
Mark Steinwachs
Debbie Tuckerman
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Shirley White
Adam Wiegand
Tamara Williams
Jarred Wilson

Friends Spotlight

Meet Miri Hardy: Friends of Myakka River's new Executive Director

by Sandra Bernardi

Have you heard this one? "A woman rode her bike into the park." It's not a joke, but a fact we are happy to share with you! That woman is Miri Hardy and you may have seen her at Myakka on her purple bike with her giant lensed camera strapped around her neck. Turns out, Miri is not only an incredible biker, writer, photographer and artist, but we are proud to announce she's now the Friends of Myakka River's new Executive Director and Consultant to the Board.

She's got quite a resume: You can check out the [News Release](#) on our website to learn more. A few highlights include her years as a teacher and ceramic artist both here in Florida and in Puerto Rico, and her work as a global market-research and brand consultant. She's traveled the world and has decided Sarasota is the place to be. And excitingly, she has many plans on how to promote and grow the Friends and the impact that we have.



"An Unexpected Find": Friends Member Kay Consigny took this fun shot of Miri, and her giant lensed camera, as part of our Bike Myakka! Day Photo Scavenger Hunt.



Talking about Caesar Weed, a highly invasive plant, during "Bike Myakka! for Biodiversity", which Miri co-planned and co-led with Ranger Zack. Photo by Friends Member Jarred Wilson.

In that regard, did you know she was the driving force behind our Bike Myakka! events? On May 22, fifty people participated in a bike ride that included several routes to choose from and a scavenger hunt with lucky participants receiving "swag" bags to commemorate their day at Myakka. And on September 25, in honor of Bike Your Park Day and National Public Lands Day, participants in our "Bike Myakka! for Biodiversity" used their bikes to help remove litter and invasive plants. I attended both these events and met so many new people and we all had a great time experiencing the park as never before. Under Miri's leadership "Bike Myakka!" events and programming, and much more, will become regular happenings at the park.

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Miri has been officially serving as our Social Media Manager since July (she started posting back in May as a FPS volunteer) and our Facebook page has since exploded with her interesting posts, photographs, and videos. And, we now have an Instagram account! We are in the twenty-first century and owe that transition to this dynamic bike rider. And, her contributions have not gone un-noticed by park staff and Friends' board members.

"When I encounter visitors deep in the backcountry during the heat of the summer, it usually signals a kindred spirit; and that's how I met Miri." Park Ranger, Zack Westmark, who has been working with Miri for over a year now, told me. "She was biking around looking for pine lilies. We exchanged hellos and quick park stories and shortly thereafter we were developing interpretive programs and planning events together." Laughing, he added that "Her passion for the park became very clear as we would sometimes work into the night debating the choice of a single word, or the color of event t-shirts (black and purple are her special field uniform colors.) Her patience never waned." He shared that, at times, she has served as the unofficial backcountry biking ranger, reporting injured wildlife and trail deficiencies while sharing park information with visitors. "Miri's passion for Myakka" Ranger Zack mused "is very palpable!"



When she's not on her bike, you just might spot Miri up in a tree. Either way, her camera is usually close at hand. Photo by John Jones.

Reflecting upon Miri's role, Miles Millwee, President of Friends of Myakka River, noted how much we've grown from the beginning vision of our founder Dr. Mary Jelks, or Dr. Mary, as she was affectionately called, to where we are today; a well-funded organization, supporting Myakka River State Park, one of Florida's largest state parks, and the Wild and Scenic Myakka River. "And moving forward, with the creativity and strategies that Dr. Miri brings to our team", he said with a smile, "we will be able to achieve an exciting new level of impact, especially in the areas of outreach, community engagement and education."

We look forward to the continuation of Bike Myakka! events and the many exciting things Miri has planned for the Friends and the Park. And if you see a woman with a purple bike and a giant lensed camera riding through the park, or up in a tree, be sure to stop and welcome our new Executive Director Miri!

Park Service Staff Spotlight

Assistant Park Manager Rob Slusser

by Zack Westmark

Myakka has a new assistant park manager. The best part is: he knows what it takes to be a ranger at the busiest non-beach park in the entire Florida Park Service system, since he has been one for the past five years.

Rob has been the ranger one could call any time of day or night for help. He was a law enforcement officer for the National Park Service in Mississippi and Pensacola (FL,) after several seasonal appointments as a visitor use assistant in Gulf Islands National Seashore. Thus, he knows how to handle "interesting" situations.



Rob Bikes Myakka!



Rob's interest in conservation was fueled by trips out west with his family

Despite his aptitude for the unordinary, Rob's favorite part of the job is fire. Once upon a time, he and I were sent to assist an agency with a large prescribed burn, with little more than a rough idea of where the operation was occurring. Our 45 minute ride in the tractor was mostly silent. Rob considered our lack of information a watch-out situation.

Brushing his forebodings aside, his sixth sense wound up being somewhat correct.

Upon arrival, we were immediately split up. I was sent interior on foot and about an hour later, Rob's voice chimed from the radio: "I don't know where I am, but someone might want to come look at this." He wound up catching a relatively large (approximately two acre) spot fire, and I wound up losing my park radio in the thick gallberry that day.

In college, Rob earned a degree in Environmental Studies from West Florida University, interning with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) propagating native aquatic grasses, and with Eglin Air Force Base conducting all sorts of plant and wildlife surveys.

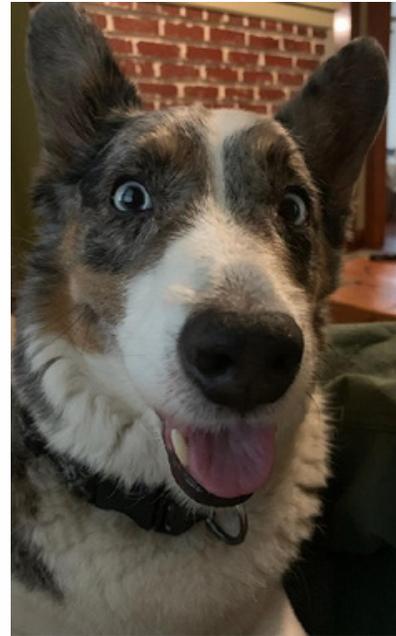
Continued on page 8

He promptly pursued public service with the Student Conservation Association (SCA) at Haleakala National Park in Hawaii. Primarily interpreting the native flora and fauna to visitors, he also assisted with search and rescue operations that sometimes involved 15 mile hikes, with 2,000 foot elevation gains on trails with names like "sliding sands."

After SCA in Hawaii and his time as a law enforcement officer for the National Park Service, Rob started his career at the Florida Park Service in 2016; focusing on invasive plant removal at Terra Ceia Preserve State Park. He became a park ranger at Myakka in 2017.

How did he wind up in conservation? Like many a Floridian, he grew up fishing and camping with his parents, plus annual trips to national parks out west in his grandparent's RV. Angel's Landing at Zion National Park and Glacier National Park are some of his favorite memories.

Join us in congratulating Rob for his promotion to assistant park manager. If the timing is fortuitous, you may meet his trusty sidekick; a nine year old cardigan corgi named Sirius.



Rob's trusty sidekick; Sirius

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 us on social media!



/FriendsOfMyakkaRiver



@FriendsOfMyakkaRiver



Tag @FriendsOfMyakkaRiver for a chance to to be featured!

Wildlife Spotlight - Whooping Cranes

An exciting sighting during The Myakka River 2021 Christmas Bird Count

by Miri Hardy

When Claire Herzog arrived for the Myakka River 2021 Christmas Bird Count, at the crack of dawn on December 20th, little did she know that she, and her team (which also included Deb Johnson, Sharon Wilcox and Nancy Edmondson), would spot, and report not only an impressive 88 bird species, but also one of North America's most endangered species: A Whooping Crane!

"The bird was spotted by Deb Johnson as she was counting away on a large group of American White Pelicans out on the marsh and then noticed the bird among over a hundred Sandhill Cranes in a very distant pond." Claire recalled. Though the crane was over a mile away, they all had good scope views of this rare, and very large, white bird.

To fully comprehend the excitement they, and indeed everyone who has heard the news, felt, and the importance of this finding, it helps to know that, per the International Crane Foundation, there are only 79 Whooping Cranes in the Eastern United States, and just about 800 in the entire world!

Belinda Perry, park biologist from 1995 to 2002, who's been coordinating the count since 2015, noted that Whooping Cranes, named for their bugling cry audible up to two miles away, once filled the skies from Florida to the Rockies, before habitat loss and hunting dramatically reduced their numbers. As part of efforts to reintroduce this highly imperiled species, over a 15 year span starting in 2000, volunteer pilots of ultra-light planes led whooping cranes, raised in captivity, south from Wisconsin to wintering grounds in Florida. Cranes that survived returned north the following spring and continued to migrate annually thereafter.



Mostly white, the most noticeable characteristic of the Whooping Crane is the large red, featherless patch on the head. Photo by Claire Herzog (taken from over a mile away!)

This particular Whooping Crane was spotted again in the park, and, thanks to bands on his legs (77-18), we can tell you that he's a bird nicknamed American Pharaoh, who was hatched and raised in captivity in 2018 at the International Crane Foundation in Wisconsin. Since his release, he has been associating primarily with Sandhill Cranes. He apparently spent his first winter (2018-2019) in Sarasota County and has been going between Michigan and Florida. We're delighted that he has now found Myakka! So keep an eye out for this exciting new member of Myakka's wildlife community. And fingers crossed he finds a mate!

To learn more about our Myakka River Christmas Bird Count, with its record count of 125 species, see the Friends' new monthly WILD FLORIDA feature in The Observer!

Friends Member Spotlight

Beth and Charles Kalmykow

by Miri Hardy

When Beth and Charles of Sarasota, both then widowed, serendipitously met 3 years ago, they discovered that they had a LOT in common. Including a great appreciation and love for our beautiful Myakka.

How long have you been visiting Myakka?

Beth has been visiting Myakka since 1951, soon after her family moved here from Long Beach, Indiana.

Charles since December of 2003, 2 weeks after he first arrived in Sarasota!

How often do you visit?

We visit Myakka Park at least several times a year.

When you think about Myakka, what comes to mind?

Beth - Old Florida, nature in abundance, spotting wildlife.

Charles - unspoiled beauty, scenic river vistas, tranquil shady walks along the trails.

Do you have a favorite spot in the park?

We love everything about the park, but our favorite areas include the canopy walk and the park area along the river where we had our second date together (it lasted 7 hours!) and recently celebrated a very festive Thanksgiving, with Turkey and all the trimmings!

What are your favorite Myakka memories?

Taking first-time visitors and our children to the park, walking across the canopy bridge and climbing the tower to enjoy the scenic vistas below.

A perfect day at Myakka for us is...

... in the early spring and fall. The sky is clear and the air is crisp and cool and comfortable for walking along the trails.

Why did you become members of Friends of Myakka River?

We joined the Friends of Myakka River because we support preserving this natural treasure for future generations by conserving the wildlife and beauty of the park.



Beth and Charles Kalmykow
Photo by Miri Hardy



Enjoying Thanksgiving at their favorite table
by the Myakka River. Photo by Cathy Keen

Thanks so much for your support, Charles and Beth!

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

Does a Deer Poop in the Woods?

Find out when you Geocache at Myakka.

by Nolan Hepburn

People of all ages geocache at Myakka River State Park, from 10 year olds like me to others who are retired. It is a fun way to explore places off the beaten path!

Geocaching is an extremely popular outdoor game of hide and seek. Dave Ulmer invented geocaching in 2000, when he put a black bucket in the woods near Portland, Oregon and posted the GPS coordinates on a website. This started a thing called "The Great American GPS Stash Hunt." Aren't you glad the name has evolved into a simpler name...Geocaching!

The word "geo" is a Greek word which means; the earth. The word cache means; a hiding place or especially one in the ground. The basic rules for geocaching are leave no trace, take some stuff, leave some stuff and sign the log book.

I use the GeoCache App (which is free) to locate the coordinates of a cache, and when I locate the cache I sign the log book. Some caches, like Myakka's "Does a Deer Poop in the Woods?" is one you just visit. Others, like my favorite Myakka TB (for Travel Bug) Stop, have a weather-proof box that is hidden, not buried, where you can sign a log book and take a treasure if you leave a treasure.

There are also "trackables", which are treasures that are located in the cache with instructions for travel! My sister and I placed a small horse figurine named Traveler at the Myakka TB Stop with directions for it to travel to Assateague Island in Maryland, where we volunteer in the summer. And Traveler made it there, thanks to several geocachers who helped it travel north!

Amazingly, there are more than 400 geocaches in Myakka River State Park! Some are conveniently located off the side of a road and others are buried deeper in the woods, making it a fun adventure "hide and seek" game. So get out and explore some today!



One of the many amazing geocaches you'll find at Myakka River State Park. Photo by Miri Hardy

**Love GeoCaching? Curious to try it out?
Read on to learn about our exciting new initiative...**

Introducing...Cache Myakka!

by Miri Hardy

The reasons for geocaching at Myakka are as varied as the caches you'll find here. Some visitors enjoy geocaching as a fun motivator to get some exercise in nature. Others enjoy the thrill of the hunt, and the challenge involved in not only finding each cache, but also figuring out how to access that all important log! Geocaching can be a fun social activity, and a great activity for kids, but is equally enjoyable solo. But regardless of the why, with over 400 Geocaches, Myakka River State Park is most definitely a geocacher's paradise!

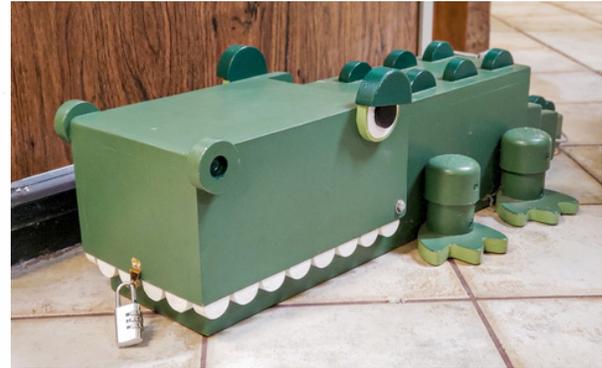
As a public land, all geocaches in the park must not only follow general Geocache hiding guidelines, but also be approved by Park Manager, Steve Giguere. He assures that they don't interfere with sites of cultural and historical significance, or disrupt ecologically sensitive habitats.

A keen geocacher himself, Steve enjoys to Cache Myakka! with his family. But his support for geocaching in the park also stems from realizing that geocaching draws many visitors to the park who would otherwise never experience Myakka's Magic. And, in addition to introducing and connecting them to Wild Florida, geocaching also offers a valuable opportunity to reach these visitors with important messages about protecting Myakka's delicate ecosystems.

Inspired by the amazing environmental education caches here at Myakka, the Friends of Myakka River are joining in on the fun. And you can too!

Join us at the South Pavilion on February 12 from 8am for **Funcoast Bash 7**, a free day of geocaching fun. If you love caching, many new caches will be released the night before the event. And if you've never cached before, there will be workshops and opportunities to join a "Geo Buddy" to learn the ropes.

If you'd like the schedule for the day OR if you love geocaching, and would like to help us create creative and educational caches in the park, drop us a line! We look forward to hearing from you.



This alligator geocache is a great example of using geocaching for environmental education. The answers to a quiz about alligators (found on a fact sheet nearby) provide the combination code needed to access the log in the gator and some cool swag too. Photo by Miri Hardy



*A local geocache phenom, Team **Perez8**, who created the alligator and deer caches pictured, and many more, includes FPS Volunteer Octavio Perez and his wife Suzanne. Suzanne writes all cache info and comes up with the quizzes, puzzles, names, quotes and more while Octavio does the physical cache ideation, construction and finishing. Octavio is also the very talented graphic designer responsible for our Cache Myakka! and Bike Myakka! logos.*

Bike Myakka! Updates

Bike Myakka! for Good Service Rides

Love Myakka River State Park? Love to Bike Myakka? Looking for an opportunity to give back? Then join us for our new, monthly "Bike Myakka! for Good" Service Rides!



On the first Saturday of each month, we'll take a ride together to a location in the park, where we'll complete a short service project, then enjoy a free picnic lunch together.

Event participation is by registration only. And, we're thrilled to report that our first ride, on **Saturday, February 5th**, very quickly reached capacity following an email blast to members and our Bike Myakka! mailing list. If you would like to join the waitlist, in case of cancellations, please click the image below.

Want to receive updates about future rides? Interested in supporting this new program by sponsoring lunch at our next ride? Send us an [email!](#)



Friends members who registered for the ride will receive a Bike Myakka! Koozie. And everyone will get a free lunch!

Coming soon! More Bike Parking!

Our Bike Myakka! initiative is a partnership between the Friends of Myakka River and Myakka's Florida Park Service staff. It supports and promotes bike use in the park as a great way to explore and connect to Myakka's Magic, while reducing our impact on Myakka's delicate ecosystems and the park infrastructure.

And, thanks to generous funding from Friends of Myakka River, we are excited to share that 10 more bike parking racks will soon be available in the park. The racks will be installed in four frequently utilized park areas, with the highest need. In the future, we hope to make bike parking racks readily available in many more areas in the park.

Bike Myakka! Updates



Win This Bike!

Win an ALKI 2 by IZIP and ride in style into the new year!

Drawing Tickets are \$5 each, or 5/\$20* and are on sale in the Ranger Station, (where you can also see the bike). You can also purchase tickets at our Moon Over Myakka Fundraising Concert Series.

The drawing will be held on April 15, 2022 at the Moon Over Myakka Fundraising Concert.

Funding for the bike was provided by Friends of Myakka River and all proceeds of this fundraiser directly benefit Myakka River State Park.



*Click [HERE](#) for Bike Drawing Rules

Coming in March: Celebrate Florida Bike Month at Myakka River State Park!

As some of you are aware, Bike Month is nationally celebrated in May. But here in Florida, cyclists decided that March is a much more delightful time of year to celebrate this enjoyable (and eco-friendly) commuting and recreational option. And we concur!

Here at the park we'll kick off the month, which highlights the many benefits of cycling in Florida, with a Bike Myakka! for Good Service Ride on the first Saturday of the month. We are also planning a fun, guided night ride, as well as a repeat of our popular "Bike Myakka! Day", which will include self-guided rides, fun activities (with prizes!) and lots of fun opportunities to get on your bikes and experience Myakka's Magic to the max!

Follow us on Facebook or Instagram for updates about these activities, and more.

As part of their benefits, members of Friends of Myakka River will receive emails updates about these, and all Friends events.

And until then, bike *the Real Florida*...Bike Myakka! See you in the park.

Park Service Volunteer Spotlight

Leo Mulcahy

by Hadley Hepburn

Did you know that right here at Myakka River State Park we have one of the oldest and longest serving Volunteers in the Florida Park Service? His name is Leo, and the week after Thanksgiving we celebrated his 90th birthday!

Before he started volunteering, Leo was a school bus driver, and a mechanic and facilities supervisor for a school district in New York. But he has now volunteered consistently for the Florida Park Service for 33 years. He has not only volunteered at Myakka River State Park but at Manatee Springs as well.

Leo and his wife Teddy started out as campers in the park. He told me that after meeting nice rangers he and his wife decided that they wanted to help the rangers and the park by volunteering.

Since 1988, Leo has accumulated over 20,000 volunteer hours. His favorite part of volunteering is meeting new people. At Myakka, he was a Host in Big Flats Campground until he became a maintenance volunteer. He currently works on everything that has moving parts or an engine. When something breaks he has the knowledge and experience to fix it, which saves the park a lot of money.

The park has many volunteer opportunities from Day Volunteers, who live locally and come in on occasion or for special projects to Resident Volunteers, who bring their campers and live in the park, serving by cleaning day use areas, cabins, campgrounds or work in the Ranger Station or Visitor Center. At any age you can feel good, by serving others and the park. Whether you are 12 like me or 90 like Leo, there is a place for everyone to give back!



Many members of our Myakka family, including my brother Nolan and me, the park's two youngest volunteers, and my parents, recently came together to celebrate Leo, our oldest, and most dedicated volunteer, on his 90th birthday. Photo by Miri Hardy

Curious to learn more about FPS volunteer opportunities? [CLICK HERE!](#)
And see Page 13 for an upcoming Bike Myakka! volunteer opportunity, with a free lunch!!!

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.

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