
Newsletter

Spring 1995

In our previous newsletter we reported that our main goal for 1994 had been to improve public access to the large tracts of land that the Calusa Land Trust already owns. We are excited to announce that we have made major steps forward on improving public access to both of our large preserves!

St. Jude Trail

In our last newsletter we lamented how negotiations with the adjacent land owner had broken down over our respective rights to the access easement to our St. Jude Trail, which provides the only public access to our St. James Creek Preserve. In fact we were on our way to court. We are happy to report that this issue has finally been settled. Circuit Judge James Thompson has agreed that we have full access rights over a 20-foot-wide strip of land running from Stabile Road to the beginning of our St. Jude Trail. We must all extend our sincere thanks to attorney Charles Bigelow who donated his legal services to help us resolve this surprisingly complicated dispute.

You may remember that our plan for this preserve includes removing the exotic plants that had invaded, replanting native vegetation, and constructing a gazebo and observation deck so that our members and the public can enjoy this beautiful preserve.

While the land management committee had made considerable headway removing the exotics, their activities had come to an abrupt halt while we settled the access dispute. Now that it is over, we can really get down to business again. A detailed plan is being developed outlining how we should proceed. For each step, there are several considerations: What is to be done, by whom, by what date, how much will it cost, do we need any skilled helpers, where will we get the materials, what about working around the rainy season? The list goes on and on. Perhaps we can raise the funds for the boardwalk by selling planks and engraving the donors' names in the wood. Ideas anyone?

The Walbridge Otto (Bill) Fritts Park

On May 10th 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 (see discussion later in this newsletter).

LAND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT (by Ed Chapin, Chairman)

Our last committee meeting was held at the Pine Island Library on April 17 to discuss our activities for the coming summer. In attendance were Harvey & Maxine Ingelse, Bud House, Rick Moore, Wyatt & Elizabeth Hooks, Norm Gowan, Peter Ordway, Jim Green, and Ed Chapin.

We agreed to continue our regularly scheduled work days on the first Saturday of each month, with the second Saturday as an alternate in case of bad weather.

Now that our access to the St. Jude Trail has been confirmed by the courts, we plan on planting native vegetation during the rainy season. Honc Construction has agreed to remove the brush piles resulting from our previous efforts. Some additional work days may be necessary to complete this phase of the project. Also, the Board has requested our committee to present by early July a complete schedule for the remainder of the improvements to the trail. Rich Larkin and Ed Chapin will draft this work plan.

The committee also discussed the formal St. James Creek Preserve Management Plan and agreed to follow it to the letter. We will be coordinating with Lee County to establish the 750-foot radius primary buffer area around the bald eagle nest and an additional 750-foot secondary area. We also will be helping with the removal of exotic vegetation and garbage removal between now and October 1. Once the primary and secondary buffer areas are established, we will develop nature trails to implement the management plan.

The 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.

This will be a very busy summer for this committee. Many of our regular volunteers are gone for the summer so we will need all the help we can get. Please consider volunteering on these worthy projects. For more information, call Ed Chapin at 283-1167 or Rick Moore at 283-1206

GIS GRANT

Our attempt to win a grant for a fully implemented Geographical Information System (GIS) was not successful. However, we were given the complete computer software package valued at \$1300. We are limited by the computer power available to us, and the software is very difficult to learn, but we have requested special training from the company that made the donation. Meanwhile some members of our GIS committee have been trying, with limited success thus far. Is there a computer whiz out there that can help? If we can make use of this software for managing our land and selecting future purchases, it could be an important tool. GIS software combines computer-generated maps with specialized data such as land ownership, vegetative types, etc. Peter Ordway is heading up this promising endeavor for Calusa Land Trust.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS NEWS

Helen McClary has unfortunately had to resign from the Board for personal reasons. We thank her so much for contributing her time, insight, and help while she was with us. The nominating committee recommended Rick Moore to fill this seat, and at its April 27th meeting the Board elected him to serve out Helen's term. Rick was the dominant figure in revitalizing the Trust five years ago, and although he later stepped down from the Board, he has never missed a Board meeting or slowed up in his participation.

The Nominating Committee is always on the lookout for potential future Board members. The main requirement is having an active interest (and of course time and energy!) to help us further our goal of acquiring and managing natural lands. Even if you cannot or do not wish to serve on the Board, we welcome the help of our members in serving on the many committees through which much of the Trust's actions are carried out. Please call Norm Gowan at 283-8203 for more information.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

(by Norm Gowan, Chairman)

As of May 8 of this year, Calusa Land Trust had 411 names on its mailing roster, 197 of which were current with their dues. 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.

Remember our 1995 campaign to double our membership by asking all members to sponsor a new member? To date, five members have sponsored a total of nine new members these honor roll sponsors are:

Bud and Shirley House - Four new members
Harvey and Maxine Ingelse - Two new members
Rick and Silvia Moore - One new member
Alison Ackerman - One new member
Brant and Jane Stanford - One new member

Please help us by signing up a friend or neighbor or give a membership to a friend or relative. We must build membership to increase and manage our preserves.