

Calusa Land Trust

and Nature Preserve of Pine Island, Inc.



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"Recruit a New Member"

15th Annual Poker Run
Sunday December 2nd
Mark your calendar

Newsletter

www.calusalandtrust.org

October 2007

President's Message

by Harold Bruner (464.2436)

A Significant Loss:

Pine Island suffered a significant loss with the passing of Wayne (Bud) House in late May. Bud was a tireless supporter of many conservation efforts, most notably the CLT, Randell Research Center, and MOTI (Museum of the Islands). Bud presided over the CLT annual meeting this past January, having served the last two years as President. At 80+ years of age Bud still exuded a lot of energy and often helped at CLT work days. He and his wife Shirley were the primary organizers of the annual CLT rummage sale. A memorial to celebrate Bud's active life was held at his beloved Calusa Canal Preserve. There was a great turnout on a sweltering summer Sunday afternoon. The CLT board has voted unanimously to rename this important archaeological site the Bud House Calusa Canal Preserve. Our condolences go out to Shirley and their daughter Cathy, both of whom continue to reside on Pine Island.

Mark your Calendar:

The 2008 annual meeting will be held at Fritts Park once again on Sunday, January 20. If you have never attended an annual meeting at Fritts Park please try to do so. There will be plenty of food, fun and great fellowship.

A Change in Newsletter Editors:

Countless thanks go out to Alison Ackerman for her many years of editing this newsletter. In fact, Alison has been the only editor for all 54 issues. Alison's attention to detail and organizational efforts resulted in a quality publication. A founding board member in 1976, and a past President, Alison will continue to serve on the board but will enjoy a break from meeting newsletter deadlines throughout the year.

Phil Rosenberg has agreed to take over as newsletter editor. Phil has done a great job maintaining the CLT website. The board and the membership are very appreciative of Phil's willingness to perform both of these tasks.

Trailhead Vista

Breaking a New CLT Trail

By Donna Venesky and Judy Ott

An eagle soars overhead, a gopher tortoise ambles by, and a snook crashes a top-water plug. These are all part of the Pine Island lifestyle we have come to enjoy, but sometimes take for granted. Why do we enjoy such a beautiful and diverse array of wildlife and landscapes? Simple, Pine Island still has plain, old-fashioned, southwest Florida, native habitat. The real stuff. Notice the description did not say “untouched” native habitat.

Those of us involved in the Calusa Land Trust, and conservation work in general, know that one of the top two challenges to local conservation work is the ferocious invasion of exotic plants that are taking over Pine Island native habitats. Obviously, the other challenge is ever increasing human development - but that discussion is for another day. This is about “invasive exotics” the green variety, specifically plants. The three major invasive exotic plants on the Island are Melaleuca, Australian Pine and Brazilian Pepper.

Long time members of the Calusa Land Trust have done battle with invasive exotic plants for decades. Removing these dastardly plants involves hand-pulling young trees, chain sawing medium-sized trees and bringing in the heavy equipment for the mature growth. It is exhausting, hard, dirty work, done by people who know that our eagles, tortoises, snook and pine trees will not thrive if choked out by invasive species.

At our monthly work parties (we call them work “parties” because they’re fun), under the leadership of Senior Ranger Ed Chapin and the help of a team of invaluable volunteers, the Land Trust has almost been able to keep the invasive exotics at bay - until the last couple of years. During the last 20 years, the Calusa Land Trust has gone from preserving 35 acres to owning and co-managing approximately 1,500 acres. Those of you with a backyard know

how much work it is to keep up even a small landscape in this sub-tropical climate. Try managing 1,500 acres!

One of the CLT Preserves that we are most proud of is the St. James Creek Preserve in St. James City. This Preserve and the popular Saint Jude's Nature Trail within the Preserve have been a quiet respite for Pine Islanders and visitors for over 15 years. Recently, the Trust was able to make a key purchase of 20 more acres between the existing St. James Creek Preserve and the neighborhood streets. The parcel cost the CLT a whopping (to us) \$250,000 - made possible by support from many members and partners. Despite the huge purchase price, the property (called the Trailhead/Vista parcel) came to us densely infested with mature (read: huge) invasive exotic plants, mostly Australian Pines.

Removing the exotics from Trailhead Vista was a daunting challenge. This parcel was literally overrun with exotics. So the Calusa Land Trust did something it has never done before. The Trust sent out Requests for Proposals to a long list of environmentally skilled Contractors to help remove the invasive exotic plants. At the same time, the Land Trust confidently applied for two grants that would partially pay for the enormous costs involved in hiring outside help.

The good news is that among the excellent proposals presented, we were fortunate to receive a thoughtful and sensible proposal from Habitat Restoration Resources, Inc., which was also the lowest bid by far. The bad news is that both grants we applied for fell through at the last minute, leaving the Land Trust faced with a dilemma.

We had the opportunity to get a terrific contractor to do the right job at a very reasonable price within the critical time period before this fall's eagle nesting season. There was the possibility that we might not be able to get this Contractor next year for the same price. And, by then the invasive plants would be that much bigger and denser - Australian Pines can grow 10 feet in a year!

The other side of the dilemma was that the Calusa Land Trust's financial coffers were as thin as a dime. This is because of our purchase of Trailhead Vista as well as purchases of other environmentally sensitive lands through our contributions to Lee County 20/20. The 20/20 purchases include Cayo Pelau and the Pine Island Flatwoods.

Never doubt that The Calusa Land Trust is a fiscally responsible organization. This is reflected in a long time history of efficiently managing our coveted donations. The Board has at times redefined the word "frugal" and they have guided our "wish list" expenditures wisely. After much deliberation and debate, the CLT Board voted unanimously to fund \$42,000 for the complete Trailhead Vista exotics removal contract. What turned the tide was the realization that it would be wiser to spend close to our final dollars on something as important as the invasive plant removal from currently owned land rather than leave funds in our Emergency Fund where it awaits the next piece of land that needs to be saved. Of course, there will be a plea for donations at the end of this article because, suffice it to say, the Calusa Land Trust needs to replenish its Emergency Fund.

So, the Trailhead Vista exotic plant removal work began in early August and is almost complete. At its best, invasive plant removal is unattractive. Even done as well as this project has been, the process is a tough insult to a landscape. The current image of Trailhead Vista is strong testimony as to why invasive exotic plants should not be allowed to get a strong foothold anywhere on Pine Island. Removing these tenacious plants after they are entrenched is a massive, disrupting and expensive undertaking. Restoration is a much higher price to pay for native habitats when we wait too long.

In a short time, the scars from the heavy equipment and dragged logs will heal and the native plants will begin to thrive, bringing the landscape back to a gorgeous pine/palmetto forest with gumbo limbos, buttonwoods and scarlet red pine lilies. Having watched the native plants return to Little Pine Island gives us a glimpse of what to expect at the Trailhead Vista. In the future, Phase 2 of this Project will remove the invasive exotic plants in the rest of the Preserve, return the wetland areas back to their original state, improve education and interpretation opportunities and hopefully provide a small kayak launch area on this Preserve.

The Calusa Land Trust is doing its part to help save our precious Pine Island habitats for our grandkids to be able to enjoy. If you're interested in watching the Trailhead Vista come back to life, drive down and visit the project. The Preserve is located just north of St James City; travel east on Laratonda, and then south on Stabile.

As the restoration project progresses, we appreciate every new and returning CLT member who can join us to help keep this and other projects moving forward. If you are interested in joining us, the CLT web site has all the information at www.calusalandtrust.org. We are also looking for a Preserve Ranger for the St. James Preserve who can assist us with day to day management, or perhaps someone who can adopt the Preserve as a philanthropic gesture.

Want to step up to the plate? Are you already a member? Please donate whatever amount you can to help us finish removing the invasive exotic plants at the St. James Preserve. We are truly grateful for the volunteers who work so hard with us, and for all donations that allow us to believe that the eagles, tortoises, snook (and us) will still be happily living here in the future. If we don't see to that, who will?

20/20 Highlights Acquisition News

by Harold Bruner (464.2436)

The soft real estate market continues to be a benefit for the Lee County Conservation 20/20 program. Pine Island has done exceptionally well. Since the county's first purchase in 1998 a total of 11 parcels have been bought on Pine Island at a cost of \$14,307,400. These purchases have preserved over 1,320 acres of environmentally sensitive lands on and around Pine Island.

Already this year the county has purchased three parcels on or near Pine Island with a total of 341.8 acres at a cost of \$7,570,000. The Calusa Land Trust works hand-in-hand with the 20/20 staff by encouraging nominations, assisting in site visits, offering co-management, and making financial contributions toward the purchases. For this year's acquisitions the CLT contributed \$20,000 toward Cayo Pelau (a magnificent undeveloped 100+ acre island northwest of Bokeelia), \$5,000 toward the Smokehouse Bay Preserve, and \$10,000 toward an addition to the Galt Preserve.

CLT support and financial contributions result in improved scores for 20/20 nominations. With our limited funds we are unable to purchase much land at today's values. But by contributing to 20/20 purchases we can greatly leverage our acquisition funds. The Lee County Board of Commissioners is the final oversight for the 20/20 program. Our support of the 20/20 efforts has resulted in two resolutions this year from the Board of Commissioners honoring the CLT for its assistance to this important program. Rest assured that your financial contributions to the CLT from dues and special gifts are being put to good use in leveraging the purchase of environmentally sensitive lands on and around Pine Island.

The Wish List – Introducing a New Idea by Harold Bruner (464.2436)

Although not a new idea among nonprofit organizations, the Wish List is a new concept for the Calusa Land Trust. An item on a Wish List can take several forms, e.g. a new piece of equipment for an upcoming project, a person to volunteer his/her talents for a specific task, or a financial contribution needed to accomplish a project.

The clearing of the invasive exotics on the Trailhead Vista property was a great accomplishment for the CLT, but it came at a significant cost. I have written in the past about leveraging our acquisition funds. So here is my wish in the form of a proposal for leveraging funds for the removal of exotics from some other preserves. I would like to challenge a few of our members to pledge a contribution of \$1,000 each to be earmarked solely for the removal of invasive exotics. We have found a potential source of cost-share funds that will provide a 50/50 match for exotics removal. If a member will step forward with a \$1,000 contribution, and the CLT contributes \$1,000 from its reserves, and if we can get a \$2,000 match, we can get \$4,000 worth of exotic removal done by spending \$1,000 of our funds. Please give me a call, or contact another board member, if you are willing to help grant this wish.



Harold accepting a resolution from the Lee County Commissioners on behalf of the CLT, thanking us for helping with the purchase of Cayo Pelau.

Membership Report by Norm Gowan (283.8203)

We currently have 878 members with 433 (49% current in their dues). This is a significant improvement since our last newsletter but how about the 445 of you that we haven't heard from in the past 12 months? We are in a pinch right now with our major restoration expense for the Trailhead Vista and our commitments to the County's 20/20 Program. So please help us out. Land prices are currently depressed so now is the time to grab some good buys. If there is an asterisk (*) following your name on the address label of this newsletter, please consider making another membership contribution now!

Many members are choosing to use credit cards (M/C or VISA only!) to make their donations. If this is more convenient for you then, by all means, do so. Records of card numbers are shredded after posting!

2007 Membership Drive by Norm Gowan (283.8203)

The vast bulk of our income is made up of donations from our wonderful members!! We need to increase our income in order to attack new projects so... Let's increase our membership! Our membership continues to hover around the 800 level. Some join, some move away and some die. We must continue to cultivate new members!!

We have started a brand new 2007 membership campaign. We are asking every member to sign up at least one new member. Ask a friend, neighbor or relative to join us. Maybe buy them a membership as a gift to get them started. Become a new member's sponsor. Make sure that your name appears on their application so that I can keep track of the results.

Major recruiters will be announced in 2007 newsletters and final results announced at our annual meeting in 2008. There will be a suitable reward!

St. Jude Trail Boardwalk by Norm Gowan (283.8203)

Due to several personal problems there had not been a name carved on the boardwalk or benches since late 2005. They are now up to date. I apologize to all of you who have been waiting to see the results and thank you for being so patient. There are now 727 names preserved in wood. Before year end we intend to compile a directory of each name and its location.

Visioning Committee by James "Alex" Alexander (283-7400)

As our members know, the primary focus of the Calusa Land Trust remains the same: to aggressively buy, co-buy, or support the purchase of all environmentally sensitive land on or around Pine Island. As you've seen in this newsletter we are investing a lot of time and substantial money to make this happen with pretty darn good results.

The other main component of the CLT mission is to effectively manage all the lands under our stewardship. This is becoming even more important as the number of preserves grow and our acreages increase—it will take hundreds of thousands of dollars over the next decade to get our preserves in shape and keep them that way.

Therefore, the Visioning Committee was formed to develop a strategy and a plan to enhance our land stewardship while not sacrificing any efforts toward acquisition. Our approach is based upon building a management plan for each of our preserves, complete with desired results, proposed actions, and anticipated timelines. To help create and implement these plans we need to find Preserve Rangers-- individuals willing to lead the management of one preserve. The land trust will give plenty of support, but good management practices require one person to steer the ship.

We'd like to talk to anyone interested in considering assuming this role. It can be a very rewarding and fun experience. Please call Alex now at 283-7400 to talk about it.

To learn more about putting the Vision Committee's goals into action, see Norm's fundraising committee report next.

Fundraising Committee Introducing 100 Days to \$100K Campaign

by Norm the Big Duck Gowan (283.8203)

To support the Visioning Committee's efforts, we are targeting our important Trailhead Vista Preserve discussed throughout this newsletter.

We have already "skinnied" our bank account to buy this property and to do some critical initial exotic removal. We need another \$100,000 to do what it takes to make this the preserve it deserves to be. Therefore, I am introducing the "100 Days to \$100K" promotion to help make this property into the outstanding preserve it can be.

Everyone who donates either \$10,000, \$1000, or \$100 will be recognized (if you want) at the new gateway to the preserve. Let's see if we can fill it up with the names of scores of our members! Please send your donation via check or credit card in the special enclosed form and envelope. Thank you for keeping our Land Trust great.

Tours & Trails Report

by Brenda J Anderson (283.1878)

The Calusa Land Trust plans to participate in the Pine Island portion of this year's Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival which will be held in Matlacha on November 2, 3 & 4, 2007.

The festival includes kayak fishing ornaments on Saturday November 3, and Sunday November 4 as well as a series of

kayak races on Sunday, November 4. In addition, there are always a large number of vendor booths with lots of boats and paddling gear as well as interesting displays from local organizations.

We hope to have a booth displaying our paddling and hiking trail maps (currently available on our website) and other CLT information. We also hope to have our great collection of CLT T-Shirts and other clothing set up for sale.

We have tentatively scheduled the following guided tours for the festival:

Friday, November 2: 9:00 AM –

Kayak trip to Big Jim Creek, departing from Fritts Park on Beach Daisy Lane. We have a couple of kayaks and a few canoes available for participants to use if needed.

Saturday, November 3: Noon –

Kayak trip to Shell Cut on Calusa Island, departing from Jug Creek Cottages in Bokeelia. Kayaks will be available on site for rent from the Tropic Star.

4:00PM

Sunset cruise kayak trip to Back Bay Preserve, departing from Oleander Road in Saint James City.

Sunday, November 4: 9:00 AM -

Kayak trip to Underhill Creek Preserve, departing from Tropical Point.

Noon -

Walking tour of the Saint Jude Trail in Saint James City.

You can obtain additional information about the Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival by logging onto their website

<http://calusabluewaypaddlingfestival.com>.

To reserve a place on one of the guided tours, obtain directions to the launch site, and other details, please E-mail me at Brenda1040@Hotmail.com or call me at 239-283-1878. Space is limited, so please contact me as soon as possible.

**CALUSA LAND TRUST AND NATURE PRESERVE
OF PINE ISLAND, INC.**

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