



*A Recap of Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park News
and What Lies Ahead . . .*

Dear Julie,

Hope you've had joyous and peaceful holidays during the conclusion to the 2023 year and that the new chapter unfolding in 2024 is one of renewed spirit, goals and reinvigoration!

The following letter serves both as a recap of the Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park activities during 2023 and a forward glimpse into the upcoming new year 2024!

These last 12 months the Friends have been diligently working in front of, and behind, the scenes relating to Wakulla Springs protection, support and improvement efforts for the Park. I'll begin with the most significant news update concerning the jungle river boats, as they play a pivotal role in the immediate lifeblood and success of the Park. Next, the letter will cover the Friends chronological primary-focused activities that have occurred this last year, with a look ahead to 2024!

FRIENDS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN – BOATS RECAP & UPDATE

To recap last year; as part of the Friends initial Capital Campaign assessment process, a marine engineer “Cole & Associates” (from Panama City) evaluated each of the boats and provided us with their final inspection reports. FDEP also conducted an independent inspection (with “Yates”) around the same time period. Both boat inspection report findings essentially had similar conclusions; that these vintage 50+ year old aluminum boats needed immediate attention

relating to upgrading and repairing the vessels and adhering to safety and maintenance standards and protocols.

During 2023, two beautiful boats, the “Monroe” and the 45 passenger “Eagle” were graciously provided to the Park from the good folks (Friends of Crystal River & Guest Services International, and Homosassa Springs), while the Park fleet was undergoing replacement(s). Although the scheduling was tight during this last year, the tours continued to be offered daily between 9 AM and 5 PM.

Over this last year, a vendor was selected (Trident Pontoon Boats, in Tavares FL) to replace the existing Park fleet (of four primary boats). Trident was able to complete and replace the existing boat fleet in record time during 2023, with the culmination of the last hybrid electric “Great Blue Heron” (generously donated by the Florida State Parks Foundation) being launched at a dedication ceremony held on November 17th. The boats are back in business, and tours will be continuing full throttle into this upcoming year! Reservations are available online and should be made before arriving at the park.



Florida State Parks Foundation and the Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park and Florida State Parks Director, Chuck Hatcher, Dedication Ceremony on Nov. 17th 2023

FRIENDS 2023 ACTIVITIES UPDATE

On January 26th to 27th, former Parks Manager Amy Conyers, Friends Secretary Renee Murray and President Julie Harrington, attended a joint Florida State Parks and Citizen Support Organization (CSO) conference in Altamonte Springs. There were numerous, diverse and interesting topics presented throughout the CSO-oriented days.



FDEP State Parks and CSO Conference held the week of January 23rd-27th 2023.



2023 Fact Sheet Relating to Florida State Parks

BILL STONE & BOB BALLARD

Prior to the Friends Board meeting last February 1st, the Friends hosted a fascinating Cave Diving & Wakulla Springs-specific research presentation by Drs. Bob Ballard (renowned Titanic researcher) & Bill Stone.



Drs. Bill Stone and Bob Ballard with Friends Board Members Cal Jamison, Karen Taylor and Former Park Manager Amy Conyers

FRIENDS ANNUAL MEETING 2023

The Friends annual meeting was held on a gorgeous day in the Terrace room of the Lodge on February 26th. Dr. Bill Stone presented his preliminary research activities during the last few weeks at Wakulla Springs. After a historical perspective of Dr. Stone's research, which has taken place at the Park with Wakulla 1 in 1987 and again in 1998 with Wakulla 2, we were treated to the initial 3D+ renderings of their most recent Wakulla 3 excursion at Sally Ward Spring. The researchers expect to return to Wakulla Springs in less than a year for ongoing research...we will keep you posted!



Wakulla 3 Research team (Stone Aerospace, WKPP, KUR, and Dr. Bob Ballard/Univ of Rhode Island Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute)

HISTORY FESTIVAL

On March 25th, the Friends and Park hosted two tables at the March 25th TCC (now TSC) History Festival in Kleman Plaza including a 3D Showing of the “Creature from the Black Lagoon”. The public was out in droves that day, and the 3D movie (at the Challenger Center) was shown to a packed theater!



History Festival held March 25th, with Park Ranger Aslan McMullian and Friends Member Melanie Watson, President Julie Harrington and Board Member Ming Ye

RIVERS BENEATH US

On April 25th, the Friends hosted the first in a series of Educational Environmental Forums entitled “Rivers Beneath Us” held at the Wakulla Environmental Institute. Two hydrogeologists; Tom Greenhalgh and Dr. Chris Werner, and a research economist, Jad Kabbani, presented on the current physiology and economic conditions of the Wakulla Spring cave system.



“Rivers Beneath Us” Educational Event on April 25th, with MC, Friends Board Member Renee Murray, and Presenters Jad Kabbani, Chris Werner and Tom Greenhalgh

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING WORKSHOP

On April 29th, the Environmental Learning and Communication Workshop was held at the Park, and co-sponsored by the Friends and FSU. The workshop was led by an interdisciplinary team of experts from FSU who shared their knowledge and expertise on microlearning, water testing and participatory GIS. Each component was designed to engage attendees and provide them with practical skills and knowledge. The second part of the workshop was Friends Board member Dr. Ming Ye’s presentation on water testing, and Mike Core’s lecture on participatory GIS focusing on how GIS and maps can be used to tell a story, communicate risk, share information, and make a difference in a community.

Two GIS apps, QuickCapture and Survey123 were introduced, and attendees were shown how to use them. The session provided users with a hands-on opportunity to learn about water quality in environmental communication and learning, and the significance of using GIS and maps to communicate environmental risks and issues.



FSU Environmental Learning and Communication Workshop Team and Participants on April 29th, 2023

ADVOCACY

During Spring and early Summer, the Friends continued to be involved in contributing evidence-based research information, and advocacy, at Wakulla County Commission meetings and through numerous letters supporting cave and springs protection relating to siting a proposed gas station (owned by SW Oil and Gas) directly above the Chip's Hole cave system, thereby feeding directly into Wakulla Springs. Ultimately, it was decided that the project would not move forward but the land would be purchased through a conservation program (e.g., FL Forever, Conservation FL, etc.).

PLAYGROUND & FAREWELL

The summer was also a bittersweet time for the Friends and Park staff. The Park Manager, Amy Conyers, was suddenly relieved of service, which was a difficult time for everyone, as it was most unexpected. On August 11th, we held both a playground construction day, followed by a going away party event on her behalf. Amy was instrumental in working with the Florida State Parks Foundation, Duke Energy, and the Friends, in securing funding for this ADA-playground project, among so many other attributes over the years. We wanted to honor her for her years of service to the Park, her stellar partnership with the Friends, and for the playground's completion.



Playground Project Completion on August 11th (and 12th) with Friends Volunteers David Shephard, Linda Keays, Randy Smith, and former Park Manager Sandy Cook

John Melton did a wonderful job assuming the role of interim Park Manager during those summer months, while the job search was underway. Due to the transition period, we were unable to hold the car show this year, but we will definitely have one in Fall of 2024!

A new Park Manager was hired. Lance Kelly began his job in late September. Lance was the former "GeoParks" (overseeing eight local State Parks) Park Manager, and had previously served as a Park Ranger at Wakulla Springs State Park. We are so fortunate that Lance has stepped into this new role as it's been a very seamless and smooth process, not only for himself, but for us (Park and Friends) as well. Lance has also hit the ground running with respect to upcoming projects and collaborative ideas/projects; we look forward to working with him, and will have more news to report this upcoming year!

TRUNK or TREAT

On October 28th we held a double-header event: the first "Trunk or Treat" event (at noon) followed by the "Creature Feature" event in the evening. The Friends had recently purchased a beautiful movie projection screen for this, and future movie-sharing events. This year, the Park, Capital City Video Lounge and the Friends partnered to provide three movies: 1) Creature from the Black Lagoon 2) Return of the Creature from the Black Lagoon, and; 3) Frogs (filmed locally). The weather was perfect, with a full moon peering through the trees, and about 400 people in attendance. The Lodge provided delicious Black Lagoon-themed food & drinks. The menu will definitely be expanded next time!

ERNEST TOOLE EVENT

On December 9th, the Friends held an event to honor Ernest Toole, a talented local musician, who has been performing and advocating on behalf of Springs protection, and for the Friends of Wakulla Springs for too many years to count. The event was deftly spearheaded by Board member Ken Beattie. It was a well-attended event, and both Ernest and his granddaughter Sarah, received awards/framed certificates for their prized years of dedicated service to the community – they are so well deserving!



Ernest Toole's Awards Ceremony on December 9th at the Park; with Fellow Musician Barry Sager (Flute), Sarah and Ernest Toole, and President Julie Harrington

GENERAL 2023 UPDATES

WATER SAMPLING PROGRAM

The regional water sampling program the Friends are involved in, with the University of Florida's Dr. John Bowden (Dept. of Physiological Sciences & Veterinary Sciences), has evolved into an ongoing partnership. We continue to be in communication with Dr. Bowden and providing letters of support for ongoing and future water quality research activities, but still haven't received our water sampling (for Per- and Polyfluoralkyl Substances, or PFAS) results for the Wakulla area's 30+ sites). It's hoped all will be ready for website viewability in 2024!

DEPT OF STATE DIV. OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES LODGE

ELEVATOR/WINDOWS GRANT UPDATE

The grant project team has continued to meet over 2023. Although the Architectural and Engineering Services (A&E) portion of the project had to be rebid (in early 2023) according to Florida Division of Historical Resources bid guidelines/procedures, the lowest bid came from the firm that was on our original proposal. MLD Architects have been very professional to work with this last year. They've completed their progress reports (100%) and we were able to hold a pre-bid conference in early December. We have one interested vendor (who has the prerequisite historical construction & restoration expertise) and we'll have the final bid opening on January 5th. Once the construction prime contractor is hired (hopefully in January), we'll be able to start the restoration work at the Lodge; including the chimneys, windows, fire escapes, drainage issues, and a few other items.

DONATION OF \$3,500 FROM ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION SOCIETY – JAPAN

The Friends are so appreciative and thankful for having received a generous donation of \$3,500 from the Ecosystem Conservation Society of Japan; facilitated by Kenochi “Ken” Yoshiya and John Outland (retired FDEP). If interested to learn about the ECS of Japan, their website is: <https://www.ecosys.or.jp/aboutus/english/index.html>

FAST FORWARD TO 2024

ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD MARCH 3rd

The Friends annual meeting is currently scheduled for Sunday, March 3rd at 1:00 PM in the Wakulla Springs Park Terrace Room (similar to last year). We will be discussing the Friends latest updates, ongoing and future planning activities, and introducing the prospective new and renewing talented Board members this year. There will also be lunch (buffet) available at 12:30 PM, prior to the annual meeting. We also hope to venture on our traditional annual boat ride after the meeting ends. Please stay tuned for more details.

FLORIDA TALKS PROGRAM SERIES

In 2023, we focused in the area of Florida History. The following are the list of speakers from the 2023 Spring series:

- Uzi Baram, Professor of Anthropology, New College of Florida, “The Historical Archaeology of the Sunshine State.”
- David Head, Historian and Author. “Pirates, Privateers, and the Fall of Spain’s Empire.”
- Eliot Kleinberg, Historian and Author. “War in Paradise: World War II in Florida.”

The previous virtual series were recorded and are available on our website if you weren't able to attend (or would like to watch again).

Click the image below to watch or re-watch the series.



Moving to 2024: This has been a very popular (with lots of positive feedback) event for the Friends membership these last few years! That said, we’re currently researching the cadre of available speakers offered through the Florida Humanities Council. We have not identified three speakers to date.

ARTOPIA LODGE AND FRIENDS EVENT SLATED FOR MAY 17th-19th

CAR SHOW SCHEDULED FOR FALL (OCT/NOV) 2024

MORE DETAILS TO FOLLOW FOR THESE EVENTS!

YOU ARE VALUED!

2023 has experienced a myriad of activities at Wakulla Springs State Park! We continue to hold monthly (first Wednesday of the month) Board meetings at 6:30 PM via the hybrid environment (including in-person and Zoom). Friends Membership Options have expanded on the Friends website

(see: <https://friendsofwakullaspringsstatepark.wildapricot.org/friends-of-wakulla-springs-membership>)

As a valued member, you're always welcome to join the monthly meetings. Also, feel free to send any comments/thoughts/contributions and/or interest in volunteering with the Friends to: Friends@wakullasprings.org.

Please know that we will continue to remain plugged in on issues that could potentially benefit or adversely affect the Springs. As a Member of the Friends of Wakulla Springs, you hold a special place in our organization. Your support to the Friends of Wakulla Springs is the backbone of our association and helps us to crystalize our plans into solutions to continue to serve the needs of Wakulla Springs State Park. Thank you again for your continued support of Wakulla Springs State Park. We truly appreciate you! Please let me know if you have any comments and/or questions, and look forward to seeing or speaking with you soon!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered on a light-colored rectangular background.

Julie Harrington, President
Friends@WakullaSprings.org