

DEDICATED TO HELPING PRESERVE, CONSERVE, ENHANCE,  
AND PROMOTE HUGH TAYLOR BIRCH STATE PARK

# BIRCH BULLETIN

## Recent Park Improvements

### **TEDDY'S PLAYGROUND IS OPEN!**



Thanks to the generosity of the Ted Stephan Family, the South Playground (located near the Banyan tree) is now being enjoyed daily by our young visitors. The reimagined, limitless playground and new ADA-accessible sidewalk replaced an old, decaying playground that was difficult to access. Although the sidewalk ran into environmental and permitting challenges, we are very happy with the upgrades. Rangers and

volunteers are working hard to plant around the area with native plants to create a pollinator garden. We thank the Stephan family for their generous donation which provide many other families with special memories of outings to Hugh Taylor Birch State Park!

### **THE PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY**

Come take a walk on Hugh Taylor Birch State Park's new pedestrian walkway at the main entrance on Sunrise Blvd. The walkway helps to reduce pedestrian traffic on the road, making a safer environment for all. A big thank you to park's hardworking volunteers for dedicating their time and skills for making this walkway a reality!



### **BEACH JACQUEMONTIA RESTORATION**



*Jacquemontia reclinata* (or "beach jacquemontia") is a long-lived, federally endangered trailing vine endemic to the coastal dune and coastal strand plant communities on barrier islands of southeast Florida. Rapid and widespread development of these communities has led to a massive reduction in available habitat, threatening the species with extinction. Fairchild Tropical Botanical

Gardens has worked diligently on the recovery of beach jacquemontia since the 1980s, with efforts including monitoring, translocations and reintroductions throughout its historical range. Over the past three decades almost all wild populations have observed widespread encroachment of both native and non-native woody species that threaten the long-term survival of beach jacquemontia and associated dune species. (continued on page 4)

## Welcome Park Manager Shane Zigler!



*Shane Zigler,  
Park Manager*

Shane has a background as a Park Services Specialist, Volunteer Manager, Interpretive Guide, Director of Marine Operations and Expedition Leader for oceanic manned-submersible research, film, and tourism expeditions, and he is

a licensed Captain with a 100-ton Masters License. Shane particularly enjoys fostering strong relationships with community stakeholders, local organizations, and government agencies.

By collaborating with these key partners, he has successfully implemented various initiatives, including educational programs, community events, and environmental conservation projects. He believes in the power of partnerships to further the mission of the Florida Park Service and create lasting positive impacts. Shane joined the park in July with his wife, Mary, and daughter, Pearl. We are all feeling and seeing the positive impact he has made on Birch State Park!

### **TEDDY'S PLAYGROUND**

THIS PLAYGROUND HAS BEEN  
DONATED BY THE  
TED STEPHAN FAMILY  
IN APPRECIATION OF THE LIFE THEY  
ENJOYED IN FORT LAUDERDALE  
WITH SPECIAL MEMORIES OF  
FAMILY OUTINGS TO  
HUGH TAYLOR BIRCH STATE PARK.

*Commemorative plaque honoring the Ted Stephan Family placed in Teddy's Playground in the South Pavilion*



FRIENDS OF  
BIRCH STATE PARK, INC.

## Executive Committee

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Ashley Sawyer Smith

### PAST PRESIDENT

Christine Madsen

### VICE PRESIDENT

Jim Ellis

### SECRETARY

Nancy Thies

### TREASURER

Tom Byrne

### AT LARGE

Stephen Botek

## Board of Directors

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Brittany Caldwell Beard

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Christie Caliendo

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Patrick Daoud

Dawn Read Diehl

Laura Elmore

Mary Forman

George Fussell Sr.

Heather Geronemus

Erica Gomer

Katherine Koenig

Rep. Chip LaMarca

Sarah Leonardi

Whitt Markum

Ann Mihaiu

Julie Saumsiegle

Shea Smith

Steve Tilbrook

William Walker

Paul Weinberg

## Honorary Council

Joe and Wini Amaturu

Gale Butler

Dominick and Meike Miniaci

Robert Roselli

## Staff

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Michelle Schmitz

MSchmitz@BirchStatePark.org

954-566-0660

### DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Bridget Marron

BMarron@BirchStatePark.org

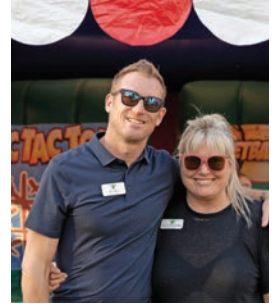
## President's Message

Spring is lovely at Birch State Park! We've had beautiful weather, relationships established and opportunities abound with our new park concessionaire, and the promise of park improvements have us excited for the months ahead. We wish a warm Ft. Lauderdale welcome to the park's new, on-site restaurant The Grille at the Grove—we're looking forward to a fun summer with renovations and continued improvement all around.

We just held our 4th annual Camp Birch Family Fun Day, an event we curate for our littler park patrons on park grounds at The Terramar House overlooking the ocean. This is my fourth year co-chairing the event with fellow board member Laura Elmore and each year we watch our Birch family grow. On May 6 we host our beloved Birdies for Birch Golf Tournament at Jacaranda Golf Club. Our golf committee is chaired by Stephen Botek (Botek Thurlow Engineering, Inc.) and Whitt Markum (Stiles), each working so hard to make the day special for our players. If you are a golfer, please join us!

The park has nearly a dozen groups committed to beach clean-ups and other, on-site service projects as we near closer to Earth Day (April 22). If your organization would like to make a difference in the park please reach out to our office staff and we'd be happy to coordinate a service project day. We're so appreciative of those willing to give their time to help our park and our planet.

Our board has also grown, join me in welcoming three new board members—each of whom have already made an impact on our organization—Brittany Caldwell Beard, JaCinda Carey, and Mary Forman. Thank you for your commitment to serve the Friends of Birch State Park. And we in turn give a fond farewell to retired board members Andrew Caldwell, Peggy Gehl, Ina Lee, and Steve Morse—thank you for your many years of service to the park!



Shea Smith, Board Member  
and Ashley Sawyer Smith,  
Board President

## AmeriCorps serve Birch State Park



Lis Phillips, Elijah Bryant and Shannon  
Scandiffio

Elijah Bryant and Shannon Scandiffio are Florida Conservation Corps members servicing the park for an 11-month period (the second 11-month period for Elijah) as part of Project A.N.T. (AmeriCorps non-native plant terminators). This program focuses on invasive plant management and trail improvement in Florida's State Parks. They spend a majority of their time outdoors in Florida's harsh environments treating and removing invasive

plants through the use of herbicides and manual efforts, surveying for invasive plants, and performing trail improvements. Lis Phillips is a Member of Project R.O.A.R (regional outreach and awareness recruiters). In her role, Lis works directly with the park to lead and develop new interpretive programs, create signs and coordinate outreach endeavors.



EXCLUSIVELY FOR FRIEND'S MEMBERS  
**Saturday, Oct. 12, 2024 at the Banyan Pavilion**  
9:30am – 11:00am  
Breakfast, Camaraderie, Park Updates and More



## Executive Director's Message



Michelle Schmitz

I want to thank so many of you, who were gracious to our Holiday giving campaign. It has been so helpful in meeting the growing needs of the park. Very few weeks go by without an immediate necessity for support from Friends, and we are happy to be here and have the resources to provide!

"Walk with Friends" was so well received by the Community! It was so humbling to see representatives from local businesses, our daily volunteers, the Fort Lauderdale Garden Club and even some tourists all come out and walk together in support of the Park. We very much look forward to growing this event in November.

Camp Birch Family Fun Day continues to be one of the highlights of my year. It is always so fun to see how the kids have grown and to be able to "wow" them with new experiences each year. I spend the other 364 days, trying to convince my own children that I do not in fact ride on the little train every day. I am so grateful to the wonderful women on that committee. Ashley, Laura, Christie, Erica and JaCinda, continue to bring new ideas and suggestions that make the day a success.



Bridget Marron

There have been so many noticeable changes around the park. Much of this can be attributed to our new Park Manager Shane Zigler. Shane brought to Birch a wealth of experience, that has helped to move so many projects and initiatives forward. He is incredibly proactive and has encouraged collaboration amongst all the park's entities. On behalf of our entire Board, we are so happy to welcome Shane and his family to Birch State Park!

As the summer months bring a small cease to park visitation and fundraisers, we look forward to devoting additional time to our projects. Improvements are being made to the park's audio tour and informational kiosks around the park, with help from the Park Rangers and Lis, our AmeriCorps volunteer. We are searching for funding to replace the failing roof at Elk's Youth Camp Lodge. It is already booked nearly every weekend this summer. The replacement of Culvert 2 is slated for June. We expect minor interruption to operations during those times but are excited to see this necessary project completed. The Friends of Birch construction committee have dedicated countless hours to making the Trestle over Long Lake a reality for the park. This summer, plans and funding are being finalized. We also look forward to our continued discussions with the Community Foundation of Broward, Museum of Discovery and Science, Flamingo Gardens and the Florida Wildlife Corridor as we formalize plans for a new exhibit and amphitheater. For more information on these and more projects, please visit page four or please call me. I would love to provide you with a tour of the Park!

mschmitz@birchstatepark.org

## Welcome New Board Members!



**Brittany Beard  
Caldwell**  
AXG Advisors



**JaCinda  
Carey**  
Seacrest  
Pools



**Mary Forman**  
One Sotheby's  
International  
Realty

## Recent Park Improvements

### **BEACH JACQUEMONTIA RESTORATION** (continued from page 1)

Funding from the USFWS Coastal Program has allowed Fairchild to focus on beach jacquemontia habitat restoration, working with land managers and partners like The Institute for Regional Conservation (IRC) to develop and implement long-term management strategies. Restoration of appropriate coastal habitat and maintenance of existing suitable habitat are vital to the survival of extant wild and reintroduced populations.

Previous evaluations of the wild beach jacquemontia population at Hugh Taylor Birch State Park showed a declining trend, with only 18 plants observed in late 2021 (from 97 plants in 2000). Fairchild GIS records as well as publicly available aerial photos show decreasing population footprint and available habitat from 1995 to today. By 2023, the beach jacquemontia habitat was reduced to a small "room" of less

than one tenth of an acre, walled-off by native and non-native hardwoods. Over the past decade, Fairchild made management recommendations to park staff which included hardwood reduction (primarily sea grape, poisonwood, oak) to open up additional habitat for the population.

In December of 2023, Fairchild's team of biologists began the restoration process. In the coming year, Fairchild will continue working with contractors and Park staff to conduct hardwood reduction and removal in the historic footprint of the species. This will expand the space available for the remaining plants and allow the population to expand back into areas it historically occupied. This area doubles as a gopher tortoise habitat. It is likely that the tortoises would also benefit from more open, sunny areas that could support herbaceous plants that make up much of their diet.

## On the Horizon...

### **CULVERT 2 REPLACEMENT**

The replacement of culvert 2 (located just north of the Water Taxi stop) is slated to take place in June. This will force closure of the loop road for two weeks, while repairs are made. This is one of two culverts that run under the road from the Intracoastal to the mangrove tidal areas inside the Park. These culverts permit tidal flow in and out of the mangrove habitat necessary for a healthy, thriving ecosystem. However, the culvert had separated along its connection, causing the surrounding fill to wash out through the culverts into both the mitigation area and the Intracoastal. Replacement of culvert 1 was concluded in late-2022.



### **REIMAGING THE ORIGINAL TRAIN TRESTLE**



The old train trestle above Long Lake is all that's left of the Scenic Railroad that traveled around Hugh Taylor Birch State Park. The train introduced visitors to the way Florida looked when Mr. Birch found it in 1893. That was his wish: for future generations to enjoy his 180-acre estate as a nature park.

The Friends of Birch have been working with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to construct a walkway, built over the old train trestle. This bridge will connect to the current "Rail Trail" located alongside the Banyan parking lot with the road closest to the Terramar Visitor Center. This ADA-accessible non-motorized diverse-use trail connector will be used by walkers, joggers, and bike riders. It will connect not only to the existing trails within the Park, but also to the larger Florida Greenways and Trails network.

To date, all planning work has been completed in-kind by our valuable construction committee John Barranco (Barranco & Gonzalez Architecture), Stephen Botek (Botek Thurlow Engineering), Tyler Chappell (The Chappell Group), Paul Weinberg (KEITH), Whitt Markum (Stiles) and Marcus Unterweger (MUEngineers, Inc.). A recent application was submitted to the Recreational Trails Program for a necessary financial match. We hope to receive the funding required and finalize the permits by Fall 2024!

### **WILDLIFE CORRIDOR EXHIBIT**

In collaboration with the Community Foundation of Broward, the Florida Wildlife Corridor, Museum of Discovery and Science and Flamingo Gardens we are working to install an outdoor exhibit featuring our park's coastal wildlife. The exhibit will ultimately include a small amphitheater, interpretive panels and moveable hands-on exhibits for learners of all ages to explore. The amphitheater will become the hub for interpretive programs like the Animal Program and interpretive talks led by our Rangers and volunteers. We are excited to partner with these fantastic organizations as we continue to enhance Birch State Park.



## THANK YOU!

### Terramar Society Members

#### **Banyan Level - \$5,000**

Jim & Olya Ellis  
Sherry Meehan  
Bruno Mejean & Martina Hund-Mejean  
The McDonald and Family  
The Miniaci Family

#### **Manatee Level - \$2,000**

Dorian & Pat Damoorgian  
Gale Butler & Randy Pohlman  
Chris & Connie Williams  
The Parrot Lounge

#### **Sea Turtle Level - \$1,000**

Joe & Wini Amaturio  
Mari Mennel-Bell & Joel Greenbaum  
Stephen & Kari Botek  
Bill Brown & Michael Scott  
Andrew & Connie Caldwell  
Tyler & Sarah Chappell  
Michael & Mary Ellen Coen  
Ed Cumisky & Amanda Hunt  
The Dettman Family  
Doug & Jane Eagon  
Martin Lesser & Linda Groene  
Tim Ingham & Julie Pabst  
Judy Joseph & Mark Greenberg  
Gary & Roberta Karch  
Andy & Fena Macdonald  
Mark McGuire & Craig Wilson  
Admiral James McManamon &  
Pamela Braden  
Robert Rothschild  
J.J. Schaffer  
Ashley, Shea & Ruby Smith  
Bill & Nancy Thies  
E.C. Traver

The Terramar Society and General Members of Friends of Birch State Park are the backbone of the Friends' operation.

We thank these loyal annual supporters.

(954) 566-0660 [birchstatepark.org](http://birchstatepark.org)





## Camp Birch Family Fun Day

Friends of Birch's 4th Annual Camp Birch Family Fun Day presented by JM Family Enterprises was held on Saturday, February 24th from 3-6pm. Nearly 300 attendees bounced on trampolines, rode the rubber tire train, enjoyed burgers from The Grill at The Grove, learned from Park Rangers, created sand art, and never stopped playing! The day brought beautiful weather and great friends together. Netting a record \$32,000 for Friends of Birch State Park, the whole day was a success! All was made possible by co-chairs Ashley Sawyer Smith and Laura Elmore, and committee members Christie Caliendo, Erica Gomer, Arielle Peters and JaCinda Carey, who went above and beyond to secure sponsors, auction items and attendees.



## THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT SPONSORS!



PRESENTING SPONSOR



## Special Delivery!



President Ashley Sawyer Smith, V.P. Jim Ellis, Bridget Marron, Michelle Schmitz and Ranger Heather

Two brand new lithium battery EZ-GO golf carts were donated by Friends and an anonymous donor to the Park this January. These new carts will be used to tram visitors, provide park tours and for the Rangers to provide daily security and maintenance. They help to replace trams in our aging fleet. Thank you to all who support Friends and make donations like this possible!



## New Concessionaire, New Opportunities!

In late Fall, the concession agreement between BG Concessions and the Florida Park Service was terminated for convenience. In a competitive open call for business plan process, the bid was awarded to ExplorUS. They are a Kansas-based company with locations in 50 parks nationwide. Hugh Taylor Birch State Park is their first property in Florida, an area they hope to grow. ExplorUS opened their restaurant and operations in the previous footprint of Park & Ocean. The new operation "The Grove" offers a similar coastal menu, specialty drinks, local beers and live music. They have increased the retail experience and have added coffee and pastry service in the morning.



The Grove also operates the recreational rentals from The Boathouse, beachside rentals and event rentals within the park. New to this agreement is access to the Garden Center. ExplorUS will renovate the building, make it ADA-accessible and open the facility for events. (Don't worry, it will keep the same charm!) Within the agreement, \$500,000 in capital improvements are to be made over the next 10 years which will include replacement of long lake boat dock, a new beach concession stand and renovations of the Garden Center and restaurant.

LOOK  
WHAT'S  
NEW!

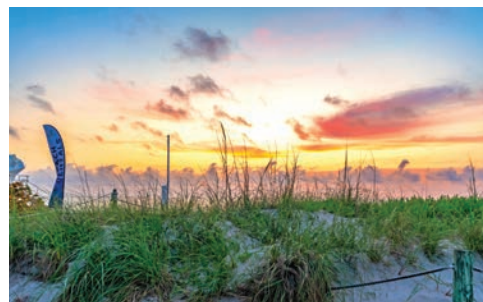
Along with the changes, the Florida Park Service saw this as an opportunity to better track park attendance and collect admission fees. Park admission is now being recorded by The Grove staff in the concession building. We are all excited about this new partnership and the opportunities it will bring for the Park! Check out our Facebook and Instagram for upcoming "Celebrity Bartending" events at The Grill at The Grove. Our fantastic Board Members will be volunteering their time to serve as bartenders, while The Grove donates a portion of the proceeds to the Friends.



EAT

DRINK

PLAY





## SAVE THE DATE: **Walk with Friends** Saturday, Nov. 9th, 2024



The inaugural Walk with Friends presented by UKG was held on Saturday, November 4, 2023. Although predicted to be a beautiful morning, it turned out to be the rainiest day Fort Lauderdale had seen in weeks! The rain did not stop the fun. The event had over 200 individuals sign up and raised over \$20,000. Those who battled the downpour and the subsequent mosquitos had a fabulous time! All this was made possible by our generous sponsors: Ultimate Kronos Group, Presenting Sponsor; Ellis Diversified, Gold Sponsor; City of Fort Lauderdale – Public Works, Silver Sponsor and Koenig IP and Miller Construction; Bronze Sponsors. Of course, the event would not have been a success without our host committee: Julie Saumsiegle, Ann Mihaiu, Mary Forman and Ashley Sawyer Smith.



*Michelle Schmitz, Katherine Koenig, George Fussell, Julie Saumsiegle, Heather Geronemus, Ashley Sawyer Smith, Stephen Botek, Nancy Thies, John Barranco, Chris Madsen (and Star), Bridget Marron*



*Miller Construction team enjoying the after party!*



*Walking with Friends!*



*Heather Geronemus, UKG with opening remarks*



*John & Summer Barranco, Stephen Botek & Dani Moschella*

## Terramar Holiday Party

On December 7th, members of the Terramar Society gathered at Wild Thyme Restaurant to celebrate the Holidays. Members were recognized for their annual contributions to Friends of Birch State Park. New "Friends" were made in the groups shared love and adoration for Birch State Park!



*Photos from left:  
Bill and Nancy Thies*



*Jim & Olya Ellis, Shane Zigler and Bridget Marron*

*Shane Zigler, Doug & Jane Eagon, Connie & Chris Williams and Pat Damoorgian*



## Thank you Terramar Members!



FRIENDS OF  
BIRCH STATE PARK, INC.

3109 E Sunrise Blvd.  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304

FRIENDS OF  
BIRCH STATE  
PARK:  
UPDATE ON  
PARK  
HAPPENINGS  
AND EVENTS!



GOLF TOURNAMENT

FOR BIRCH

BIRDS

FRIENDS OF BIRCH STATE PARK

SAVE THE DATE:  
MONDAY, MAY 6, 2024