Outdoor recreation is big business. It is important to our economy and our environment.

A survey in 2000 reported that sixty-six percent of the American public participates in some kind of outdoor recreation at least several times as a month. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, twice as many Americans birdwatch as play golf. Americans spend more than $18 billion annually to watch, feed and photograph birds and other wildlife. Some of those dollars are reinvested in statewide programs to help preserve land for greenways and trails, providing opportunities for people and wildlife.

Osceola County is trying to help outdoor enthusiasts learn more about the environment while exploring our outdoors. The greenways and trails newsletter, The Pathfinder, lists a variety of natural and paved trails around the county. Contact the UF/IFAS Extension Office for a free copy by calling 321-697-3000 or email efoe@osceola.org.

October is Greenways and Trails month and a variety of activities are going on around the state to help citizens become aware of opportunities close to home. Go to www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/.

The Florida Freewheelers bicycle club is sponsoring several rides next weekend. Saturday, Oct. 4, they will meet at 8 AM at the east side of the Courthouse, for a ride called "Rolling through a Cow Town". This is a social ride where they ride as fast as the slowest rider. This is approximately 17 miles with a break about ½ way. This is on mostly back roads/city streets and some on the new Bill Johnston Memorial Pathway.

Sunday, Oct 5, they will lead a ride called "Osceola East Loop Plus" beginning at 8 AM at the parking lot of St. Cloud boat basin, downtown at the lakefront. This is a tour ride of approx. 35 miles. It is mostly on the Osceola East Loop so traffic is a little heavier and it is probably better for riders with more experience. For more information, contact Mark Gill at 407-791-3429 or or email him at mgil@kvcom.net.

Wildlife, like people, have basic needs for shelter, food and water. They also need space and some animals need a lot of space or connections to a variety of habitats. Humans also enjoy these connections. Walking, biking, hiking, horseback trails or paddling trails allow us to stay connected with our natural surroundings.

Residents can provide space for wildlife close to home by providing diversity in the landscape. Large expanses of single species of plants don’t attract as many types of creatures. Include a variety of trees, shrubs, groundcovers, wildflowers, and natural grasses for your landscape.

Grow plants that mature at varying heights to provide hiding places and nesting sites for the widest variety of species. Thorny plants are good for many birds because they help to protect their babies from predators. Brush piles, low vines, and groundcovers provide low places for many animals to nest, feed or hide.

Dead trees and logs also provide homes for animals. Leave them if they don’t threaten property damage. Remove the limbs and leave the main trunk allowing it to decompose on its own. Woodpeckers, lizards, owls, possums, and many insects find their homes in the rotting wood.

Use plants as natural feeders to attract wildlife. Many provide fruits and nuts that are seasonal food. Select plants that produce foods at different times of the year for the best smorgasbord for your feathered and furry friends. Insects are food for a variety of wildlife. Some feed on plants, but may not cause significant damage to them. Some insects feed on other insects and never damage plants.
Contact the Extension office for more information on attracting wildlife to your landscape. Whether you prefer to walk, bike, hike or paddle, explore our natural world along the way.

Eleanor Foerste  
Natural Resources Agent  
Osceola County Extension/University of Florida  
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane  
Kissimmee, FL 34744  
(321) 697-3000  
Fax (321) 697-3010  
efoe@osceola.org  
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu  
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