PLANT LIFE COLUMN

GREENWAYS AND TRAILS

The Governor has proclaimed October as Florida Greenways and Trails Month. The weather is great this time of year so get outside, get some fresh air and get some exercise as you explore some of our recreational pathways and natural areas.

Osceola County Extension/University of Florida is working with a variety of county and city staff members as well as user groups to support the development of community and ecosystem connections in Osceola County.

The planning team has established several goals:

- identify existing public land, significant natural areas, historic and cultural resources and recreational trails
- develop and assist with implementing a greenways and trails master plan to connect communities and these resources through a network of natural corridors and recreational trails
- identify funding sources and educate the public on greenways and trails recreational opportunities within Osceola County.

A series of public input sessions started the process of developing a Greenways and Trails Master Plan. The county just received $100,000 from the Office of Greenways and Trails for projects at Lake Lizzie Preserve east of St. Cloud off Old Melbourne Highway.

We meet about once a month to discuss topics relevant to our goals. The meetings are open to anyone who would like to be active in the planning effort. Call 407-846-4181 for information on upcoming meetings.

Central Florida is hosting the National Trails Symposium at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort November 9-13. It is a great chance for trails planners and users to interact and learn from experiences across the nation. Volunteers interested in trails are needed to help with various aspects of the conference. Details are available at www.americantrails.org at the symposium link.

If you haven't been here long enough to discover some of our treasures, how do you find out where to go? A full color nature and heritage guide was produced by Osceola County Convention and Visitors Bureau to share information about our history and environment with guests. It contains information about greenways and trails. Contact information and details are updated in the "Osceola Pathfinder" newsletter. The next issue is in press and will be available in early November. Call 407-846-4181 ext 121 to get a copy. The spring issue is currently online and has descriptions and locations for both paved and nature trails in the county.

The county and city staff have been doing a lot of work on Makinson Island to widen trails, remove exotic invasive plants and renovate the boat landing on the west side of the island where there is public access. The 132 acre island has a perimeter trail that takes you through a beautiful cabbage palm hammock and hardwood and cypress swamp. Allow a leisurely two hour walk. Picnic tables are under a shelter and available on a first come first served basis.

The public has access by boat or by charter with area guides. Information on businesses providing access to the island is in the newsletter.

Special trips to the island will be available during limited times at Aquamania, a celebration of our lakes.
and the environment. This year's event, November 9 and 10 at the lakefront in downtown Kissimmee includes a variety of fun and educational activities. Aquamania provides opportunities to experience nature and learn more about fishing and boating on our lakes. Guest speakers share detailed information on environmental topics at mini-seminars on Saturday. Last years' event boasts attendance of 23,000 guests from throughout Central Florida.

Staff from various agencies will be available to discuss issues relating to the draw down of Lake Tohopekaliga which is scheduled to begin November 1st if all permits are approved. See native plants and animals, learn fishing tips and find out about our Florida birds. Find out how to take care of your landscape and what you can do to help keep our waterways clean. There will be activities for kids including a fishing rodeo and casting contest on Saturday. Businesses and organizations can enter cardboard raft races but need to register in advance.

Free concerts on Saturday and Sunday are another reason to make a day of it at the Lakefront Park. Pre-band entertainment beginning at 3:30 p.m. both days with Foghat playing Saturday and Clay Walker on stage Sunday. Call Osceola County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 407-847-5000 for more information.

Make plans to enjoy our trails and natural areas and visit Aquamania to find out more about our land of lakes.

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