

# Landscapes

7 BETWEEN TWO LAKES ~  
CONSERVATION OF A FAMILY  
HOMESTEAD

11 A PATH TO PURPOSE  
AND PLACE

13 PERKS OF THE JOB



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SUMMER

NORTH FLORIDA  
LAND TRUST

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2025







# A LETTER FROM Leadership

Dear Friends,

The first half of 2025 has been a powerful affirmation of NFLT's vision for the future; a vision rooted in protecting the wild and working lands that define our region and ensure they endure for generations to come.

At Smith Lake Preserve, we completed a long-anticipated chapter in its restoration. The removal of the final 1.5 miles of submerged fencing has enhanced water flow, improved habitat connectivity, and restored more natural conditions. New interpretive signage along the Florida Trail now enriches the visitor experience and deepens the connection between people and the landscapes we safeguard.

Across North Florida, significant conservation milestones have strengthened our footprint. In Putnam County, we partnered with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to protect 385 acres of family-owned land through a conservation easement. In Clay County, we closed on an 83-acre easement with the Hughes family, securing both habitat and working lands. And looking ahead, our role in facilitating the upcoming preservation of 76,000 acres in the Ocala to Osceola (O2O) Wildlife Corridor marks a truly historic achievement for our state, with closing scheduled in 2026.

This momentum was felt at our 2025 Annual Meeting, which drew record-breaking attendance, and was an inspiring sign of growing public engagement. We were also honored to be named one of Florida Trend Magazine's Best Companies to Work For, a testament to the values and dedication of our team.

In this summer edition of Landscapes, we focus on the personal side of conservation, the stories behind the headlines. In "Between Two Lakes" we learn how one man's desire to preserve his memories of place and family resulted in an opportunity for NFLT to expand its reach and stewardship. A former intern extraordinaire, Will Wanzenberg, shares his journey of finding his why and his passion for conservation in "A Path to Purpose and Place." We share details of a new partnership between NFLT and Sea & Shoreline and the work we are doing together to make the St. Johns River healthier, and we share anecdotes from a unique opportunity born out of our partnership with the U.S. Navy.

While acquisitions and projects are the tangible results of our mission, it's the stories and experiences along the way that are our "why." They fuel our commitment to Keep North Florida Wild. Thank you, as always, for standing with us, today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.



**Rev. Cn. Allison DeFoor**  
President & CEO









# NFLT In The News



## THREE NEW MEMBERS TO JOIN NFLT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**February 2025** – NFLT welcomed Janyce Dawkins, Tom Goodrich, and Natalie Healy to its board of directors in January 2025 when all three began their three-year terms. Dawkins, a retired attorney and former director of the equal opportunity office at the University of Georgia, is the immediate past president of the American Beach Property Owners Association. Goodrich, a private wealth adviser with Ameriprise Financial and longtime Atlantic Beach resident, brings decades of environmental advocacy. Healy, of Jacksonville Beach, manages operations for The Healy Foundation and serves on the board of Pace Center for Girls, Jacksonville. Each brings valuable expertise and a shared commitment to keeping North Florida wild.



## NFLT'S ANNUAL MEETING CELEBRATED CONSERVATION MILESTONES AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEROES

**April 2025** – NFLT recognized the accomplishments of its 25th year with a sold-out Annual Meeting on March 30 at The Yards in Ponte Vedra, raising nearly \$130,000 to support conservation. Guests heard from keynote speaker Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole, who shared her family's historic ties to American Beach. President & CEO Allison DeFoor presented awards to those advancing NFLT's mission: Conservation Legacy Award to former Florida House Speaker Paul Renner; Partners of the Year to Florida Senator Jennifer Bradley and Representative Sam Garrison; Volunteers of the Year to Keith and Suzanne Langenberg for their stewardship of Bogey Creek; and the Charlie Commander Land Conservation Award to Jack Thornton, whose family donated nearly 400 acres on Amelia Island in December.



## NFLT CELEBRATED EARTH DAY WITH AN INTERPRETATIVE SIGN REVEAL AT SMITH LAKE PRESERVE

**April 2025** – NFLT celebrated Earth Day by unveiling interpretative signs along a portion of the Florida National Scenic Trail at Smith Lake Preserve. Made possible through a gift from Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) through its charitable arm, the NextEra Energy Foundation, the signs give hikers information on the habitats throughout the preserve and the efforts to preserve the natural spaces in North Florida. Signs at the trailhead kiosk explain NFLT's mission to protect and preserve the natural landscape and ecosystems of North Florida and why conservation is so important. It also gives a history of Smith Lake Preserve. Along the trail, the six signs explain the habitats and wildlife throughout the preserve. Topics include the role of fire in maintaining an ecosystem, the increasingly rare sandhill habitat, the Florida Scrub habitat, and the wet prairies and lake habitats. A fifth sign showcases the birds found in Smith Lake Preserve and the final sign is about the gopher tortoise; a keystone species found within the preserve.





## **NFLT PRESERVED MORE THAN 83 ACRES NEAR CAMP BLANDING THROUGH A CONSERVATION EASEMENT**

**May 2025** – NFLT acquired a conservation easement on 83 acres in Clay County, southeast of Camp Blanding, within the Army Compatible Use Buffer zone and the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor. The property, owned by the Hughes family, was protected using funds through the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program.

Situated near Milam Preserve, Smith Lake Preserve, and Gold Head Branch State Park, the land is the family's primary residence and includes homes, a horse barn, and pastureland. The agreement allows continued private use while prohibiting further development. The conservation easement will ensure the protection of upland pine forest, open pasture, and habitat for species like white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and the protected gopher tortoise. It also buffers Camp Blanding, protects aquifer recharge areas, and helps prevent flooding.



## **NFLT AND PARTNERS PROTECTED MORE THAN 385 ACRES IN PUTNAM COUNTY**

**June 2025** – NFLT and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection protected more than 385 acres in Putnam County with a conservation easement on family-owned property adjacent to the Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway and near Orange Springs. It connects existing conservation lands within the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor and FDEP purchased the conservation easement from the O'Connor family with funding from the Florida Forever program. This was the second time NFLT facilitated a conservation easement purchase from the family in coordination with FDEP. Approximately one year ago, an 855.35-acre conservation easement was purchased from the O'Connors on property east of this location and also within the O2O.

The preservation of the property provides natural resource protection and recreational opportunities. Comprised of four parcels of land, it is a mix of uplands and wetlands. The land plays an important role in water quality protection, supports aquifer recharge, and is vital for landscape-scale restoration efforts in the region. Preserving this land is also critical for native plants and wildlife, including the Florida black bear.



## **NFLT CONGRATULATES THE GOVERNOR AND CABINET FOR APPROVING MORE THAN 78,000 OF CONSERVATION LAND**

**June 2025** – NFLT celebrated a landmark victory as Governor Ron DeSantis and the Cabinet approved the acquisition of more than 78,000 acres of conservation land with more than 76,000 in the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor. As lead of the O2O Partnership, NFLT convened key stakeholders, worked with former Florida House Speaker Paul Renner to secure funding, and championed the effort from start to finish. The largest project, a 61,000-acre working forest in Baker and Union counties, connects the Raiford Wildlife Management Area to the Osceola National Forest. A second 14,000-acre easement in Baker and Bradford counties links to Jennings State Forest and Camp Blanding. These protections secure vital habitat for species such as the Florida black bear and American kestrel, safeguard aquifer recharge and wetland systems, sustain rural forestry economies, and ensure the long-term resilience of this 100-mile ecological corridor.





## NFLT MAKES IMPROVEMENTS AT SMITH LAKE PRESERVE THANKS TO TWO GENEROUS DONORS

**July 2025** – NFLT completed a long-anticipated project at Smith Lake Preserve to remove an old fence from Smith Lake that was a significant obstacle for wildlife and a potential danger to boaters, swimmers and researchers. Two generous donors, Faith and Rick Hoffman, and the Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Funds, made the fence removal project possible. The cross-fencing on Smith Lake was built in the early 2000s for livestock grazing, when the land was privately owned and the lakebed had been exposed due to a severe drought. Over the years, the water levels naturally rose, submerging the fence and impeding the movement of aquatic species like fish, turtles, amphibians, and alligators, causing population imbalances and disrupting ecological processes. The work was done with no impact on the surrounding environment.



## NFLT ACQUIRES NEARLY 80 ACRES OF CONSERVATION LAND IN BRADFORD COUNTY

**July 2025** – NFLT expanded conservation land within the Ocala to Osceola (O2O) Wildlife Corridor by purchasing more than 79 acres in Bradford County. The land is west of the Camp Blanding Joint Training Center, and about a quarter mile from Water Oak Creek Preserve, a property of more than 1,100 acres that NFLT acquired at the end of 2024. Protecting this land will allow NFLT to increase the natural habitat for many wildlife and plant species. It will also help buffer Camp Blanding and its training operations and keep it free from incompatible development in perpetuity. The nonprofit land conservation organization bought the property from Brian and Meghan Nicoletti and funding was provided by the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program and the Army Compatible Use Buffer program. Much of the acquired property consists of forested wetlands and cypress swamps. The remainder is a mixed hardwood hammock and improved pasture. The land provides habitat for the Florida black bear, deer, turkey, and sandhill cranes, all of which have been observed on the property.



## NFLT RECOGNIZED AS A TOP WORKPLACE IN FLORIDA BY *FLORIDA TREND* MAGAZINE

**July 2025** – NFLT was named one of Florida's Best Companies To Work For by *Florida Trend* magazine. The annual list, featured in the August issue, ranks companies in small, medium, and large employer categories. NFLT ranked ninth out of 36 in the Best Small Companies category. The nonprofit land conservation organization, which has 18 employees and two consultants, has been operating in Florida since 1999. NFLT underwent an evaluation of workplace policies, practices, philosophy, systems and demographics. NFLT leadership completed an in-depth questionnaire about the nonprofit's practices, programs, employee benefits, policies, and population statistics. Employees were then asked to participate in a survey, which included questions about their experience, job satisfaction, workplace culture, and other topics. NFLT was required to have at least an 80 percent employee response rate, but they exceeded that with 100 percent participation from staff. *Florida Trend* used combined scores from the questionnaire and the surveys to determine the final ranking.





# Between Two Lakes

How a Family Homestead  
Became a Cornerstone of  
Conservation



For generations, the Glisson family's land stretched wide across what is now the quiet, unincorporated hamlet of McRae, Florida. Like so many family farms, it slowly began to change. Parcels were sold to neighbors, pieces were gifted to children, and the acreage that once spanned hundreds dwindled down to its last 51.

That final piece, known as the M&M Ranch, was first the pride of Merrill and Marie Glisson. After their passing, it became the home of their daughter Janice and her husband, Tim Wilder.

Perched between Glisson Lake and Big Lake Johnson and pressed up against the edge of Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park, the property feels like a step back in time. On a moonless night, the Milky Way spills across the sky, undimmed by artificial light. Mornings bring the trumpet of sandhill cranes across the water, the shuffle of wild turkeys through the pines, and, on rare days, the shadowy presence of a black bear moving along the tree line.

When Mrs. Wilder passed, Tim's children urged him to move closer to them in Jacksonville. Reluctantly, he decided it was time to let go of the last remaining link to the Glisson family's history. That's when North Florida Land Trust entered the picture.

NFLT's Stewardship Department has its headquarters at Smith Lake Preserve located just outside Keystone Heights. The nature preserve was acquired through the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program, designed to protect the training mission at nearby Camp Blanding by creating a buffer of preserved lands. A short distance away lies another NFLT property, the Robert E. Milam Jr. Preserve. At just over 200 acres, it is wild and beautiful, but it has challenges: limited access and tricky management.

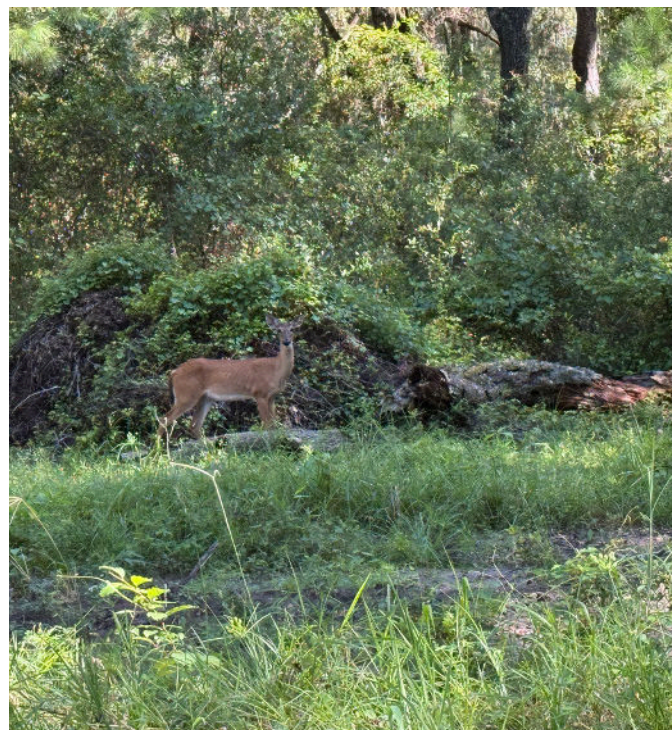
One afternoon, as NFLT's director of land stewardship, Rianna LaChapelle, was driving home, she noticed a weathered real estate sign at the end of a dirt road. "51 acres for sale," it read. The location caught her attention. Could this be the very piece of land that connected to Milam Preserve? She pulled over, snapped a photo, and sent it to NFLT's Conservation Acquisitions team with a simple question: *Is this ours to save?*

**It was; and more than that, it was a keystone.**

By purchasing the M&M Ranch, NFLT could open a direct route into Milam Preserve, vastly improving access for stewardship and restoration work. The property's lakes, wetlands, and forests would become part of a protected landscape linking state park land with existing preserves, expanding critical habitat for wildlife, and safeguarding the scenic character of the area.

With support from the ACUB program, the acquisition went forward. Today, the land where the Glisson family lived for generations is forever preserved, its forests, lakeshores, and night skies safe from development.

Standing on the shore of Glisson Lake now, one can imagine the generations who came before and those still to come, looking out over the same view. The wild calls of cranes and turkeys echo just as they always have. The Milky Way still spills across the dark sky. And the story of this land, once nearly lost, has found its way into the forever chapter.







# Beneath the Surface

## Restoring the Roots of a Healthy River



Beneath the calm surface of the St. Johns River, a quiet but critical restoration effort is taking shape. NFLT, in partnership with Sea & Shoreline, is working to restore approximately 40 acres of *Vallisneria americana*—better known as eelgrass or tape grass—in the river’s lower reaches.

Submerged aquatic vegetation like eelgrass plays an essential role in Florida’s freshwater ecosystems. It stabilizes sediment, filters pollutants, improves water clarity, and provides food and shelter for countless species. Nearly 80% of commercial fish and shellfish depend on it at some point in their life cycle. But in the St. Johns River, eelgrass has suffered major declines from nutrient pollution, invasive species, and changes in water flow.

The most significant blow came during the 2017 hurricane season, when Hurricane Irma caused severe flooding and extended periods of low water clarity. Without sunlight, eelgrass beds withered. In their absence, algae flourished, making recovery even more difficult.

Despite these setbacks, restoration efforts in areas with better water clarity and reduced grazing pressure have shown encouraging results. In the right conditions, *Vallisneria* can spread quickly, creating lush underwater meadows that anchor the ecosystem. That’s why this new restoration site near the Bayard Wildlife Management Area and just south of the Shands Bridge was chosen. Bordering conserved land, it offers an ideal location for habitat recovery.

The project involves planting eelgrass and installing temporary protective cages to shield young plants from grazing by turtles and manatees. Once the plants are well established, the cages will be removed allowing the eelgrass to expand naturally.

Kala Neighbor, NFLT’s Land Stewardship Liaison, is overseeing the plantings and monitoring the site’s progress. “Restoring *Vallisneria* here has the potential to strengthen the health of the river for generations to come,” she says.

While challenges like water quality and invasive species remain, this project is a model for science-driven, adaptive conservation. Step by step, planting by planting, eelgrass restoration can help rebuild the foundation of a healthier St. Johns River, benefiting both wildlife and the communities that depend on it.





# A Path to Purpose and Place

## My Conservation Journey

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BY WILL WANZENBERG

Starting a career can feel a lot like venturing onto an unfamiliar trail. You take the first steps without knowing exactly where it will lead. The path rarely runs straight, it climbs over mountains, bends around rivers, and forks in unexpected places, asking you to choose before you know what lies ahead.

My own path wasn't mapped out. I moved from Illinois to Florida for school with no clear plan for what would come next. I was an idealistic student, eager to save the world but unsure where to start. Like many of my peers, I wanted to tackle the world's problems but felt paralyzed by their scale. Through my introduction to land conservation at the North Florida Land Trust (NFLT), I found a trail that offered purpose, growth, and community in a place that once felt unfamiliar. It turned out to be the right path for me, and it might be for you, too.

It's easy to see conservation as simply saving endangered plants and animals. While that's part of the work, it's only a fraction of the story. Conservation is about working with communities to protect the places they love and rely on—family farms, fishing spots, hunting grounds, hiking trails. It's about preserving Florida's frontier heritage and family legacies that predate statehood. It's about securing the future of food and water, shielding communities from floods and storms, supporting Florida's tourism economy, and even safeguarding

military installations. Conservation is public service in the broadest sense.

This work also offers a powerful antidote to the sense of helplessness many young people feel today. Climate change, political division, and environmental degradation can be overwhelming. It's easy to believe nothing you do will matter. But land conservation proves otherwise. The impact is local, measurable, and lasting. Whether it's helping a family protect their farm, restoring a wetland, or securing riverfront access for public use, the work is tangible. You can see the difference. You can walk it.

None of this happens without people. Conservation depends on communities, landowners, farmers, and anyone willing to speak up for the places that matter to them. It also relies on a wide range of professionals—scientists, educators, lawyers, real estate agents, fundraisers, communicators, and land stewards. Once lands are protected, practitioners like foresters, biologists, burn crews, and restoration specialists manage them—using prescribed fire, controlling invasive species, and rehabilitating damaged ecosystems. Whether negotiating an easement, leading a hike, or conducting a burn, what unites all these contributors is a shared commitment to protecting something bigger than themselves.



The interdisciplinary nature of land conservation makes it an ideal place to begin a career. At a nonprofit like NFLT, you quickly learn to wear many hats. I started as an intern assisting with database management. Nearly two years later, I've joined prescribed burn crews, drafted contracts, met with elected officials, and negotiated real estate deals, all while exploring the wild landscapes of "Old Florida." One day you're coordinating a site visit; the next, you're editing a conservation easement or kayaking wetlands along a property boundary. The pace is fast, and the work is varied, but that's what makes it such a rich learning environment. For someone starting out, it's an unmatched opportunity to build skills, explore new interests, and grow both professionally and personally.

Working in this field has shown me that conservation isn't just about protecting land, it's about navigating relationships, understanding local politics, and crafting practical, durable solutions. It requires compromise and creativity, listening to stakeholders, finding common ground, and identifying outcomes that benefit both people and ecosystems. These skills don't just apply to conservation, they're foundational for being an effective, thoughtful professional in any field.

Beyond building a resume, conservation has given me something more: a sense of place. Over time, Florida became more than the state where I went to school, it became home. Working alongside passionate practitioners to protect its landscapes connected me to its ecology, culture, and history. It gave me a sense of ownership and responsibility for a place I wasn't born in but came to care deeply about. That's the power of conservation.

I'm still that idealistic student hoping to make a difference but now I have a practical path forward. In a time of polarization and gridlock, conservation offers common ground. It brings together people across political and cultural lines who may disagree on much, but agree on the value of land, water, and wildlife. **Whether motivated by recreation, economy, tradition, wildlife, water, or simply the desire to leave things better than we found them,**



**conservation invites collaboration.** From rural hunters to urban planners, from Democrats to Republicans, people show—in their votes, voices, and actions—that protecting land matters.

For young people who want their work to count for something, conservation is a meaningful path. It pushes you to get outside, understand your surroundings, and engage with your community. The outcomes are real and local: a new preserve for hunting or hiking, a restored wetland, a family farm protected for future generations. For those overwhelmed by global issues, conservation offers something grounded and hopeful. You can meet a landowner and see how their story fits into a broader landscape. You can work with your hands, your head, or your voice and see the results firsthand. It's concrete. It's hopeful. And it matters.

My path into this work may have been unplanned, but it has shaped how I see the world and my place in it. If you're searching for direction, consider conservation. There's room on the trail.

*Editor's Note: All of us at NFLT greatly enjoyed having Will with us and hope deeply that our paths continue to cross. Will is an exceptional young professional who is already well on his way to becoming an outstanding lawyer and conservationist.*





# Perks of the Job?

## Once in a Lifetime Experiences



**Working in conservation brings no shortage of unique, challenging, rewarding—and sometimes unexpected—experiences.** How lucky is it to spend a gorgeous spring day kayaking on Egan's Creek? Or to catch a rare glimpse of the elusive Southeastern American Kestrel during a site visit? (That's the kind of moment that convinces you you're in exactly the right place at the right time.)

Of course, not every day is quite so idyllic. There are also the less glamorous moments, like lint-rolling dozens of tick nymphs off your legs or battling invasive plants in 100+ degree July heat.

Recently, members of NFLT's Conservation Acquisitions team may have set a new bar for awe-inspiring opportunities. Below, Director of Conservation Acquisitions Ramesh Buch and Conservation Transactions Manager Kimberly Hall share stories of a once-in-a-lifetime experience made possible by shared goals and a growing partnership.

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I was privileged to spend an overnight trip on the USS Eisenhower as a guest of Mark McManus our Navy Liaison. This came about after a trip down to Pinecastle Bombing Range in the middle of the Ocala National Forest (ONF) to see firsthand how the Navy uses this facility. ONF is the southern anchor of our Ocala to Osceola (O2O) Wildlife Corridor project area. The Navy has installations in the O2O and our Salt Marsh & Coastal Resilience project area. The Army National Guard operates Joint Training Base Camp Blanding within the O2O. Both Navy Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) and the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) Programs are major sources of funding for our work. The military needs to protect these installations from incompatible development on their fence lines and under the Air Installations Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ). So, they fund our purchase of property and easements in these zones.

As I watched airplanes approach Pinecastle that day, Mark casually asked me if I wanted to “see the other end of these operations?” Not really aware of what he was asking, I said sure, thinking I'd visit a carrier on a port call. Nope. A few months later, I was geared up and aboard the CoD (Carrier OnBoard Delivery) aircraft headed out to parts unknown. The landing was every Top Gun nerd's dream; 160 mph to zero in a second or two. The catapult takeoff in the CoD was even more spectacular, zero to 190 mph in about the same amount of time. Not to mention walking around the aircraft in the hangers and watching the crew launch and retrieve aircraft from on deck and ‘Vulture's Row’ high up on the carrier's bridge.

As much fun as this was, the overwhelming feeling I returned with was gratitude. Gratitude for the sailors and aviators, many younger than my own kids, in positions of enormous responsibility, many miles and months from home and family, keeping us all safe at home. The carrier (affectionally known as Ike) was undergoing a re-certification before it to be re-deployed. So, while we were there, Navy HQ threw several scenarios at the battle group to test their readiness. I saw professionalism, dedication, and remarkable efficiency “under fire” as they not only hosted us but handled everything the Navy Brass threw at them.

It reinforced my respect for our armed forces and my resolve to continue to accomplish the small part we play in keeping their bases operational and the US Military mission-ready.



*As told by Ramesh Buch*





Recently, I had the extraordinary privilege of stepping aboard the USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), the U.S. Navy's most advanced aircraft carrier. From the moment I was welcomed onto the vessel, I knew I was in for an unforgettable experience. What I didn't anticipate was just how profoundly moving and enlightening the visit would be.

Spending time aboard the Ford offered an up-close look at the daily operations, training exercises, and incredible precision that define life at sea for our sailors. From the flight deck to the command center, every detail was a testament to the Navy's commitment to excellence. Observing the strike group in action and witnessing the orchestration of flight operations left me in awe—not just of the technology, but of the people behind it.

At one point, I found myself watching aircraft launch and recover on the flight deck, holding my breath as each jet caught the arresting cable or rocketed into the sky. It was absolutely thrilling, but I was also keenly aware that at any moment, anything could go wrong. We were standing feet away from high-speed, high-stakes operations involving millions of dollars in equipment. And yet, what struck me most was the calm, almost choreographed execution of every movement. It was like watching a high-tech ballet, one where every step was the result of intense training, discipline, and unshakable teamwork.

What stood out throughout the visit was the professionalism and unwavering discipline of the crew. From commanding officers to junior enlisted sailors, every person I met embodied a deep sense of duty and pride. Their work is not only highly technical and demanding, it's essential to our national security and global presence.

This visit gave me a renewed appreciation for the sacrifices made by the men and women who serve. It was both a thrill and an honor to see their world up close, if only for a brief time. I left the ship with a deeper understanding of the Navy's mission and a profound respect for the individuals who make it possible.

As someone dedicated to supporting military partnerships through land conservation and compatible use strategies, experiences like this only strengthen my commitment. The operational readiness of our armed forces is inextricably linked to the land, sea, and airspaces in which they train and it's up to all of us to ensure those spaces remain available, protected, and functional.

To the entire crew of the USS Gerald R. Ford, thank you for your service—and for the unforgettable glimpse into your world.

*As told by Kimberly Hall*









**Anhinga**



**Great Blue  
Heron**



**Great Egret**



**Little Blue  
Heron**



**Robin**



**Snowy Egret**



# Feathered Residents: Birds of Smith Lake Preserve

## A Key Marker of Habitat Health

The O2O Wildlife Corridor includes diverse habitats including wetlands, lakes, and coastal areas that support a variety of wading birds and other avian fauna. Birds play a crucial role in Florida's ecosystems, contributing to biodiversity and serving as indicators of wetland health. The presence of birds such as Great Blue Heron, Sandhill Crane, Anhinga, Snowy Egret, Robin, Little Blue Heron, and Great Egret in the O2O underscores the corridor's importance in maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance. By connecting large tracts of land, the O2O allows these birds to move freely, supporting their feeding, breeding, and migratory needs.

The Great Blue Heron is a common sight and found year-round in Florida's aquatic environments. These large wading birds can be spotted in freshwater and saltwater habitats, including marshes, lake edges, and shorelines. Anhingas, also known as snakebirds, are well-established in Florida's warm, shallow waters and swamplands. They are also year-round residents in the state, often seen perched near water bodies with their wings spread to dry. Little Blue Herons are found nearly statewide in Florida, though they are less common in the western Panhandle and southern Florida Keys. They prefer wetlands and can be observed foraging in various aquatic habitats. All of these wading birds play essential roles in aquatic ecosystems, helping to control fish and amphibian populations.

Sandhill Cranes are one of Florida's iconic birds, found in diverse habitats including freshwater wetlands, prairies, and open pine forests. Standing nearly 4 feet tall with distinctive red crowns, these elegant birds are known for their loud, rattling calls that can be heard up to 2.5 miles away. Florida is home to two subspecies: the non-migratory Florida sandhill crane and the migratory greater sandhill crane. These iconic birds serve as indicator species for the health of these habitats within the O2O and contribute to seed dispersal. While their populations have faced challenges due to habitat loss and vehicle strikes, recent studies indicate a slight increase as they adapt to suburban areas. Conservation efforts are crucial, as the Florida sandhill crane is listed as a state-threatened species with only an estimated 4,000-5,000 individuals remaining in the wild.



**Sandhill Crane**





**Give Today,  
Protect Forever**



# Give Today, Protect Forever

## Your Guide to Year-End Giving

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As the year draws to a close, now is a meaningful time to make a tax-smart gift that advances land conservation across North Florida. Whether you're considering a one-time contribution or exploring more strategic giving options, there are several impactful ways to support North Florida Land Trust and maximize your charitable benefits before December 31.

### **MAKE A CASH GIFT**

Cash gifts remain one of the simplest and most effective ways to support NFLT's mission. Gifts made by check must be postmarked by midnight on December 31 to qualify for a 2025 tax deduction. Most donors can deduct up to 60% of their adjusted gross income.

### **DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT WITH A CORPORATE MATCH**

Many employers offer matching gift programs, which can double—or even triple—your contribution. Check with your HR or benefits department to see if your company participates. NFLT is happy to help complete any necessary forms or confirmations.

### **RECOMMEND A GRANT FROM A DONOR-ADVISED FUND (DAF)**

Donor-advised funds are an increasingly popular and flexible giving tool—and now account for over 20% of NFLT's total contributions. Recommending a DAF grant allows you to support conservation work today while receiving immediate tax benefits. Contact your sponsoring organization to recommend a gift before year-end.

### **DONATE STOCK OR APPRECIATED SECURITIES**

By donating stock held for more than one year, you may be able to avoid capital gains tax and receive a charitable deduction for the full fair market value. These gifts are a tax-efficient way to support conservation while preserving your cash flow.

### **GIVE THROUGH YOUR IRA: QCDs & RMDs**

If you're age 70½ or older, you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) of up to \$100,000 from your IRA—satisfying your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) while excluding the gift from taxable income. It's a smart way to support NFLT using one of your most tax-efficient assets.

### **CREATE A LEGACY THROUGH PLANNED GIVING**

Consider including NFLT in your will, trust, or estate plans to ensure your impact on Florida's natural legacy continues for generations to come. Bequests and beneficiary designations on retirement accounts, life insurance policies, or donor-advised funds are simple ways to make a lasting difference—often with significant tax advantages. Let us know if we can help you explore your options.



*To qualify for 2025 tax benefits, all contributions must be received by North Florida Land Trust by midnight on December 31. Please allow extra time for processing DAF grants, stock transfers, and IRA distributions. Every gift helps protect the lands and waters that define our region—forever. If you have any questions or would like assistance making your year-end gift, or setting up a legacy gift, we're here to help. Contact Dr. Lee Anderson Louy, CFRE, at [LANDersonLouy@nflt.org](mailto:LANDersonLouy@nflt.org).*







# Save the Dates!

## NFLT Members-Only Events

### FALL 2025

**Save these dates and stay tuned for more details coming soon. Check the NFLT Member Calendar on the website for registration links!**

**October 4 – 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Member Appreciation Event**  
**Stargazing & S'mores at Milam Preserve in Keystone Heights**

#### ***Working Lunch Wednesday – A Virtual Series***

August 20 — Fred Richards, Timucuan Parks Foundation – “Community Impact and Programs of the Timucuan Parks Foundation”

September 17 — Elizabeth Filippelli, Duval Audubon Society – “Love Your Birds – Where Science and Conservation Meet Art”

October 15 — Jamie Lankenau, Jacksonville Zoo and Botanical Gardens – “Conservation Engagement and Education at Jacksonville Zoo and Botanical Gardens”

November 19 — Matthew Corby, Camp Blanding – “Conservation Partners in the Community”

December 17 — Nikki Dix Pangle, GTM NERR – “Water Quality in the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve”

#### ***NFLT Members Book Club***

September 4 — The Comfort of Crows by Margaret Renkl at Happy Medium Books and Café

December 4 — Book swap at Lanakila Gardens with Tour

#### ***NFLT Members Outdoor Series***

September 9 — Kayak NFLT's Gloria Childs Goelz/Guana River Preserve

October 7 — Hike/kayak NFLT's Bogey Creek Preserve

October 30 — Exclusive first look at NFLT's Putnam Lakes Preserve (Special Invitation)

November 13 — Private tour of Jacksonville Arboretum and Garden

December 9 — Hike at NFLT's Little Rain Lake Preserve



# How to Get Involved



If you believe that the conservation of North Florida is a necessity, there are many ways you can support. Together we can build NFLT to be as robust and expansive as our region's natural resources. Here are some ways you can help.

## **GIVE**

Our mission is to protect land, which often means to buy it and always means to maintain it. The more funds we have to purchase land and take care of that land, the more land we can protect. Help us say "yes" to more projects by donating today!

## **VOLUNTEER**

Opportunities to give with your hands are available throughout the year. We regularly hold cleanup days to remove trash and conduct maintenance on our preserves.

## **ADVOCATE**

Much of the funding needed to conserve land in North Florida comes from public sources, like Florida Forever. To continue to preserve the parts of Florida that are quickly disappearing, we need our local, state, and federal representatives to prioritize the funding of conservation. You can ask your representatives to ensure these funding sources continue and confirm their commitment to conservation.

## **SHARE**

As a conservationist and a member of the NFLT family, we hope you'll share with your network the good work we are accomplishing together. The threat of over-development continues to grow and with it our need to act quickly. To meet our goals, we need our family to grow. Whether you share the mission of NFLT in person or online, you'll help to spread the word and grow our region's understanding of the importance of conservation.

**Become a  
Member**



**Donate  
Today**

