

Impact

Fiscal year October 1, 2019 - September 30, 2020



The Dalton Discovery Center Expansion Will Add New Exhibits



The Conservancy of Southwest Florida announced a monumental \$4.5 million renovation and expansion of its Susan and William Dalton Discovery Center, which will add new interactive exhibits and galleries exploring areas of critical importance to the region. The renovations and expansion include exciting new enhancements such as an Augmented Reality Endangered Species exhibit that will allow guests to interact digitally with Florida's threatened animals.

The new Invasive Species Gallery in the John & Carol Walter Discovery Wing will explore Burmese pythons, lionfish, cane toads, and invasive plants. The Climate Change Gallery, also located in the Walter Discovery Wing, will focus on intensification of storms, ocean acidification, and habitat protection and will also showcase the *Science on the Sphere* exhibit.



State Stormwater Rules Is a Win for Water Quality

Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law the Clean Waterways Act which includes in its provisions the requirement to update Florida's statewide stormwater rules. The Conservancy has been a strong advocate for updating Florida's stormwater standards for over a decade and is pleased to see this common-sense measure finally put into law. Every new community in Florida should be incorporating the best available standards to treat pollution onsite to ensure downstream estuaries and waterways are not plagued by upstream developments.

Given the continued high rate of growth in Florida, an overhaul of new development and redevelopment stormwater rules are long overdue.

The Conservancy Environmental Policy team plans to provide detailed input into the rulemaking process to ensure the law has the intended impact on reducing water pollution to downstream water bodies. The rulemaking is expected to kick-off in January 2021 and the Conservancy will keep our members apprised of progress and action items to support the adoption of meaningful and protective stormwater standards.

“Thousands of visitors, including many school groups, have learned about the region’s ecosystem and environment by touring the Discovery Center, and I’m pleased to support the comprehensive renovations and expansion that will further educate and engage Conservancy members and guests,” said Sue Dalton, donor and namesake of the Dalton Discovery Center.



Rookery Bay Collaboration

The Conservancy Education team launched a new partnership with Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve’s education team, called Survivors. This field trip, geared towards 7th grade students of Collier County Public School’s Cambridge program, takes place at the Rookery Bay field station and aboard the Conservancy’s *Good Fortune II* eco-cruise boat. While aboard, students work together to gather data on water quality and plankton populations in the estuary.

Environmental Education Goes Virtual

Although our Nature Center closed to the public, the Conservancy Education team remains hard at work to provide lessons, materials, and content for teachers, students, and families to learn about the importance of our Southwest Florida habitats. Our virtual learning opportunities allow audiences of all ages to have access to lesson plans, hands-on activities, scavenger hunts, and links to other resources. Our social media channels also feature videos,

trivia, and more interactive learning from afar.

The team have also partnered with Collier County Public Schools to launch an E-learning site – equipped with virtual field trips, interactive modules and more! Whether students are in elementary, middle or high school – there are endless opportunities to join the team as they investigate Southwest Florida’s incredible ecosystems.

Conservancy Python Team Joins Forces with Federal Agencies

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and Conservancy of Southwest Florida announced they have teamed up to radio-track Burmese pythons in Big Cypress National Preserve, Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge and other areas of Southwest Florida. This new effort marks the first-time pythons are being tracked in so many different habitats to better understand python biology across the region and ultimately find ways to more effectively control this invasive species. Conservancy biologists, in collaboration with other agencies, implant pythons with radio transmitters and then track them to understand python movements, breeding behaviors, and many other characteristics.



The Conservancy’s research on Burmese pythons is featured in a newly released book that documents the species’ emergence as Florida’s apex predator.

Adult male “scout” pythons are especially useful, as tracking males during the winter breeding season can lead biologists to breeding aggregations consisting of multiple males and a single large female that would otherwise be impossible to find. This technique may improve removal rates of large breeding females, which are the most important individuals to target for population reduction.



5,000
pounds of python removed during the 2019-2020 breeding season between the collaborative efforts.

Wildlife Hospital Baby Shower Is a Huge Success



Our local community, as well as people who follow the Conservancy on social media from around the country, donated hundreds of items from the Amazon Wish List. These items are always needed inside the von Arx Wildlife Hospital to provide the best care possible to all the injured and orphaned animals that are admitted. The Conservancy also received more than \$2,000 from a Facebook fundraiser. This support was critical, as the team admitted a record number of injured, sick and orphaned animals each month resulting in over 4,200 animals receiving care this year.

The Environmental Science team concluded its 38th season of loggerhead sea turtle nest monitoring on Keewaydin Island. 22,422 hatchlings are assumed to have made their way to the Gulf of Mexico!



421
number of sea turtle nests protected on Keewaydin



Animal Care Coordinator Sam Arner getting ready to release Nin into the Gulf of Mexico.



Eastern Collier County

Conservancy Files Suit, Challenges Rivergrass Approval

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida has filed a lawsuit against Collier County in response to the Collier County Board of County Commissioners' approval of the development of Rivergrass Village within the County's Rural Lands Stewardship Area (RLSA) in eastern Collier County.

Filed in Florida's 20th Judicial Circuit Court, the complaint contends that Rivergrass Village Stewardship Receiving Area (SRA) is inconsistent with Collier County's Growth Management Plan and Land Development Code.

Conservancy Continues Sea Turtle Research, Protection With Release of Nin into Gulf

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida released its first known male loggerhead sea turtle ambassador, Nin, into the Gulf of Mexico. Nin was part of a Sea Turtle Sex Determination Study by Jeanette Wyneken, a professor at Florida Atlantic University who is analyzing the impact of nesting temperatures on the sea turtle population. The study documented that higher nesting temperatures result in more female hatchlings, while lower nesting temperatures produce more males. The imbalance could affect the species' survival and serves as a reminder of the importance of sea turtle conservation. Before his release, Nin took temporary residence in the Conservancy's 5,000-gallon Patch Reef Aquarium at the Dalton Discovery Center, serving as an ambassador for his species.

Unnecessary Toll Roads Moving Quickly Despite Questions And Concerns

In May 2019, Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law a bill creating the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES). M-CORES anticipates three new toll roads, winding through rural Southwest Florida all the way to the Georgia state line. The bill could create as many as 350 miles of new unnecessary and expensive toll roads that will cost taxpayers money and result in devastating environmental effects. The corridor that impacts Southwest Florida would cut right through the heart of conservation lands, rural agricultural areas, wetlands and wildlife habitat, especially the habitat needed by the endangered Florida Panther.

Oil Project Withdrawn

The Conservancy's long-term persistence has paid off, as the extremely destructive oil project proposed by Tocala, LLC has been withdrawn

For the past six years, the environmentally sensitive lands of Collier and Hendry counties have been at direct risk of a damaging seismic survey that would have used thousands of explosive-laden shot holes to search for oil reserves. Since then, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and others in the environmental community have fought this plan. Thankfully, it appears that Tocala's thousands and thousands of proposed shot holes are no longer being pursued. These shot holes – up to 8,800 shot holes at one point were proposed – would have been packed with explosives and placed up to 100 feet deep in order



to create the seismic waves used to record the oil reserve data. These shot holes can threaten our aquifers and drinking water supplies.

The Conservancy's environmental policy and advocacy team will continue its fight to protect our water resources from development and other inappropriate uses.



Climate Solutions - Leadership Circle Formed

Growing Climate Solutions – Path to Positive Southwest Florida convened an initial meeting of its Leadership Circle on March 10 in Naples, where nearly 60 thought leaders representing the fields of health, education, faith, business, environment and philanthropy reviewed scientific data and began exploring possible solutions to counter climate trends.



Marisa Carrozzo, Everglades and water policy manager at the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, has been selected to serve a second term as co-chair for the Everglades Coalition, an alliance of over 60 local, state, and national environmental organizations focused on restoring the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. The coalition's primary areas of focus include advocating for protection of the Everglades, hosting the annual conference, and coordinating communication and education efforts among coalition members and the public.