

# ELLIE SCHILLER HOMOSASSA SPRINGS WILDLIFE STATE PARK



# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

*Last Updated October 14, 2011*

# Table of Contents

Welcome Letter from Volunteer Coordinator	1
Contacts	2
Management of the “real” Florida	3
Florida Volunteer Program History	3
Volunteer Program Philosophy	4
Volunteer Objective	4
Volunteer Positions at HSWSP	5
Application and Acceptance Process	6
“Basic” Training	6
Schedule and Recordkeeping	7
Benefits	8
Responsibilities	9
Professional Image	9
Professionalism	9
Attitude	10
Uniform Requirements	10
Wearing of the Uniform	10
Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park	11
History	11
Physical Features	11
Homosassa Spring	11
Pepper Creek	11
Captive Wildlife	12
Lu	13
Manatees	13
Public Facilities & Services	14
Major Buildings	14
Park Operations	15
Hours	15

Weather	15
Admission Rates	15
Schedules	16
Boats	16
Trams	16
Educational Program Schedule	16
Park Rules and Guidelines	16
Park Websites	16
Emergency Procedures	17
Location of Phones	17
Location of First Aid Kits	17
Missing Persons	17
Incident Reporting	17
Emergency Phone Numbers	17
Park Terminology	18
Friends of Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park	20
Ordering Uniforms	22

## **Appendix**

Volunteer I.D. Cards
Volunteer Time Cards
Placement of Attachments



# Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park  
4150 S. Suncoast Blvd.  
Homosassa, Florida 34446-1168

Rick Scott  
Governor

Jennifer Carroll  
Lt. Governor

Herschel T. Vinyard, Jr.  
Secretary

Dear New Staff Member:

Welcome to Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, one of the most unusual in the Florida Park Service! All of our staff, which includes full-time employees, OPS employees, and volunteers, play a vital role in our mission to provide a quality recreational experience for our visitors.

Enjoy your orientation, take time to read this handbook, and you will find the answers to many of your questions. This handbook is an introduction to Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, but remember that training and continuing education are key elements to a great "start."

The volunteer program at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park has been evolving for more than 15 years and continues to change in order to improve the services we offer the public as well as the benefit we offer to you as a volunteer. You are entering into an extremely professional program, and we know that your contributions will continue to "raise the bar" and keep Homosassa as one of the most successful volunteer programs in the Florida Park System. Your handbook is an important part of your training process, so please refer to it frequently as a resource.

The Park has seen many changes over the years. As we grow, we will continue to experience a dynamic Park operation. Expect that procedures will change as well grow; however, know that along the way we will need your help to make Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park the best it can be.

I look forward to getting to know you and working with you. I am truly excited!  
Welcome aboard!

Sincerely,

Allyssa Taylor  
Your Volunteer Coordinator

## Contacts

### Volunteer Coordinator

Allyssa Taylor (Park Service Specialist)  
628-5445 ext. 1006  
Allyssa.Taylor@dep.state.fl.us

### Administrative Office

George Lee (Administrative Specialist)  
628-5343

### Transportation/Visitor Center

Robert Dampman (Assistant Park Manager)  
628-5445 ext. 1005

### Maintenance

Lenny Sechrist (Maintenance Mechanic)  
628-1049

### Marketing/Photography

Susan Strawbridge (Park Service Specialist)  
628-5445 ext 1002

### Toll Collector Office

628-5445 ext 1004

### Wildlife Care

Susan Lowe (Wildlife Care Supervisor)  
628-1508

### Children's Education Center Office

628-3922

### Park Gardeners

Ginny Svoboda (Volunteer)  
628-9187

### Citrus County Tourism Office

628-9305  
Visitcitrus.com

### Nature World Wildlife Rescue

621-5575 (Local Beeper Number)



The mission of the Florida Park Service is to provide resource-based recreation while preserving, interpreting, and restoring natural and cultural resources.

## **Management of the “Real” Florida**

The “Real” Florida is captured and preserved in State Parks. Indeed, Florida has some of the most beautiful and natural state parks in the nation. There are more than 160 state parks, recreation areas, museums, gardens, preserves, and special feature sites in the Park System.

Managing, preserving, and protecting these resources are the primary responsibilities of the Division of Recreation and Parks within the Department of Environmental Protection.

The Florida Park Service is committed to the sensitive stewardship of more than one-half million acres. The management goal for Florida State Parks, “The Real Florida,” is to treat the parks as natural systems – as representative examples of native landscape conditions and biological communities.

Florida’s State Parks are charged with providing recreational opportunities for Florida residents and visitors without depleting the natural and cultural resources. This system provides opportunities to escape from the day-to-day pressures of modern urban society. The parks provide a chance to spend leisure time in a wholesome and healthy outdoor recreational environment.

### **Florida Volunteer Program History**

Volunteers have served in Florida State Parks for many years. Before 1977, most volunteers were recruited in individual parks, and there was no system-wide policy or program of volunteerism. In 1977, the Division of Recreation and Parks adopted a

policy encouraging parks to recruit volunteers to help operate the parks.

The formal recognition of the value of volunteers to all state agencies occurred in 1978 when the Florida Legislature adopted Chapter 110.5, Florida Statutes. This law provides formal status to volunteers working for state government, including Workers’ Compensation coverage and liability protection to volunteers engaged in work for state agencies. In addition, the law allows volunteer service to be considered as work experience in applying for state jobs.

During the early 1970s, the National Park Service began promoting the use of volunteers and provided training and staff support to them in the field. California State Parks started setting up associations in 1972 for three state parks. These groups raised funds, provided volunteers, and helped develop publications about their parks.

By the early 1980s, the use of volunteers in parks had become a standard feature across the nation. Through the leadership in the National Park Service, a new concept of volunteerism began with initiation of Campground Hosts in 1985. The program provided the National Parks with staff to help in campgrounds in exchange for complementary campsites.

The volunteer program received added emphasis from the Florida Park Service when in 1988 a Coordinator of Volunteer Services in the Division of Recreation and Parks was hired. The coordinator supports park staff in their efforts to recruit and use volunteers by providing training, resources, and information. The coordinator continues to review accomplishments of the program and develops goals for expansion of the volunteer

program throughout the Florida Park Service.

Each of the five districts in the Florida Park Service employs a Park's Program Development Specialist who acts as a liaison to individual park volunteer programs.

There are now around 7,000 volunteers throughout the Florida Park Service. Volunteers contribute one million hours of service, which represents the equivalent of nearly 450 full-time employees and over \$3,000,000.00 in wages.

At Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, volunteers have been part of the program since its early years as a private attraction. The Park currently has an active volunteer force of over 350 people managed by a full-time Park Service Specialist serving as a Volunteer Coordinator. Volunteers annually contribute the amount of time equivalent to over 30 full-time employees.

### **Philosophy**

The volunteer program at Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park provides the community with an opportunity to give something to the Park while providing a much-needed work force to enhance the overall operation of the Park. This program has grown into one of the largest volunteer programs in the Florida Park Service. Volunteer Service makes up about 40% of the work accomplished in this Park.

The staff of Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park consists of full-time employees (FTEs), part-time or seasonal employees called Other Personnel Services (OPS), and volunteers. It is our philosophy that everyone who works in the Park is considered Park Staff. We pull together as one team to provide our visitors with

exceptional service as they experience our part of the real Florida.

We strive to provide a balance between the type of work volunteers want to do and the needs of the Park operation. It is through a cooperative spirit that our balance is achieved. Because of the operational needs of the Park and regulations regarding our animal residents, it is not always possible to place volunteers in exactly the job they may want to do. However, with so much work to be done here, there is always a challenging and helpful role for every dedicated volunteer.

We expect the same level of performance from our volunteers as we do from our employees. When visitors see the staff of this Park, the only difference they should see is the color of the uniforms. We are the Florida Park Service – note that our last name is SERVICE. It is through serving together as one team that we continue to provide a quality experience to our visitors.

### **Objective**

Volunteer services by individuals and groups are helpful in handling many worthwhile projects and activities in Florida State Parks. Sometimes these are projects that otherwise could not be completed due to staffing shortages, lack of funds, or both.

Volunteers improve the quality of services and allow for the development of new programs. Involvement in Park projects provides a better understanding of State Parks for volunteers and helps create a meaningful partnership between the local community and the Park.

One of Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park's goals is to develop and maintain an effective and productive volunteer force,

which increases public awareness of the Park and helps the Park in all areas to make improvements. Our Park volunteers are valuable members of the Park team.

## **Volunteer Positions at HSWSP**

At the time of publication, twelve volunteer positions are staffed at the Park. Here are brief descriptions of the work that is done by volunteers in each:

### **Administrative Volunteer**

- General Office – reception, typing, filing, mailings, and computer data entry.
- Volunteer Program Support – assist with volunteer materials, handbook, training, photographing, record-keeping, and recognition.
- Library/Archive – maintain and coordinate library and archive material for use by staff.

### **Diving Volunteer**

- Clean Underwater Observatory windows, inspect and clear spring of lost items and debris, and perform spring and underwater habitat observations.
- Must be open-water certified, have your own equipment, and complete DEP diver requirements.

### **Children's Education Center Docent**

- Act as guide and interpreter for exhibits in Center.
- Set-up and facilitate crafts.
- Assist in keeping Center clean, well organized, and up-to-date.

### **Garden Volunteer**

- Help with planting, watering, weeding, and general maintenance of special gardens.

- May assist with identification of native and exotic plants.
- Plan new gardens, such as natives, hummingbird, or butterfly displays.

### **Maintenance Volunteer**

- Help maintenance employees with construction and repairs. (Work may include minor plumbing, carpentry, painting, masonry, and/or electrical projects.)
- Help tidy up the Park's public areas.
- Assist with Park opening or closing, including grounds keeping.

### **Manatee Watch Volunteer (Seasonal—Nov. 15-Mar. 31)**

- Operate a canoe, kayak, or tiny pontoon boat in the waters bordering the Park.
- Provide education about the manatee to boaters and swimmers.
- Collect trash in the Homosassa River. *Must complete a Boating Safety Course and attend USFWS orientation. Training is required before using pontoon boat.*

### **Education and Outreach Volunteer**

- Conduct interpretive programs on-site and off-site.
- Assist in maintaining supplies and equipment for programs.

### **Park Host**

- Assist visitors by answering questions and directing them to interpretive programs.
- Interpret exhibits and natural resources of Park.
- Monitor safety of visitors.
- May conduct special tours for special interest groups or school groups.



### **Transportation Volunteer**

- Tram Driver/Dock Assistant – assist Ranger with boat preparation and visitor safety, answer visitor questions, and drive tram.
- Boat Operator\* -- operate tour boat, conduct interpretive programs, answer visitors' questions, and perform minor maintenance on boats.

*Boat Operators require Boat Safety Course (mail-in or on-line exam) and interpretative training.*

### **Visitor Center Greeter**

- Greet visitors to Park, answer questions, assist with movement of visitors, assist toll collector, light housekeeping.
- Interpret exhibit in Visitor Center and Florida Room.
- Meet groups and assist them in getting into the Park easily and quickly.

### **Wildlife Care Volunteer**

- Help behind-the-scenes with animal care, including exhibit cleaning, housekeeping in the Felburn Wildlife Care Center, animal diet preparation, feeding, and other duties assigned by Wildlife Rangers.

## **APPLICATION AND ACCEPTANCE PROCESS**

The Department of Environmental Protection has a process for new volunteer applications into the Florida Park Service. The Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park then has additional screening and training procedures it employs. Successful volunteers recognize they have been carefully selected and trained to similar standards as the Rangers they work alongside. Here is the process:

- Complete both sides of the DEP Application/Contract form
- Orientation and Park Tour
- Successful 100-hour probationary period and Volunteer Coordinator has signed DEP contract
- Other position placement, if desired
- Job-specific training\*
- Annual Florida Training on Diversity and Harassment
- Continuing Education Refreshers
- Feedback Sessions

*\*See volunteer position descriptions for details.*

### **“Basic” Training**

Training is a key element in preparing the volunteer to be successful. Training is offered to new volunteers periodically in a three-hour workshop that covers volunteer program and Park information and includes a guided tour to familiarize volunteers with the layout.

Training prepares the volunteer for the Park experience by providing information about the Park, developing an understanding of the Florida Park Service mission, and enhancing communication skills.

After placement in a work area, the volunteer must complete training specific to the job. Some jobs require detailed training or certification beyond what can be accomplished on the job. Below are the volunteer positions that have special requirements.

**Divers** – Must meet DEP Diver Requirements and an open water skills dive with Unit Diving Safety Officer.

**Educational Outreach** – Animal handling techniques, Interpretive Workshop.

**Manatee Watch** – Florida Boating Safety Course, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Orientation.

**Transportation (Boats and Trams)** -- Florida Boating Safety Course: “How to Boat Smart” <http://www.boat-ed.com/fl>.

### **SCHEDULE AND RECORDKEEPING**

Volunteers and their supervisor will communicate to set volunteer work hours, duties, and responsibilities. It is very important that a volunteer be present on the shift(s) agreed upon, as with any job.

If a volunteer cannot arrive at the scheduled time, he/she should call the volunteer scheduler (typically a volunteer) or their direct supervisor as soon as possible. If a volunteer list is provided in the work area, the volunteer should try to contact a replacement.

The hours a volunteer contributes to the Park are recorded for many reasons. Benefits, awards, and recognition are most typically linked to the number of hours contributed to the Park. In addition, the State **requires** accounting of all volunteer service hours. These statistics are often used to support legislative efforts on behalf of the Florida Park Service.

Record all volunteer hours on time cards provided in the staff lounges. Complete cards on a monthly basis and keep them in the work area until collected at the end of each month. Time cards are color coded for each type of volunteer service.

### **Timekeeping Procedures**

- Start a new card for each new month.
- Legibly put your first and last name and month on the card.

- Record date and time each work period, round up quarter hours.
- Fill out individual cards for EACH department that you work in (example: Wildlife Care - green card, Special Events - pink card, etc.).
- Do not hold cards over the month’s period.
- At the end of the month, add up your monthly hours, and circle it on your card.
- Cards will be collected from the work areas on the last day of the month by 4 P.M.



*See the Time Card sample in the Appendix.*

### **Feedback and Reviews**

Performance review and feedback sessions are extremely important both to the volunteer and the supervisor. They provide an opportunity for both supervisor and volunteer to evaluate the working relationship, clarify expectations, reinforce strengths, and agree upon ways to improve the overall volunteer experience.

The Volunteer Coordinator can conduct an informal evaluation. It will be based on peer and supervisor evaluations, observations, and visitor comments/complaints, if any.

### **Serious Illness or Major Surgery**

All volunteers who are returning to work after a major surgery or a serious illness are required to obtain a doctor’s permission slip that authorizes them to return to their regular volunteer duties. Failure to do so may prevent them from returning to their normal duties, specifically as related to Wildlife Care, Divers, Maintenance, and Transportation. For volunteers in all other positions, please report to the Volunteer Coordinator if you are absent more than one month due to

surgery or serious illness. Please make sure that this is done prior to your return to your volunteer work.

Present the doctor's slip to your supervisor who will then give it to the Volunteer Coordinator to put into your master file. If the Volunteer Coordinator is your direct supervisor, please return the slip directly to her/him.

### **Leave of Absence**

Volunteers must notify their supervisor and the Volunteer Coordinator when they need a leave of absence or will not be volunteering for an extended period. Leave will be granted for no longer than one year. A volunteer who remains inactive for more than one year must reapply to the program.

### **Resignation**

In the event that a volunteer decides to resign, two weeks of advance notice is appreciated. Notification must be made to the supervisor and the Volunteer Coordinator. All State-badged property, including nametag, ID, and shirts, must be returned to the Park after a volunteer permanently leaves service.

### **Dismissal**

*The Florida Park Service maintains the right to dismiss any volunteer who violates stated policies and Park procedures.*

### **BENEFITS**

Volunteering benefits the Park, the State, volunteers, and their families.

- Volunteers learn new skills, build self-confidence, and gain a sense of satisfaction for a job well done.
- Volunteer work provides new challenges and responsibilities.
- Volunteers meet new friends and make professional contacts as well as increase physical activity.

- Volunteers gain work experience that is recognized by the Florida Park Service on job applications.
- Volunteers gain recognition from Park visitors, Park staff, the local community, and the Florida Park Service.
- Volunteers are issued a Park photo I.D. card after 100 hours of service. The card entitles the volunteer and immediate family members admission to the Park. **This card is renewed annually by contributing an additional 100 hours of continued service.**
- When a volunteer has earned 500 hours the park can issue an engraved nameplate and he/she can apply for a Special Volunteer Florida State Parks Annual Pass. **The pass is awarded by the Division of Recreation and Parks and can be renewed after 500 hours of additional service.**

*A sample of the I.D. card is located in the Appendix.*

### **Recognition**

Service awards are presented to each volunteer who has donated milestone numbers of hours to Florida State Parks:

- 100 hour photo ID
- 500 hour drop pin and engraved nameplate
- 1000 hour drop pin
- And each 1000-hour increment thereafter.

Additionally, engraved plaques hang in the Visitor Center:

- At 1000 hours, the volunteer's name is engraved on the 1000-Hour Club.
- At 2000 hours, the volunteer's name is engraved on the 2000-Hour Club plaque.
- At 3000 hours, the volunteer becomes a member of the Lifers' Club, and the

## **Risk Protection**

All volunteers are covered by Workers' Compensation insurance while on duty at the Park. If you are injured while volunteering, no matter how minor the injury, please report it at once to your supervisor. Volunteers are also protected from personal liability claims from actions involving their volunteer services.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Professional Image**

To ensure that visitors have a positive impression of the Park and its staff, it is essential that you accept your role as a member of the Florida Park Service and an ambassador of the Department of Environmental Protection. It is also important that you learn the basic uniform and personal appearance regulations and how these things contribute to building a positive image.

### *What is the FPS policy regarding image?*

The FPS has a positive public image, and all employees and volunteers should work at maintaining this image; therefore, the actions and appearance of each individual reflect on all FPS employees and volunteers.

### *What are the key ingredients needed to maintain a good public image?*

- Appearance: compliance with uniform policy.
- Professionalism: competence and knowledge in all areas of responsibility.
- Attitude: friendliness, energy, enthusiasm, and a desire to be of service to others.
- Consistency: providing the same level of service or better **with each visitor interaction**.

### *Why do we wear uniforms?*

- Uniforms are easily identified.
- Uniforms are a symbol of being part of a team.
- Uniforms are a tool in gaining public respect and confidence.

### **Professionalism**

- Learn the answers to questions; do not bluff. If you do not know, say so, and offer to find the answer.
- Don't wear sunglasses when talking to visitors.
- Don't eat or smoke where the public can see you.
- Don't group together and give the appearance of ignoring visitors.
- Separate personal and professional feelings, respect your colleagues, and don't let gossip be the rule.
- While on breaks, be mindful of your actions. Visitors may be observing.
- Never purchase or consume alcoholic beverages while in uniform.
- Inappropriate language (obscenities specifically) will NOT be tolerated.
- Sexual harassment will NOT be tolerated.

### **Attitude**

- Be positive.
- Be available to serve the public.
- Work to maintain the FPS image.
- Smile.
- Be tactful.
- Be patient.
- Treat everyone, staff and volunteers, with respect and courtesy.

*There's no second chance for a first impression!  
Make the first one count!*

### **Uniform Requirements**

All volunteers are identified as Park staff; therefore, volunteers are expected to wear the

uniform completely and properly.

Authorized uniform items are listed below:

- Grey uniform shirt (short or long sleeves) purchased from State vendor with the FPS patches attached or white collared buttoned-down shirt with patches sewn on.
- Black shorts or pants (black belt).
- Black shoes/socks with pants OR white shoes/socks with shorts.
- **Florida Park Service Name Tag w/drop bar Service Awards, if received.**
- Black jacket in cold weather.
- **FPS Volunteer T-Shirt, if in Wildlife Care or Maintenance.**
- **FPS Black Volunteer Ball Cap.**
- Friends' Patch (members only).

*The Park issues items in **bold print**. Other items are supplied by the volunteer except for the Friends' patch, which is provided by the Friends upon joining their membership.*

### **Wearing of the Uniform**

Volunteers involved in public contact will wear the grey uniform shirt and black pants or shorts. An alternative uniform is a white buttoned-down shirt in place of the grey one.

*See Appendix for illustration.*

**The FPS nametag** will be worn on the right side ½" from the top of the pocket or in line with the second button.

**Service awards** are worn as drop bars attached to the permanent nametag. They are turned in at the time of a new award.

The Friends' patch is placed ½" above the left pocket.

If the black jacket is worn, a FPS patch can be worn over the left pocket area.

Volunteers performing minimal or non-public contact work (e.g., Maintenance, Gardening, or Wildlife Care) will wear the **FPS volunteer T-shirt. A plastic name tag** will be issued to wear with the T-shirt.

**FPS Volunteer ball caps** may be worn when performing duties outdoors.

The care and cleaning of uniform items is the responsibility of the volunteer. Outfits should be clean, well fitted, and **wrinkle-free** when reporting for duty or otherwise involved in public contact. "Aussie Style hats" may be purchased from the State vendor, and are also authorized a Sun-safety item.

## **Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park**

### **HISTORY**

The Park's early history included a series of private owners who maintained small tourist attractions on this site. Visitors were entertained by a variety of wild animal shows. The last private owner planned to sell the attraction to developers. A grassroots effort within the County collected enough petitions to block that sale. A referendum asking the County to purchase the Park passed with fewer than two hundred votes.

On January 1, 1989, the State of Florida purchased the Park from Citrus County in order to preserve it from any future development that might threaten this precious landscape.

Since becoming the Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, management emphasis has shifted from entertainment to environmental education and from exotic animals to the protection and exhibition of native wildlife.

### **PHYSICAL FEATURES**

This 200-plus acre Park located on U.S. Route 19 in Homosassa Springs (approximately 70 miles north of Tampa) encompasses some of Florida's most diverse and interesting landscapes. Wetlands, hydric hammock areas, and spring-fed streams are just some examples of the physical features of the Park.

### **Homosassa Spring**

A deep, natural spring is the centerpiece of the Park and pumps out over a million gallons of water every hour. Saltwater and freshwater fish are attracted to the large natural spring with its constant year-round

water temperature of 72° Fahrenheit. As many as thirty-four different species of fish have been identified in the spring. Schools will spend a few days circling the spring before heading back to their regular territories.

To provide the best possible view of the spring, previous owners of the Park (then called Homosassa Springs Attraction), installed a floating underwater observatory in the main spring in 1964. The 168-ton structure floats in the spring.

The spring provides a refuge for captive-born West Indian Manatees and a halfway house for rehabilitating manatees scheduled for release back into the wild.

Experts estimate that there may be fewer than 2,400 West Indian Manatees left in the wild. These endangered marine mammals are protected by Federal and State sanctuaries marked by pylons along the Homosassa River where they can be observed and studied safely and in year-round warm environs.

### **Pepper Creek**

From the Visitor Center on U.S. 19, visitors board pontoon boats for an introduction to the Park's environs. The boats travel along Pepper Creek, a spring-fed waterway dredged to allow boat travel. Pepper Creek runs from an upland pine habitat through a hydric hammock.

Nesting Ospreys, Great Blue Herons, colorful Wood Ducks, and several species of turtles sunning themselves on fallen tree branches are all familiar sights as are the occasional Alligator and snake.

Sabal Palms, Live Oaks, Loblolly Pines, Southern Magnolias, Wax Myrtles, and

Muscadine Grapes are examples of the wide variety of native trees and plants that grow along the banks of Pepper Creek.

The Holly bushes that grow in abundance were called “peppers” by the Native Americans who lived here. In fact, *Homosassa* is a Seminole and Creek Indian word meaning “where the wild peppers grow.”

### **Captive Wildlife**

The Wildlife Park is home to many native animals. Residents vary as new members are introduced while others are released.

Florida Black Bears, Whooping Cranes, a Florida Panther, Key Deer, Red Wolves, a Grey Fox, and American Alligators present a showcase of past and present native Florida species.

The first question many visitors ask is, “Why does the Park have wildlife in captivity?” Most of the animals in the Park have been injured, orphaned or imprinted on.

The birds of prey, many of our White and Brown Pelicans, and a few of our Sandhill Cranes were rendered flightless by wing injuries caused by window crashes or utility wire tangles. Many others were hit by cars, entangled in fishing lines, or shot by humans. All of the other birds in the Park can fly but have made their home here, due to the abundance of food and the security from large predators.

Many of the mammals are victims of “human imprinting.” This means they have spent their entire lives being cared for by people and/or have abandoned their fear of humans. Therefore, they would be likely to

fall prey to human cruelty, starve to death, or cause some menace or danger to humans.

**Wild animals raised in captivity do not become tame.** In fact, they usually become more dangerous, because they retain their natural instincts of self-defense or hunting skills **but no longer fear humans.**

Manatees kept in captivity are regularly released if their health permits. The new Manatee Holding Facility allows those being released to have time to adjust to the move and be checked for health concerns.

All of the snakes in the Park could be released and could survive. However, they are important educational ambassadors for their greatly maligned wild relatives. Many people have an unfounded fear of snakes and tend to assume that every snake they see is venomous. By exhibiting native venomous and common non-venomous species, the Park provides a way for people to learn to identify them and learn how snakes benefit our ecosystems.

Although the Park has named many of the permanent animal residents, we encourage volunteers to not use these animals’ names when speaking with the public. A name encourages the animal’s perceived status as a pet, and we are not advocates of that practice. The exceptions are Lu and our female West Indian Manatees.

### **Lu**

When the State purchased the Park in 1989 and began replacing exotic animals with Florida natives, Lu, an African Nile hippopotamus, was on the list of animals scheduled to be moved to another facility. The local community had grown to love Lu and his movie star past (watch *Daktari* or *Cowboy in Africa*) and did not want to see him

go. A grassroots effort resulted in the Governor of Florida making Lu an honorary Floridian and making Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park Lu's permanent home.



Born in 1960, Lu is (by hippo standards) an old man. The average life span of a hippo is about forty years with the maximum being about fifty-four years. Lu, an herbivore (vegetarian), is fed twice daily and consumes approximately forty to fifty pounds of fruits, grains, and hay each day. On this healthy diet, his weight has reached 6,000 pounds!

Males like Lu tend to be solitary animals, while females and their young band together in herds of up to forty hippos. Although normally mild and inoffensive by nature, hippos can exhibit great ferocity when wounded or defending young or territory. Visitors and volunteers will notice that with the exception of Lu's birthday, Park Rangers never enter Lu's exhibit when he is nearby.

Even outside the exhibit, people are not always safe from a hippo. The "Splatter Zone" warning signs warn anyone nearby that a hippo's mode of defecating involves a spinning and splattering maneuver.

Most of the time, old Lu is snoozing either underwater or on his beach. He can easily stay underwater for eight or nine minutes, so visitors may need to be patient to see him. In fact, sometimes, Lu will be asleep during the 12:30 P.M. educational program. Visitors are often disappointed by not seeing him (or the alligators) eat, but we stress that we are an animal rehabilitation and rest home, not a circus.

### **Manatees**

We care for several West Indian Manatees. The Save the Manatee Club allows members to sponsor or "adopt" them, and so visitors often come to see "their" manatee.



## **PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES**

The following is a description of the public facilities and services currently available at the Park:

### **Restrooms**

Restrooms are located in the Visitor Center, the West Entrance, the Children's Education Center, and next to the Florida Black Bear Habitat.

### **Public Telephones**

Are not available on Park property.

### **ATM Machines**

Located in the Visitor Center and the West Entrance.

### **Food Concessions**

A small restaurant is located in the West Entrance. A snack bar is located behind the Hippo Habitat.

### **Gift Shops**

We have two gift shop located in the Visitor Center and in the West Entrance.

### **Picnic Area**

Picnic tables are scattered throughout the Park. A group of tables is located in the Garden Pavilion, which can be rented in advance. School groups often use this area. Picnic areas are in the Shearin Pavilion adjacent to the parking lot at the Visitor Center, as well as on the island by the boat dock behind the Visitor Center, and between the West Entrance and the Citrus County Tourism Bureau.

### **Water Fountains**

Fountains are located in the Visitor Center, the Shearin Pavilion, the Garden Pavilion, the West Entrance, Children's Education Center, and by the Florida Black Bear Exhibit restrooms.

### **Strollers/Adult Strollers/Wheelchairs**

Available on a first-come, first-served basis at the West Entrance only. Strollers are furnished by the Friends of Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park (donation box available for contributions).

### **Lost and Found**

Items should be turned in or reported to the Toll Collector at the West Entrance Admissions or Visitor Center. Unclaimed items go to Administrative Specialist George Lee at the Office.

### **Dog Kennels**

Pets are not allowed in the Park, and leaving a dog in a parked car is not advised. Therefore, the Park offers free kennels, located at the Visitor Center. Keys are located in each kennel; visitors must supply water, food, and return with the key to retrieve their pet. The kennels are a first-come, first served, self-service facility.

### **Special Needs**

*Parking spaces* are available adjacent to the Visitor Center and in the West Entrance Parking area for those displaying appropriate identification.

*Restrooms* in the both Visitor Centers and Children's Education Center are fully handicap accessible.

*Service animals* are permitted in all Florida State Parks.

## **MAJOR BUILDINGS**

**The Visitor Center** is located on U.S. 19. It contains a gift shop, the Park administrative offices, the concessions administrative office, and the Florida Room.

On the main floor of the Visitor Center are a tourist information center and a ticket booth. An elevated area houses educational and

interactive exhibits. Two featured exhibits are the Manatee Education Center, a partnership project with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and *Partners in Flight*, a Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission project.

Outside through the back of the Center is the boat dock where the Pepper Creek boat tour departs and returns. Also here is the Tram Station where the tram shuttle departs and returns. There is a songbird aviary in the dock area, an exhibit of swans on the shore outside, and an exhibit of Gopher Tortoises to the south of the Tram Station. The staff smoking area is in an enclosed area behind the offices.

**The West Entrance** includes the Café, a gift shop, a toll collectors' ticket booth, restrooms, and a staff lounge. Child and adult strollers, plus wheelchairs, are stored behind the building, where visitors enter the Park. The staff smoking area is hidden around the side.

**The Underwater Observatory** is a floating exhibit located over the main spring. It features a wrap-around deck where visitors can observe, from above the spring, the manatees and many varieties of fish. A set of stairs leads down to the underwater observatory. A wrap-around window allows visitors to view, from below the water line, the spring and the aquatic life. A camera provides a live view on the deck's monitor for those unable to descend the stairs.

**The Children's Education Center** opened in August 1992 in the museum building, the original entrance to the Park. The Center features hands-on activities, live animal exhibits, and other educational media about Florida's native flora and fauna.

## **PARK OPERATIONS**

### **Hours**

The Park is open every day from 9:00 A.M. until 5:30 P.M. Ticket sales end at 4:00 P.M. Three to four hours are recommended to see the entire Park.

### **Weather**

Severe weather may cause closing, ceasing of boat travel, and/or the removal of large mammals, endangered species, and birds of prey from exhibit.

Rain checks are not given; however, supervisors may issue complimentary passes under extenuating circumstances.

### **Admission Rates (2011)**

#### **General**

- Adults (ages 13 and up) \$13.00
- Children (ages 6 -12) \$5.00
- Children under 6 Free

*AAA members and AARP members who present proper I.D. receive a 20% discount.*

#### **Group Rates (10 or more)**

- Adults (ages 13 and up) \$8.58
- Children (ages 6-12) \$3.30
- Children under 6 Free

*Tax not included in rates.*

One chaperone per every five children is admitted at no charge for children's groups. Bus drivers are admitted at no charge. One group leader and one driver will be admitted at no charge with adult groups. Call (352) 628-5343 for more information and group reservations.

#### **Other Rates (2011)**

- **Park Entrance Pass** \$60.00  
(Good for one person for one year for all State Parks. Sunshine Skyway Fishing Pier gives a 33 1/3% discount.)
- **Family Park Entrance Pass** \$120.00

(Good for a family of eight for one year for all State Parks except HSWSP and Weeki Wachee, which permit two free entries. Sunshine Skyway Fishing Pier gives a 33 1/3% discount.)

*See toll collectors for other options and promotional programs.*

### **Schedules**

The Park's daily routine has a regular pattern based on its educational and transportation timetables.

### **Boats**

The boats transporting visitors between the Visitor Center and the West Entrance run on a continuous basis from 9:30 A.M. until approximately 3:00 P.M., according to demand. Normally the last boat leaves the Visitor Center Dock at 3:00 P.M. and the West End Dock at 3:30 P.M. Inclement weather or low water levels may prevent boat operations. The boat ride is approximately 20 minutes long.

### **Trams**

The trams serve as transportation between the Visitor Center and West Entrance when boats are not running or the demand for transportation is great. Trams run continuously after the last boat and are seven minutes each way.

### **Educational Program Schedule**

**Wildlife Encounter Program**  
10:30 A.M. and 2:30 P.M.

**Alligator/Hippo Program**  
12:30 P.M.

**Manatee Program**  
11:30 A.M., 1:30 P.M., 3:30 P.M.

*Programs last 15-20 minutes. Program times subject to change during special events.*

### **Park Rules and Guidelines**

The following are the posted rules and regulations for all visitors to the Park. They also apply to volunteers.

- **Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the Park during normal Park hours.**
- **Pets are not permitted in the West Entrance of the Park except for service animals. In all other areas, the animal must be on a six-foot, hand-held leash.**
- **Visitors must not feed either the captive wildlife in the Park or the visiting wildlife such as Grey Squirrels.**
- **Visitors must not climb over or under any fences, gates, or other barriers. The wild animals in the Park can be very dangerous.**
- **Visitors may not enter any of the waters in the Park to feed, touch, or observe any of the animals, including the manatees.**
- **Picnic grills are not allowed in the Park.**
- **Smoking is not allowed within the Park. A visitors smoking area is located at the West Entrance.**

### **Park Websites**

There are several approved websites prepared by the State of Florida and volunteer contributions:

[www.floridastateparks.org/homosassasprings/](http://www.floridastateparks.org/homosassasprings/)  
[www.homosassasprings.org](http://www.homosassasprings.org)  
[hswsp.com](http://hswsp.com)

## **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

**A – Assess:** Use your best judgment; decide how urgent the situation is.

**Any collapse requires a 911 call.**

A skinned knee is a First Aid kit event, but do NOT administer the First Aid unless you are a Registered Nurse. Provide the visitor with the ointment and bandages instead.

**B – Backup:** Report to a full-time employee; you may ask a visitor for help with this.

A full-time employee is someone wearing green and a badge.

**C – Control:** Remain calm; keep onlookers calm by example. Keep onlookers at a distance.

### **Location of Phones**

- Visitor Center Admissions
- Dock Master’s Office 628-5343
- Park Main Office – 628-5343
- CEC – 628-3922
- Wildlife Care Building – 628-1508
- Maintenance Shop – 628-1049

### **Location of First Aid Kits**

- Visitor Center Admissions
- Dock Master’s Office
- West Entrance Dock
- West Entrance Admissions
- Park Office – Copy Room
- Wildlife Care Building
- Children’s Education Center
- Maintenance Shop
- Manatee Operations Office

## **Missing Persons**

In the event that a visitor requests assistance in locating someone, follow the procedures below:

1. Notify a Park Ranger, giving full description of the missing person.
2. Man the appropriate exits and screen visitors leaving the Park; someone must stay with the person who reported the loss.
3. Begin search of the entire Park.
4. If all search efforts are fruitless, notify 911.
5. Assist the Sheriff’s Department within the Park boundaries.

## **Incident Reporting**

An incident report must be filled out for all crises and incidents including job-related injuries. Include a detailed description of the crisis. White folders are located in each department area and contain the forms you will need. Miscellaneous incidents include theft, losses, minor injuries, altercations, auto accidents, and car break-ins.

## **Emergency Phone Numbers**

In case of a **serious** emergency involving the Police, notify the following appropriately:

Park Manager – Art Yerian

Home: 628-9770

Ass’t. Park Manager – Bob Dampman

Home: 628-3653

Wildlife Supervisor – Sue Lowe

Home: 621-3996

## **PARK TERMINOLOGY**

Effective communication between staff and visitors is critical, so learning and using standard Park terminology insures consistence when referring to facilities, features, and staff in the Park.

- **Children's Education Center** - often called "Museum" or "CEC," is the interactive science center located in the Garden of the Springs.
- **Dockmaster** - Park Ranger or volunteer assigned to Visitor Center Dock and who coordinates the transportation schedule.
- **Dock Assistant** - volunteer assisting the Dockmaster.
- **Employees** - paid workers, including full and part-time.
- **Felburn Wildlife Care Center** - main operations of the Wildlife Care Supervisor and Wildlife Care Rangers, including animal quarantine, veterinary facility, staff lounge, and animal diet preparations.
- **Florida Room** - Visitor Center conference room, includes Winslow Homer exhibit and manatee DVD.
- **Full Staff Meeting** - meeting with entire Park staff (volunteer, OPS, Concessions, Full-time employees) held annually.
- **Gate 2** - last Park gate on Fishbowl Drive where Manatee Watch and special events folks enter/exit the Park.
- **Gate 3** - gate behind Children's Education Center where gardeners, students, and large groups enter/exit the Park.
- **Gate 4** - gate nearest to Underwater Observatory used by film crews/produce truck/volunteer divers to enter/exit Park.
- **Gate 5** - gate between West Entrance and Tourist Development Council Building.
- **Habitat or Exhibit** - outdoor areas that house wildlife (replaces "cage" or "pen").
- **Magnolia Room** - Meeting Room
- **Manatee Above-Ground Pool** - Closed water facility to house animals separated from spring run due to veterinary needs.
- **Manatee Salad Bar** - floating feeding area located next to Underwater Observatory so feeding manatees can be seen by visitors.
- **Mews** - or mew, the specialized non-public habitat for birds of prey used in Wildlife Encounter programs and outreach.
- **MOO** - Manatee Operation Office where divers change and shower.
- **Office** - Administrative office Visitor Center.
- **Park Ranger** - rangers not assigned to Wildlife Care.

- **TDC Building** – the brown building next to the West Entrance that is rented long term to the Tourist Development Council.
- **Pepper Creek** – body of water between Main Entrance and West Entrance.
- **Program** – all interpretive programs presented by Park Staff (replaces “show”), including Wildlife Encounters, Alligator and Hippo, Manatee, Carts, and Outreach programs.
- **Reptile Building** – walk-through exhibit where snakes, baby alligators, crocodiles, and turtles are housed.
- **Staff** - all employees and volunteers.
- **Staff Lounge** – break room located in Visitor Center and housing the most current information on boat operations, concessions, events, and newsletters. Lounge is open to all staff. Additional staff lounge located at the West Entrance.
- **Staff Meeting** – monthly meeting with supervisors and administrative employees.
- **State Park** - all Park-owned property, including the Visitor Center, Pepper Creek, the West Entrance, and additional outlying parcels.
- **Underwater Observatory** – floating facility located in the main spring (replaces “Fishbowl”).
- **Visitor Center** – building, boat dock, tram station, and located on Highway 19.
- **Visitor Center Admissions** – toll station #2 in Visitor Center.
- **West Entrance** – main Park building on Fishbowl Drive.
- **West Entrance Admissions** – toll station #1 in West Entrance.
- **West Entrance Dock** – boat dock area located opposite the West Entrance.
- **Wildlife Encounter Pavilion** – program seating area on the Wildlife Walk between the Felburn Aviary and the Cougar/Panther exhibit.
- **Wildlife Exhibits** – all animal habitat areas (replaces “bird park,” “alligator pool,” “turtle pond”). When describing locations, use specific exhibits, such as “near the Fox exhibit.”
- **Wildlife Care Ranger** – Park Rangers assigned to Wildlife Care.
- **Wildlife Walk** – elevated boardwalk linking the animal exhibits -- except the alligators, hippo, deer, and manatees -- that closes at 5 P.M. daily.
- **Wildlife Way** – the back entrance to Wildlife Care off Halls River Road.

# **FRIENDS OF HOMOSASSA SPRINGS WILDLIFE PARK, INC.**

## **History**

In 1986, The Florida Legislature authorized the establishment of Citizen Support Organizations for individual state parks. Over fifty-five parks have organized groups called Citizen Support Organizations (CSOs) like the “Friends of Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park.” All CSOs are not-for-profit corporations.

CSOs undertake special projects approved by the Park Manager. They organize hundreds of events and activities for their parks in support of the Florida Park Service mission.



The Friends of Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park incorporated on February 25, 1991, as a not-for profit Florida corporation

established to support Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park.

Members of the “Friends” support this Park financially and can contribute time and effort toward accomplishing the Park’s goals. In return, they and their guests can visit the Park for free on every second Saturday of each month.

## **CSO Funds Use**

The Friends can accept any and all financial contributions for improving animal care, visitor services, and habitats of the captive wildlife in the Park. The Friends also support the Children’s Education Center (CEC), manatee care, and a suite of

education and outreach programs known as Nature Academy.

Improvements to the Park are made in direct coordination with the Park Manager and the Park staff. All activities of the CSO must be approved by the Park Manager to ensure compliance with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection agreement.

The Division of Recreation and Parks has a **Partnership in Parks (PIP)** matching fund program. When a CSO raises 60% of a project costing at least \$100,000, the Division provides a 40% match.

A program entitled **Partners in Giving** recognizes donations beginning at the \$200 level. Donors can choose to be recognized with a leaf on The Giving Tree located in the Visitor Center. For donations from \$1,000 to \$2,499, plaques are engraved and mounted on Park benches. The donor can elect to have a cast plaque placed in an exhibit area for a donation of \$2,500 or more.

The Friends is governed by a Board of Directors, elected by the members at an annual meeting in March each year. Information about Friends’ activities and meetings is published in a quarterly newsletter, *Friends to Friends*.

## **Special Events**

The following events are hosted by the Friends at the Park for the Park and the community:

**Easter Egg Hunt**, on the Saturday morning before Easter Sunday, is not a fundraiser but a community event. Volunteers are instrumental in assisting with bagging candy, event preparation, and helping children on the day.

*Nature Academy Summer Camp*, a summer program for school-aged children, is a partnership between the Friends of Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park and the Park. Children attend hands-on workshops each day, which include activities designed to reconnect them with the natural world. Volunteers with teaching backgrounds facilitate the activities.

*Annual Halloween Haunted Tram Ride*, a fundraiser occurring the weekend before Halloween, transforms the Pepper Creek Trail into one long, frightening, and fun ride. The Staff Parking lot includes the Friends' Food Wagon as well as activities for kids. Volunteers participate in the spooky fun and staff the activities.

*Christmas Celebration of Lights*, an annual evening event, is held over several nights in the Park prior to and sometimes also after Christmas. The event attracts thousands of visitors each year and requires the assistance of several dozen volunteers before, during, and after.

*Lu's Birthday* is on January 26, and the Park celebrates it every year with a party outside his exhibit. The Homosassa Elementary School is invited to attend, and volunteers bake cupcakes for them. Everyone sings Happy Birthday to Lu, and he is given a giant cake made in the shape of a watermelon or other appropriate image.

### **Membership Application**

Dues give membership for one year from date of receipt, except for lifetime members. Members can choose to join special interest groups within the Friends and should indicate their interest in the following: Special events, publicity, office help, Greeter, Fundraising, Wildlife Outreach Programs, Park host, or other interest.

To join, applicants send their name, address, phone, and email to:

The Friends of Homosassa Springs  
Wildlife Park, Inc.  
4150 South Suncoast Blvd  
Homosassa, FL 34446

### **Dues**

#### *Voting*

Individual	\$15
Family	\$30
Merchant/Group	\$100
Lifetime Member (on plaque)	\$500

#### *Non-Voting*

Associate/Youth under 18	\$10
Associate Individual Member	\$15
Associate Family Member	\$30

### **Ordering Uniforms**

The website for ordering uniforms is:  
[uniforms.vfimagewear.com](http://uniforms.vfimagewear.com). (Do not put  
the www or http.).

User ID: **VOLUNTEER**

Password: **VOLUNTEER**

User ID and Password are the same and  
should be in all caps.

Click the little button that says "My Own  
Credit Card Purchase."

On the next page there is a link on the left  
side of the page under Shopping Categories  
named **SHIRTS**. Click on either of these and  
then follow the instructions to order.

Sales tax of 6% will be added to your order.

We would like to ask that when you order,  
you put your first initial and last name as  
the PO# so that VFImageWear will be able to  
find the orders in their system if they have  
any questions. There is a Purchase Order  
text box on the first page where you input  
your shipping information.

Payment for items must be made by credit  
card only.

Any items that you order with the FPS  
emblem cannot be returned to  
VFImageWear. You may, as an option,  
order an item and try it on then pay for  
shipping and handling to return it to the  
company for a credit. You would then place  
a new order for the correct size with your  
choice of logo.

Since these items are specific for the Florida  
Park Service, once the logo is embroidered  
onto the selected item, you will not be able  
to return it to VFImageWear for an exchange  
or refund due to size or other preference  
such as color if the item is prepared as

ordered. If there is a defect in the product  
or the wrong size or color is shipped, then a  
credit or exchange will be provided.

Allyssa Taylor

Volunteer Coordinator

Park Service Specialist

Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park  
4150 South Suncoast Blvd.

Homosassa, FL 34446-1168  
(352) 628-5343