



# Bay County Conservancy, Inc.

## The Land Conservancy of Northwest Florida

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Fall 2024 Newsletter  
[www.baycountyconservancy.org](http://www.baycountyconservancy.org)

### Partnership Brings Rewards—and Awards!



For nearly a decade, volunteers from the local **Sweetbay Chapter** of the **Florida Native Plant Society** have helped the Conservancy weed and plant at the **Mary Ola Reynolds Miller Palm Preserve** in downtown Panama City. Once a year, the Florida Native Plant Society bestows various awards to members and chapters for their contributions to their mission.

This year, FNPS honored long-time Sweetbay member (and BCC Volunteer) **Susan Llorca** with a **Green Palmetto Award** for her *Service* at BCC's Palm Preserve. This award recognizes outstanding contributions to the conservation and preservation of Florida's native plants and plant communities.



**Congratulations to Susan!** It is an honor (and a lot of fun) to work alongside you at the Palm Preserve!

Not only did Susan earn a personal award for Service—but the Sweetbay Chapter was awarded the **Garden of Honor** award for its exceptional work on BCC's **Palm Preserve Pollinator and Wildlife Garden!**

*“Your project has transformed a 1/3-acre parcel in the heart of downtown Panama City into a vibrant native plant oasis. The Mary Ola Reynolds Miller Palm Preserve now stands as a testament to the power of native plants to enrich urban environments. With its diverse array of around 70 native palms, bald cypress, oaks, and 125 different native plant species, this little public garden offers a refreshing escape amid the hustle and bustle of city life.” - FNPS*

Thanks also go to Sweetbay Co-President **Rhonda Hoeckley** for all her hard work writing and submitting award applications and to the Sweetbay BOD for their contributions to beat that deadline! - **Teresa Nooney**

### New Land Acquisitions

In an occurrence of serendipity, **Martha and Andy Nodine** of San Antonio, TX contacted us to ask if we would like to receive 10 acres of property in north Bay County that she inherited. Not only would we be happy to receive 10 acres of timber land anyplace in the county, this particular property is adjacent to 50 acres that we already owned and referred to as the Marlen Property. We have combined the two donations and are now calling it **Chipola Basin Preserve**. Thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Nodine and to the Marlen donors, Marlen Developers, Inc.

Another new donation is 33 acres of undeveloped land north of Highway 20 that was given to us by **Patricia Heaton Teaf** in honor of her brother George Heaton. In accordance with Mrs. Teaf's request, a sign will be erected proclaiming it as the **G. W. Heaton Preserve**. Thank you, Mrs. Teaf! - **Candis Harbison**

## What is a CE?



A Conservation Easement (CE) is an individually tailored contract between the owner of a piece of land and an outside party that protects the conservation value of the land. It might be an agreement that lets a landowner continue harvesting trees or farming but forbids any future buildings on the land. In BCC's case, CEs have been granted on several of our Preserves to protect all natural values and prohibit any development or destruction of habitat. Somebody has to enforce these agreements, and Bay County Audubon Society (BCAS) has accepted that role for most of our CEs. If BCC should get carried away and try to develop a property protected by a CE, then BCAS could insist the activity stop, even if it meant going to court.

In addition to *granting* CEs, BCC has now *accepted* one. **Anne and Gary Grace** own a beautiful building lot on the gulf at Indian Pass in Gulf County that they wanted to preserve undeveloped forever. In order to prevent future owners from building on the lot and to relieve themselves from the burden of ever-rising property tax, they decided to donate the building rights on the property to BCC. That gives BCC the responsibility of checking on the site periodically and taking action if any incursion on the property should occur. This is a big responsibility,

and BCC has declined to take any CEs prior to now, but this particular property is deemed too important to leave unprotected. We are grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Grace for their concern and foresight.

- Candis Harbison

## A Healthy Prescription for Juniper Headwaters Preserve

BCC is taking a bold new step to protect and enhance one of its most promising preserves – the **Juniper Headwaters Preserve** located off US 231 near Fountain in Bay County. The 40-acre preserve partially abuts this important creek and is nearly free from exotic and invasive vegetation. It also features a loop trail that became blocked by trees damaged in Hurricane Michael. To rejuvenate the property, BCC recently signed a contract with **Cordgrass Consulting** to prepare a habitat management plan for the property. This will include identification of the property's assets like native flora and fauna and a "prescription" for keeping it healthy and productive. With the professional guidance of Cordgrass to help us implement the improvements, we hope to unlock future grant opportunities that will help defray the costs of long-term preserve maintenance and enhancement. Cordgrass Consulting is a woman-owned firm headed by Principal and Lead Ecologist **Kelly Mandello** who has 18 years of experience in ecological consulting and natural resources, including the evaluation of wetland and upland ecosystems. She is a certified Southeastern Master Herpetologist and holds authorization from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the permitting and relocation of gopher tortoises in the State of Florida. Her professional expertise includes both flora (botanical surveys, vegetative mitigation surveys, ecosystem restoration and management, plant ecology, invasive species control and seagrass surveys) and fauna (imperiled wildlife surveys, gopher tortoise permitting, relocation and long-term recipient site management), as well as wetland assessment and delineation, habitat mapping and more. We are thrilled to be working with Kelly and her team and look forward to making the most of this beautiful preserve.



- Bonnie Blue

## You Saw a *What?* At the *Palm Preserve?*



It was mid-May, and Susan and I were working in the Palm Preserve garden. I heard a loud screechy wail coming from the treetops, and grabbed my camera, not knowing what to expect. I spied a long, brown neck and an almost cartoon-like face peeking out from the very top of a cypress tree. Some kind of heron, perhaps?

Then the bird flew to another tree and I got a few photos. To our great surprise, the big brown speckled bird was a **limpkin!** Limpkins are medium-sized wading birds with long legs and long, slightly curved beaks. They are usually found in freshwater wetlands and swamps in peninsula Florida - where they forage for apple-snails and other aquatic mollusks. But in recent years, a new invasive snail has moved into Florida—*Pomacea maculata*, the island apple snail. They are abundant—and more food means more limpkins.

Audubon has noted that limpkins have begun popping up across much of the U.S. and as far north as Canada.

We are not quite sure how our particular limpkin found the tiny Palm Preserve—we certainly don't have any apple snails there! Nevertheless, it was a fun sighting.

- Teresa Nooney

## Involving Students in the Conservancy's Mission

**Sierra Czubaj**, a student at Georgia Tech and a Bay County resident, invited the Bay County Conservancy to be the guest speaker at her Human-iTech class which focuses on integrating technology into real – real-world solutions that are created and modified by the students. They were interested in what the Conservancy does and what challenges it is experiencing. On March 6, 2024, the instructor, Cassandra Shriver, a PhD candidate at Georgia Tech, opened the discussion by Zoom.

Candis Harbison started with a short explanation of how the Conservancy got started, what we do, and what we would like to do.

Jackie Kolk noted the need to connect conservation lands, have plant and wildlife surveys done periodically, manage urban preserves and allow people to use – but not misuse – them.

Mark Hyman noted the need to involve more volunteers. The Georgia Tech students discussed the various ways social media could be used and suggested Linked In, Meetup, Event Break, and Instagram. They noted that students needed volunteer hours for various reasons and suggested we contact schools, sports teams, civic organizations, and so on.

We appreciate the opportunity to connect with the Georgia Tech class. Please share an idea about how to involve students in the Conservancy's work by contacting **Jackie Kolk** at [jackie@kbcpc.com](mailto:jackie@kbcpc.com) or at 850-624-9762.

## BCC Receives Invasive Species Grant

Thanks to our hardworking BCC Board member (and Rutherford H.S. teacher) **Heather Briscoe**, BCC has been awarded a **\$1,500 grant** from the **Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP)** and the **Florida Invasive Species Council (FISC)**.

BCC plans to use the funds to purchase outreach materials that will help us put a spotlight on invasive plant species such as **Air Potatoes (*Dioscorea bulbifera*)**. Volunteers who help out each year at our Air Potato Roundup event have seen firsthand how these invasive vines smother and strangle our native trees and shrubs. BCC's Air Potato Roundup event is usually held in February.

**Photo: Volunteers from local Publix Supermarkets helped remove invasive air potatoes from BCC's Audubon Nature Preserve earlier this year.**



**Mission Statement**

Bay County Conservancy is a land trust dedicated to the preservation of environmentally sensitive lands in Northwest Florida.

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