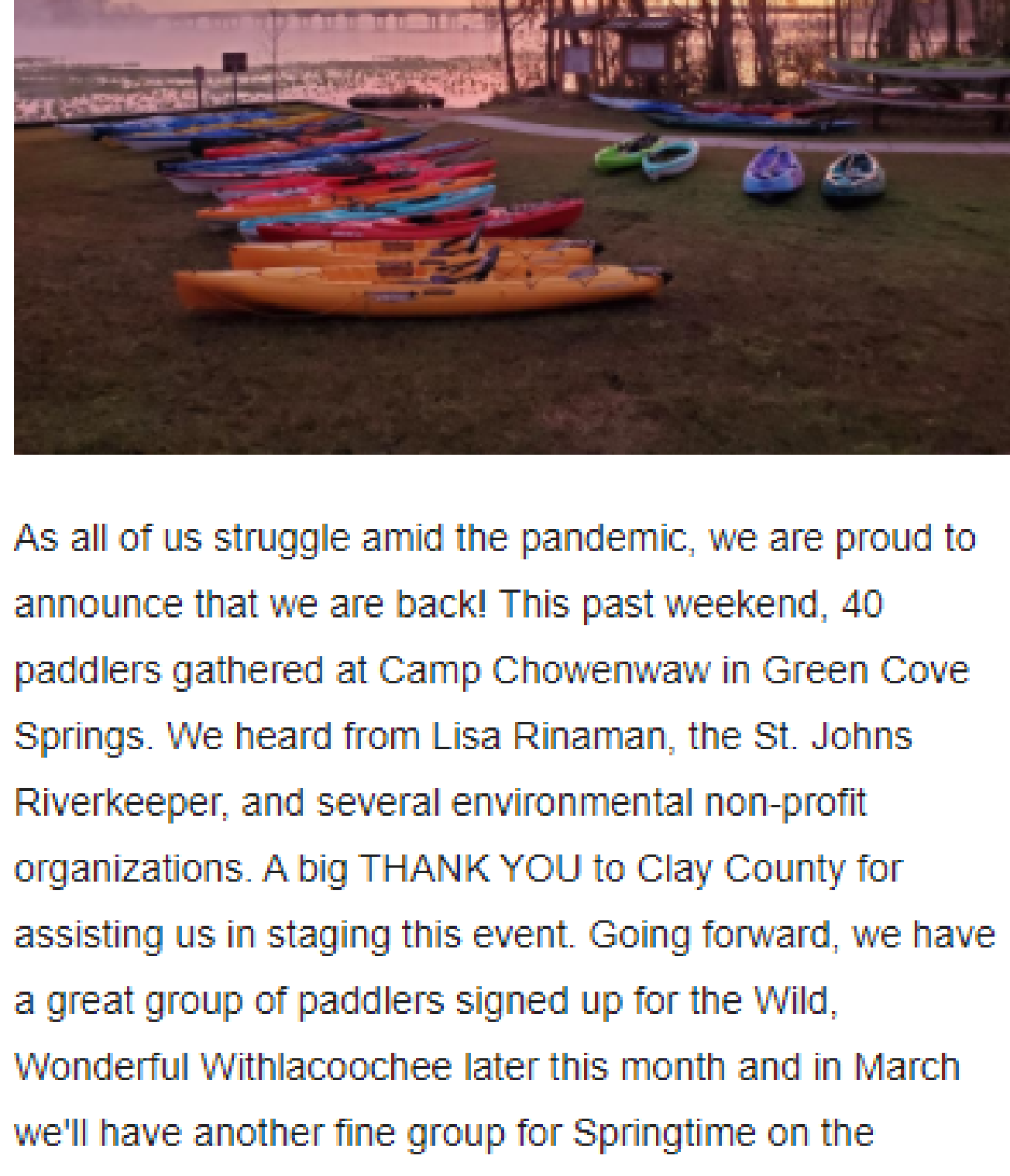


We're Back!



As all of us struggle amid the pandemic, we are proud to announce that we are back! This past weekend, 40 paddlers gathered at Camp Chowenwaw in Green Cove Springs. We heard from Lisa Rinaman, the St. Johns Riverkeeper, and several environmental non-profit organizations. A big THANK YOU to Clay County for assisting us in staging this event. Going forward, we have a great group of paddlers signed up for the Wild, Wonderful Withlacoochee later this month and in March we'll have another fine group for Springtime on the Chipola. There is still time to sign up for that trip!

So, we started the season on the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail in October. We had to cancel our events in November, December and January due to COVID, but we still will have staged 5 out of 7 scheduled events, and look forward to our schedule next season, when we will hold some of the events that were cancelled. Please stay tuned.

Paddle Florida COVID-19 Trip Protocols

- Temperature checks;
- Social distancing of 6 feet;
- Participants will be required to wear masks at campsite and buffs on the water when closer than 6 feet;
- COVID-19 safe rescue practices;
- Paddlers to distance a paddle length from each other;
- Hand sanitizer;
- Food will be served so participants will not touch utensils; and
- Disposable eco-friendly plates will be provided.



Myths to Watch Out for this Legislative Session

By Ryan Smart

*Executive Director,
Florida Springs
Council*

I am the only registered lobbyist in the State of Florida who works solely on issues that affect Florida's springs and spring-fed rivers. It's a big undertaking, but one I look forward to each year. It is the single greatest opportunity we have to impact policy and funding that can help protect and restore Florida's springs and the beginning point for most of the rulemaking and legal work FSC member groups take on throughout the rest of the year.

January was the unofficial kick-off of the 2021 Florida Legislative Session which formally begins on March 2nd in Tallahassee. Throughout January and February, the Legislature will hold "Committee Weeks" where House and Senate Committees will receive updates from state agencies, hold workshops, and consider legislation that is a priority for leadership.

The Florida Springs Council has identified four legislative priorities for the 2021 Session that we will lay out in a future article. First, we need to clear up some myths you are likely to hear from legislators, agency officials, and even other non-profits over the next four months. [\[Read more...\]](#)

What could Weeki Wachee users lose so that the river wins?

By Barbara Behrendt, *Tampa Bay Times*

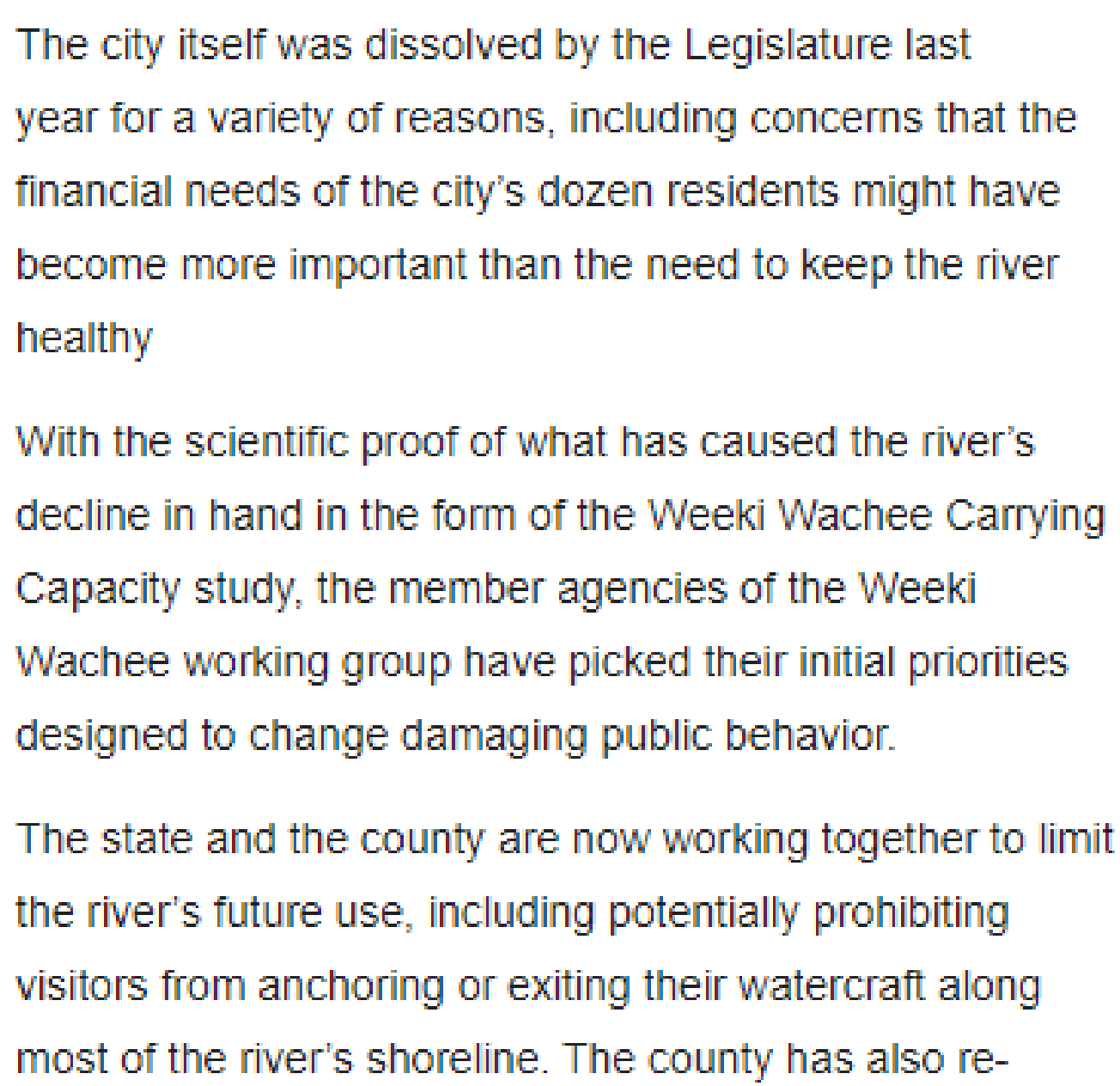


Photo Credit: [Gzuraski](#)

Hernando County needs the Weeki Wachee River.

The river's headsprings host, in non-pandemic years, the most popular tourist attraction the county provides, the legendary Weeki Wachee mermaids. The county values that image so much that they are asking state lawmakers to give them ownership of the attraction's old slogan — "The city of live mermaids" — for marketing purposes in the coming years.

The city itself was dissolved by the Legislature last year for a variety of reasons, including concerns that the financial needs of the city's dozen residents might have become more important than the need to keep the river healthy

With the scientific proof of what has caused the river's decline in hand in the form of the Weeki Wachee Carrying Capacity study, the member agencies of the Weeki Wachee working group have picked their initial priorities designed to change damaging public behavior.

The state and the county are now working together to limit the river's future use, including potentially prohibiting visitors from anchoring or exiting their watercraft along most of the river's shoreline. The county has also re-ignited the controversial idea of urging development of new public attractions, which could include swimming and boating, inside the Weekiwachee Preserve to offset the loss of recreation opportunities on the river. [\[Read more...\]](#)

Silver Springs attraction to get glass-bottom boat for wheelchair users

By *Associated Press*

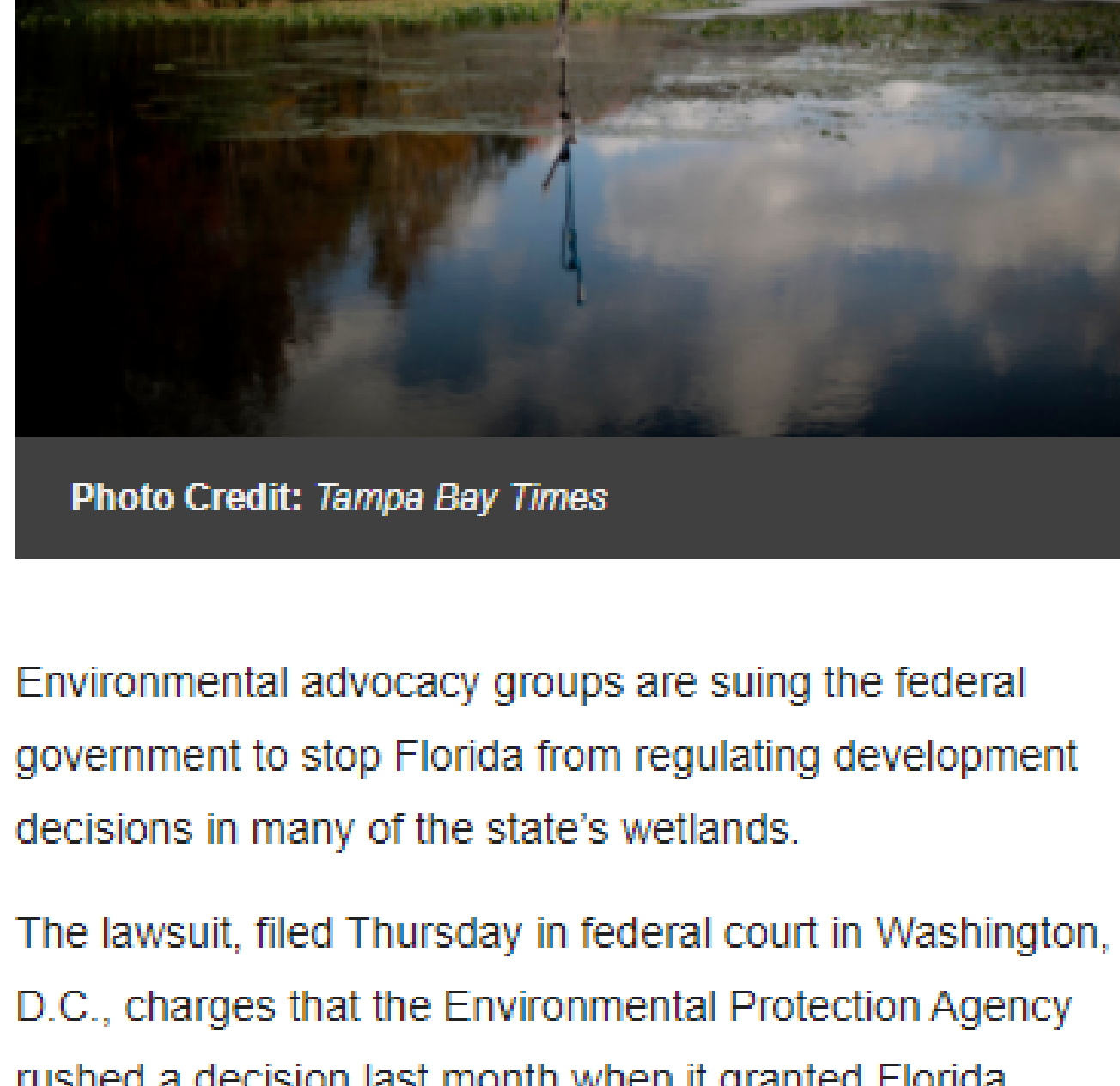


Photo Credit: [Stephen M. Dowell, Associated Press](#)

Florida's 150 years of treating tourists to gushing springs, lolling manatees, curious fish and emerald grasses undulating in invisible currents is about to take a turn because of a chance remark.

In 2015, Paula Russo, a volunteer for the Florida State Parks Foundation, set up a table for a public event at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park near Gainesville. Russo, relying on a powered scooter because of childhood polio, was there to tout state park trails and paddling for people with disabilities.

"And this woman came rolling over in her manual wheelchair with children trailing along with her," Russo said, recalling as many as five from about 5 to 12 years old. "She said something to the effect that 'this is all very nice, but I took the kids over to Silver Springs to go out on a glass-bottom boat and I couldn't get on the boat. It's not accessible.'

"What are you going to do about it?" the woman implored. That challenge became a marathon for Russo, who will "beat my head until I get where I'm going or I'm bleeding" as an unyielding advocate for parks and people with disabilities.

Nearly six years in the making, Russo's response to that woman in the wheelchair is taking shape. [\[Read more...\]](#)

Environmentalists sue to stop Florida from handling wetlands development permits

By Zachary T. Sampson, *Tampa Bay Times*

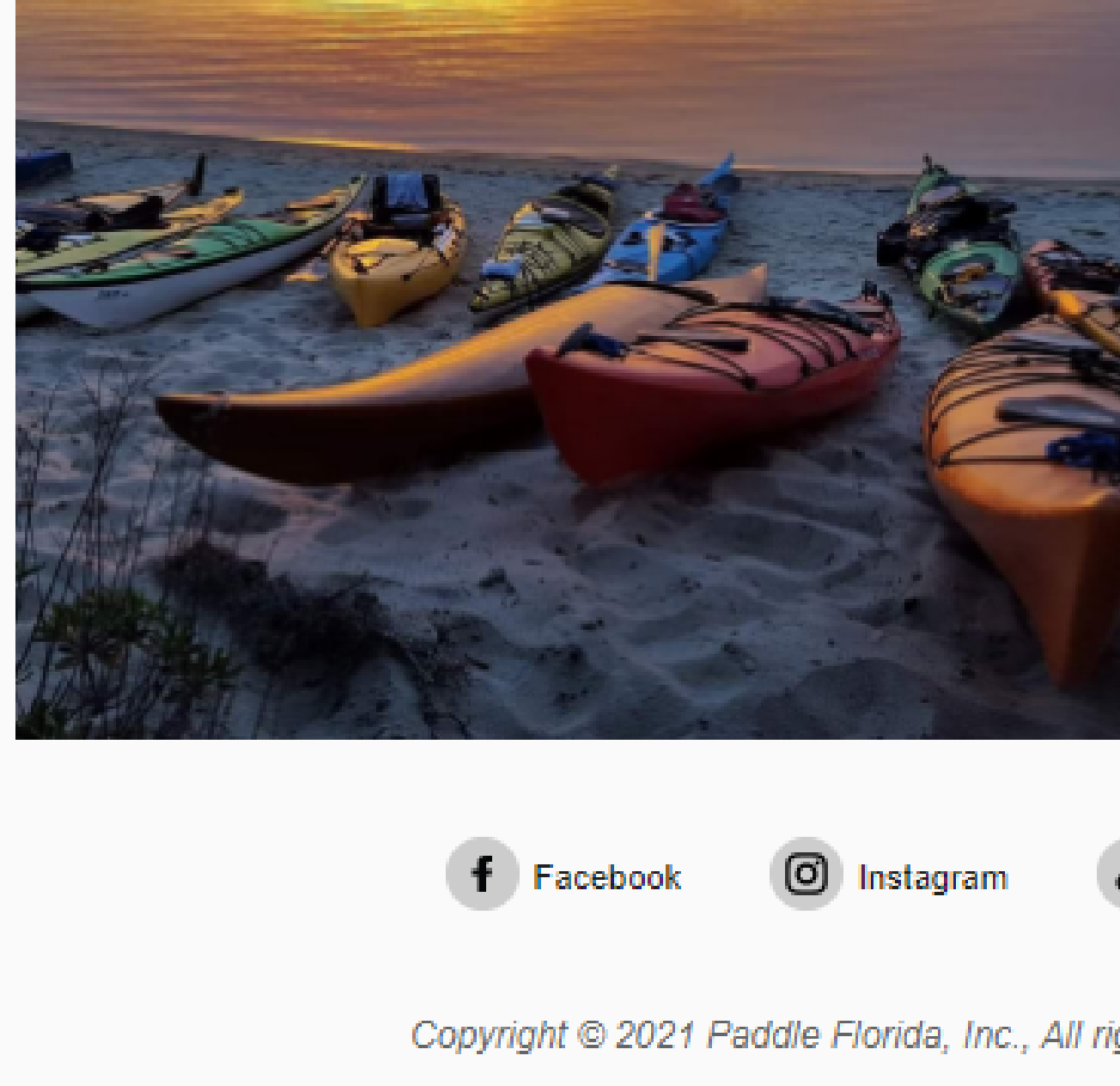


Photo Credit: *Tampa Bay Times*

Environmental advocacy groups are suing the federal government to stop Florida from regulating development decisions in many of the state's wetlands.

The lawsuit, filed Thursday in federal court in Washington, D.C., charges that the Environmental Protection Agency rushed a decision last month when it granted Florida permitting authority over dredging and filling in certain wetlands. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers previously controlled such decisions.

"EPA's approval is unlawful because the state's program is not as stringent as federal law and rests on unprecedented arrangements that violate federal law," lawyers for Earthjustice, an environmental legal organization, wrote in their complaint. Several groups were behind the challenge: the Florida Wildlife Federation, Miami Waterkeeper, St. Johns Riverkeeper, Defenders of Wildlife, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida. [\[Read more...\]](#)

Flora & Fauna Spotlight: Christmas Bird Count shows decline in population

By Abigail Mercer, *The Daytona Beach News-Journal*

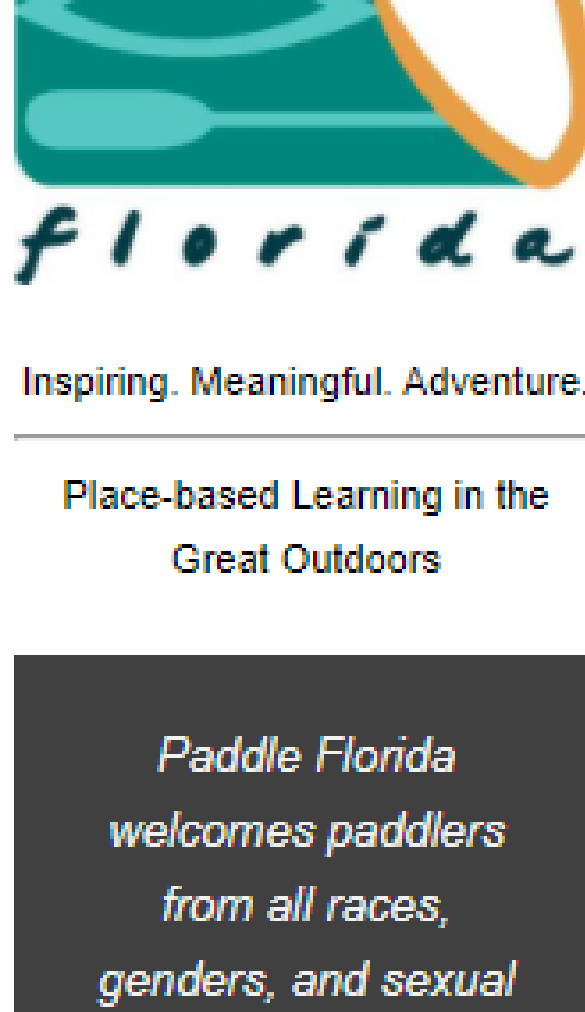
Photo Credit: [David Tucker, News Journal](#)

Years ago, in Ponce Inlet, thousands of Yellow-rumped Warblers thrived. Often found eating wax-myrtle berries, the little gray, white and yellow birds used to be everywhere. But this year, over the course of three weeks, just 35 were counted.

This species isn't the only one in potential decline. Over the years, due to loss of habitat, birders around the area have seen a steady decline in the number of birds counted annually across Volusia and Flagler counties.

"The trees used to be dripping with birds, but there's been so much development, so much loss of habitat, that there's been a drop in population," said David Hartgrove, an experienced birder and self-described environmentalist. [\[Read more...\]](#)

It's Safer Outdoors



Inspiring. Meaningful. Adventure.

Place-based Learning in the Great Outdoors

Paddle Florida welcomes paddlers from all races, genders, and sexual orientations. We will continue to strive to promote diversity among the paddling community and work to create a safe space for all to enjoy our paddling adventures.

2020-21 Paddle Florida Season

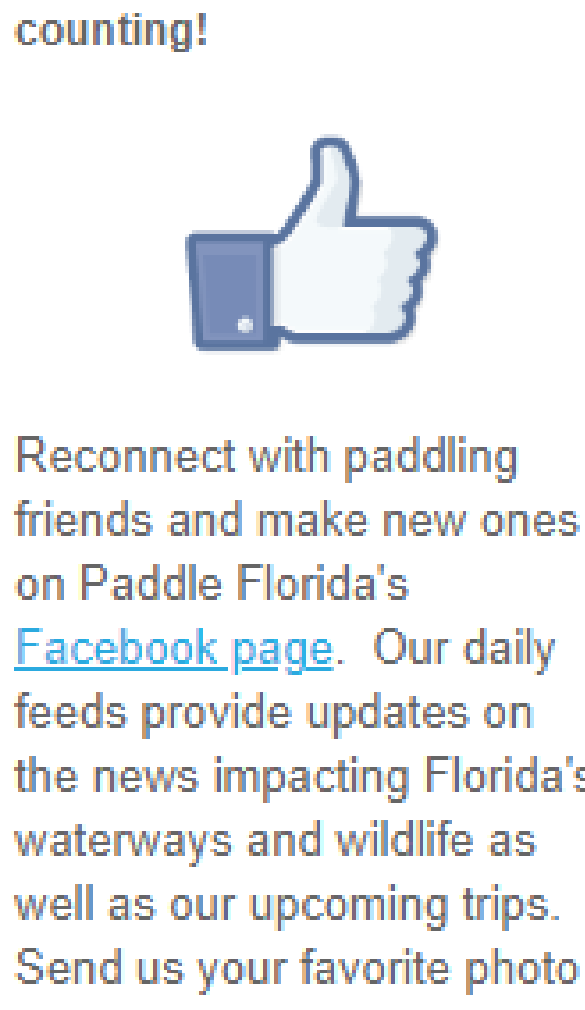
[Wild, Wonderful Withlacoochee](#)
February 9-14, 2021
Beginning at Lake Panasofkee, paddlers will thread their way through hardwood swamps and tannic streams on a 60-mile journey to the Gulf of Mexico. The adventure includes a side trip to the colorful Rainbow River and its world class first magnitude spring. *The registration deadline for this trip has passed.*

[Springtime on the Chipola](#)
March 17-23, 2021
This will be our 4th different trip in Florida's panhandle, joining the Ochlockonee, the Choctawhatchee, and the Perdido. Given the right conditions, this river will be suitable for all paddlers and paddlecraft. Florida Caverns State Park is the starting point for staging this event next March, when spring will be blooming in the panhandle. This is going to be a great experience! **Only 14 spots left!** Register by: February 28th

[Suwannee River Paddling Festival](#)
April 2-4, 2021
With camping atop the bluff overlooking two beautiful rivers, our season-capping festival takes place at Suwannee River State Park near Live Oak. The weekend will offer supported 8-12 mile paddling options on both the Suwannee and Withlacoochee Rivers, a concert featuring Florida's favorite musicians, and educational presentations from regional waterway experts. *Registration for this event is full.*

Note: Many of Paddle Florida trips have historically sold out before the registration deadline, so to ensure you have a spot, please register early.

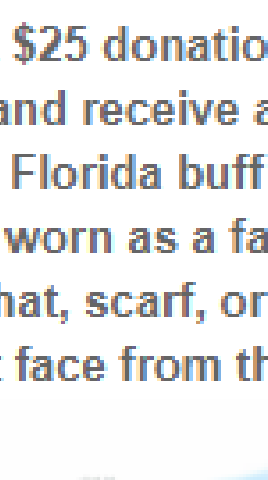
How To: Choose A Good Paddling spot



Choosing a good paddling spot is an essential skill to learn how to kayak. [\[Read more...\]](#)

Like us on Facebook

30,283+ followers and counting!



Reconnect with paddling friends and make new ones on Paddle Florida's [Facebook page](#). Our daily feeds provide updates on the news impacting Florida's waterways and wildlife as well as our upcoming trips. Send us your favorite photo depicting paddling in Florida and it might be selected as our 'Picture of the Day!'

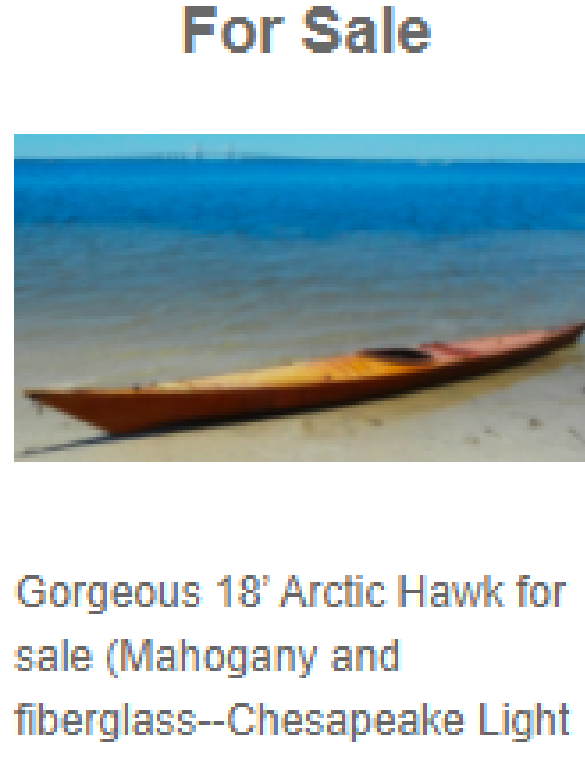
Support Paddle Florida

During this challenging time, we are all changing our daily lives in order to minimize and shorten the impact of this awful virus. To continue our programs of place-based learning in the great outdoors, we are counting on the Paddle Florida Community to help us through this difficult time.

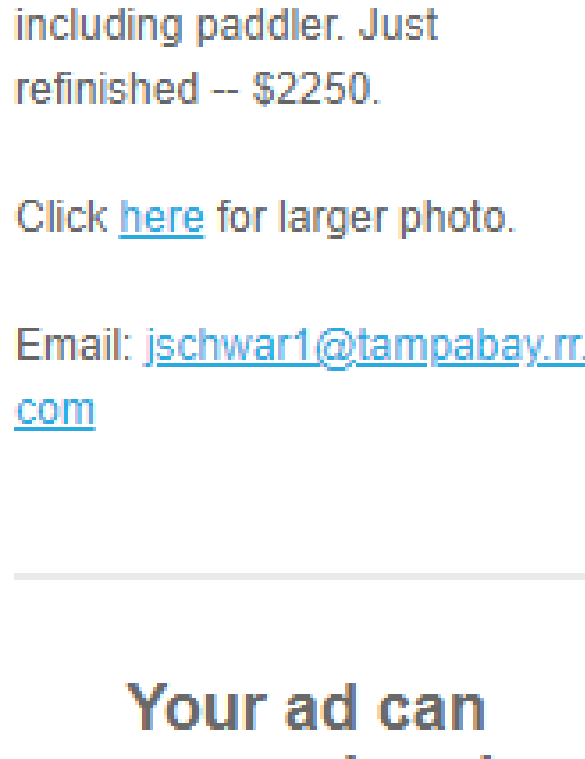
Please consider making a donation* to show your support of our mission of connecting people to nature and each other.

In appreciation of your donation, you will receive a special gift:

Make a \$25 donation [HERE](#) and receive a Paddle Florida buff that can be worn as a face mask, hat, scarf, or to protect face from the sun.



Make a \$50 donation [HERE](#) and receive a 11x14 watercolor paper giclée print "A Bevy of Paddlers" painted by one of our own paddlers, Peggy Perry



Make a \$75 donation [HERE](#) and receive a long-sleeved, dri-fit Paddle Florida shirt.



Click on the photo to enlarge.

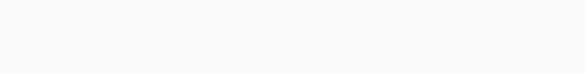
We are all in this together.

To donate online using your debit or credit card, please click the links above.

To donate by check, please send an email with your name and address to bill@paddleflorida.org

*The CARES Act allows taxpayers to deduct up to \$300 in charitable donations made in 2020 without itemizing.

For Sale



Gorgeous 18' Arctic Hawk for sale (Mahogany and fiberglass--Chesapeake Light Craft) Click here for larger photo.

Carefully maintained. Fast, fun, nimble, stiff and lightweight - 44 lb. Large keyhole cockpit ready to customize for your personal fit. Turns and tracks well. Proven Greenland design. Carves nicely -- Shallow "V" hull with hard chine for great structural stability. Beam 22", draft 4". Front and rear waterproof storage areas allowing maximum payload of 350 lb. including paddler. Just refinished -- \$2250.

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Email: jschwartz@tamgabayr.com

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