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DID YOU KNOW?

Prescribed Fires at Oscar Scherer Protect Wildlife and Visitors

Did you know that prescribed fires are vital for protecting and preserving Oscar Scherer State Park's natural ecosystems? These carefully planned burns are carried out by the park's fire crew under the direction of a certified burn boss. Fire Managers and Burn Bosses in the Florida Park Service spend time planning and prepping before each burn to ensure the safety of both the public and firefighters. Burn days are chosen based on weather conditions like wind, temperature, and humidity to keep the fire controlled and effective.

The park's habitats—such as pine flatwoods and scrubby flatwoods—depend on periodic fire to thrive. Species like the Florida scrub-jay, gopher tortoise, and indigo snake rely on these fire-adapted environments. Without regular burns, invasive plants and underbrush can overtake the land, threatening native wildlife and upsetting the ecosystem.

Prescribed fires also help reduce wildfire risk by clearing dry, flammable vegetation. This protects nearby communities and maintains open, healthy spaces for wildlife and visitors. Oscar Scherer's fire crew assists other Florida state parks with burns and receives support in return. This teamwork helps keep Florida's natural areas thriving and safe.



<https://www.floridastateparks.org/PrescribedFire>



Manager's Message

Matt Kruse
Park Manager

Hello Friends of Oscar Scherer Park,

Thank you for making Oscar Scherer a great place to work and visit. The park staff have experienced an exciting spring traveling about south Florida responding to wildfires. The intense late spring storms have caused wildfires to erupt at neighboring parks. Oscar Scherer State Park employees responded to the call to provide relief at Myakka River, Alafia River, and Fakahatchee Strand State Parks. The Friends offered their support by providing work crews with water, snacks, and other refreshments while on deployment. The Friends have also been busy with numerous improvements to the Nature center. Recent projects include new lighting fixtures, new ceiling fans, and a new floor in the adjacent annex room. The floor inside the nature center sparkles and shines after a professional cleaning and waxing funded by the Friends of Oscar Scherer. Please stop by to see the improvements. The park is also planning for future upgraded interpretive displays in the Nature Center.

After a long delay on the roadway paving, the project is finally underway. Plans include overlaying the roads throughout the park with new asphalt. The pavement will cover the front entrance along the main park drive all the way to the Legacy trail access gate. The project will also include paving the campground loop, along with parking lot improvements at Lake Osprey and Legacy Trail parking lots. Please be careful when traveling through the park while construction is occurring.

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VOLUNTEERS

Are you interested in helping out with the operations of a state park? Florida State Parks have many volunteer opportunities, day volunteer positions and residential positions.

Some examples of the volunteer opportunities include: Nature Center host, Ranger Station assistant, field worker, trail maintenance, butterfly gardening, park maintenance, campground hosts, specialty skills worker, and many others. There is something for everyone; all skill levels and abilities are welcomed and encouraged. Our winter seasonal events and programs are kicking off and are always in need of extra volunteers.

We have a group of volunteers that work strictly on Mondays and/or Wednesdays from 8 am to noon on various tasks. They split wood, work on trails, carpentry, mowing and trimming, and whatever else needs to be done for the day. It is a great way to meet new friends!

Did you know that campground hosts get a campsite for up to 4 months at no charge, in exchange for your volunteering 24 hours per week? We're currently in need of campground hosts for the months of June thru November.

If you are interested in volunteering, please complete an online volunteer application at:
<https://www.floridastateparks.org/get-involved/volunteer>.

If you would like more information on volunteer opportunities, please feel free to contact Jamie Butler, Park Services Specialist, at (941) 882-7219 or e-mail at Jamie.Butler@floridadep.gov

"Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." – Sherry Anderson

***Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers at
Oscar Scherer State Park!***

National Public Lands Day
Saturday, September 27th
Visit or Volunteer!



— Regular park entry fees apply —



Manager's Message (continued from page 2)

As the Florida sun climbs high, casting its golden glow across the landscape, Oscar Scherer State Park in Osprey transforms into a vibrant summer haven, offering a refreshing escape into nature's embrace. While the mercury rises, the park's diverse ecosystems and wealth of activities provide ample opportunities for adventure, relaxation, and a deeper connection with Florida's unique natural heritage.

One of the undeniable stars of a summer visit to Oscar Scherer is Lake Osprey. This pristine freshwater lake, complete with a sandy beach, beckons visitors to cool off from the heat. Swimming, snorkeling, and simply lounging by its clear waters offer a welcome respite, making it a perfect spot for families and individuals alike. For those seeking more active water pursuits, canoeing and kayaking along South Creek, a tidal blackwater stream that flows to a nearby bay, provides a tranquil journey through shaded mangrove forests. Rentals are available, making it easy for everyone to explore these serene waterways.



Beyond the aquatic allure, Oscar Scherer boasts an impressive 15 miles of trails – a network perfect for hiking, biking, and wildlife viewing. While summer brings warmth, the park's lush hardwood hammocks and pine flatwoods offer shaded sections, especially along trails like the South Creek and Lester Finley trails. The Legacy Trail access gate is currently closed for construction, please check the website for updates. While the Legacy trail may be closed, the Orange and Green trails are both open after a lengthy closure. Remember to bring water, wear appropriate footwear, and apply sunscreen and insect repellent for a comfortable experience.

Summer is also a prime time for wildlife spotting. Park visitors have been reporting numerous bobcat sightings. Early mornings and late afternoons are often the best times to catch a glimpse of these fascinating residents, as well as other captivating creatures like gopher tortoises, deer, and a variety of bird species. With a little patience and luck, you may be able to spot one of the animals that call Oscar Scherer home. The park's nature center provides valuable information and exhibits about the local flora and fauna.

For those looking to extend their stay and fully immerse themselves in the park's tranquility, camping at Oscar Scherer is an excellent option. The park offers full-facility campsites with electric and water hookups for both tents and RVs, as well as a primitive group camping area. Many sites provide a sense of privacy and seclusion, allowing campers to truly disconnect and enjoy the sounds of nature. Reservations are highly recommended, especially during peak seasons, but spots may be available on short notice in the summer.

While the heat of summer is undeniable, Oscar Scherer State Park offers a unique opportunity to experience the "real Florida" in a dynamic and engaging way. From cooling dips in Lake Osprey to peaceful paddles down South Creek, invigorating hikes through diverse habitats, and the thrill of spotting rare wildlife, a summer visit to this exceptional state park promises memorable adventures and a deeper appreciation for the Sunshine State's natural beauty.



NATURE CENTER TIDBITS

We Get Fired Up at OSSP

Believe it or not, nature likes to be fired up. Well, not completely and only occasionally. For example, Florida pond pines and sand pines have cones that open when fire melts the resin that holds the scales closed. That lets the seeds fall out.

Other plants, such as the longleaf pine, wire grass and saw palmetto, have evolved to survive wildfires. Saw palmettos have rhizomes that appear to be underground or partially buried trunks. That means much of the plant is not exposed to high heat, so it can quickly recover after a fire. Fire also benefits certain plants by eliminating other flora that compete for the same moisture and nutrients they do.

Let's Prescribe a Burn

Because winters are dry in Florida, many plants are subject to fires started by accident or a lightning strike. So, it is not always wise to let nature take its unrestricted course. Since Oscar Scherer State Park is in close proximity to roads and residential and commercial buildings, care must be taken.

That's when Florida state park fire teams take action. Each region has members that can be called upon to travel to a specific park to help with a prescribed burn. Their careful observation and management of the burn safeguards delicate ecosystems and neighborhoods.

What Are the VIPERS?

Of course, subtropical Florida state parks have vipers that visitors may catch sight of slinking across a hiking path or sunning themselves on a dirt road. But there is also a group of the state's fire team called VIPER (Vanguard Pyric Ecosystems for Restoration).

The VIPER team specializes in habitat preservation and promoting the health of endemic species. So, the VIPER team will visit Oscar Scherer's scrubby flatwoods because the habitat requires periodically controlled burns to maintain the correct ecosystem for the vulnerable Florida scrub jay.

They're Suited for the Job

The fire teams wear special clothing and carry survival gear while corralling a burn. In the photo, you may notice a compass, whistle, a flashlight with a red blinker, safety glasses, walkie talkie, helmet and heavy boots.

To set the fires, the teams use a metal drip torch. To remove the oxygen from a section of a grass fire, they may employ a long-handled rubber flapper. Also, part of their working kit is a pouch containing a flame-resistant emergency shelter in case they become disoriented in flames or thick smoke and need protection from the heat.

Please visit the park's nature center to learn more about being a firefighter or a VIPER. While you are there, say hi to "Burnie," the main component of our prescribed burn exhibit.



SCRUB-JAY FUN FACTS

Florida Scrub-Jay Juveniles



Spring and summer is an exciting time of the year at Oscar Scherer, when we start seeing the new young birds! Usually in early May, young fledglings may be observed after they have left the nest. The brown-headed juveniles can be distinguished from adults through about August or September when they molt into adult plumage.

The young birds leave the nest an average of 18 days after hatching. Upon fledging, they are about 75% the size of an adult. As with most passerine birds, these fledglings cannot yet fly but can run, climb, and perch. Parents and adult helpers will be nearby attending and feeding them. They are able to fly short distances about 25 days after hatching, and are capable flyers around day 32. These young birds practice foraging and are able to catch and consume some arthropods by day 38. By day 60, they can forage on their own and by day 85, are nutritionally independent. These young birds will stay with the family group for at least a year and often for subsequent years as cooperative breeder helpers.

Information from: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/flsjay>

Our featured scrub-jay this quarter is LS-AF (Light Green/Silver-Azure/Flesh). This male Florida Scrub-Jay was banded on 7/17/20 and is from the CAMP family. He skipped around the park looking for a mate and started associating with the droop-wing female in June 2021, when they were named the LGCY group. In early 2023, he left the LGCY group and paired with recently widowed RS-LF in the adjacent CNTY area. He and his mate have been successful breeders and had three young in 2024 and another three in 2024. At the beginning of this year, the CNTY group numbered eight birds.

<https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/adopt-a-scrubjay>

KEEP THE WILD IN THE WILD

Do Not Feed our Scrub-Jays!

The official position (of the Department of Environmental Protection) is that "Intentional feeding of a threatened species (including luring them to one's person), constitutes take (i.e. harass, molest, possess) as the activity alters the natural behavior of the bird by changing its diet and feeding behaviors as well as acclimating it to make contact with humans."



Volunteer News

Dear Friends of Oscar Scherer Park,

I just wanted to take a moment to share some special gratitude on behalf of “The Gentlemen”.

“The Gentlemen” are back at it again! This time, spreading fresh mulch around the playground at Lake Osprey in the middle of summer. Their impact on this park is substantial and unwavering!

We really appreciate the work they do at the park and their unwavering dedication to show up twice a week all summer long! Big round of applause and gratitude for these “Gentlemen”!



Special thanks to Deb Murray who is always first through the door and off to work treating exotic plants and keeping up with the butterfly garden.

Have a great week my Friends!

Sincerely, Jamie Butler, Park Services Specialist

Volunteer Spotlight

Bruce Eales

A Big Thanks for Hard Work and Dedication!



Let's take a moment to appreciate the dedication and sheer effort that goes into keeping our campground looking its best. This man has been out there in the blazing heat, tirelessly working to clean up fallen palm fronds and branches. With the Dodge and the dump truck loaded up, he's already made a huge impact—and there's another load coming tomorrow!

Next time you see him, give him a well-earned high five and a heartfelt thank you. His hard work makes a difference, and we are grateful for everything he does to keep our space beautiful!



Friends of Oscar Scherer Park - Volunteers

An industrious team of volunteers is an integral part of ensuring that Oscar Scherer State Park is maintained in peak condition. These volunteers do a variety of tasks and administrative duties dedicated to supporting the park in its undertaking to provide a natural environment of learning and pleasure for all: campers, day visitors, adults and children, naturalists, and visiting groups such as school children and scouts.

Our volunteer's projects include:

- General "hands on" maintenance projects, including providing firewood for campers.
- Preserving and improving the 15 miles of hiking trails and updating trail markers.
- Conserving the habitat of the Florida Scrub-jay.
- Maintaining 106 campsites and related facilities through the Florida Campground Host Program.
- Presenting nature and outreach programs; including bird walks and nature strolls, to provide a deeper understanding of the park's natural ecosystem.
- Removing invasive exotic plants, encourage Florida native plant gardening, and maintaining the butterfly gardens.

<https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/volunteers/>

Park Updates



- New LED lighting in Nature Center Screen Room

- New floor finish In Nature Center Screen Room



- Cleaning and sealing of Nature Center floor tiles

- Park repaving project in process



Florida State Park System

Park System Map available online:

https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/State_Parks_Map_36x36-color_no_aerial_2023.pdf



Friends of Oscar Scherer State Park

Board Director Spotlight

Bob Frank

During his working years, Bob was a professor and dean at several universities in Ohio. He is trained as neuroscientist and conducted research in the areas of drug abuse and human taste and smell perception. He retired several years ago and moved to Osprey, allowing him to get involved in local conservation activities and indulge in his hobby of wildlife photography. In addition to serving on the board of Friends of Oscar Scherer Park, Bob is a board member and president of Friends of Myakka River, the chair of his community's Ponds and Preserves Committee and serves on Sarasota County's Neighborhood Initiative Grant Advisory Committee. In his spare time, he and his wife Allie enjoy international travel, cycling, and summer trips around North America in their travel trailer.



Bob recently earned his Florida Master Naturalist certificate. See the story here:

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasotaco/2025/05/20/meet-bob-frank-a-florida-master-naturalist-program-success-story/>

Dave and Julie Wankowski

Dave and Julie Wankowski, Wisconsin natives who became proud Florida residents in 2022, bring a shared love of the outdoors and a deep commitment to service to their roles on the board of the Friends of Oscar Scherer State Park. Married for over 20 years, they are the proud parents of two children and grandparents to four (soon to be five) active, adventurous grandchildren.

With a strong passion for nature, the Wankowskis enjoy hiking, cycling, traveling, and shark tooth hunting along Florida's coastlines. Their appreciation for natural beauty and conservation led them to become actively involved in Oscar Scherer State Park, where they now help support community outreach, education, and environmental stewardship. Dave also previously served as a park ranger for Oscar Scherer State Park.

Professionally, both have devoted their careers to the field of Food Safety. Dave is semi-retired and works as a consultant, while Julie serves full-time as a Business Development Director at Neogen, continuing to advocate for public health and safety. In addition to his work and park involvement, Dave also serves on two HOA boards in the Venice area.

The Oscar Scherer State Park Florida Scrub-Jay Adoption Program is your opportunity to directly support our efforts to protect and preserve the threatened Florida Scrub-Jay population for current and future generations.



Scan me to
adopt your
Scrub-Jay
online!



Or go to: <https://friendsofoscarscherer.com/adopt-a-scrubjay/>



Juvenile Florida Scrub-Jay

Our Nature Center

The nature center offers interactive ways to learn about park programs, history, and wildlife.

Oscar Scherer's interpretive nature center is located adjacent to Lake Osprey and a large picnic area, or a short walk over the bridge from the campground.

Stop in to chat with one of our wonderful volunteers to learn more. Hours may vary so contact the park at 941-483-5956 for current hours. The public hours are made possible by volunteers.



Meet the Friends' Directors & Officers (June 2025)

President - Ron Newton
Vice President - Jim Rogers
Secretary - Dave Wankowski
Treasurer - Anne Heuer

Robert Frank
Joel Robbins
Julie Wankowski

Meet the Park's Staff (June 2025)

Park Manager – Matt Kruse
Assistant Park Manager – Chris Tretter
Administrative Assistant – Alyssa Rothstein
Park Services Specialist – Jamie Butler
Services Specialist – Jon Hunter
Park Ranger – Ty Beetham
Park Ranger – Colin Ott

Park Ranger – Glenn Mitchell
Park Ranger – Morgen Coe
Park Ranger – Jerry Bodnar OPS
ROAR AmeriCorps – Laurie Johnson
AmeriCorps ANT Member – Ibrahim Sharif
AmeriCorps ANT Member – Ezra Townsend