

January
Newsletter
2017

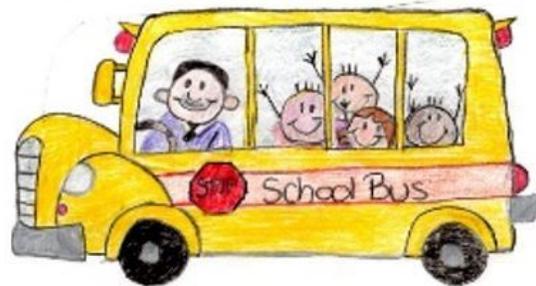


FRIENDS OF FLORIDA STATE PARKS

Breathing New LIFE Into Our Parks

Friends of Florida State Parks is delighted to announce that the LIFE program has never been more alive and kicking in our state parks and 2017 promises to be a record year.

LIFE stands for Learning in Florida's Environment and it serves many purposes. First of all, it is a model for science-based education on public conservation lands. Each program represents a partnership between FFSP, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and a school district to bring students outdoors to learn science.



The program was launched by the DEP in 2004 but unexpectedly cancelled by them in April 2015. Because we considered this to be such an important program, FFSP agreed to take over the reins last year.

Today, we are happy to report that nine state parks are currently participating in the program with a further nine pledged to offer it in the coming months. Almost each day we get more inquiries from parks, the park's Citizen Support Organizations and teachers wanting to get involved and the Florida Park Service has agreed that park staff can also participate in supporting LIFE.

Now is the time to take LIFE to the next level. We are shortly going to advertise for a part-time statewide LIFE Director able to successfully steer the program over the next year or so. We plan on appointing a volunteer LIFE supervisor in each of the Florida Park Service's five districts and, of course, we want many more schools and parks participating and many more volunteers, teachers and supporters getting involved.

The LIFE program is a process for reinforcing and enriching the existing curriculum through hands-on, field labs facilitated by educators, scientists, rangers and trained volunteers. Each LIFE site is tailored to address local priorities and unique environmental issues. This is done in consultation with the school board and science teachers from the participating schools. Students participate in multiple field experiences each year and are exposed to real-world technology careers.

Another benefit is that most of the students have never been to a state park before and, hopefully, they will persuade their parents to come out and visit as well. We have to engage these young people and help them understand the importance of protecting and preserving our public lands. After all, they will be the next custodians of these precious places.

Until now the LIFE program has focused on children from middle schools but our aim is to eventually expand it to cover all grades and to introduce programs targeting adults and families that can be held on weekends. Ideally, we would like every state park to become an open-air classroom offering LIFE programs.

There are many ways that you can help. You can become a partner educator and assist at existing LIFE program sites. You can help support travel costs to bring students to the field and help buy the equipment needed. If you are a parent or a teacher, you can encourage participation in the LIFE program at a park near you.

Above all, if you are interested in helping expand this valuable program by becoming our first part time statewide LIFE Director we would love to hear from you. For more information about this and the LIFE program in general, please contact ffspinc@gmail.com.



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