



SCCF

Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
Come explore our natural world

JULY - AUGUST 2019



SCCF MEMBER UPDATE

Marsh Rabbits and Your Plants

By Audrey Albrecht, Biologist and Shorebird Coordinator

The marsh rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris*) is a native species in Florida, and can be found throughout the state. Throughout most of their range they are considered a species of least concern for conservation purposes, but the Florida Keys subspecies, the Lower Keys rabbit (*Sylvilagus palustris hefneri*) is both state and federally endangered.

Though they are from the same family as cottontails, marsh rabbits lack the signature white fluffy tail of their relatives. Marsh rabbits are strong swimmers,



and tend to walk using all four legs rather than hop like most rabbits. Their predators include alligators, owls, hawks, bobcats, and coyotes. In addition to threats from predators, flooding and hurricanes can take a toll on rabbit populations by flooding out their nesting habitat. Rabbits breed year-round in south Florida, but the peak of breeding takes place between December and June.

The marsh rabbit's preferred home is in wetland habitat, especially freshwater marshes. Over time, the landscape of Sanibel has changed significantly, leaving much less acreage of freshwater marshes and cordgrass swales. In the absence of natural fire regimes, many of these marshes have begun to fill in with hardwoods like buttonwood. Our freshwater marshes are not only important for our rabbits, but also for our only endemic animal species: the Sanibel Island rice rat (*Oryzomys palustris sanibeli*). Both of these small mammals are also important prey species for our native hawks and owls, who also suffer the loss of this important habitat type.

SCCF and other agencies on the island conduct occasional prescribed burns to maintain healthy marshes and swales for the benefit of all our native wildlife. In addition

See Rabbits on Page 2



Plants that rabbits like to eat:

- Firebush (*Hamelia patens*)
- Gaillardia/Blanket Flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*)
- Dune Sunflowers (*Helianthus debilis*)
- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Grasses-Muhley Grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), Fakahatchee Grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*), Sea Oats (*Uniola paniculata*), Dwarf Fakahatchee (*Tripsacum floridanum*)
- Blue Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*)
- Tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*)

Plants that rabbits don't like to eat:

- Red Salvia (*Salvia coccinea*)
- Southern River Sage (*Salvia misella*)
- Bahama Cassia (*Senna mexicana var. chapmanii*)
- Cocoplum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*)
- Coontie (*Zamia pumila*)
- Quailberry (*Crossopetalum ilicifolium*)
- Walter's Viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*)
- Several aquatic: Blue Flag Iris (*Iris virginica*), Canna Lily (*Canna flaccida*), Lizard's Tail (*Saururus cernuus*)
- Wild Coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*)
- Gopher Apple (*Licania michauxii*)

SCCF's New Skid-Steer Enhances Land Restoration Capability

By Chris Lechowicz, Director, SCCF's Wildlife & Habitat Management Program

When SCCF acquires land for conservation, the native habitat of that land has usually been negatively impacted and requires restoration. SCCF's Wildlife & Habitat Management staff (WHM) is charged with this task. Before development, Sanibel's interior wetlands were an open savannah, maintained by fire from lightning strikes. With development, fire must be tightly controlled in order to preserve homes and private property – but that means that woody shrubs and trees begin to encroach on that savannah, replacing the open grasslands that are suited to Sanibel's native wildlife.

SCCF recently purchased a John Deere skid-steer (a compact track loader, similar to a bobcat) to aid in habitat restoration. The purchase was made possible through generous gifts from the Wescustogo Foundation/Nanovic Family; the Donald Slavik Family Foundation; Linda and Wayne Boyd; Leah and Doug Beck; The Pfeifer Realty Group; Kay Redmond; and Kris and Doug Ryckman, who all responded to a campaign to support WHM's work.

The new skid-steer enables SCCF to handle larger projects that were previously contracted out. It can remove undesirable trees (up to 5" in diameter) from the ground in seconds, whereas previously, trees were cut down by hand and left in place on the ground, deterring the growth of desirable ground cover plants. Now, the fallen trees can be moved to piles or mulched, allowing grasses and other low plants to grow in their place. Additionally, the skid-steer is less likely to get stuck in mud when working wildlands because it uses tracks, not wheels. Tracks provide more surface area on the ground, making it easier to maneuver over large obstacles.

Along with the John Deere skid-steer, the forestry package was purchased to protect the vehicle as much as possible on wildlands. This package includes additional metal panels over exposed areas to prevent sticks and brush from puncturing lights and hydraulic lines, as well as a reinforced door, windows and roof to protect the operator from flying debris. Also, a root rake grapple was purchased to pull trees and brush out of the ground so it could be moved and stacked into piles for burning or to let break down naturally. The bucket attachment (included) can be used to move dirt and create low depressions in the soil to increase wetlands. Most importantly, the purchase of a mulcher attachment allows tree stems, stumps, and debris up to 5 inches in diameter to be grinded down.

Acquisition of the skid-steer also enables SCCF to have two pieces of heavy machinery working on a project. After 2017's Hurricane Irma, the clean-up of SCCF's fire breaks and trails took about six months with just one tractor and low manpower. With the skid-steer and our tractor working simultaneously, it would have taken one quarter of that time.

The skid-steer will greatly enhance SCCF's habitat restoration work. Through the combination of controlled burning (where possible), wildland mowing, and the clearing of both non-native (and native) invasive vegetation with the skid-steer, it will



Rabbits -- Continued from Page 1

to prescribed burns, SCCF mows some of these areas during the dry season, and engages in mechanical removal of buttonwood (see story above).

As our city's vision statement says: "Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary, one in which a diverse population lives in harmony with the island's wildlife and natural habitats." Our native rabbit population is currently experiencing a natural boom, which will

eventually subside.

On Page 1 is a list of plants for your landscaping consideration. If you have questions about landscaping to attract or to naturally deter rabbits, please stop by our Native Landscapes and Garden Center at the Bailey Homestead Preserve to talk with our native plant experts (or call 472-1932).

Right: The root rake grappler attachment allows the habitat management team to grab exotic vegetation, debris and downed trees and move them to piles. Far right: it is carrying a Brazilian pepper tree (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) to a pile of debris after ripping it out of the ground (roots and all). Below left: SCCF Land Conservation Steward and Chief Operator, Victor Young, stands next to the new skid-steer and a debris pile he just stacked.



be possible to more efficiently restore the open canopy grasslands (particularly *Spartina* marshes) that once covered Sanibel's interior.

The skid-steer will also provide measurable results and public visibility of the restoration of Sanibel's natural habitat to a more historic state. SCCF currently manages about 1,800 acres on Sanibel, and conducts several wildlife monitoring projects on Sanibel, Captiva, North Captiva and other islands in Pine Island Sound.



Pfeifer Realty Group Broker-Owner Eric Pfeifer with SCCF's CEO, Ryan Orgera. Operation Working Smarter is the name for SCCF's Wildlife & Habitat Management fundraising campaign.

SCCF is pleased to announce a \$2,500 gift from Pfeifer Realty Group to be directed toward new land restoration equipment for Wildlife & Habitat Management.

As a Trustee on SCCF's Board of Directors, Pfeifer Realty Marketing Director, Mary Ellen Pfeifer, co-serves as board liaison with Robin Krivanek of the committee reporting to the Board on the work of the Wildlife & Habitat Management staff. Pfeifer learned how the department's old equipment was impacting their ability to function efficiently. Pfeifer and Krivanek requested some equipment updates, including a new

ANNUAL FUND DRIVE
YOU DID IT!

Thanks to the generous support of our wonderful members, we have reached our Annual Fund Drive goal for this fiscal year.

The Board of Trustees and hardworking staff will be forever grateful that we ended FY2018-2019 with our operating budget fully funded.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

John Deere Skid Steer.

In support of the equipment request, Pfeifer Realty Group kicked in \$2,500 toward the equipment and accessories.

"We are pleased to be able to support the work of the Wildlife & Habitat Management staff," said Pfeifer. "This equipment will be used in the restoration and maintenance of habitat on SCCF preserves. Once conservation land has been purchased, it usually requires restoration, which is part of SCCF's work that is often not seen by the public."

Notes SCCF CEO, Ryan Orgera, "We are lucky to have Trustees who are so invested in the work being done by SCCF staff, and the financial support provided by Eric and Mary Ellen Pfeifer helps us to further that work."

Natural Resource Policy: Legislative Update

By Rae Ann Wessel, Natural Resource Policy Director and Holly Schwartz, Policy Assistant

2019 Florida Legislative Session Recap

The Legislature gets high marks for passing a budget that provides significant funding for Everglades and water resources, delivering a stated priority of Governor DeSantis. Unfortunately, despite last year's devastating water crisis, no meaningful water quality or water pollution legislation passed despite 40 proposed water related bills.



Budget: The \$91.1 billion budget was primed by Governor DeSantis with a target of \$625 million for Everglades restoration and water quality improvements. The Legislature exceeded that target passing \$682 million. The budget breakdown included:

- \$367.2 m for Everglades
- \$100 m for Springs (\$50 m unspent from last year)
- \$145 m for the C43 reservoir
- \$108 m for CEP/EAA reservoir
- \$10.8 m for the blue-green algae task force
- \$4.8 m for red tide research and mitigation
- \$10 m for Innovative technology to treat and remove algae
- \$25 m cost share for local government to address septic and stormwater sources of pollution
- \$500,000 for Sanibel's Donax wastewater treatment plant
- \$33 m for Florida Forever (no funding to Florida Communities Trust or Rural and Family Lands), far from last year's \$100 m and the historic funding of \$300 m that built our state's extraordinary, award-winning park and preserve system.

Passed but Vetoed: HB 771, the Plastic Straw Ban Preemption was just one of an extraordinary number of state preemption bills considered by the Legislature this year. The straw ban bill was combined with a contaminated plastics and sunscreen bill. The bill that passed would have suspended existing bans passed by local governments like Sanibel and Ft. Myers Beach until a study could be completed. This bill was an assault on local government's ability to address a real problem that local governments took positive action to address. Fortunately, the Governor vetoed this ridiculous legislative action.

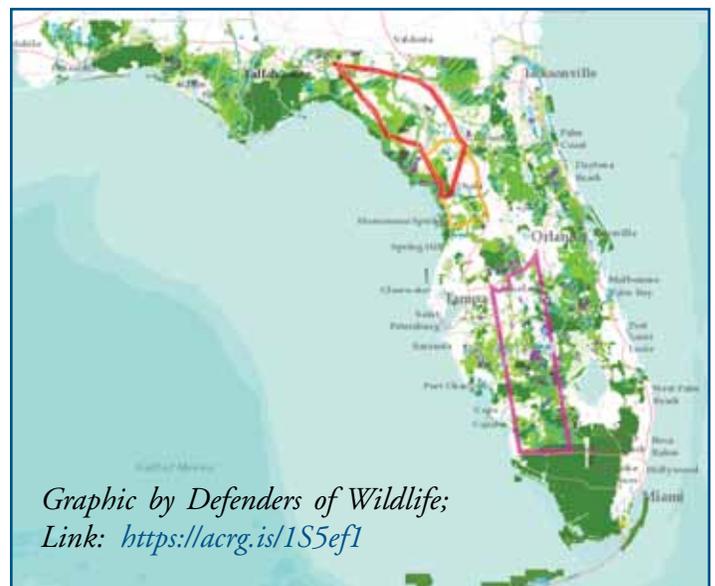
Map right: The three color boxes are the planning corridors for the three toll roads.

Failed Water Quality: no less than 40 bills were introduced that touched on some form of water quality improvement including septic tank inspections, bio-solids management, fertilizer requirements, public health data and records management, environmental resource permitting rules, and waste water treatment and septic to sewer initiatives. Not one good water bill passed.

Taxpayer Dollars Misspent:

Passed Transportation: SB 7068, the Toll Road to Nowhere, Senate President Galvano's priority bill, passed and has been signed into law by Governor DeSantis. The bill features three toll roads from Collier County to the Georgia state line where it dead ends. Georgia DOT officials were taken by surprise to find out about the bill from a reporter because this multi-billion dollar highway expansion will not connect to any existing road. This bill shifts critical funding from the state's general fund away from needed projects to these roads which will not be self-sustaining. In exchange they will result in long term, devastating impacts on Florida's environmentally and ecologically valuable conservation lands critical to water storage, cleaning and aquifer recharge (see map below). Watch for public meetings in the near future to take public comment.

Passed Growth Management: HB 7103, a Community Development and Housing bill passed with a late-filed



Graphic by Defenders of Wildlife;
Link: <https://acrg.is/1S5ef1>

amendment that effectively eliminates citizen challenges and enforcement of local comprehensive plans. As this newsletter goes to print, the Governor still has the opportunity to recognize the chilling effect this bill will have on citizens that serve as the last option to hold their local governments accountable for questioning local growth rules. SCCF opposes this bill and actively requests that Governor DeSantis veto this bill.

Failed Fracking Ban: The session started with a pair of comprehensive Fracking ban bills sponsored by Senators Montford and Stewart and Representative Heather Fitzenhagen. Leadership of both the House and Senate actively substituted incomplete, partial ban bills for the early-filed comprehensive ban bills. The partial ban bills do not address matrix acidizing, the key form of Fracking practiced in and harmful to Florida's unique geology. Despite the Governor's support of a Fracking ban, none of the Fracking ban bills advanced this year.

Catch your breath, we'll need to get back to work preparing for next year's session. Since 2020 will be an election year the Legislature has scheduled the annual session to begin two months early in January. This means committee meetings will begin this September!

Good News:

Everglades Action Day Mobilized Your Voices

Thank you to everyone who helped us achieve the 7th Annual Everglades Action Day in April! This year we brought our biggest group to meet with over 70 legislators and staff at the Florida Capitol.

Everglades Restoration

There is much better news on the Everglades front. President Trump increased his Everglades budget from \$63 million to the \$200 million needed to make significant progress on the EAA (Everglades Agricultural Area,



south of Lake O) reservoir.

Funding for the remainder of the Tamiami Trail project has also been committed with \$60 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation and \$40 million committed by the state. This fully funds the remaining work to elevate Tamiami Trail to allow water to flow south into Everglades National Park. The last 5.5 miles will be accelerated by the use of high span, pre-cast culverts instead of bridging. Work is ongoing to remove the old road under the current bridges to increase flows south.

EAA Reservoir

Progress has been accelerated on one of the most critical Everglades projects, the EAA reservoir. On 6/5/19 the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) submitted permit applications to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Florida Department of Environmental Protection to clear, grub, and demuck 690 acres to begin site work on the state-owned land currently leased to Florida Crystals.

In a letter from Florida Crystals to the SFWMD on 4/10/19 they stated, "The terms of the lease executed in November 2018 show it was designed to accelerate the project by giving the SFWMD early access to 560 acres of land, allowing the agency to begin site work... The lease was also written to ensure that land will be available as needed and without delay for the EAA reservoir's construction. Florida Crystals is fully committed to ensuring the same timely and cooperative transition of the 16,158 acres of leased land for the EAA reservoir as was achieved with the A-1 FEB and the STA-1W expansion... you have our commitment that, if construction of the reservoir is accelerated, we will transition land covered by this lease as needed by the SFWMD for construction of the EAA reservoir project."

On 6/4/19 SFWMD Executive Director Bartlett responded "...reaffirming Florida Crystals' commitment to ensure your Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) operations and leases are not an obstacle to the construction of the EAA Reservoir Project" and "that [the District] will pursue expediting every component of this Project."

The District anticipates permits and preparation work on the perimeter levee and canal will be complete by the end of 2019. Accelerating the work anticipates construction could begin in 18 months. The Army Corps estimates the 10,100-acre reservoir being built by the Army Corps of Engineers should be completed in about eight years. The SFWMD and the Corps are splitting the \$1.8

See Policy on Page 6

Policy -- Continued from Page 5

billion cost of the project.

More Good News: C43 Treatment Planned

Addressing one of the Governor's commitments to tackle water quality, a Working Group has been formed to work on plans for a much-needed water quality treatment component for the C43 Reservoir (on the Caloosahatchee). The task force is composed of representatives of the City of Sanibel, Lee County, DEP, SFWMD and a contracted technical firm, J-Tech. Public meetings will be held to discuss and evaluate the best available science-based projects and select a project within 18 months. This is welcome progress as it has taken nearly two decades to get action on the need for this feature, despite it being the Prevention and Recovery Strategy for meeting the Caloosahatchee Minimum Flow and Level (MFL).

Federal Offshore Oil Drilling

Representative Francis Rooney continues the fight for a permanent moratorium on offshore oil drilling off Florida's coast. He is the sponsor of H.R. 205, the Protecting and Securing Florida's Coastline Act. This simple bill makes the moratorium on offshore drilling in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico permanent.

In testimony before the House Natural Resources Committee on the need for making the current moratorium on offshore drilling made permanent, he explained that action is needed because without additional legislation, the current moratorium will be lifted in 2022, leaving open the possibility of drilling just a few miles off Florida's shores.

We know well from our experience with the BP Oil Spill (which didn't even reach our beaches), that offshore drilling will undermine our economy by impacting tourism and the quality of our water-based recreation.

Rooney testified, *"In addition to the risks to our economy, we don't need to take this risk to be energy secure anymore. We have more reserves in the United States now than Russia or Saudi Arabia have in conventional reserves. The economic case for extending the drilling moratorium is strong. As important, the Eastern Gulf is home to the Gulf Test Range, a 120,000-square-mile range that stretches from the Florida panhandle to the Keys. This unimpeded training and testing areas are crucial national security assets that cannot be carried out anywhere else in the United States. The vast size allows the testing of hypersonic weapons, combat maneuvers training, drone testing, and untold future operations of weapons and platforms that will not only need space for testing, but also restricted access areas for classified operations."*

SCCF has signed onto a letter endorsing House Legislation to Protect Our Coasts from Offshore Drilling and Seismic Airgun Blasting.

Natural Resource Policy Challenge Grant: YOU DID IT!

As shared in a May 2 e-blast, The Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment issued a \$37,500 challenge grant to support the natural resource policy work of Rae Ann Wessel and others at SCCF.

Many thanks to all the SCCF Members who replied to that news with your own matching gifts. Because of your generosity, we have met that challenge. That means the operating budget for the policy program area will be fully funded before the June 30 end of this fiscal year.

Every donor to this effort has received individual acknowledgment letters, but we wanted all of SCCF's supporters to know we have reason to celebrate.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

And for those of you who may know the Campbell Family, please join us in sending them your own appreciation for their leadership in this effort.

Governor's Bluegreen Algae Task Force

The Governor's bluegreen algae task force held its first meeting June 12 in Tallahassee. ***The next two meetings will be held in Fort Myers and Sanibel.*** Dates/locations TBD .

Tumblers Available at the Garden Center

Show your support of SCCF while you're drinking coffee! Twenty-ounce vacuum-insulated tumblers are now available for purchase in the SCCF Native Landscapes & Garden Center. Made of stainless steel, the Klean Kanteen brand mugs have the SCCF logo and mission printed on the sides, and are perfect for keeping your coffee warm or your water cold. Each mug comes with a tumbler lid, and c o s t s \$26.95. SCCF members receive a 10% discount.



Garden Center Intern Ben Long

Ben Long graduated from the Georgia Institute of Technology in the beginning of May 2019 with his B.S. in Biology and a minor in Chinese. While attending college, his research projects included work in both evolutionary biology as well as ecologically minded urban agriculture. During his time at the Native Landscapes and Garden Center on Sanibel, Ben hopes to gather valuable field experience and knowledge of Florida's native flora so that he may ultimately pursue a career in plant conservation science.



SCCF July-August 2019 Program Schedule

CAPTIVA CRUISES

SCCF partners with Captiva Cruises for experiences on the water. SCCF docents narrate the family oriented daily Dolphin & Wildlife Adventure Cruise from 4-5:30pm. Captiva Cruises also offers lunch cruises to Cabbage Key, Useppa Island, Boca Grande and Tarpon Lodge On Pine Island. Beach & Shelling excursions to Cayo Costa State Park and Sunset Cruises are also available. Reservations are required. Call Captiva Cruises at (239) 472-5300 or book online (www.captivacruises.com).

TURTLE TRACKS

Sanibel Island had one of the first sea turtle monitoring programs in the country. Learn about the life cycles and habits of the sea turtles that nest on our beaches, SCCF's monitoring activities, and what we are doing to protect them. Learn about the devastating impacts on sea turtles of this past summer's Red Tide, when 204 dead sea turtles washed up on island beaches between July and November. *Thursdays at 10 a.m. in the Nature Center auditorium. Free to members and children, \$5 for non-members.*

SCCF JULY-AUGUST 2019

HAPPENINGS
PROGRAMS
OPPORTUNITIES

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 July	2 New Moon Meditation on Captiva-7:30pm-for info www.ambuyoga.com .	3	4 HOLIDAY	5	4
		10	11 Turtle Tracks-10	12	13	
		17	18 Turtle Tracks-10	19	20	
		24	25 Turtle Tracks-10	26	27	
		31	1 Aug Turtle Tracks-10 New Moon Meditation on Captiva-7:30pm-for info www.ambuyoga.com .	2	3	
		7	8 Turtle Tracks-10	9	10	
		14	15 Turtle Tracks-10	16	17	
		21 Save Our Water Forum (see flyer, left)	22 Turtle Tracks-10	23	24	
		28	29 Turtle Tracks-10	30	31	

SAVE OUR WATER

Wednesday, August 21, 2019
Hyatt Regency Coconut Point
7:30 am - 12:30 pm
Tickets - \$50
Open seating • Includes buffet breakfast
Purchase Tickets: tickets.news-press.com

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

DISCUSS water quality issues in Southwest Florida with expert speakers, presenters and panelists from the region:

- Noah Valenstein, Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- The Water School at FGCU
- The Conservancy of Southwest Florida
- Keep Lee County Beautiful
- South Florida Water Management District
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Public Health Impact
- Regional Water Policies
- Major Water Projects
- State Legislature Progress Report
- How YOU Can Make A Difference & Take Action

Presented By: **Naples Daily News | News-Press.**

Supported By:

Breakfast Sponsored By:

The News Press, Naples Daily News and Alliance of Chambers will host a third Save Our Water program to discuss southwest Florida's water quality issues. The event will be held on August 21 at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point from 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$50 per person and include buffet breakfast. Purchase your tickets at: tickets.news-press.com



Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
P.O. Box 839
Sanibel, FL 33957

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July-August 2019 Member Update



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SCCF Nature Center

3333 Sanibel-Captiva Road
(1 mile west of Tarpon Bay Road) / P.O. Box 839, Sanibel 33957

SCCF Nature Center and Main Telephone:

(239) 472-2329 Fax: (239) 472-6421 www.sccf.org blog.sccf.org

Native Landscapes & Garden Center: (239) 472-1932 (at the Bailey Homestead Preserve)

Marine Laboratory: (239) 395-4617

Wildlife & Habitat Management: (239) 472-3984

SCCF is dedicated to the conservation of coastal habitats and aquatic resources on Sanibel and Captiva and in the surrounding watershed through:

- Marine Laboratory
- Natural Resource Policy
- Native Landscapes & Garden Center
- Sea Turtles & Shorebirds
- Wildlife & Habitat Management
- Land Acquisition & Stewardship
- Environmental Education



Nature Center Hours:

Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. from October - May
8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. from June - September

Native Landscapes & Garden Center Hours:

at 1300 Periwinkle Way, Bailey Homestead Preserve
Monday - Friday — 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday from 10 a.m. — 3 p.m. (January through April)

Visit our Nature Center

- Trails & Observation Tower
 - Education Center
- \$5/adult, children under 17 free, members free.

Find the latest real-time water quality readings from our RECON sensors at www.recon.sccf.org

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Member Update Contributors

Audrey Albrecht Alex Horn Ryan Orgera, Ph.D.
Jenny Evans Chris Lechowicz Holly Schwartz
Cheryl Giattini Ben Long Rae Ann Wessel
Karen Nelson

Ryan Orgera, Ph.D. - *Chief Executive Officer* Erick Lindblad - *CEO Emeritus*

Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, 3333 Sanibel-Captiva Road, P.O. Box 839, Sanibel, FL 33957 Tel. (239) 472-2329 www.sccf.org