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Message from FNPS President Steve Woodmansee

Dear Fellow FNPS Member,

At this time of year, we think a lot about family and giving. I have fond memories of past holidays. Having been raised in Miami, it's the time when air conditioners are shut off, the house is opened up, and "camping season" begins in South Florida. I am lucky to be part of a large family, with four brothers and sisters, and my parents found fun, frugal ways to entertain us. They often scheduled camping trips during the holidays, helping us refill the spiritual well by visiting some of Florida's most beautiful places.

Every year we'd find time to visit Key Largo for a weekend, camping at America Outdoors (which no longer exists). As a child, I'd explore the Florida Bay waters, and snorkel among the hard bottom patch reefs filled with tropical fish and corals, and then wander through the endless tropical hardwood hammock forests, looking for hermit crabs and snakes. Sunburnt and sand covered, we'd fish from the seawall, and catch snapper and barracuda. We'd also catch pounds of pink shrimp using a minnow seine, and watch in horror as dad boiled them alive for a savory meal.

We regularly camped at Fisheating Creek on the west side of Lake Okeechobee, and with my brothers and sisters, paddled around the myriad of creeks and tributaries, finding our favorite giant cypress tree with the rope swing. We'd perform acrobatic feats, and let go of the rope at its highest point and plunge into the water. I don't know why we never feared alligators or cottonmouths, but we never had any incidents, except once with a hornet's nest. We'd fish for bass and catfish, and have a wonderful fish fry in the evenings at our campsite. Nights would be filled with stars and fireflies, the hoots of barred owls, and the singing of insects.

Each year we'd camp at Jonathan Dickinson State Park, paddling along the Loxahatchee River and hiking through the beautiful pine flatwoods, prairies, and scrub. It was there that I saw my first pileated woodpecker. I was only five years old, but I vividly remember the image of the large crested bird, the jackhammer like pounding of its beak, and how my mother encouraged my excitement.

Not far from home was Everglades National Park, and we spent many Thanksgivings on Long Pine Key. My uncle taught me how to "tolerate" mosquitoes, with the nifty trick of cutting off the emerging frond of a cabbage palm and using it to sweep mosquitoes off as they gathered on his arm. We collected firewood, and he taught me which dead wood was best for smoking the turkey

continued on back page

continued from front

(buttonwood gives the best flavor). After a stupendous meal, and the giving of thanks, we'd sit and talk by the camp fire, whittling a new handle for the coffee pot, and watching the night sky.

It was amazing how in traveling a few hours or less from home, and spending only one weekend away, I could be part of a whole new world, unstructured, roadless, nature's classroom, allowing me to make my own discoveries and learn to appreciate our beautiful "backyard." Camping trips for me also meant time with my family, undistracted by school and TV, and the coveted one-on-one time with my parents or brothers and sisters. The typical stress of holiday family gatherings was reduced – somehow, being surrounded by nature calms everyone down and puts things into perspective.

As an adult now, I am flabbergasted as to how my parents did all this. Funds were tight, and both worked multiple jobs. Despite being frugal, my parents always supported our parks and conservation based organizations. They'd always find some amount of money to jam into the donation box, sometimes letting me have the honor. I am grateful to them, for as a result of those experiences, I became a botanist, and the forests, prairies, and woodlands are often my office. It is my turn to give back to the natural world that bore me.


Whether it is going on a chapter or conference field trip, participating in a land management review of one of our state owned conservation lands, eradicating exotic plant infestations, planting natives in a restored area, rescuing a doomed population of plants slated for asphalt, working in one's yard planting a native garden, or funding projects that do all the above, FNPS encourages everyone to get outside and enjoy nature. My early childhood experiences led me to being part of FNPS, because I believed in our mission before I knew there was an FNPS.

We feel compelled to act and bestow upon the rest of the world the importance of our natural areas and how they can heal our souls, help mitigate the stresses that overwhelm us, and because it is the right thing to do. **I cannot imagine a world without FNPS, and we have much to do.**

This season, I hope you and your family can find time with nature.

I also hope you will **give to FNPS**. Please make a secure donation online or return a check to us in the mail, using the enclosed donation coupon. FNPS appreciates any amount you can give.

Thank you for your continued support and for being a proud member of the Florida Native Plant Society,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve V. Woodmansee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Steve Woodmansee, President

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