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CREW LAND & WATER TRUST

2022-2023

ANNUAL  
REPORT



*CREWTrust.org*

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**MISSION:** The CREW Land & Water Trust is dedicated to the preservation and stewardship of the water resources and natural communities in and around the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW).

For nearly 35 years, the CREW Land & Water Trust has been one of our community's most active and effective champions of watershed and biodiversity conservation. Working with a diverse coalition of public and private partners, we've helped bring thousands of acres into conservation, while also educating our communities about the importance of protecting the wetlands and increasingly fragile ecosystems comprising the largest intact watershed in Southwest Florida (SWFL).

This year alone, more than 95,000 people visited CREW Trust's four trail systems to make use of forty miles of marked hiking, biking, and equestrian trails, as well as our outdoor pavilions, primitive campsites, elevated boardwalks, and observation platforms. Many of these visitors came to enjoy the stunning views and multitude of flora and fauna, while others came to participate in the educational and recreational programs we host for learners and enthusiasts of all ages, interests and abilities. Our trail-based adult and youth educational and recreational programs are designed to build a foundation of knowledge and citizen science skills that set participants on the path of life-long learning as community stakeholders and public advocates for our vital yet threatened watershed.

We are grateful for our committed members and volunteers, and for the support of the generous sponsors, donors and partners who make our work possible.







## A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It's been another great year at the CREW Trust. Our excellent and dedicated staff and volunteers have been keeping the trail system in great shape while providing an impressive menu of educational and recreation hikes through CREW's beautiful ecosystems. Many thanks to Robert and the CREW team he has put together over the last year. They are an amazing, hard-working group of people and an absolute pleasure to work with. The progress we've made this year is due to them, our amazing supportive members and to our partners at the SFWMD. The District continues to work hard for the citizens of SW Florida by continuing to protect and invest in this important resource for recreation, education, water quality, resource protection and stormwater runoff management. Our community and the CREW Trust are so fortunate they are on the job.

For me, and many others, being a member, a volunteer and/or a trustee with CREW Trust is not only a great way to give back to the community and this amazing area that does so much for us; it is just straight up fun to be a part of this great group of people. Whether its hiking, biking, doing trail

maintenance, attending wildflower walks or one of the many events that CREW Trust sponsors, it is always fun, gratifying, productive and educational. So, if you're not yet a member, please join us at CREW Trust.

Everyone be safe out there as we all continue to work together to take care of the place that continues to take such good care of us all - mentally and physically... the CREW Trails!



*Hope to see  
you on the  
trails!*

**BEN NELSON**  
CREW TRUST  
PRESIDENT

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## A WORD FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As CREW Trust approaches its 35th anniversary in 2024, we can all look back with great pride and satisfaction on the accomplishments of the staff, trustees, volunteers, members and other supporters who committed themselves throughout the years towards the preservation and stewardship of the water resources and natural communities in and around the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW).

From the very beginning, CREW Trust led the way coordinating the acquisition of nearly 30,000 acres of CREW lands that today form the South Florida Water Management District's CREW Management Area - the core of the 70,000+ CREW Project we recognize today. In recent years, we have not only financially supported Collier County's Conservation Collier and Lee County's Conservation 20/20 land acquisition programs within and adjacent to CREW, but we have directly acquired lands that we handed over to other conservation partners, including Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

Over the years, we have also pioneered many education programs, including those detailed in this report. All our programs have one principal goal in mind – cultivating, nurturing, and sustaining successive generations of CREW. All our programs have one principal goal in mind – cultivating, nurturing, and sustaining successive generations of CREW

stakeholders who have the knowledge, skills, and passion to protect CREW, especially as our watershed faces pressures from land use and climate change.

Our programs strive to safely introduce youth and adults to natural spaces, stimulate curiosity and wonder, and nurture connectedness to the land and water on which we all depend. Our ethos is inspired by the wisdom of environmental philosopher David Orr: *"I do not know whether it is possible to love the planet or not, but I do know that it is possible to love the places we can see, touch, smell and experience."*



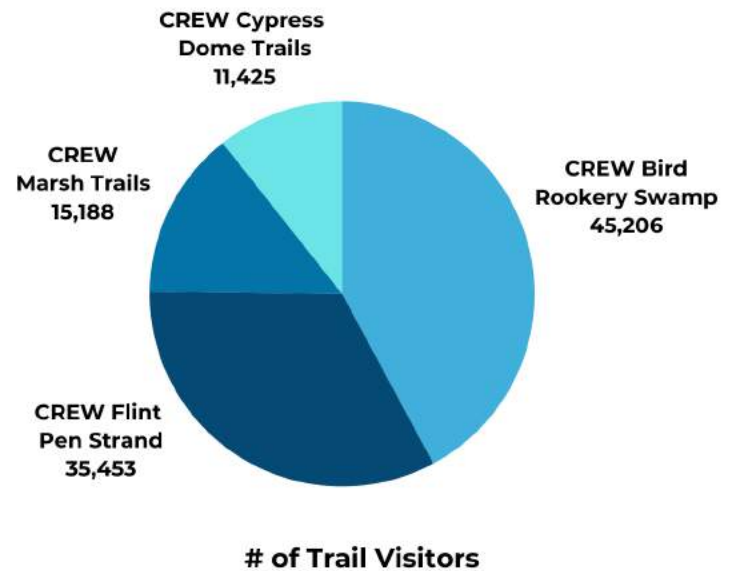
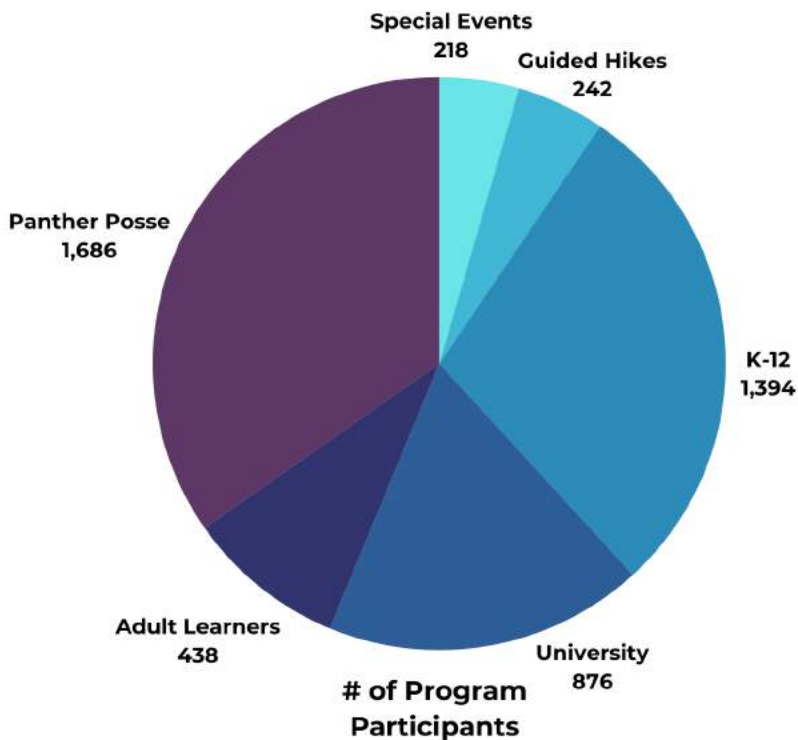
**ROBERT LUCIUS, PH.D.**  
CREW TRUST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





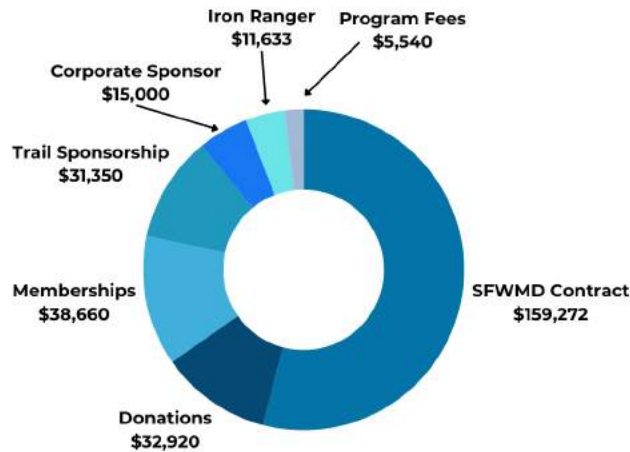


## FY23 CREW TRUST BY THE NUMBERS

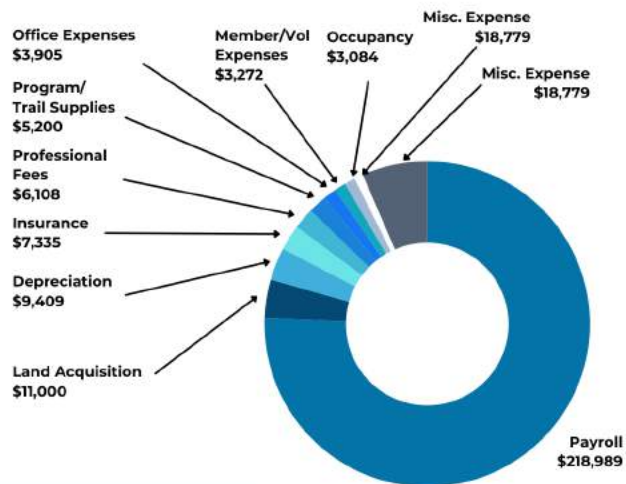


# FY23 (10/1/22-9/30/23) FINANCES

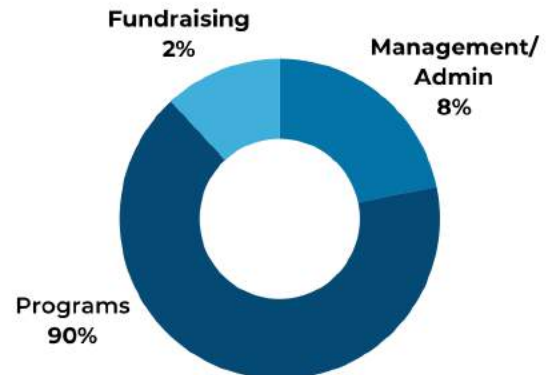
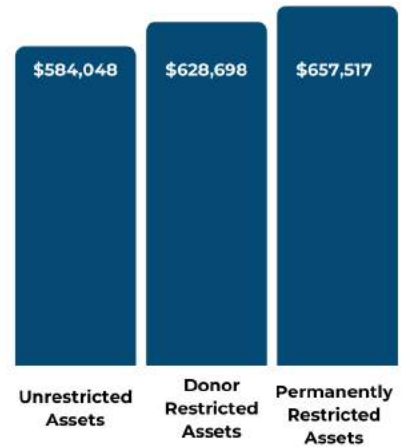
**Revenue \$308,174**



**Expenses \$289,626**



**Net Assets \$1,870,263**



**How was each \$1 used?**

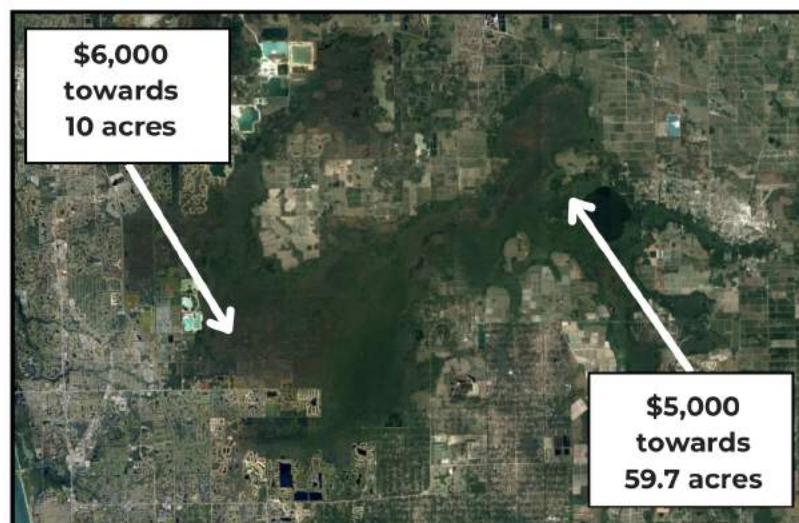
**Net Income \$18,848**

## CREW PROJECT - LAND ACQUISITION

Total CREW Project Acres: 70,279

Total FY23 CREW Trust Land Acquisition

Expenditures: \$11,000



### CREW Project Partners

- South Florida Water Management District
- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Lee County 20/20
- Conservation Collier
- National Audubon Society (CSS)
- CREW Trust

Land (acres) directly/indirectly held by CREW Trust in FY23:

- 100 acres in Collier County - Parcel #0114280101
- 5.6% interest in 367.7 acres (Collier County's Caracara Prairie Preserve)
- 530 acre conservation easement (The Quarry Community Association, Inc.)



## EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Each year, thousands of children, university students, and adult life-long learners participate in CREW Trust's recreational and educational programs. We work closely with educators from public and private schools, universities, homeschool groups, and with other subject matter experts to develop trail-based programs that not only satisfy educational goals and objectives, but that also re-connect participants with the natural world. Our programs, if not free, are priced substantially below market value so that cost is mitigated as a barrier to access.

### SoilROCKS!

SoilROCKS! is CREW Trust's outdoor, trail-based environmental education program for second graders. It was designed and introduced in 2018 in partnership with Collier County Public Schools' (CCPS) Elementary Science Department and Field Trip Specialist Program. This program is available at no cost to public, charter, private, and homeschool groups from Collier, Lee and Hendry counties.

Since 2018, more than 2,000 students have participated in the SoilROCKS! program, gaining knowledge and developing skills that support achievement of benchmarks for fourteen (14) Florida state science education standards. SoilROCKS! field activities explore properties of matter, basic concepts of geology, soil composition and classification, and the needs/habitats of native animals.

SoilROCKS! also introduces and acclimatizes participating students to natural environments to which they may not have had previous exposure. For many students, the SoilROCKS! fieldtrip is their first experience hiking in nature, exploring both wetlands and upland ecosystems, using binoculars, and observing wildlife in natural habitats.

To watch a video about SoilROCKS! visit here: <https://vimeo.com/942523626>





## Walk Through A Watershed

Walk Through A Watershed (WtW) is an outdoor, trail-based environmental education program designed for third-graders and introduced in 2011. Like SoilROCKS!, it was developed in partnership with the CCPS' Elementary Science Department and Field Trip Specialist Program. Since 2011, more than 5,000 students have participated in the WtW program, gaining knowledge and developing skills that support achievement of benchmarks for twelve (12) Florida state science education standards. In the WtW program, students cover the principles of energy and matter, biodiversity, the water cycle, watersheds, and basic water quality concepts. This program is available at no cost to public, charter, private, and homeschool groups from Collier, Lee and Hendry counties.

WtW also introduces and acclimatizes participating students to natural environments to which they may not have had previous exposure. For many students, this field trip is their first experience hiking in nature, exploring both wetlands and upland ecosystems, and observing wildlife in natural habitats. A principal goal of this program is to establish positive associations with the natural world that provide a solid foundation for future environmental education engagement.



Walk Through A Watershed - Fall 2022



## Specialty Topic Treks & Strolling Science Seminars

CREW Trust's Specialty Topic Treks (STTs) and Strolling Science Seminars (SSS) are trail-based environmental education programs that explore a specific subject or theme. Both programs are open to participants ages 16 and older.

CREW Trust's STT and SSS programs have long been a mainstay of our environmental and watershed education programs. These programs are led by CREW Trust staff members or outside subject matter experts recruited via a competitive application process and selected for their credentials and ability to engage, delight, and inform. These programs typically involve 2-4 hour guided walks conducted on the CREW trails with stops along the way to allow participants to employ all their senses as they learn about, observe and discuss the program topic. SSS programs also involve a citizen science component that involves read ahead materials and challenges participants to observe, collect, record, and analyze data, and then compare their findings.



## Strolling Science Seminars for Kids

Just like our adult seminars, but kid-sized! CREW Trust's new Strolling Science Seminars for Kids (SSS-K) programs invites participants aged 8-14 to accompany subject matter experts for an in-depth exploration of science topics in natural settings. Participants get to interact with a specialist in the field and conduct experiential field research activities that help them gain a better understanding of the role of the scientific method in answering important research questions. The SSS-K program is also designed to introduce youth to a world of future career possibilities in ecology, geology, hydrology, wildlife biology, and conservation.





## In-Town Summer Lecture Series

CREW Trust's In-Town Lecture Series is one of our newest accessibility-focused initiatives intended to accommodate individuals who would like to attend our environmental education programs, but who for whatever reason may not be able to participate in trail-based programs. These lectures are held throughout the year, but primarily during June-September. We specifically choose venues that are close to population centers and are highly accessible. Our presenters include CREW Trust staff as well as invited subject matter experts. Lecture topics address a wide range of subject matter related to CREW's hydrology, geology and diversity of natural communities.



## CREW Ecosystems Exploration

CREW Ecosystems Exploration is an outdoor, trail-based environmental education program introduced in 2018 in partnership with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) to support the learning goals and objectives of FGCU's Colloquium on Sustainable Development. This CREW Trust staff-led program guides university students on an exploration of various upland and wetland ecosystems within CREW as they discuss the importance of ecosystem services provided by natural infrastructure, better understand the interdependency of human communities and ecosystems in a coupled human–environment system (CHANS), and learn about native plants and animals as observed in their natural habitats. Students are also asked to consider the practical impacts of land-use changes and climate change on the sustainable health and functionality of CREW's ecosystems and natural communities.





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## Nature's Peace

CREW Trust is committed to removing barriers that prevent visitors of all ages, abilities, interests and means from enjoying all that CREW has to offer. Our Nature's Peace program - first introduced in 2013 - is designed to introduce visitors who have accessibility challenges, such as those who may be visually impaired or experiencing early-stage Alzheimer's, to the wonders of CREW.

Each Nature's Peace program is tailored in collaboration with partner agencies and in response to the specific needs and desires of participants and caregivers. Specially trained volunteers collaborate closely with those partner groups and caregivers to lead guests on an informative and stimulating stroll along the 1400' boardwalk at CREW Bird Rookery Swamp Trail, where they can safely enjoy the sights, sounds, smells, and tactile experiences of the natural world.



## CREW Guided Discovery Programs

CREW Trust's Guided CREW Discovery programs aim to help visitors safely experience the CREW trail systems in ways that spark affection for the natural world and cultivate a deeper sense of appreciation and attachment for what these lands provide to our community. These staff- and volunteer-guided programs introduce participants to the natural history of CREW lands and efforts by CREW Trust and its partners to protect and preserve CREW's diverse ecosystems and natural communities. Participants also learn about CREW as a coupled human-environment system (CHANS), and are introduced to native plants and animals as observed in their natural habitats. These programs are regularly scheduled throughout the year, but special groups visits may be tailored to accommodate the specific interests of guests.





## CREW TRUST INTERNSHIPS - 2022-2023

CREW Trust's Environment Education Internships are designed to provide opportunities for local university students in related fields to apply theoretical knowledge in the real world, acquire practical knowledge and skills, develop professional networks, and explore career possibilities.

CREW Trust's Environmental Education Internship program began in 1999 and has welcomed interns every year except for 2021 due to pandemic restrictions. Several participants in this program have gone on to become CREW Trust staff members, while others have been employed as part-time Seasonal Naturalists to support our education programming. Many others have leveraged these internship experiences to gain employment with other environmental education and conservation organizations in Florida and across the United States.



Sarah Schurr



Veronica Salvatierra



Paola Rivera



Rory Cushen





## VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

CREW Trust may have a small staff, but we're blessed to have remarkable volunteers who contribute their time, skills, and energies towards trail maintenance, guiding recreational programs, engaging in community outreach, and helping with our educational programs. In addition to our regular cadre of volunteers, many of whom have been with us for years, CREW Trust is also supported by college students who volunteer with us as part of their service-learning requirements, as well as by members of local businesses and other groups who simply want to help at CREW!

When you're out on the trails, you can thank the volunteers when the kiosks are fully stocked, the trails are trimmed, the

infrastructure and amenities are well-maintained, and signage is in good order. Our volunteers also do so much more behind the scenes, including serving as trustees and committee members, conducting research, photographing CREW's diverse flora and fauna, and providing essential support to our growing menu of programs. We really couldn't do it without them! We're especially grateful to Boy Scout Troop 2001 and Rylan Zurbrigg for our new picnic pavilion at CREW Flint Pen Strand!

CREW Trust volunteers generously contributed 2,810 hours of labor in FY23, worth an estimated \$84,160 according to an analysis by the Independent Sector and the University of Maryland's Do Good Institute.





## SPECIAL EVENTS

In addition to our regularly scheduled educational and recreational programs, CREW Trust staff also hosted a remarkable assortment of special events in 2023. Among these were a special after-hours event at the CREW Marsh Trails to celebrate Earth Day, an evening Bug Watch program, and seasonal wet walks.

We also hosted an evening film screening at CREW Flint Pen Strand in support of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation and welcomed members of the Southwest Florida Association for Environmental Professionals, the Florida Native Plant Society, the Environmental Education Alliance of Southwest Florida, Leadership Collier's

Alumni Association, and the local chapter of the Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) for special events on CREW lands.

CREW Trust also conducted tours for interns from the Naples Botanical Garden and for hundreds of other guests from local businesses, community associations, and clubs.





## MEMBER EVENTS

CREW Trust's members are the lifeblood of everything we do. Their commitment to the protection and stewardship of CREW and their generous financial support underwrites our land acquisition efforts, recreational and educational programming, and community outreach activities.

To show our appreciation, we offer special programs just for them! Our exclusive, members-only Sunset at the Lakes, Morning on the Marsh, and Full Moon hikes offer glimpses of CREW's uplands and wetlands after-hours when silence reigns and wildlife is often most active.

We also hosted a member social this year, welcoming CREW Trust's members to Riptide Brewery in Bonita Springs to show our appreciation and share some in-depth presentations about CREW Trust's multi-faceted mission and our vision for the coming years.







## FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION (FWC)

The CREW FWC biologists have been collecting bat acoustical data in the CREW Bird Rookery Swamp as part of FWC's Long-term Statewide Bat Monitoring Project (since 2018). The project goal is to collect long-term monitoring data to observe trends in species presence and abundance over time. The project is patterned after the NABat Program (North American Bat Monitoring Protocol) where data are collected using standardized techniques, and thus, data are comparable over time to other regions of North America.

Acoustical detectors were placed at three stationary locations in the CREW Bird Rookery Swamp unit for nine consecutive nights four times per year. Data were analyzed using a bat call analysis software and results were sent to FWC Bat Biologists for further analysis and species confirmation. Data were then uploaded to the NABat website for comparison across regions, states, and countries.

In total during 2021-2023, 53,937 bat call files were auto identified as one of 8 species or species groups detected at CREW. The species with the highest proportion of call files were Brazilian free-tailed bats (TABR) and evening bats (NYHU) (Figure 1). Other species groups detected included low frequency bats (big brown bats, hoary bats, and northern yellow bats) (LOWFREQ), tricolored bats (PESU), eastern red bats/Seminole bats (LABO/LASE), Florida bonneted bats (EUFL), Rafinesque's big-eared bats (CORA), and southeastern myotis (MYAU). All 8 species groups were detected in the NE and SW locations, while 7 species were detected in the NW location. A noteworthy trend was the NE location regularly supported the highest total detection of Florida bonneted bats. This species is one of the rarest in Florida and is listed as a federally endangered species.

Overall, the CREW bat survey locations had consistent detection of 6 bat species throughout the year and had almost all 8 species recorded in each location. This result indicated that the more common bat species are likely to find suitable roosting and foraging habitat within the CREW Bird Rookery Swamp unit. Bat acoustical surveys will continue in perpetuity. As more data is collected, more can be understood about the trends in bat species detected.

Additional 2023-24 wildlife monitoring surveys included swallow-tailed kite nest monitoring, breeding bird surveys, freshwater fish surveys, gopher tortoise surveys, herpetofauna surveys, acoustical frog surveys (Frog Watch), and game camera monitoring.



Florida Bonneted Bat



Southeastern Myotis



Rafinesque's Big-Eared Bat



Northern Yellow Bat



Brazilian Free-Tailed Bat

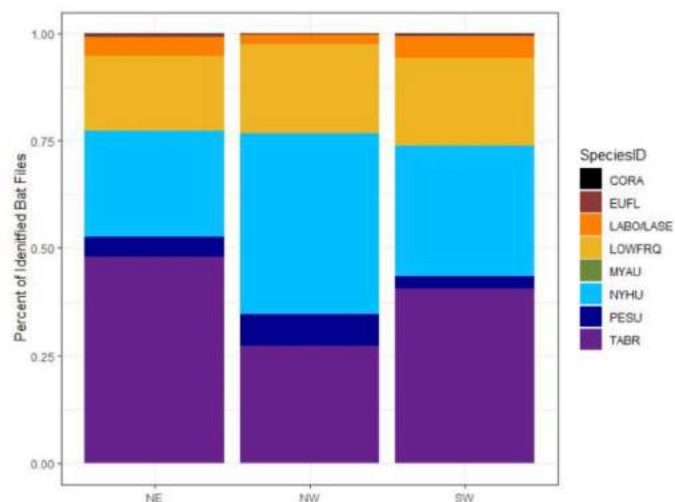


Figure 1.

WYNLYN MCBRIDE & LAUREN PLUSSA

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION COMMISSION





## **SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)**

### **Prescribed Fire**

The District was able to prescribe burn 578 acres within CREW during FY23. We received significant prescribe burn assistance from FWC. We conducted 15 prescribe burns distributed throughout the CREW Management Area. All prescribed burns were conducted in the growing season when ecological benefits are the greatest.

### **Exotic Plant Control**

Treatments to control exotic plants continued throughout CREW with contract applicators treating 1011 acres during the last fiscal year. Applicators spent most of their resources on Lygodium (481 acres treated), torpedo grass (60 acres), Melaleuca (245 acres) and terrestrial grasses (225 acres). Critical CREW (southern Flint Pen Strand) and Bird Rookery Swamp received treatments. We continue to receive funding from FWC's invasive plant management section for exotic plant control treatments. We are planning to expand our treatments in Flint Pen Strand this upcoming year. We again added biocontrol measures to our arsenal to reduce exotic plants this summer. We again added biocontrol measures to our arsenal to reduce exotic plants this summer. We released *Floracarus perrepae* mites in Corkscrew Marsh to help with Lygodium control.

### **Mechanical Treatment**

We shredded 18 acres of willow in Corkscrew marsh at the beginning of the wet season to reduce woody plant cover. This is an ongoing project which mirrors the efforts of Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The goal is to reduce woody plant cover and encourage herbaceous plant growth and maintain that condition through prescribed fire.

### **Infrastructure**

Contractors replaced 4 culverts along the Bird Rookery Swamp tram. During the upcoming year we plan on completing the BRS culvert project with the replacement of the remaining culverts.



**JOE BOZZO**

**SFWMD CREW PROJECT DIRECTOR**





## THANK YOU TO OUR FY23 DONORS

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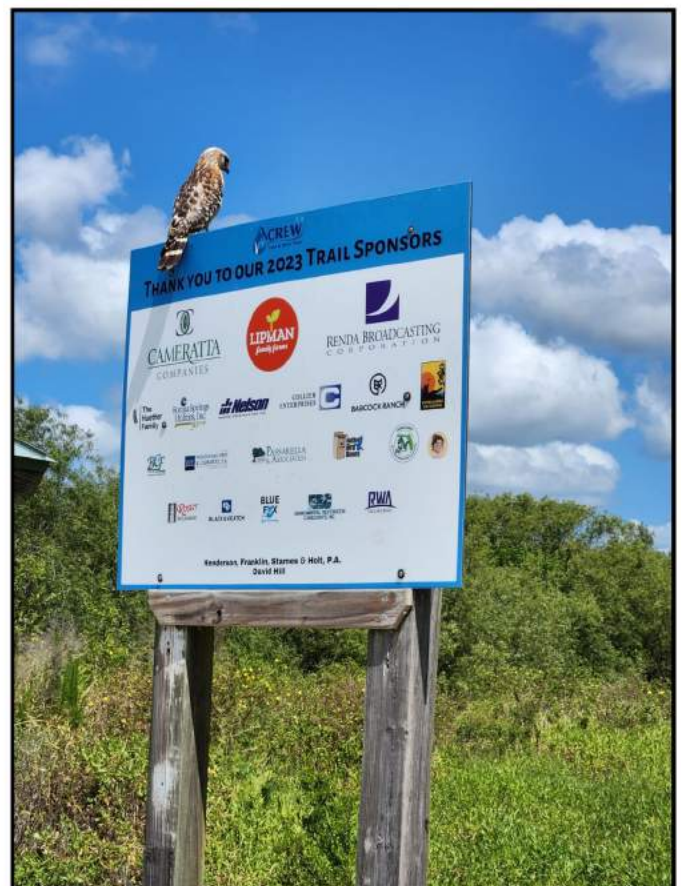
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Cameron Schrader





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Sidney and Andrea  
Steinberger  
Nancy Stoner  
Louise Taylor  
Tyler Thompson  
Sabine Vandenhende  
Jo-Ellen Vernali-  
Knoerl  
Suzanne H. Wilson  
James Wood  
Jill Wood

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Toby Anstett  
Jennifer Baima  
Fay Baltzell  
Jack Berninger  
Gregg Brent  
Carole Cakov  
Gary Chirlin  
Gretchen Church  
LuLaura Day  
Cindy Decker  
Robin Diller  
Gary Dumas

Diane & Richard Early  
Nancy Farinella  
Raymond Fasano  
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Roberta Fleischman  
Doug Foster  
James Foster  
Pat Giller  
Alec Gough  
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Mary Huigens  
Amanda Ignasak  
Tammi Jamison  
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Jenny Kaplan  
Larry Leider  
Bernd Lohner  
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Theresa Roake  
Darin Sanders  
Trish Sanson  
Gary & Bernice Schmelz  
Karen Sendik  
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Joshua Smith  
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Debra Taylor  
Jaime Theobald & Olaf  
Elander  
Peter Vertin

Richard & Milla Voellinger  
Dot Vorhees  
Jason Wagnon  
Paul Washa  
John and Dee Wharton  
Jessica Wilson  
Brynn Wolcott  
Kevin Yue

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Jeff Adair  
Adecia Adams  
Louis Albrecht  
Neill Barber  
Glen Bigness  
Jamey Binneveld  
Amy Blakeley  
MaryAnn Bohannon  
Charles Boyle  
Vanessa Bumbarger  
Diana Carkin  
Candace Cartwright  
Rich Cohen  
Linda Colander  
Shaun Reid Coulter  
Mary Day  
Theresa Ellsworth  
Debbie Endsley  
Todd & Natty Farley

Michon Floreani  
Alan Gordon  
Gabriele Gregory  
David Grinnell  
Anne Gross  
Nancy Hall  
Solemi Hernandez  
Mike Junk  
Cheryl King  
David Koch  
Michael Krassner  
Jeff Leseck  
Yesenia Machuca  
Rick McGrath  
Michelle McLeod  
Joyce Michel  
Alain Monbaron  
Luann Warrington  
Mustard  
Thomas Myles  
Connie Nagele  
JoAnn B. Rahl  
Anne Rapp  
Wendy Rex  
Jeannine Richards  
Katherine Ross  
Leslie Sanderson  
Donald Sawin  
Robin Serne







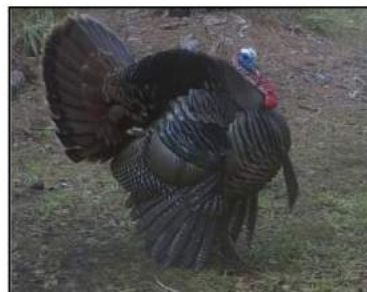
## THANK YOU TO OUR FY23 CREW TRUST MEMBERS

### Individual cont. (\$25)

Leslie Sanderson  
Donald Sawin  
Robin Serne

### Student

Raquel Braun  
Iris Brown  
Kimberly Cordero  
Rory Cushen  
Ashlyn Edmonds  
Mary Hagle  
Maggie Lou Hughes  
Makena Jary  
Katarya Johnson-Williams  
Samantha Jones  
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Polina Radinsky  
Heidi Randall  
Samantha Reimer  
Paola Rivera  
Adriana Vidal  
Candice Walker  
Edwin Wilke  
Marguerite Wright  
Lucia Zvonar



**Many thanks to CREW Trust member & volunteer Tom Mortenson for sharing these recent CREW trail cam photos of infrequently seen CREW Trust staff in the field!**



# CREW LAND & WATER TRUST



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