

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is considering [bringing back a statewide bear hunt for 2025](#). The last Florida bear hunt occurred in 2015 and was such a colossal cluster-you-know-what that it was shut down after 2 days.

LINK: <https://floridaphoenix.com/2024/12/13/democrat-lindsay-cross-predicts-a-bear-hunt-in-2025-would-be-wildly-unpopular/>

The St. Mary's Riverkeeper was recently [awarded a \\$716,000 grant](#) from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to develop a plan addressing the impacts of climate change across its watershed.

LINK: <https://thecurrentga.org/2024/12/10/st-marys-riverkeeper-looks-to-nature-for-solutions-to-climate-impacts/>

Speaking of Rivers, check out my recent [“Welcome to Florida” podcast episode](#) all about the St. Johns River.

LINK: <https://welcometoflorida.buzzsprout.com/1169570/episodes/16273799-episode-235-the-st-johns-river>

A final version for a completely revamped Metropolitan Park in downtown Jacksonville on the riverfront across from the Jaguars stadium was [unveiled this week](#). I attended the public meeting introducing the design and was impressed overall. Great efforts were made to protect and move existing mature trees. Fewer than 10 will be lost. More than 200 hardwood trees will be planted.

I voiced my support for native trees and native plants to be used exclusively in the design and believe that will mostly be the case.

Of particular interest to me was a “stormwater planting” area along the riverbank which will be lowered 2 feet to act as a resiliency/flood barrier measure. This section will feature native plants and an “enhanced wetland” area. This section of the park will have a boardwalk over it for visitors.

LINK: <https://jaxtoday.org/2024/12/18/metropolitan-park-final-design-2/>

I also visited the Emerald Trail through LaVilla downtown adjacent to Lift Every Voice and Sing Park where a living shoreline was planted with native plants along half of what is called “LaVilla Pond,” a stormwater retention pond there. Emerald Trail volunteers did a nice job with the installation earlier this month and there were a number of birds on the pond when I visited including ibis, egret, little blue heron, and mergansers telling me the area is ecologically rebounding.

An Amelia Island family just [donated 396 acres along Egans Creek adjacent to Fort Clinch State Park](#) to the North Florida Land Trust, ensuring that the land will remain in its natural state.

LINK: <https://www.jaxdailyrecord.com/news/2024/dec/16/amelia-island-family-donates-396-acres-to-north-florida-land-trust/>

More than 8 years after a state law mandated the Florida Department of Environmental Protection propose more protective rules for pumping springs, the office finally filed a proposed rule earlier

this month for how the state should oversee the pumping of groundwater from Florida's most vulnerable freshwater springs, a process regulated through consumptive use permits.

Florida's springs face two existential threats, one from pollution, which most people are aware of – agriculture runoff, fertilizer runoff from homes, pesticide runoff, etc. – the other is less well known, and that's the degradation of our springs through overuse – overconsumption – pumping too much water out to irrigate golf courses, lawns, crops, etc., and allowing corporations like Nestle to pump millions of gallons of our water a day to bottle and sell for their corporate profits.

The FDEP rules are terrible for the springs, but having something on paper allows springs advocates to sue the FDEP in the hope of enacting strong regulations because the proposed rules don't achieve what the mandate for the rules required.

LINK: <https://www.wusf.org/environment/2024-12-11/rule-finally-proposed-for-pumping-florida-freshwater-springs>

The state has begun the process of looking into acquiring for conservation nearly 20,000 acres of land along the Apalachicola River which is being eyed for oil drilling.

LINK: <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2024/12/apalachicola-river-oil-drilling-00194289>

[Congress passed the BEACH Act](#) in November with overwhelming bipartisan support, adding nearly 300,000 acres of wetlands and beaches to an existing coastal conservation program.

LINK: https://www.audubon.org/news/our-coasts-are-stronger-ever-thanks-big-win-little-known-law?ms=policy-adv-email-ea-x-engagement_20241215_advisory&utm_source=ea&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=engagement_20241215_advisory&emci=6a2f7e4f-65b9-ef11-88d0-000d3a9d5840&emdi=dd068a6c-1cbb-ef11-88d0-000d3a9d5840&ceid=907790

Congress also this week passed an enormous outdoor recreation and parks funding act called [the Explore Act](#).

LINK: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/travel/news/landmark-law-congress-passes-explore-act-in-historic-win-for-outdoor-industry/ar-AA1wbDt7>