

Sept. 10, 2008

Sarasota County seeks volunteers to mark trails, remove exotic plants

Sarasota County is seeking volunteers to help celebrate the 15th annual National Public Lands Day by improving habitat and trails at county-owned sites. From 8:30 a.m.-noon, Saturday, Sept. 27, staff from Sarasota County Natural Resources and Parks and Recreation will guide volunteers in the removal of exotic plant species, the installation of trail markers, and the collection of the invasive air potato plant and debris.

Pre-registration to participate in this event is required. For information about how to pre-register, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000. Those interested in Circus Hammock, Pocono Trail Preserve or Curry Creek Preserve should ask for Natural Resources, and those interested in Pinecraft Park should ask for Beaches and Natural Area Parks.

All volunteers will receive gardening gloves and water. Restrooms or portable toilets will be available at both locations. Participants must provide their own hand tools, such as clippers and shears, and should also bring water, bug spray, sunscreen, hat (optional) and sunglasses. Volunteers should wear closed-toe, closed-heel shoes such as hiking boots or old sneakers and comfortable clothing suitable for outdoor work.

Trail markers will be installed at Curry Creek Preserve, 1075 Albee Farm Road, Venice, and Circus Hammock, 4572 17th St., Sarasota. At the same time, staff and volunteers will be removing invasive exotic plants from Pinecraft Park, 1420 Gilbert Ave., Sarasota, and Pocono Trail Preserve, 189 Pocono Trail, Nokomis.

“Providing trail markers at sites provides easier walking access along the trails on our public lands,” Ondercin added. “This project is a fun way to introduce families to nature and improve the trails that visitors hike.”

“Invasive plants have a tendency to take over native habitats,” said Public Use Coordinator Brie Ondercin. “Some invasive plant species are toxic and harmful for other plants, animals and even humans. Removing them keeps them from spreading farther throughout the county’s natural areas and into people’s backyards, and this is the perfect opportunity to highlight the problem and recruit volunteers to help restore natural areas.”

National Public Lands Day is the nation’s largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance America’s public lands. Sept. 27 marks the third year that Sarasota County will participate in the annual event, which is a program of the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation.

During last year’s National Public Lands Day, nearly 110,000 volunteers built trails and bridges, planted trees and plants, and removed trash and invasive plants. In the process, they also learned about the importance of public lands to the nation’s environmental, economic and social health.

To learn more about National Public Lands Day, visit www.publiclandsday.org.