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Sarasota County seeks public defenders of natural lands

Sarasota County is seeking volunteers to help celebrate the 16th Annual National Public Lands Day by improving habitat and trails at Deer Prairie Creek Preserve, 7001 Forbes Trail, Venice. From 8:30 a.m.-noon, Saturday, Sept. 26, staff from Sarasota County Natural Resources will guide volunteers in the removal of invasive plants and trail improvements.

“Exotic plants have a tendency to encroach on and take over native habitats,” said Public Use Coordinator Brie Ondercin. “Some invasive plant species like Brazilian pepper 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 back yards, and this is the perfect opportunity to highlight the problem and recruit volunteers to help restore natural areas.

“Trimming and cleaning up the trails allows visitors to better explore our public lands,” Ondercin added. “This particular volunteer event is a fun way to introduce families to nature while improving the trails that visitors hike.”

National Public Lands Day is the nation’s largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance America’s public lands. Sept. 26 marks the fourth year that Sarasota 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 120,000 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.

For information on how to register, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Natural Resources.

All volunteers will receive gardening gloves and water. Portable restrooms will be on site. 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 that may get wet and comfortable clothing suitable for outdoor work.

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

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