

PRESS RELEASE
Jan. 11, 2016

RALLY TO DEFEND PAYNES PRAIRIE
SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 23
IN DOWNTOWN GAINESVILLE

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. – A rally and march to support Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park against efforts to commercialize it will be held on Saturday, January 23, 3-5 pm at the First Magnitude Brewery, 1220 S.E. Veitch St.

The program will include live music by Whitey Markle and the Swamprooters; keynote speakers Jim Stevenson, Leslie Kemp Poole and Pat Harden; children's games; and a mile-long march to the corner of University Avenue and Main Street with banners and signs.

The rally is being sponsored by the Protect Paynes Prairie Coalition (PPPC), a grassroots group of concerned local citizens with support from a variety of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society. Although the focus of the upcoming rally is on Paynes Prairie, the group's concern extends to all the state parks, locally including San Felasco Hammock, O'Leno and Ichetucknee.

Harden is the PPPC coordinator and a long-time conservation advocate, while Poole is a writer and historian whose recent book, "Saving Florida: Women's Fight for the Environment in the Twentieth Century," has been widely acclaimed and will be available at the rally.

Stevenson was chief naturalist of Florida's state parks when Paynes Prairie was acquired by the state. He explored the prairie on horseback in 1970 to identify management needs including removal of cattle and led the effort to reestablish bison on the prairie in 1975, restore the hydrology and implement prescribed burning.

Florida's parks have been expertly managed by the Florida Park Service for 80 years providing compatible outdoor recreation and conservation of Florida's high quality natural features. Now, according to Stevenson, the Department of Environmental Protection is quietly planning to allow incompatible uses including logging, cattle grazing and hunting on these valued parks.

Florida's 174 state parks provide one of the few remaining opportunities to observe and photograph wildlife where they feel safe, and to enjoy the serenity and beauty of Florida's finest natural areas. Chain saws, logging trucks, cattle manure and dead deer are unacceptable in the finest state parks in the nation. Once hunting begins, wildlife observation will be a thing of the past.

Three former state park directors with a combined tenure of 38 years oppose these plans, as do 42 former state park managers. Virtually every major newspaper in the state has written editorials against this scheme. DEP is responsible for protecting our state parks, but the Secretary and the Governor are poised to ruin them. These parks belong to the people of Florida, not to political officials.

Please join the rally and help protect these parks. Public sentiment expressed at the rally will remind officials that it is their job to protect these parks,

not to exploit them for profit.

March against hunting, cattle, logging and other commercial uses of a public treasure. For more information, visit protectors@protectpaynesprairie.org

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