



A National Scenic Byway

Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

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Marjorie Harris Carr, photo from Wikipedia.

THE WOMAN WHO SAVED NATURE

by Tony Ehrlich

This is the story of a modern day David and Goliath. In this story, “Goliath” is a combination of federal and state agencies, spurred on by the shipping and defense industries. And “David” is Marjorie Harris Carr, a Florida scientist, environmentalist, wife, mother, and organizer. The rock in her sling is her knowledge, and the power of her sling comes from the outrage she and her cadre of friends felt. The battle that they won was a Florida issue, but it had far-reaching ramifications that spread nationwide.

According to the website of the Florida Defenders of the Environment, “Marjorie’s work on behalf of the environment started in Gainesville in the early 1960’s during the time she was a member of the Alachua Audubon Society and the Garden Club. Both organizations comprised of a vigorous membership which took leadership positions on local environmental matters.

“Marjorie and other members of the Garden Club of Gainesville initiated the Payne’s Prairie Wildlife Refuge. In the early 1960’s, the refuge was only as wide as the right-of-way for US Highway 441. The group landscaped the entrance to the Prairie, planted cabbage palms along the road’s route and created viewing areas. This small beginning started the work which has now culminated in the Payne’s Prairie State Preserve, a part of the Florida State Parks system.”

It also honed Marjorie’s leadership and organizational skills and demonstrated the power of grass roots organizing. Again, from the FDE website, “In 1962, the Alachua Audubon Society of Gainesville invited two representatives of state and federal agencies to give a talk on the probable effects of the Cross Florida Barge Canal on Florida’s environment. The talk was well presented and well illustrated with slides and charts. It was well-rehearsed, but a ‘blizzard’ of questions followed the presentation—questions about the economics of the project, the effects construction would have on the geology, hydrology and ecology of the canal project area. These were questions for which the government had no satisfactory answers.”

A waterway across the Florida peninsula was a dream that had been attracting politicians and people of power for centuries. In 1537 when Florida was under Spanish control, King Phillip II wanted to connect the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico with a canal that would allow his explorers to avoid the lengthy voyage around the Florida peninsula, cutting such a trip by three days. In the early 19th century, American politicians and businessmen again envisioned such a canal to provide a direct route for commercial boat traffic. None of these projects lasted long.

Then in 1935, as part of his New Deal program, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved a five million dollar allocation of federal funds for the project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made plans for a 30-foot deep waterway that would allow large vessels to cross the state, but the threat of salt water intrusion to the aquifer made them change plans to a waterway along the Ocklawaha River with locks and dams for barges, a project that was called the Cross Florida Barge Canal, more than a mile and a half wide in some places. Even in the 30's progress stalled until more federal funding in 1964 allowed for construction to resume, with President Lyndon Johnson personally presiding over the groundbreaking ceremony.

Marjorie loved the Ocklawaha River and was outraged by the degradation of the first few miles of the river caused by canal construction. So in 1969 she and members of the Audubon Society and others created Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE), a group of hydrologists, geologists, economists, zoologists and other concerned citizens. They wrote a carefully researched, scientific report called the "Environmental Impact of the Cross Florida Barge Canal With Special Emphasis on the Ocklawaha River System." The report provided fundamental information necessary to assess the disastrous impact of the barge canal on the Ocklawaha River and its floodplain.

In 1970 FDE, using their environmental impact report, joined a suit by the Environmental Defense Fund to stop construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal. A Federal judge issued an injunction stopping construction in January of 1971 and three days later President Richard Nixon, citing potential serious environmental damage, issued an executive order halting construction.

Although work on the canal had stopped, it was still on the books as a Congressionally approved project. In 1976, Marjorie and others spoke before the Florida governor and cabinet. After two days of testimony, Governor Askew and the cabinet voted to ask Congress to deauthorize the barge canal and restore the Ocklawaha. Congress began the lengthy process to do so, which involved directing the Corps of Engineers to generate its own environmental impact statement. The Corps turned to the National Forest Service for assistance with its knowledge of biology and wildlife. One of the people called on for his expertise was our own Jim Thorsen, currently chairman of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway, then a young ranger at the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia. Jim says he was assigned to the vegetation and undergrowth inventory team that covered the Ocklawaha

valley for a mile on each side of the river. “It was clear to me after a short time,” he says, “That the environmental destruction from the canal would have been a total disaster.” The Cross Florida Barge Canal was officially deauthorized by Congress in 1990, and all lands and structures associated with the project were transferred to the state of Florida for use as a public conservation and recreation area and became the Cross Florida Greenway State Recreation and Conservation Area. Marjorie Harris Carr was appointed by the Florida legislature to the Canal Lands Advisory Committee in 1991 to represent the public at large and help create a master plan for the Greenway.

The FDE environmental impact statement, one of the first such reports written by any citizen group in the nation (along with a similar report being written about the Everglades) spurred the creation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in the early 1970’s, which subsequently required all federal projects to assess environmental impacts before work has begun.

Thus, Marjorie’s efforts were essential not only in halting further work on the Cross Florida Barge Canal, but in establishing the Environmental Impact Statement as a standard by which projects were to be evaluated before they were begun, and in setting national policy to apply such standards. In 1998, the Greenway was officially renamed the [Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway](#) in honor of the woman who saved nature.

Carr continued to work on Ocklawaha River conservation, including removal of the [Rodman Dam and Reservoir](#), and to preserve parks and green spaces in Florida for nearly 30 years until her death in 1997. Today, the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway (FBBSB), on its way north to Palatka along SR 19, crosses the remains of the barge canal between Rodman Dam and Buckman Lock. Another connection to the FBBSB is that Marjorie was married to Archie Carr, the environmentalist credited with saving sea turtles. Marjorie and her husband’s family often relaxed at the Carr Family Cabin in the Ocala National Forest, which is a partner of the FBBSB. The amazing Carr family and their cabin in the woods may be covered in a future Newsletter article.



In 1969, Florida Governor Claud Kirk presents an environmental award to Marjorie while her husband Archie looks on.

To read more about Marjorie, check out two books: *Marjorie Harris Carr : Defender of Florida's Environment* by Peggy Macdonald, and *The Three Marjories: Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Marjorie Harries Carr and Their Contributions to Florida* by Sandra Sammons.

Check Out Our New Website

West Volusia Tourism Advertising Authority recently funded the redesign of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway (FBBSB) website.

FBBSB worked with Sailforth Productions to develop a new site utilizing the branding, identity, themes, and story content they developed for the 2011 site at floridablackbearsenicbyway.org

Highlights include:

- * **Photo gallery** refreshed with new images shot for the Florida Scenic Highways in 2021
- * **Video clips**, including 2021 Florida Scenic Highways and a 2023 Florida Channel video
- * **Ask a Black Bear** section, which includes views of the byway from locals
- * **Recreational overview** information
- * **Travel by Type** overview looking through the lenses of famous travelers to FBBSB

Check out the **Why Support Us** section to learn more about getting involved with FBBSB, and sign up for the **newsletter!**

NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN.....Jim Thorsen

Hope everyone had a pleasant summer and were able to “beat the heat”! A good way to do this is to visit our many springs along the Byway. Fortunately, I was able to enjoy the 72 degree water when that heat index was 100 degrees. We traveled to Juniper Springs and Alexander Springs in July and had a delightful experience. A short hike to Fern Hammock Springs is unique and is considered as one of the most picturesque springs on the Byway.

I also hope that everyone survived and stayed safe during hurricane Helene and any damage was minimal. All Floridians know about our hurricane season and stay alert. Some new items that I want to share with our readers and show that we are always improving the experience of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway:



- ✓ In July, we were awarded a grant from the Felburn Foundation to construct new kiosks along the Byway. These kiosks provide information and education to travelers on the Byway on the history, places to visit, wildlife awareness and protection of the resources. Currently, we have 15 kiosks located in various locations on the Byway.
- ✓ Our new website is up and running and we invite everyone to visit this site to gain additional knowledge about our Byway. Highlights include a beautiful photo gallery, video clips, ask a “black bear” section, recreational activities to enjoy and a travel by type overview. Please check it out and either become a member or donate funds to work toward our mission. Website is: Floridablackbearsenicbyway.org
- ✓ On November 2 and 3, we will be at the Pioneer Settlement in Barberville for the 48th Annual Fall Country Jamboree. Please visit our booth for information on the Byway and free educational items. We always enjoy lots of black bear stories!!

I always like to end with a “Black Bear Fact”: Our Black Bears have an extremely good smelling ability. Their nasal mucosa area is about 100 times larger than humans. This means that they can smell well over a mile away!!

Jim Thorsen, Chair thor1505@aol.com

WILDFLOWER PLANTING



Jim Thorsen, Nikki Thorsen & Mike Cross



In September Byway members gathered in the Pittman area to seed wildflowers along the SR 19 right of way. When you travel North on 19 this spring, look for a colorful display along the way.



Do you know the Byway? Be the first to answer our Byway question and win a Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Tote Bag.

What endangered/protected bird species thrives along the Byway and in the Forest? Email your answer to tomrose43@gmail.com

Congratulations to the previous contest winner, **Tomi Andrews of Sarasota, FL**. Tomi knew that Lassie filmed several TV episodes at Alexander Springs in 1965.

Website & Facebook: Learn more about the byway at our website

<https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org> and

Facebook page

<https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/facebook>



Lassie filming at Alexander Springs

Next Meeting: October 29, 2024 (Tuesday) at the Pioneer Settlement in Barberville FL @ 2:00 PM. Visitors are welcome. Attending a board meeting is a great way to learn more about the byway. Please let us know if you plan to attend. tomrose43@gmail.com

Our Mission: To enhance, encourage and promote the preservation and protection of the outstanding natural, ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway for its residents, inhabitants, visitors and future generations.

Officers: Jim Thorsen, Chairman - Kristee Booth, Vice Chair - Nikki Thorsen, Secretary

Editor: Tom Rose Contact: tomrose43@gmail.com. Your letters, comments, suggestions and submissions are welcome.