



A National Scenic Byway

Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

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A Very Special Day for Two Byways

by Nikki Thorsen

Black Bear National Scenic Byway Chair Jim Thorsen had been pursuing a vision to have a “kids day” event for quite a long time. With the help of our newest Board member Carlee McKinney and a handful of other pivotal people, June 14, 2025 turned into a reality for over a hundred registered children and their families when they signed up for a memorable Saturday morning called **“TRY FISHING.”**

Carlee recently joined the Black Bear Byway as a Board member. Prior to volunteering in this position, she had also recently been appointed into a paid position with West Volusia Tourism in Deland working under the Executive Director, Georgia Turner. Additionally, Carlee is a Board member on River of Lakes Heritage Corridor Byway. Carlee’s background in technology, coupled with an abundance of energy and enthusiasm orchestrated a memorable day for families. Working along with Carlee was Rochelle Hood, Exec. Director for Merritt Island Wildlife Assoc. and Sterling Valentine, U.S. Wildlife Refuge Mgr. at Lake Woodruff in Volusia County.





trails and picnic areas along with peaceful nature scenery. We encourage readers to explore Lake Woodruff and take a little time



This event became a significant coordination of two byways – **Black Bear Byway** and **River of Lakes Heritage Corridor** and partnering with other organizations to have a fun filled day and create lifelong memories for many children at Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge in DeLeon Springs, Fl. Not only was this an opportunity for many kids to cast a fishing pole for the first time, but also a great time for families to spend time together outdoors at Lake Woodruff, home of a beautiful refuge established for the public and offering walking trails, bicycle

to discover the beauty of nature. Black Bear Byway is so thankful for all the volunteers who surfaced from different venues to join together for this memorable day under the supervision of Carlee McKinney whose time and energy helped the partnering efforts of two magnificent byways.

Central Florida’s byways provide endless opportunities for outdoor adventures and to learn about Florida’s history and conservation efforts to protect wildlife and our lands.

TRY FISHING!
SAT, JUNE 14
9:00AM - 12:00PM
At Lake Woodruff NWR
2045 Mud Lake Rd, De Leon Springs, FL 32130
A free, fun, family friendly introduction to freshwater fishing!
For those new to fishing or wanting to brush up on the basics. You will learn how to: cast a fishing line, choose the right bait, set up a rod and reel!
Bait will be provided - Loaner fishing gear will be available. Guests are also welcome to bring their own.
Advanced Registration is Required. Register at: <https://bit.ly/tryfishing2025>
Free Registration Clearaway

Bear Bytes

by Nikki Thorsen

This is a share for our Byway enthusiasts to see what our committee has done over the last year:

- Quarterly Board meetings were held August 6, 2024, October 29, 2024, January 14, 2025 and April 8, 2025. Our upcoming meeting will be July 8, 2025 at the Umatilla Museum in Umatilla, Fl. at 2:00 PM. **The public is always welcome to attend.**
- FBBNSB renewed our partnership with Trout Lake Nature Center, Eustis, FL. We continue, as we have for many years, to provide ongoing activities and programs with the Nature Center to increase awareness to the public about protecting and understanding both the wildlife and the natural resources in Florida.
- Two outstanding individuals have joined our Black Bear Board. We welcome Carlee McKinney and Jessica Meinhofer. Both bring a wealth of interesting backgrounds to our committee.
- Four kiosks have been erected over the past year due to the generosity of a grant provided by the Fulmore Foundation. One kiosk has been installed at The Essex House

Restaurant on S.R. 40 in Astor; the second kiosk is at the Volusia County Speedway; the third at Silver Glen Springs on the Ocala National Forest and the fourth kiosk was erected in Marion County at the Mill Dam Recreation area on the Ocala Nat. Forest.

- Renewed our ongoing partnership with the Umatilla Museum.
- Received permission from the Pioneer Settlement Board in Barberville to relocate the Black Bear kiosk from the parking lot to the interior of the settlement. A new kiosk will be erected.
- “Try Fishing” Kids Fishing Tournament was held at Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge in DeLeon Springs on June 14, 2025. Two Byways participated in the fun filled event which was organized primarily by Carlee McKinney, West Volusia Tourism along with Florida Black Bear National Scenic Byway and River of Lakes Heritage Corridor. The kids and their families had a great time. So did the volunteers...



NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN.....Jim Thorsen

Florida summers are long hot sunny days, sultry nights, scattered showers and thunder storms that light up the sky. This climate is also a time to visit one of Florida’s natural springs along the Black Bear Byway. It’s a way to “cool off” and refresh yourself in 72-degree water. It may stun you at first, but after adapting to the temperature, the springs will be a pleasant experience. One can do this at any of the public springs along the Byway – Alexander, Juniper, Salt and Silver Glen. Visit our website: www.floridablackbearsenicbyway.org to find out more information.



We are proud to announce that we have a new Board Member. Jessica Meinhofer from Deland. Jessica operates a Walk and Paddle business to inspire and guide people about the outdoors environment. We are very happy to have Jessica on our team and this will complete our nine-member board. Like all organizations, funding is a challenge. We always need more members and donations for our projects. Please take time to visit our website and any donation will help our cause to improve the Byway and enhance environmental education.

I always end with a black bear fact. Did you know that Florida Black Bears are excellent swimmers? They can cross rivers and lakes in search of food and seasonal migration to adapt to various habitats. I have never seen a black bear enjoying one of the natural springs, however I have seen them crossing the St Johns River rapidly! Have a great summer!!

Jim Thorsen, Chair thor1505@aol.com



Do you know the byway? Answer our byway question and you'll be recognized in a future Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway newsletter.

What Ocala National Forest hike destination allows you to descend 80 feet into the earth? Email your answer to tomrose43@gmail.com

Congratulations to **Wesley Andrews** of Kensington Park who was first to answer the April question. Wesley knew that the byway springs flow at 72 degrees year round.

Website & Facebook: Learn more about the byway at our website <https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org> and Facebook page <https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/facebook>

Board Meetings: Our next meeting will be on Tuesday July 8, 2025 at the Umatilla Historical Museum - 299 N Trowell Ave. Umatilla, FL 32784 - 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. **Board of Directors:** Tony Ehrlich, Georgia Turner, Mike Cross, Janet Lewis, Jessica Meinhofer, Carlee McKinney, Tom Rose

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