



A National Scenic Byway

# Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

published quarterly



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## Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Kids Fishing Day on the Byway

by Tom Rose & Jim Thorsen

*“It’s better to go fishing with your kids, than hunting for them”*

Saturday April 11<sup>th</sup> began as a beautiful sunny picture perfect day on the byway. It got even better as 20 youngsters with their parents gathered around the small pond adjacent to the **Essex Seafood Restaurant** on SR 40 in Volusia County. This group had signed up for the inaugural Kids Fishing Day on the Byway. The event was totally free for participants. It was a special day for the kids age 6 to 12. A grant from **Fish Florida** provided each participant with a quality rod, reel and bait. Volunteers and parents provided guidance and instruction. They all



caught a fish, for some it was the first time. Many passing travelers stopped to see what was going on and stayed to watch the activities. It was truly inspirational to witness the excitement of the kids and the interaction of the kids with parents and volunteer instructors. The fishing equipment was theirs to keep, so future fishing adventures are in store for these kids.

The **FBBSB** is proud to have hosted this wonderful highly successful event and hopes to continue it annually. This would not have been possible without major commitments from the volunteers, partners and sponsors.

**Essex Seafood Restaurant** not only provided the venue, but also served a delicious lunch to everyone. Essex is famous for their fresh claims and lobster which are brought in from Massachusetts.

**Fish Florida** is a non profit organization partially funded by the Florida fishing license plate. They provide organizations like the Scenic Byways with grants to teach kids about Florida fish, aquatic habitats, ethical fishing skills and protection of aquatic environment.

Event partners included the **Astor Kiwanis Club, Pierson-Taylor High School Future Farmers of America, Essex Seafood Restaurant, FBBSB Board** and **WIDA Outdoors in Astor**. Owner David Williamson supported the event and provided bait.



## **NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN...Jim Thorsen**

Hope everyone is enjoying the Summer of 2026. With our heat index reaching to about 105 degrees, one of the best ways to “cool off” is to visit and enjoy one of our natural springs on the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway. Silver Springs is a great one-day experience and canoeing in Silver Springs run can offer a pleasant adventure. Our four magnitude 1 Springs, Alexander, Juniper, Salt and Silver Glen springs offer a sustained temperature of 72 degrees and swimming, snorkeling, canoeing and just cooling off is delightful. One can visit our website at [www.floridablackbearsenicbyway.org](http://www.floridablackbearsenicbyway.org)



and receive excellent information on the Springs and water activities. What a great way to celebrate our Nation's 250 years or "Philly 250" and visit the Byway to enjoy your summer.

So, what do Florida Black Bears do during the summer months? Interestingly enough, they are very active and focus on two main tasks: mating and foraging. The breeding season is from June to August. So, the males are searching for mates and females are bulking up their energy reserves. Also, I have witnessed bears having fun in a "cool water hole" in Billies Bay Wilderness and Juniper Prairie Wilderness areas. Both of these designated wilderness areas are located off the Byway. Enjoy the Summer, stay safe and find a "cool water hole!!"

Jim Thorsen, Chair [thor1505@aol.com](mailto:thor1505@aol.com)

**Bear Bytes - July 2025 to June 2026** Submitted by Nikki Thorsen

- ✓ Quarterly Board meetings were held July 8, 2025, October 7, 2025, January 13, 2026 and March 31, 2026.
- ✓ FBBNSB renewed our partnership with Trout Lake Nature Center, Eustis, FL. We continue, as we have for many years to provide 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.
- ✓ FBBNSB renewed our ongoing partnership with the Pioneer Settlement in Barberville, FL. The settlement continues to be a supporting partner to our group by donating a room in the Gate House to display Black Bear paraphernalia and information about the Byway and additionally provides us setup space at the annual Fall Jamboree.
- ✓ FBBNSB renewed annual membership with the National Scenic Byway Association.
- ✓ FBBNSB renewed our ongoing partnership with the Umatilla Museum, Umatilla, FL.
- ✓ August 8, 2025: Jim and Nikki Thorsen coordinated a "sparkle up" for the Bartram Oak in Astor on the east side of the St. Johns bridge on 40. SR 40 is the main corridor for the Black Bear Byway. The Bartram Oak is close to 400 years old. The historical tree and the signage have been refreshed for visitors to stop and enjoy a magnificent moment with nature...if trees could talk.....
- ✓ FBBNSB and Mike Palossi, partner from Atkins Group submitted Black Bear's annual report required by FDOT.
- ✓ Oct. 30, 2025: The new kiosk was installed inside the grounds of the Pioneer Settlement in Barberville, FL.
- ✓ Nov. 1, 2 2025: FBBNSB set up a booth and display at the annual Pioneer Fall Festival which is a two-day fun filled event with food, crafts, information vendors and continuous music venues.
- ✓ Jan. 11, 2026: Trout Lake Sunday Fun Day. Jim and Nikki set up a booth for visitors to get information about the Black Bear Byway.
- ✓ Jan. 13, 2026: The prestigious Gary Balough Inspiring Excellence Award was presented to Jim and Nikki Thorsen for 2025 by Dean Stoddard, FL. Scenic Highways Program State Coordinator at the FBBNSB quarterly Meeting.
- ✓ Jan. 31, 2026: The return of the Umatilla Bear Festival proved to be a very successful event on a windy Saturday! Two tours to the forest were 100% attended and enjoyed by many curious visitors who learned about our Byway mission and had an opportunity to greet Florida Scrub Jays.
- ✓ March 9, 2026: Jim and Nikki presented Silver Springs "Lure of The Springs" Discovery Center a large print of The Byway corridor. Silver Springs Discovery Center plans to hang the print in the center once it is fully renovated.

- ✓ March 26, 2026: Jim Thorsen gave a presentation to a well-attended group of residents at Lakeview Terrace Senior Living Facility in Altoona, FL. about the FBBNSB and the Ocala Forest.
- ✓ April 11, 2026: Kids Fishing Day on The Byway. Hosted by The Essex House Restaurant in Astor, FL. Board member Carlee McKinney secured a grant that allowed for the fun filled and well attended event for kids and their families. BBNSB Board members, volunteers from Astor Kiwanis, Future Farmers students from Pierson Taylor HS all participated to make a memorable day for many kids.

## **ATTENTION READERS:**

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

**<https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org> and our Facebook page**

**<https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/facebook>**

**Board Meetings:** Our next board meeting is July 14th, 2 pm, at the Umatilla Historical Museum 299 N. Trowell Ave. Umatilla, FL 32784. Visitors are welcome. Attending a board meeting is a great way to learn more about the byway. Let us know if you would like to attend and I'll send you details.  
tomrose43@gmail.com

**NEW MEMBER:** Florida Black Bear National Scenic Byway Board members would like to recognize our newest member: **Robert Walters** who resides in Altoona, Fl. Thank you for your New Friend membership and for supporting our efforts to protect our wildlife and their habitat on the Black Bear Byway.

***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](mailto:tomrose43@gmail.com). Your letters, comments, suggestions and submissions are encouraged and welcome.