

SAVED! BEACHLAND WOODS!!!

FLORIDA CITIZENS KEEP WOODLANDS FROM BEING TURNED INTO A PARKING LOT!

BY ANNE MULLER



Florida is precious. I never tire of visiting because of the amazing wildlife that calls Florida home. Sadly, the state is becoming more and more developed. The photo above is typical of what you will see in many communities. Except for national and state parks, and national wildlife refuges, there's little wild land left.

When even a small parcel of land is threatened with development in a community, it could make all the difference in the world for the wildlife that calls it home.

Development causes the loss of homes for so many wild animals. They are then pushed into backyards where they are considered nuisances and often killed by "nuisance control officers," or they are hit by cars on the roads. Some slow-moving animals like gopher tortoises are even buried alive during construction!

In early April, Wildlife Watch received an e-mail from Laura Guttridge of Vero Beach, Florida. She was devastated that the Beachland Elementary School was planning to construct parking in the last safe haven for wildlife in that area. Wildlife Watch helped Laura to develop a plan of action and this is what happened:

Laura wrote the following letter to her newspaper, and they published it:

Don't let woodlands behind Beachland Elementary become concrete wasteland.

Earth Day is near, and instead of celebrating wildlife, the residents of Central Beach are fighting to save it.

I am disheartened after learning about the project to extend a parking lot through the lush woodlands behind Beachland Elementary School. These woodlands are the last safe haven for the

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wildlife in the Central Beach community.

I have spotted bobcats, tortoises, and other various species either exiting or entering those woods. My daughter and I often see this beautiful little painted turtle; he ventures out occasionally to graze on the low grasses at the edge of the woods.

How heartbreaking it would be to see his home turned into a concrete reserve parking space, after that turtle has flourished there for so many years.

Furthermore, there are two confirmed active gopher tortoise burrows located almost directly in the line of fire.

If this project goes through, I suspect we will see many of these animals lying dead as road kill, simply scraped up off the pavement and discarded like trash.

There are numerous options to resolve the parking concerns at the school. What kind of an example is this "future project" setting for the children?

Why not make good use of the woodlands to help teach these children about nature and natural processes in an otherwise artificial environment?

Furthermore, Green areas not only provide us with aesthetic value, but they also increase our property value. They are also important to our environment as a whole, by doing their part to help control air pollution.

Earth Day has been celebrated for more than 20 years. It is my hope that the school district will reevaluate its environmentally destructive project, and consider one that reflects being the good stewards of the Earth that we are meant to be.

Then Laura leafleted all of her neighbors:

"Green areas not only provide us with aesthetic value, but they also increase our property value. They are important to our environment as a whole by doing their part to help control air pollution. Please join us for a peaceful protest on Earth Day, Sunday, April 22, from 12-2 in front of Beachland Elementary School. Bring a sign to support saving the woodlands."

Laura and other concerned residents created a Facebook page called "Save



Laura, her husband, Bobby, and her daughter, Celeste

Beachland Woods," and then created an event page under "Protest to save Central Beach Woodlands" suggesting that everyone call The Indian River County School Board to voice their opinion!

Wildlife Watch provided numbers of wildlife rehabilitators in her area and also put her in touch with LOHV-FL, the League of Humane Voters in Florida.

What a difference a month can make! Between 4/3 and 5/4/2012, saving the woodland was accomplished. Laura wrote, "Hi Ann, Just wanted to up-date you on the progress. We have won a reprieve for the woodlands!!!! They have backed off for now. So instead of an Earth Day protest it will be an Earth Day celebration Rally!!!! The next move is to get them to work with The Indian River County Land Trust to make the woodlands a permanent reserve. Phew!!"

The local paper reported: "A new plan directing traffic to pick up children down Date Palm Road near the school has since been proposed, but that also was opposed by residents at a meeting last week. After last week's meeting with Beachland neighbors, district officials said they would revisit options.

Organizers say they hope to see the Indian River County School District work with the Indian River Land Trust to create a conservation element to protect the hammock (slightly elevat-

ed, wooded piece of land) permanently. 'It would offer Beachland Elementary School a very unique opportunity for its students to learn about nature, and natural processes in an untainted setting. Furthermore, green spaces benefit the community as a whole,' said Save Beachland Woods member Laura Guttridge in a prepared statement.

Guttridge, who lives on Date Palm Road, said she and her neighbors are concerned about the additional traffic proposed for the road. However, she said they would prefer that to seeing the woodlands cut down. 'We're happy the woodlands were spared,' she said."

So, there you have it: A total plan for organizing and saving land, the home of wildlife. Let's call it the Laura Plan!

