Celebrating Windy Hill Acquisition

By Tom Palmer



Over 50 people assembled Sunday afternoon on Green Horizon Land Trust's recently acquired tract on Windy Hill overlooking Crooked Lake to celebrate what they hope is the first of a series of purchases and enjoy the scenic sunset.

Kristen Nowak, Green Horizon's board president, said this acquisition is part of a larger plan to ultimately connect Windy Hill to The Nature Conservancy's Tiger Creek Preserve. She said this property is important to protect groundwater and a portion of the Florida Wildlife Corridor.



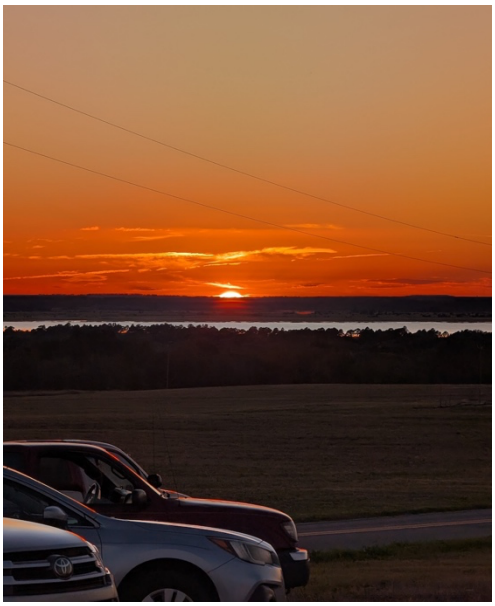
Plans are under way to plant Longleaf Pine on the property to restore the open pineland habitat that existed here historically, she said.

Nowak credited the" vision and leadership" of the Windy Hill Committee in making this happen.

Steve Morrison, a member of the Windy Hill Committee, said this caps 12 years of work during which committee members had approached landowners to find out if they were interested in selling.

"This is one of the best views in Florida," he said, explaining the land rises to around 300 feet above sea

level – one of the highest points along the Lake Wales Ridge – and the purchase prevents the view from being ruined by rooftops.



“We don’t want to see what is happening from north of Babson Park to Orlando happen here,” Morrison said.

Morrison said the high terrain allows rainwater to recharge the aquifer and serves as a water bank that benefits Crooked Lake. “We’re protecting the view and we’re protecting the water,” he said and echoed Nowak’s prediction that this is the beginning of a larger project.

The Polk County Commission recently agreed to allow work to proceed to try to purchase adjacent parcels recommended for acquisition by the Polk County Environmental Lands Program.

The Lake Wales Ridge is a series of prehistoric islands that contain plants and animals found nowhere else on the planet whose habitat has been lost by more than a century of development and conversion to intensive agriculture.

Protecting and restoring land along the Lake Wales Ridge and Crooked Lake has been a priority for local conservationists for decades. Crooked Lake is the only water body in Polk County and one of the few in the state to be designated as an Outstanding Florida Water.

Read published article in Lake Wales News.
https://www.lakewalesnews.net/story/2026/11/18/ridge-life/celebration-of-success-draws-conservationist-to-summit-of-windy-hill/5205.html