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Scenic Watch is a free bi-monthly publication of Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc., dedicated to the preservation, protection and enhancement of Florida's scenic heritage. Individuals, organizations and government agencies are welcome as members. [Join Scenic Florida now](#) to protect our scenic qualities.

### National News:

### Spot a digital billboard? Fill out Scenic America's digital billboard questionnaire!

Digital billboards are popping up all across the country. Have you seen one go up near you? If you have, we'd like to hear from you. We're interested in your opinion and in finding out how the sign(s) affects your commute or your neighborhood. Please take a moment to complete our digital billboard questionnaire.



[Click here to complete the questionnaire.](#)

### Scenic America featured in *The New York Times*

[NY Times slideshow](#)

Dan Barry's weekly *New York Times* column '*This Land*' was recently titled "A Place Just Like Every Other Place. Only Not," and featured an interview with Kevin Fry, Scenic America president, and Brad Cownover, Scenic America's director of conservation services. [Click here](#) to view the article.



### Scenic Symposium - a Success Story...

Ninety people from numerous states attended the Scenic Symposium sponsored by Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc. in Jacksonville earlier this month. Topics included spotting and dealing with illegal billboards, disparity in how billboards are taxed and valued for purchase, legal considerations of sign ordinances, corporate franchise design considerations and more. Corporations are increasingly willing to design their buildings and signage in keeping with the community standards when communities insist.

## Billboards

### Do Road Signs and Billboards Contribute to Vehicle Accidents?

Submitted by ePR Source on April 15, 2008 - 1:50pm.

Have you ever been driving along and all of a sudden you were distracted by a billboard that you have never seen before? Well, this response is all too common among drivers on today's roads and highways. A recent poll conducted by Privilege Insurance determined that 30% of drivers in the United Kingdom admitted to losing concentration while driving because of a billboard or sign.



Stock Photo

Why Driver Distraction Matters

Driver distraction increases the chances that a vehicle accident will occur. It is a major underlying cause of auto accidents. In fact, driver behavior is cited as one of four causes of vehicle accidents listed below in order of most major cause to least major cause:

1. Driver behavior
2. Poor roadway maintenance
3. Roadway design
4. Equipment failure

In fact, over 95% of motor vehicle accidents have some amount of driver behavior as a portion of the cause even if some or all of the other major causes are involved.

#### Why a Few Seconds of Inattention Matter

We've all done it—momentarily moved our eyes away from the road. The problem is that sometimes drivers take their eyes off the road for too long or at a crucial point. If a driver is distracted by the bright colors or someone in sexy lingerie on a billboard while they are driving near you, you could wind up being the victim of a vehicle accident. Orlando auto accident attorney [S. Best & Anderson](#) are very familiar with this scenario.

Also, electronic and moving billboards with pop-out sections may increase the chances of an accident because people tend to look at them longer than traditional billboards.

If drivers are distracted for five seconds while traveling at 60 miles per hour, then they aren't looking at the road for 100 yards or more (the length of a football field), which is more than enough time for a vehicle accident to occur.

Even more disturbing, a 2006 study performed by Nottingham University, determined that as much as 50% of a driver's time spent on the road may involve paying attention to roadside distractions.

Drivers are even distracted by the sheer volume of signs that are actually supposed to help them navigate roads.

All of this adds up to great potential for auto accidents to occur.

#### The "Highway Hypnosis" Phenomenon

Some people may claim that billboards help relieve driver boredom on long road trips. This would be a positive benefit to billboards. However, a counterargument to this idea is the phenomenon of "highway hypnosis." This is so-named because when you are driving along a straight, flat section of highway, you enter into an almost trance-like state because of the monotony of everything looking very similar. Drivers can end up fixating on a billboard that seems to pop up out of nowhere during their "hypnosis" and end up causing an accident.

Privilege Insurance determined that in the United Kingdom, roadside distractions affected 83% of UK drivers. That number can surely be applied to United States drivers as well.

This is a startling statistic because it validates what we already suspect: being inundated by signs and billboards as we drive down the road can distract us while we are driving. In fact, there is even a billboard that says, "Keep your eyes on the road and stop reading these signs." This billboard confirms that even companies who place billboards know that they are a distraction!

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## Land Use & Smart Growth

### Florida envisions green cities

By Bruce Ritchie • FLORIDA CAPITAL BUREAU • April 27, 2008

Florida's effort to address climate change could result in the redevelopment of cities with more mass transportation, bike lanes and pedestrian walkways and mixes of office space, stores and high-rise residential buildings.

Planners and environmentalists in recent years have advocated such "smart growth" techniques to combat urban sprawl and improved living conditions in cities. But now, the Legislature is poised to adopt sweeping energy bills that could require cities, counties and the state to consider projected miles traveled when they approve new developments.

"Transportation and transportation costs will be a big factor in how cities continue to develop," said Sen. Burt Saunders, R-Naples and co-sponsor of the Senate energy bill.

Cars are key

Some planners and scientists said improvements are needed now in the way cities are developing to begin reducing greenhouse-gas emissions in the future. And they say they are developing research techniques to measure how the design of a development can increase or reduce the amount of driving people have to do.

That may be critical in Florida, where 41 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions come from transportation, according to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The governor last July signed executive orders requiring the state to reduce emissions to 2000 levels by 2017 with further reductions in future years. He said last week the orders are key to protecting Florida's environment.

"I believe that climate change is one of the most important issues we will face," Crist said at an Earth Day event at the Capitol this week.

Planning for less driving

The number of miles driving each day in Florida could increase from 300 million miles in 2005 to more than 1 billion by 2050, according to the Florida Department of Transportation.

In the most compact cities in the United States, including New York, San Francisco and Boston, people drive 25-percent less than in the least compact cities, according to the "Growing Cooler" study.

If adopted, Florida's energy legislation will lead the Department of Community Affairs to require local governments to adopt policies to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions through land-use planning, said Charles Gauthier, director of DCA's Division of Community Planning. He said the department could object to local land-use changes that could substantially increase vehicle miles traveled.

How it should look

That could help reverse a trend, planners and builders say, that forces development away from city centers where roads are more congested.

A spokeswoman for the Florida Home Builders Association said the group supports the mobility fee, as provided in House and Senate growth management bills, as a means for encouraging development in cities as opposed to urban sprawl.

Without such changes, "the overall goal of discouraging sprawl and reducing greenhouse-gas emissions becomes difficult to achieve," said Edie Ousley, association spokeswoman.

1000 Friends of Florida Executive Director Charles Pattison said reducing greenhouse-gas emissions through land-use planning may be cheaper than requiring reductions from industry.

"You're not saying 'No' to development," Pattison said. "You are saying how it should look on the ground, which to me has to be as cheap as it can be."

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## **Scenic Highways & Trails**

### **Experience the wild life -- it's only natural**

#### **new generation of nature attractions aims to protect Florida's wildlife as well as educate and entertain the public**

**BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON Special to The Miami Herald**

There was a time in Florida, when "nature park" meant a penned alligator, a caged Florida panther, some rose bushes and maybe a tiger -- or some other misplaced wild creature -- tossed in for good measure.

Native and exotic flora and fauna made up the state's original roadside attractions and to this day continue to draw the curious.

But curiosity has evolved into a sophisticated yearning for knowledge and experiences without bars. As new eco-attractions open, they cater not only to the people who come looking for a true Florida adventure and learning episode, but also to the animals they come seeking.

Here's a handful that have opened in the past decade with missions to protect the wildlife and to educate on a whole new level.

#### **BROOKER CREEK**

The amazing state-of-the-art visitors center at Brooker Creek Preserve in Tarpon Springs engages all ages, all senses in learning not so much about the charismatic stars of the Florida wilds -- the manatees, sea turtles, dolphins and panthers -- but about the undersung, sometimes underfoot species.

The A Year in Florida exhibit, for instance, features videos and interactive displays that take you from summer through winter with the creek's favorite critters. Whirl a whirligig. Hear a catbird meow and an American goldfinch ask for a "potato chip." Step on an ephemeral leafy projection and peek at live aquarium specimens.

A second room replicates the creek's habitat with levers and other forms of manipulation for exploring hidden creatures. Maneuver a larger-than-life millipede through leaf litter, a weevil out of a rotting log, and an ant lion around its funnel-shaped lair.

The kids will be drawn to the gopher tortoise burrow. They go to plunge in, but then hear the faint rattling and notice the sign about "surprises" -- what also lives in the burrow. As they make their way through the tunnel, blown up to five times a true gopher tortoise habitat, they lift doors and read signs to learn about eggs, rattlesnakes, and other natural encounters turtles might experience on the crawl.

Once everyone has learned about "looking for traces in all the right places" -- identifying tracks, scat and skins -- it's time to hit the six miles of hiking trails to explore cypress dome, swamp, oak hammock and pine flatwoods.

As you learned in the education center, one must look closely to recognize the treasures saved from development by this county preserve: epiphytes, Catesby's lilies, dung beetles, zebra longwing butterflies,

five-lined skinks, gopher frogs, red-billed woodpeckers, green herons and white-tailed deer.

## **PANTHER REFUGE**

The Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, which opened near Naples in 1989, is all about protecting the endangered panther from humans. However, some six years ago, a board of stakeholders decided the refuge needed public access.

To protect both human and beast, the refuge carved out a 600-acre tract lightly visited by panthers, easily accessible from Interstate 75 and bounded by fences. Two trails opened in June 2005 as the refuge's contribution to the greater Everglades trail system.

The shorter of the two loop trails, paved with crushed shell to be wheelchair-accessible, is the easiest and driest, measuring one-third mile in length. The less developed, longer trail loops for 1.3 miles through three of the refuge's four eco-systems -- tropical hammock, wet prairie and pine-oak upland. There's also swamp habitat in the refuge, and at certain times of year the long trail resembles it.

In addition to saving the dwindling panther population, the refuge's main work involves restoring its once-abundant orchid growth, decimated by the Gatsby-era appetite for the coveted flowers. Now the refuge works at reproducing and reintroducing them to save the habitat.

Bottom line: Chances are you'll never see a panther, but you may see signs of its presence and experience the wide range of habitat it requires.

## **MARINE CENTER**

In contrast to the high-tech direction many new eco-centers are taking, the St. Lucie County Marine Center in Fort Pierce feels a little old-fashioned, despite the involvement of the Smithsonian Institution in its exhibits. Opened in 2001, it feeds our fascination with what lies beneath the ocean surface.

The Smithsonian Marine Ecosystems Exhibit demonstrates the interaction of marine life in local underwater habitat -- the coral reef, seagrass bed, lagoon hard bottom, and mangrove forest.

Most fascinating, the *Oculina* reef exhibit explores the dark world of deepwater (250 to 300 feet) pure-white coral, which lies 20 miles offshore from Hutchinson Island, where the marine center resides.

This is a neighborhood kind of place where families visit over and over again to welcome new babies, hold a sea cucumber and see who can be the first to find the flatfish that camouflages well on the mangrove floor.

Ask for a guided tour or explore on your own. Staff is always willing to point out (and are clearly passionate about) the minutiae in the aquariums, and that's what makes this place so special.

## **MARINE SCIENCE CENTER**

Racy Daytona Beach shows its serious side at the Marine Science Center to its south at Ponce Inlet.

Here's a place where wildlife advocacy and environmental education intertwine. The science center concentrates on the beach's nesting sea turtle population. Inside, see a replicated cutaway nest of turtle hatchlings at the Dunes exhibit.

Feel as though you're surrounded by a swarm of mosquitoes. Spy tropical fish in the 5,000-gallon reef aquarium. See how you compare in size to different sea turtles.

Step outside for reality shock: tanks of rehabbing turtles with photos of their scars and the beach trash found in their stomachs.

Follow the short boardwalk and nature trail past a butterfly garden and into scrub habitat to learn sound environmental practices and the names of native flora and fauna. An easy climb up the observation tower gives you a view of wetlands, estuary and the inlet.

## HILLSBOROUGH RIVER

Another new trend in eco-attractions serves the primary purpose of protecting water sources for metropolitan areas or nearby sensitive environment.

Lower Hillsborough Wilderness Park has been many years in the making, but only recently solidified recreational opportunities in the 16,000-acre spread just 15 minutes from downtown Tampa, where the Hillsborough River flows past big city noise and tempo.

Out here, the 54-mile river runs pure from Crystal Springs and the Green Swamp. The area was once logged for cypress, and the industry has left remnants of its roads and bridges.

Along the river, the county has developed parts of Wilderness Park into a system of recreational areas that holds picnic facilities, canoe launches, off-road biking and equestrian trails.

Canoe Escape arranges trips along four to five miles of the river in the park's developed portion.

On the canoe trail, silence envelops like sleep, broken only by the electric buzz of unseen insects, the soft slap of wooden paddles, and the territorial sentry of a red-shouldered hawk.

Crinum lilies intermittently scent the air. Alligators float like logs. Great blue herons pose as statues, knee-deep and stone-still as they stalk their prey.

Access points such as John B. Sargeant Park and Morris Bridge Park provide local schoolchildren and visiting families scenic, oak-shaded spots from which to observe nature, cast a line or paddle lazily in natural surroundings only 10 minutes from the contrived "Africa" wilderness created at Busch Gardens.

For information on where to stay at these eco-attractions, visit <http://www.miamiherald.com/living/travel/florida/story/486404.html>

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### Other Scenic News

#### Southwest Florida named 'Hottest Spot' in America

#### Romero Montalban

**Issue date:** 4/15/08 **Section:** [Features](#)

Who's the oldest visitor in America? It's Lucy, the 3.2 million-year-old fossil, perhaps the most famous in the world.

Discovered in 1974 at Hadar in Ethiopia, Lucy was assigned to the species *Australopithecus afarensis*. She is special because she is the earliest known hominid to walk upright. Lucy's entourage includes 190 other fossils, artifacts and relics.

Lucy is the star of her own show, "Lucy: The Story of Human Origins," on exhibit through June 8 at the Southwest Florida Museum of History, in Ft. Myers, Fla.

Perhaps the hottest spot in America right now for intellectuals and peripatetic cogniscenti, Ft. Myers and Sanibel are treasures awaiting discovery.

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge offers delightful footpaths, winding canoe trails and a four-mile scenic drive, all of which are lush with native plants. Wendy Erler, general manager, is quite proud that USA Today named this refuge as the top bird-watching destination in North America. The lagoon becomes bright pink when filled to capacity with wading flamingos, and the joint is really jumping with fish that sail through the air in graceful arcs. Flying squirrels glide from tree to tree, and live alligators approach frequently so photographers can capture spectacular close-ups. Guests can drive through the reserve, or take a narrated tour on an open-air tram, hosted by a wildlife expert from Tarpon Bay Explorers.

The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum showcases a delightful display of shells from around the world, with a focus on species from southwest Florida. An introductory film produced by a local shell collector inspires the museum's patrons to rush out and collect their own bonanza. Cultural anthropologists will be amazed at the display, which reveals how humans have used shells for tools, clothes, decorations, even ceremonial exchange.

Barbara Knapp offered curious children a "treasure map" of shells, and challenged them to find all the shells listed. Any child who find all of them would win a prize - a coveted seashell to take home as a souvenir.

Captiva Cruises provides an entertaining and educational look at one of the world's largest populations of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins in Lee County. Diane Etter recommended her company's day cruise to the very private and very upscale Useppa Island, a quaint and picturesque village with storybook cottages and carpets of flowers, a tranquil getaway for yesteryears' tycoons like Rockefeller, Dupont, Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. On this romantic island, publishing magnate Barron Collier built a stately mansion and entertained the world's most celebrated VIPs.

A "must-see" for visitors to southwest Florida, the Edison & Ford Winter Estates is its number one historical attraction, featuring the famous inventor's 1886, 14-acre riverfront estate, laboratory, and experimental gardens, and the winter abode of his next door neighbor, the illustrious industrialist Henry Ford. Lisa Sbuttoni explained, "The winter home of Thomas Edison is beautifully poised along the Caloosahatchee River, and is one of the greatest historic treasures within Lee County. In 1885, Thomas Edison first visited Florida, and he purchased property along the river and built his vacation home, which served as a winter retreat and work place for the prolific inventor until his death in 1931."

The beach at Cayo Costa State Park was recently named among the world's best "hidden beaches" by prestigious Condé Nast Traveler magazine. Condé Nast described the beach on Cayo Costa island (accessible only by boat) as having "soft white sand, chill-out serenity, and nary a high-rise at the tide line."

For an unforgettable romantic sunset cruise, The Marco Island Princess offers narrated tour of the fabled island, accompanied by a lavish gourmet meal. The desserts are absolutely, positively to die for.

Lee Rose, communications manager for the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau, welcomes visitors to this unique and fascinating area, and encourages readers to visit [www.FortMyersSanibel.com](http://www.FortMyersSanibel.com) or call (800) 237-6444 for further information.

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Wilton Rooks

Scenic Watch Editor

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