

Special Edition: Scenic Watch

Citizens for a Scenic Florida



January 27, 2011

Citizens for a Scenic Florida President's Message



Grand Jury Results

In 2009 Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc. received information from an anonymous source indicating an extraordinary failure by the Florida Department of Transportation to enforce Florida laws. More than 2,000 public trees were cut down without approved plans or associated mitigation fees in "flagrant violation of the law."

In a grand jury presentment unsealed on January 24, 2012, the grand jury refers to the FDOT failure as a "debacle." The grand jury concluded that FDOT failed to collect between \$1M and \$4M due the state of Florida in connection with the loss of over 2000 public trees, and also that the billboard company failed to remove 56 "nonconforming" signs.

We are devoting much of this issue to giving you access not only the press coverage, but also to the actual Grand Jury report and the Citizen's for a Scenic Florida Press Release which outlines specific actions that we believe should be taken by Governor Scott and FDOT in light of the Grand Jury findings.

Jan-Feb



Fun Festivals and Events

Central Florida

Nov 19-Jan 1

Facts: Grand Jury Document

The Grand Jury's results are summarized in a document that is known as a Presentment. This recently unsealed document includes:

- Factual Summary
- Findings
- Recommendations

The Presentment is six pages that were written with the layperson in mind, so don't be hesitant about reading it. Intriguing details are found throughout that aren't available in other sources.

[Read Presentment Here>](#)

Festival of Lights, Punta Gorda

Jan 27-29

5th Annual Sarasota Indian Festival,
Sarasota

Jan 28

Kumquat Festival, Dade City

Jan 28

Pinellas Folk Festival, St. Petersburg

Jan 28-29

Images - A Festival of the Arts, New
Smyrna Beach

Jan 28-29

Town Center at Cagan Crossing Art
and Craft Festival, Clermont

Feb 1-29

ArtsFest 2012, Orlando

Feb 4

Bike Fest, Plant City

Feb 4-5

The Mount Dora Arts Festival, Mount
Dora

Jan 18-Mar 24

Real Music Concert Series, Tampa
Bay

Feb 4-5

7th Annual Art in the Park and
Music Festival, Lady Lake

Feb 9-12

Fort Foster Rendezous, Hillsborough
River State Park, Thonotosassa

Feb 11-12

4th Annual Art and Craft Festival,
Holmes Beach

Feb 11-Mar 4

Bands Brew and BBQ music festival,
Orlando

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South Florida

Jan 26-29

Key West Food and Wine Festival,
Key West

Jan 28

Annual Port Salerno Seafood
Festival, Port Salerno

Jan 28

Benefit Flea Market at Flamingo
Gardens, Davie

Jan 14-15

25th Annual Boca Fest, Boca Raton

Facts: Florida Statutes

This document contains Florida statutes and it has been highlighted for readability.

[Read Document Here>](#)

Press Release: Citizens for a Scenic Florida

Citizens for a Scenic Florida's press release sums up the grand jury finding and calls for the following actions:

- "1. FDOT take whatever action is necessary to hold Salter responsible for cutting down trees without legal permits. This includes monetary fines of \$2.1 million and the surrender of at least 56 nonconforming billboard permits - as would have been required had the permits been legally granted.
2. FDOT engage in a thorough investigation to determine which agency officials were engaged in a cover-up of the debacle once it came to light, including existing employees. The investigation should include (a) the scheme to offer additional "training" to Wilks and his staff as a way to deflect attention from the fact FDOT District 3 Operations Director James Rodgers and/or others ordered Wilks to break the law, and (b) to determine specifically whether FDOT Assistant Secretary Kevin Thibault, Rodgers, 01' other higher-ups were involved in that scheme to deflect attention and whether the same was discussed in one more secret meetings in January 2010.
3. FDOT engage in a thorough internal investigation to determine why public records requests were not fully complied with by FDOT's Central and District 3 Offices, thereby (a) keeping secret key emails to/from Deputy Secretary Kevin Thibault exchanged in January 2009 and (b) keeping secret notes of a meeting that occurred in January 2010 involving Thibault and others. The investigation should include why the notes and the meeting itself were kept from a St. Pete Times investigative reporter who made an inquiry shortly after the meeting occurred.
4. Governor Scott investigate what roles FDOT's current leadership played in this debacle and in any subsequent cover-up(s)."

[Read Press Release Here>](#)

Letters: Governor and FDOT Urged to Take Specific Actions

In addition to the recommendations section of the Grand Jury Presentment (see document above), Citizens for a Scenic Florida has delivered letters to government officials urging action.

[Read Letter to Governor Here>](#)
[Read Letter to Secretary of FDOT Here>](#)

Miami:

Jan 28-28

27th Annual Key West Craft Show,
Key West

Jan 14

Edison Day of Discovery, Fort Myers

Feb 3-5

Everglades Seafood Festival,
Everglades City

Feb 4-5

Artfest Fort Myers, Fort Myers

Feb 4-5

11th Annual Hobe Sound Festival of
the Arts, Hobe Sound

Feb 4-5

Everglades Seafood Festival,
Everglades City

Feb 10-12

Florida's Creative Coast Weekend,
Pine Island

Feb 11-12

18th Annual Pigeon Key Art Festival,
Marathon

Feb 11-12

12th Annual Bonita Springs National
Art Festival, Bonita Springs

Feb 13-14

Sweetheart Express on Seminole
Gulf Railway, Fort Myers

Feb 12

Edison Festival of Light Junior
Events, Fort Myers

Feb 16-20

Strictly Sail Miami Boat Show,
Miami

Jan 27-29

Goodland Mullet Festival, Goodland

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North Florida

Jan 26

Lu the Hippo's 52nd Birthday,
Homosassa Springs

Jan 27-29

Goodland Mullet Festival, Goodland

Jan 28-Jan 29

Hoggetowne Medieval Faire,
Gainesville

Feb 12

Second Saturdays Artrageous
Artwalk, Fernandina Beach



Photo: Scenic Miami-Dade

Another New Proposal For Commercial Ads On City Property

ANY city owned property could be available for advertising

"In a proposed ordinance up for first reading this week, justified by 'dire economic conditions,' the City of Miami Commission would allow internally lighted signs on any city-owned property in which at least 1000 patrons can assemble.

There is no indication of which buildings qualify. There are no standards of size or number of signs or letters. There are no standards of distancing from other signs, residential properties or highways. There is no standard of illumination, no indication whether to be free-standing or attached, and no requirement that message pertain to venue.

This is an open-ended business deal with the outdoor advertising industry which potentially dramatically increases illuminated LED billboards in the city, probably causing another amendment to the questionable settlement agreements with the billboard companies.

A sign would be proposed and the City Manager or his designee would permit with no public input..."

Barbara Bisno, an attorney associated with Scenic Miami-Dade, says "This is, of course, illegal under the County Code which provides 10 conditions for programmable signs and other standards having to do with whether a sign advertises on site goods and services, etc. "

-- Scenic Miami-Dade Website

[Visit Website Here>](#)



Photo: WXOW.com

The Nation: Referendum in WI National Overview of Billboard Wars

Feb 17-18

Mardi Gras At The Beach, Panama
City Beach

Feb 18

Grand Mardi Gras Parade, Pensacola

Feb 25-26

Art and Craft Festival, Flager Beach

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Note from the Editor

Suggestions for improvement are
always welcome.

La Crosse Wisconsin: "Council puts billboard regulations on the ballot"

"The La Crosse City Council voted to put two questions regarding billboards onto the April ballot on Thursday night...

The first question of the two questions will ask whether the city should ban future electronic billboards. The second asks voters whether the city should reduce the number of traditional billboards.

Going into the vote, there was debate on whether the issue should be referred to the Sign Committee or to be put to a referendum.

Council member Audrey Kader says it's important that the public have a say in the matter. "It seems to me that the reason for doing it is really to get a sense of the pulse of the community and to get some sense of direction as that committee proceeds with its work," says Kader..."

-- WXOW News 19, La Crosse

[Read Entire Article Here>](#)

Billboards Vs. Democracy: "Billboard corporations use money and influence to override your vote"

It's a pattern in many Western communities. For people who think government has a role in protecting viewsheds and aesthetics, billboards are like unsightly weeds popping up in the cracks of land-use regulations. Many cities, including Salt Lake, are trying to impose tougher regulations, either banning billboards altogether or instituting "cap-and-reduce" programs that limit the total number of signs and then reduce it over time. Understandably, the billboard companies generally oppose regulations, arguing that their property rights are being violated. The issue has sparked many court battles, and state legislatures have become another kind of battlefield. Billboard companies work hard to persuade legislatures to pass laws that override local regulations; in return, the companies donate to political campaigns and run ads for politicians on billboards.

Many industries and businesses struggle with regulations, of course. But the underlying issue seems especially clear for billboards. The battle isn't really about aesthetics, or whether billboards constitute an acceptable instrument of commerce. At its core, the issue concerns corporate power and its influence over all the forms of local democracy -- city and county governments and ballot measures passed by voters. Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker, a former Grand Canyon National Park seasonal ranger with degrees in law and planning, says simply: "I've never liked billboards. It's an incredibly aggressive industry."

-- Ray Ring, High Country News

[Read Entire Article Here>](#)