Join Hands Across the Sands to oppose drilling

By Barbara Singer, president
On Saturday February 13, citizens of Florida will have an opportunity to show their opposition to oil drilling as close as three to ten miles off our coast. This movement will be made of people from all walks of life and will cross political affiliations. This movement is not about politics; it is about protection of our shoreline, our tourism, our valuable properties and our way of life. Let us share our knowledge, energies and passion for protecting our waterways and beaches from the devastating effects of oil drilling.

Sierra Club, enviro organizations, citizens and businesses are standing up in a grassroots effort to protest offshore drilling and protect our beaches, waterways and tourist economy on Saturday February 13 from 1-2 p.m. EST at Manatee County Beach, Anna Maria Island. Please go to www.handsacrossthesand.org for more information and to see all the beaches that will be involved. This is a statewide protest and it’s simple – just go to the beach and join hands. Wear black if you have it!

There will be flyers and media on this event that will drive a statewide and national conversation about this important issue.

Supporters of this option should urge county commissioners to go forward

County has chance to expand Robinson Preserve

By Molly McCartney
Manatee County has a chance to acquire 200 acres adjacent to the popular 487-acre Robinson Preserve in northwestern Manatee if a financial arrangement can be worked out with the Robinson family members who own the land, according to Charlie Hunsicker, director of the Manatee County Department of Natural Resources. In his January 21 presentation to Manatee Audubon, Hunsicker said the Robinsons have signaled that they are so happy with the success of the preserve that they are interested in talking to county officials about ways that the county could buy the 200 adjacent acres.

Hunsicker said there is a limited time for the Manatee County Board of Commissioners to express interest in this opportunity and work out a financial plan to acquire the property since the Robinsons already have approval to proceed with the development of the 200 acres this spring and transform it into an 18-hole golf course and 20 single family homes. Manatee County purchased the original 487 acres for the preserve from the Robinson family for $10 million at a time when its market value was nearly $17 million. The county contributed $4 million for the land purchase and obtained grants and other gifts to cover the balance.

In his talk, Hunsicker showed slides of Robinson Preserve as it exists now and the improvements that his department has made, bringing in waterways and taking other steps to restore the land to its natural condition and attract wildlife. The county has also built a series of trails, walks and rest stops. Another addition is a tower that visitors can climb to get a birdseye view of the surrounding landscape. Hunsicker said there are plans to add a camera to the top of the tower and connect the camera to the Internet so that anyone can see the view on a computer screen.

Citizens who want the county to try and acquire the 200 additional acres for Robinson Preserve should make their views known to the seven county commissioners as soon as possible. See page 3 for how to contact each of the commissioners.

Upcoming events on page 4
We put out a big plea for volunteers to come to Felts Preserve for a big “RAKE IN” on Sunday January 24. We had 12 hardy people show up with rakes of all descriptions. Everyone pitched in and we were able to rake the built up thatch from our new wildflower meadow. For those of you who may not know what we were doing, I will give a quick review. We received a grant from the Southwest Florida Water Management District to eradicate the St. Augustine grass, Stenotaphrum secundatum, a non-native species, and replace it with native Florida wildflowers. Last fall we started the eradication and now we were left with a thick layer of thatch. We need “soil to seed” contact in order for the seeds to successfully germinate. So that was our task Sunday. We will finish Saturday January 30 on our regular scheduled work day and we will be seeding within a couple weeks.

Sunday January 24 was not a cool day and everyone worked into the hot afternoon sun. While we were working, we saw a Purple Martin scout fly over. We also saw some great birds during a break in the blind. Thanks to our volunteers – Smithy McGinnis, Susan Anderson, Al Semago, Ergun Baharoglu, Stephani Meister, Tom Heitzman, Roger and Jan Robson, Lucette Wombacaher, Fred Allen, Steve Black, Barb Singer and a special thanks to Bob and Nancy Dean who not only showed up and helped but, also came out to Felts during the week and cleaned litter from all three of the ditches along the roads, and filled feeders.

Manatee Audubon received an award as a Bradenton Herald Community Club for a number of years during the late 1980s. The award was a high quality scrapbook with a brass plaque on the cover and sometimes with a special category such as “Environmental Improvement” stamped on the cover. Those scrapbooks are the source of much of the history of our club.

Americus (Meric) Woodward was president from 1988 to 1990 followed by June Boettcher (later June Harrington) for the years 1990 to 1992.

The county had six active Eagle nests at the time of the Christmas Bird Count in 1989.

MCAS member and teacher Rick Meyers helped Sugg Middle School students place Bluebird houses that they had built at several locations in north and eastern Manatee County.

In April 1990 two students from Lincoln Middle School won an essay contest sponsored by MCAS and each received a week at the Florida Division of Forestry Student Camp. They read their essays at Hendrick Auditorium at the State Fair Grounds.

Don Bansen, your historian, became president in 1992 and served for two years, followed by Rick Meyers for another two years.

Leffis Key was developed in 1992 by the county, with help from volunteers who planted marsh grass and later mangrove trees.
If you support the chance for Manatee County to acquire 200 acres adjacent to Robinson Preserve, here’s who to contact and how to reach them:

Commissioner Larry Bustle  
District One  
(941) 745-3701  
larry.bustle@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Gwen Brown  
District Two  
(941) 745-3700  
gwen.brown@mymanatee.org

Commissioner John R. Chappie  
District Three  
(941) 745-3700  
john.chappie@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Ron Getman  
District Four  
(941) 745-3713  
ron.getman@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Donna Hayes  
District Five  
(941) 745-3703  
donna.hayes@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Carol Whitmore  
At Large  
(941) 745-3700  
carol.whitmore@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Joe McClash  
At Large  
941) 748-4501  
joe.mcclash@mymanatee.org

Letters to the commissioners should be mailed to them at:  
P.O. Box 1000  
Bradenton FL  34206-1000
Manatee Audubon Society, P. O. Box 14550, Bradenton FL 34280-4550

Birders spot 63 species and visit Ybor City
By Nancy and Bob Dean, field trip leaders.

Thirty-one participants enjoyed spectacular bird watching on January 13 and sampled the cultural history of Ybor City, a Tampa, FL district. More birds were seen at Lettuce Lake County Park than trip leaders Nancy and Bob Dean can recall finding in a single outing over the past 23 years.

After years of absence, two Limpkins were seen. Since one was spotted eating an Apple Snail, we surmise that this valued food source is again plentiful. Early morning cold apparently caused over a dozen Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons to perch together on sun-drenched shrubs across from the Observation Tower. Other great sightings at this site were a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Common Yellowthroat. Myriads of Palm Warblers walked on Duck Weed covered water near the boardwalk, as did fewer numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Lunch at the famous Columbia Restaurant met all of our expectations. Touring the state-owned Ybor City Museum provided additional cultural insights as well as a good historical review of this restored company town, beginning with its inception shortly before the 20th Century until present day. Group size and time precluded a visit to the authentic Cuban bakery, but we could not return home without visiting Cockroach Bay Road for its usual winter birds. Unfortunately, our target bird, the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, was not seen. Great views of an adult male Harrier as well as a good assortment of ducks and lots of Killdeer were obtained. Altogether 63 species were spotted before this trip concluded at 5 p.m.

Send your items for The Night Heron to newsletter editor Molly McCartney at msmccartney@sprintmail.com or call 778-3228