

# Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association Earth Day 2026 Cleanup Restores Kissimmee River Habitat

**May 2, 2026 – Kissimmee River**

The Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association (FSCA) once again demonstrated its longstanding commitment to protecting and improving Florida's managed lands through its annual Earth Day cleanup effort. For more than three decades, Earth Day has provided FSCA members and partners an opportunity to put conservation into action through hands-on projects that leave Florida's public lands better than they were found. This year's event on the Kissimmee River proved to be one of the most successful efforts yet.

Earth Day 2026 focused on Blanket Bay, located along the east side of the Kissimmee River south of Highway 60 near where Lake Kissimmee feeds into the river corridor. The cleanup was made possible through a partnership between the Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association, Lake Okeechobee Association of Airboaters (LOAA), Kissimmee River Valley Sportsmen's Association (KRVSA), and the South Florida Water Management District, along with the incredible efforts of 77 dedicated volunteers.

The day began with a joint safety briefing before volunteers were assigned to designated cleanup zones throughout the marsh and river corridor. A large fleet of equipment, including 15 buggies, 5 side-by-sides, 2 skid steers, and 2 dump trailers, was used to transport volunteers, tools, and debris throughout the area. Additional equipment was also provided by volunteers to assist with the cleanup effort.

Throughout the day, crews removed old fence lines, broken signage, batwing mower debris, abandoned farm materials, trash piles, and invasive overgrowth from the property. Vegetation around the camping pavilion was also cleared to improve visibility from the river and reduce wildfire risk.

The project centered around four primary objectives, all of which were successfully completed. The first objective was to install signage on both sides of the new fence line, clearly marking the boundary and the adjacent South Florida Water Management District property. The second objective established a clearly defined airboat boundary line to keep airboats out of sensitive hardwood areas and away from fencing for safety. The third objective focused on removing large trash piles and debris scattered throughout the marsh, all of which was ultimately staged by the roadside for proper disposal. The fourth objective involved clearing heavy vegetation around the camping pavilion to create a more camper-friendly area and improve fire safety.

After a long day of work under the Florida sun, volunteers gathered beneath the shade of the large oak trees near the parking area to enjoy a well-earned lunch prepared by the Lake Okeechobee Association of Airboaters. Events like these continue to strengthen the bonds between conservation groups, volunteers, and the outdoor community while making a lasting impact on Florida's natural resources.

FSCA extends special thanks to Matt Nelson for his leadership, as well as Dan King and Johnny Escobar for organizing and coordinating the event. Special appreciation also goes to Jerry Bridges for his generous support and for providing heavy equipment that played a major role in the cleanup's success.

FSCA leadership would also like to thank the Wildlife Foundation of Florida and the Deer Tag Grant Program for generously providing T-shirts and lunch for all volunteers. Supporters are encouraged to consider purchasing the Deer Tag specialty license plate, which directly funds conservation efforts benefiting Florida's wildlife and public lands.

Dan King and Johnny Escobar, the event's chairmen, are already looking ahead to Earth Day 2027. The leadership of all participating organizations hopes to see even more volunteers join future efforts to preserve and protect the beauty of the Kissimmee River for generations to come.









