## What is a CSO?

Citizen Support Organizations (CSOs) are some of the Division’s most treasured resources helping to support Florida’s state parks, provide visitor services, and protect the amazing natural and cultural resources unique to our exceptional state through volunteerism. For more than 30 years the Florida Park Service has enjoyed a special partnership with an ever-growing family of 86 CSOs. These volunteer involvements, also known as Friends groups, consist of local community members, business people, retirees, and families.

Through years of collective efforts, CSOs throughout Florida have contributed hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours and raised tens of millions of dollars to ensure the state park system’s incredible natural and cultural resources are preserved and cherished. As a result, visitors to state parks can be assured of high quality, resource-based recreational opportunities for generations to come.

## How are CSOs different from general volunteers?

The Florida Park Service is not supported by the state of Florida’s general revenue fund (e.g., sales taxes paid for goods and services). State parks are supported primarily by park-generated revenue from entrance fees, overnight accommodations, and concession operations. These provide slightly more than two-thirds of the operating costs of state parks. The other one-third of the state parks’ operating budget comes from revenue generated by documentary stamps through real estate transactions. CSOs are an additional important source of fundamental support and provide enhancements to visitor services.

Benefits of a CSO

* Saves agency resources
* Long-term continuity of support
* Sense of ownership and responsibility
* Enthusiasm and different skills
* Collective effort of a group can be more powerful than individuals working independently

## What is the mission of the Friends of Ichetucknee Springs State Park (FISSP)?

To conserve, protect, restore and enhance the natural, historical, cultural and recreational resources of Ichetucknee Springs State Park for present and future generations.

The FISSP supports the mission of Ichetucknee by:

* Conducting programs and activities at the Park and in the community
* Raising funds and receive grants, gifts, and bequests for the benefit of Ichetucknee Springs State Park and the Florida Park System as defined by park management and the Unit Management Plan.
* Funding park infrastructure, boardwalks, interpretive programs, sponsorship of special events, enhance universal access to natural and cultural resources, purchase vehicles, equipment, and supplies

In 2020-2021, 80+ Citizens Support Organizations (CSO's) statewide provided over 10,000 volunteers who contributed more than 1 million hours of service to Florida State Parks. Those volunteers are the equivalent of 600 Full Time Employees and are 61% of the park service's workers. Those volunteers assist with visitor services, maintenance, protection, resource management, and administration.

### FISSP’s Priority Goals for 2023-2026

* Seeking grants and fundraising opportunities to raise funds to support aquatic plant restoration along the Ichetucknee River
* Increasing accessibility & inclusivity of park recreational opportunities
* Funding for interpretative displays and panels for the park’s visitor center, trails, and day-use areas
* Recruitment and recognition of local park volunteers
* Purchase of equipment which supports the park’s prescribed burn goals

## Examples of Past Projects and Accomplishments

* Receipt of $4000 grant from the Keepers of the Springs to support restoration of eelgrass
* $5000 grant from the Florida State Parks Foundation for prescribed burn equipment and protective clothing
* Purchase of visitor center projector and program materials
* Community events such as Spooky Springs, Springs Family Fun Day, 6th Grade Day, Iche Nippy Dip Day, and more
* Partnerships with local schools to share park resources and volunteerism spirit with community youth
* Purchase of solar powered, automatic service road gates to conserve staff time and energy

## Member Benefits

* Membership Card with 12 Free Entries to the Park during membership year
* Quarterly newsletter and other communications about volunteer opportunities at the Park
* Attendance at special events & volunteer appreciation days
* Inclusion at member meetings and socials
* Meaningful involvement in the betterment of Ichetucknee Springs State Park State Park
* 100% of membership dues and funds raised return to the park, as opposed to the 1% from standard park entry fees.