

Greater New Orleans

# West Bank's 'Forest Fest' to benefit protective wetlands

By **NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune****Follow on Twitter**

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**Story by**

There is a reason why Louisiana is referred to as a sportsman's paradise; it is because it is bountifully blessed with a myriad of natural beauty and wildlife all around. As quiet as it is kept, the West Bank has its own piece of paradise-- a multi-purposed nature lover's dream nestled on the edge of Algiers and Belle Chasse called the Woodlands Trail. On Saturday, Sept. 24, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. the trail will be showcased at Forest Fest, a benefit to "Save Our Sponge" which will provide food, music, art and activities for the family.

**J. Heard**

*Belle Chasse and West Bank contributing writer*

What is the connection between nature trails and sponges?

That is where the multi-purposed function of the trail comes in. Not only does the Woodlands Trail serve as a recreational park packed with hundreds of species of migratory birds, but is also a natural sponge and wind barrier during storms, thus making it a critical part of the local landscape.

"As we've seen with the recent floods across Louisiana, it's important to have natural woodlands and wetlands to absorb rain and storm impact," said Katie Brasted, Executive Director of Woodlands Conservancy, the nonprofit that manages the trail.

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Woodlands Conservancy manages over 800 acres of bottomland hardwood forest: 631 acres in Plaquemines Parish and 190 acres in Orleans Parish. Experts report that with the continuing loss of our wetlands in combination with relative sea level rise, the Woodlands Conservancy lands will be one of the largest forested landmasses between open water and the city of New Orleans within the next 35-50 years.

But that's not all the trail offers.

Visitors to the conservatory will find birds chirping and flapping in the air, the sound of leaves and creepy creatures rustling on the ground, and the damp smell of woody grassland and trees. Occasionally a cool breeze rustles through the canopy of lush green trees, providing hikers protection from the sun.

Visitors will see plenty of deer and alligators along the way. The trail is minutes away from Algiers and Belle Chasse and about 15 minutes from the city's Central Business District. The trail, which is free and open seven days a week from dusk until dawn, is located just past Belle Chasse Primary School at 449 F. Edward Hebert Blvd. in Belle Chasse.

Woodlands Conservancy will be celebrating 15 years with Forest Fest, and it is a great way to be introduced to the Woodlands Trail. The event will feature bird banding demonstrations, guided hikes, nature art activities, saplings for sale, music with Rockamo and the NOCCA Jazz Ensemble, food for purchase, and much more. Forest Fest is free for children 12 and under and

adults may attend for a suggested \$5 donation.

"We want people to come for the celebration activities, but most of all, we want them to learn the many roles the forest plays, not only as providing habitat for wildlife and migratory birds and an ecotourism destination, but as a natural sponge and wind barrier that serves as a critical line of defense during storms," Brasted said.

For more information about Forest Fest, the Conservancy or to schedule a school field trip, visit the Conservancy's website at [www.Woodlandsconservancy.org](http://www.Woodlandsconservancy.org).

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