



**Florida Department of Environmental Protection
CITIZEN SUPPORT ORGANIZATION
2024 LEGISLATIVE REPORT
(pursuant to Section 20.058 Florida Statutes)**

Citizen Support Organization (CSO) Name: Friends of Rookery Bay, Inc

Mailing Address: 300 Tower Road, Naples, FL 34113

Telephone Number: 239-530-5972

Website Address (required if applicable): www.rookerybay.org

Check to confirm your Code of Ethics is posted conspicuously on your website.

Statutory Authority:

Section 20.2551, F.S., Citizen support organizations; use of property; audit; public records; partnerships. In summary, the statute specifies the organizational requirements, operational parameters, duties of a CSO to support the Department of Environmental Protection (Department), or individual units of the Department, use of Department property, audit requirements, public records requirements, and authorizes public-private partnerships to enhance lands managed by the Department.

Section 20.058, F.S., Citizen support and direct-support organizations. In summary, the statute specifies the organizational requirements to submit an annual report each year for each designated CSO and to post that information on the Departments website.

YOUR MISSION AND LAST CALENDAR YEAR'S PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

CSO's Mission: (Consistent with your Articles and Bylaws)

Connecting people to Southwest Florida's dynamic coastal environment in support of Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Describe Last Calendar Year's Results Obtained: Brag! (List or discuss the past calendar year's accomplishments and contributions. Cite specific support from last calendar year's Annual Program Plan.)

- Connected 4,744 people to the waters of Rookery Bay via boat and kayak tours through our exclusive eco-tour partner, Rising Tide Explorers.
- Recorded a record number of adopted sea turtle nests (n=113; \$32,980) to fund interns and project supplies for the Reserve's sea turtle monitoring program.
- Reached a record 18,956 visitor admissions at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center (excludes program/event participants).
- Exceeded our membership goal, boasting 611 friends of Rookery Bay.
- Our investment in digital advertising with Beasley Media Group since 2021 has reached over 3 million impressions, increasing program and admission numbers and diversity.
- Setting another record, we raised more than one dollar for each acre protected in the 110,000-acre Reserve during our 15th annual fundraiser to support the Friends and Reserve.
- Provided the Reserve \$150,000 in direct funding to support education, conservation and research programs.
- Enhanced staff capacity to oversee all customer service and co-manage visitor services at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center.

Describe the CSO's Plans for the Next Three Calendar Years:

- Drive new and diverse audiences to the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center and eco-tours.
- Expand eco-tour program.
- Invest in ELC exhibit upgrades leveraging generous donor contribution.
- Cultivate relationships with donors, volunteers and members.
- Host events to recognize members and donors, engage new audiences and raise funds.

CSO's LAST CALENDAR YEAR STATISTICS:

Total Number of CSO General Membership:

Total Number of Board of Directors:

Total Volunteer Hours for the Board of Directors:

ORCP & CSO RELATIONSHIP:

Do not duplicate by describing accomplishments and contributions in the summary. Brag in the above Results Obtained. Below, describe the relationship.

AP Manager's Comments on the CSO & ORCP Relationship and Support:

Provide your perspective on

- Changing developments of the managed area provided by the CSO.
- Effectiveness of the organization in fulfilling their purpose to support the managed area(s).
- Effectiveness of the Board of Directors in completing their Annual Program Plan.
- The relationship between the ORCP team and CSO. What went well? Are there areas of improvement?

At the time of this submission the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (RBNERR/Reserve) manager position has been filled since October of 2023 by Jeffrey A. Carter. The Reserve's current relationship with the FORB continues as a priority and key partnership providing much needed crucial support and resources that would otherwise not be available.

FORB's ongoing support continues to fully support the Reserve's mission and their ongoing commitment to a robust advertising and fundraising campaigns has resulted in many record-breaking numbers in visitors to the Environmental Learning Center and memberships, as well as, with store sales.

FORB has been a CSO for multiple decades now and their board, staff and membership continue to be deeply devoted to the ongoing research and natural resource management goals of the Reserve.

In response to FORB's financial commitment to their advertising campaign and increase participation in outreach programs in the local community, the Center continues to see increased diversity among its visitors and participation in fee-based programs. In addition, FORB's leadership in eco-tourism and partnership with their eco-tour provider remains strong and continues to grow. -Jeffrey A. Carter

CSO President's Comments on the CSO & ORCP Relationship and Support:

Provide your perspective on the relationship between the ORCP and CSO. What went well? Are there areas of improvement?

The relationship between Rookery Bay Research Reserve and the Friends of Rookery Bay (FORB) is in a strong position and FORB is excited about the opportunities to support the Reserve in greater ways in the coming year. The Reserve was without a director for several months and that created a unique set of challenges for FORB when it came to support, communication, etc. With a new director in place, who is also familiar with the Reserve and the relationship with FORB, we have improved lines of communication and expectations. FORB and the Reserve's successes have necessitated the need for FORB to grow and part of that growth has allowed us to re-organize our support for the Reserve. FORB is in the process of implementing that re-organization now and believe it will reap benefits for the Reserve in the years to come. We will continue to work on communication strategies that allow the Reserve and FORB to streamline their work. A number of exciting opportunities lie ahead in FY25 and the Reserve and FORB are in strong positions to take advantage of these opportunities for the good of Rookery Bay. -Curt Witthoff

SUMMARIZE FINANCIAL ACTIVITY FOR LAST CALENDAR YEAR, DIRECT AP(S) SUPPORT & REVENUES: Program Services are costs related to providing your organizations' programs or services in accordance with your mission. Describe and provide expenses that directly support the AP(s). For established nonprofit organizations, program service expenses generally represent most of the overall expenses of the organization. For the last calendar year provide the total \$ for each that apply. **Do not use commas.**

Building improvement, construction, or renovations	\$
Cultural resources (e.g., historic structure restoration/ renovation)	\$
Natural resources (e.g., native plants, natural lands restoration)	\$
Maintenance equipment (e.g., mowers, chippers, blowers, chainsaws)	\$
Other facilities and landscape maintenance	\$
Vehicles (e.g., trucks/cars, UTVs, golf carts, accessible devices, etc.)	\$
Amenities (e.g., water fountains, benches, picnic tables, recreational equipment, kiosks etc.)	\$
ORCP employees or volunteers support (e.g., interns, training, uniforms, awards, or recognition)	\$
Big ticket visitor center exhibits or interpretation updates	\$
Preserve exhibits, displays, signage	\$
Preserve publications, brochures, maps, etc.	\$
Programing/interpretation support material purchases	\$
Other program services	\$ 736094
Total Program Service Expenses	\$ 736094

Visitor Services Revenue are revenues and the sources generated from fundraising on preserve property. **Do not use commas.**

Preserve gift shops, craft stores, and concession sales	\$
Merchandise sales (e.g., plants, firewood, ice, t-shirts, hats, etc.)	\$
Programs and Special Events (e.g., fundraising workshops, seasonal events, concerts, etc.)	\$
Vending (e.g., drink machines, penny press, laundry, Wifi, etc.)	\$
Rentals (e.g., bikes, canoe, kayak, SUPs, etc.)	\$
In-preserve donation boxes	\$
Other visitor services revenue	\$ 901976
Total Visitor Services Revenue	\$ 901976

NET ASSETS: \$

Organizations end of last year's Total Assets minus Total Liabilities. This is not the above's Visitor Service Revenue minus Program Service Expenses.

CSO AUDIT THRESHOLD:
Last Calendar Year's Total Expenses (including grants) \$

Are the CSO's annual total expenses \$300,000 including grants? Then Section 215.981(2), Florida Statute requires an independent CPA audit using Government Audit Standards ([U.S. GAO Yellow Book](#)). The audit is **due by September 1** (9 months after the CSO's calendar year ends) to the Florida Auditor General and to the Department.

CONFIRM ATTACHMENTS:

- Code of Ethics
- The most recent Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 990, 990-EZ, or 990-N receipt. All IRS Form 990's must be **complete** with Part III Program Service and **all** appropriate Schedules (A, O, and others as appropriate). If filing an IRS extension, attach the IRS 8868 receipt and the most recent complete 990 and schedules

2024 CSO Legislative Report Acknowledgment

This information is complete to the best of my knowledge pursuant to Section 20.058 Florida Statutes

Signature: 

Print name: Curt Witthoff, CSO President

Friends of Rookery Bay, Inc.

Date: 05/12/24

Signature: 

Print name: Jeffrey A. Carter

*Southwest Florida Program
Administrator & NERR Manager*

Date: 05/31/24