

RESOLUTION NO. 2024- 294

A RESOLUTION BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA, AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR, OR DESIGNEE, TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION FOR BELUTHAHATCHEE PARK TO BE LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES.

RECITALS

WHEREAS, the National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources; and

WHEREAS, Beluthahatchee Park is a County Park with historical significance, is already designated as a St. Johns County Historic Landmark, a Florida State Historical Landmark, and a Literary Landmark; and

WHEREAS, none of the requirements, restrictions, and/or obligations associated with the application, or the register itself would negatively impact the interests of the County; and

WHEREAS, applying for the National Register of Historic Places serves the overall interest of the County.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County, Florida that:

Section 1. The above recitals are hereby incorporated into the body of this resolution and are adopted as findings of fact.

Section 2. The County Administrator, or designee, is authorized to apply for Beluthahatchee Park to be listed on the national register of historic places.

Section 3. To the extent that there are typographical or administrative errors that do not change the tone, tenor, or concept of this resolution, this resolution may be revised without subsequent approval by the Board of County Commissioners.

Section 4. This resolution shall be effective upon adoption by the Board of County Commissioners.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County, Florida, this 16th day of July, 2024.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA**

Rendition Date JUL 16 2024

By: _____
Sarah Arnold, Chair

ATTEST: Brandon J. Patty
Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller

By: Crystal Smith
Deputy Clerk



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PRELIMINARY SITE INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE - LAUREL M. LEE - SECRETARY OF STATE

This questionnaire is intended only to provide preliminary information about the property to the Bureau of Historic Preservation.

Name and Location of Property

Name and Address of Owner

Name: Beluthahatchee

Name: St. Johns County

Address: 1523 SR 13 N

Address: 500 San Sebastian View

City: St. Johns

City: St. Augustine

Zip Code: 32259 County: St. Johns

State: FL Zip Code: 32084

I support this effort to list or seek a determination of eligibility for listing my property on the National Register of Historic Places:
 Yes No Owner Signature and Date: _____ Phone: _____

Property Information

Significant Dates (construction, events, etc.):

1948, 1952, 1974

Has it been moved? Yes No Year moved: _____

Property Type

- Archeological or Historic Site
 Residential Building
 Commercial Building
 Industrial Building
 Public Building
 Other (describe)

Original use: Artist Retreat

Current use: Public Park

Property Description:

Describe the design, construction, and general condition of the building. Indicate any architecturally significant features, unique materials, and alterations to the building. (If space below is insufficient, attach additional sheets of paper)

See Attached

Why is the property significant?

Provide a basic history of the property. Indicate significant events, people, or architectural styles associated with the property. (If space below is insufficient, attach additional sheets of paper)

See Attached

Required Enclosures:

- Current photos (exterior and interior)
- Historic photos (if available, photocopies acceptable)
- Location map (and site plan for large properties)
- Sketch floor plan
- Proof of ownership (property appraiser record or notarized letter)

Date: _____

Submitter's Name and Address

Name: _____

Address: _____

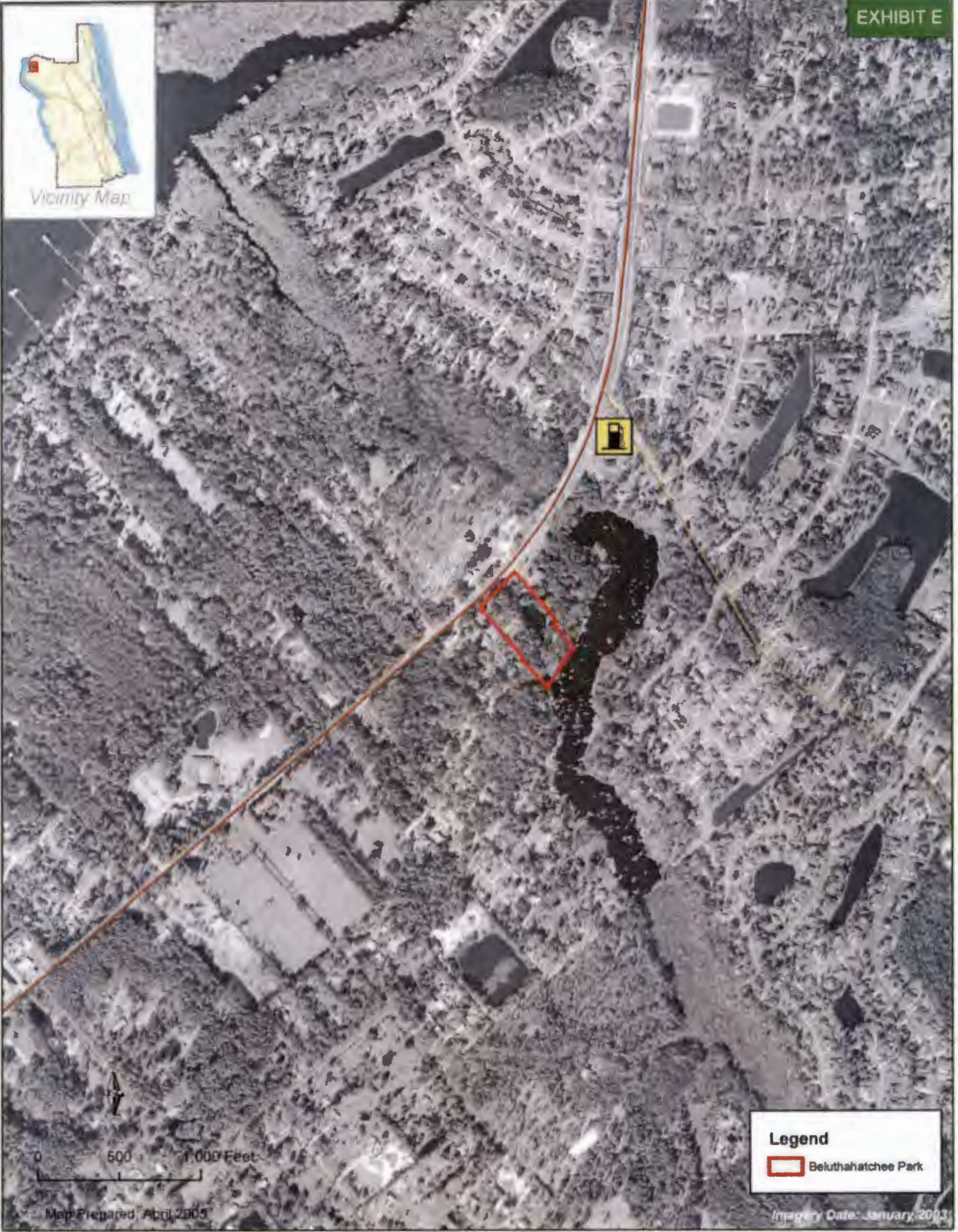
City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____


Email: _____

Phone: _____

Signature: _____



Vicinity Map

Legend
 Beluthahatchee Park

Map Prepared: April 2005

Imagery Date: January 2003



Disclaimer: This map is for reference use only. Data provided are derived from multiple sources with varying levels of accuracy. The St. Johns County GIS maintains all responsibility for the accuracy of completeness of the data shown herein.

Aerial View Beluthahatchee Park

St. Johns County, Florida
 Florida Communities Trust
 2005 Florida Forever Program
www.dca.state.fl/us/fcft

Property Description

Though originally 70 acres, the current footprint of the property is 2 acres.

Summary and Setting:

The cabin is located in a rural setting, on a man-made lake, in the northwest sector of St. Johns County, along the William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway (State Road 13). The cabin is located within a St. Johns County passive park. The area surrounding the cabin consists of residential development, sprinkled with historic buildings. The cabin sits at a distance from the William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway. A long, narrow driveway takes visitors from the Scenic and Historic Highway to the man-made lake. The cabin sits on the driveway's hairpin curve, on the edge of Lake Beluthahatchee. The lake is the central focus. The cabin was built with a large deck and second-story balcony jutting out into the lake. Large windows frame the view of the lake, while the front entrance exhibits small windows. The property is wooded, and retains much of its historic landscape features. Along the narrow wooded rural driveway there are a few residential buildings close by both that sit close to the William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway and others that sit close to Lake Beluthahatchee. In fact, the cabin shares the narrow driveway with a couple of other buildings, including the house at the corner of the highway and the driveway, where the stepdaughter of the previous owner lives. There are four buildings on the park property: the cabin, octagon house, shed, and garage.

Overview

In 1975, Kennedy built a cabin at Beluthahatchee, ordered from the Linda! Cedar Home catalogue. The drawings that most closely resemble the cabin are associated with Chalet Vail. The Chalet Vail footprint is small, less than 1,200 square feet. The facade faces northwest and the deck jutting out onto the lake faces southeast. The cabin is a two-story building. The architectural style is vernacular based on a catalogue home. The cabin is wood frame, with cedar vertical siding. The foundation consists of wood pilings, on a steep slope, that tie into land and lake. The roof is particularly interesting. From the facade, the roof form appears to be gambrel, with the end view on the facade and the rear that faces the lake. However, only the northeast half of the building follows the gambrel roof form. The roof form on the southwest half of the cabin is gable, following the first pitch of the gambrel roof. The roof is clad with hand hewn cedar shake shingles. There is a side porch on the southwest elevation with a door that leads into the kitchen.

There is a large deck that juts out into Lake Beluthahatchee and a smaller second floor balcony that overlooks the deck out onto the Lake. The windows vary in size and placement on all elevations. Most of the windows are either sliding or casement. The entire cabin inside and out was ornamented "Floridiana Rusticana" or "Shipwreck Kennedy" with "flotsam and jetsam" cottage crafts and folk art decor. The cabin is not oriented on the cardinal directional system. The front entrance is on the northwest elevation, the side entrance is on the southwest elevation, the deck and rear entrance is on the southeast elevation, and there are not doors on the northeast elevation.

This northwest elevation features the front entrance with a hand hewn cedar shake shed roof on brackets. The entry is accessible via two steps up from the ground to the door, with handrails on both sides. To the left of the front door, there is a casement window roughly 3'-0" x 2'-0". To the right of the front door, there is a small fixed window roughly 6" x 8". There is a horizontal band of one strip of wood siding separating the first and second floors. On the second floor, there are two large sliding windows roughly 5'-0" x 4'-0". From this perspective, the building roof appears to be gambrel in form. Three rafter beams extend under the eaves of the roof.

The southwest elevation features a side entrance with a covered open porch. There are various sized windows. The southeast elevation features first floor and second floor approximately 10'-0" wide sliding glass doors. The first floor sliding door leads out to the large deck that juts out into Lake Beluthahatchee. The second floor sliding door leads out to a small balcony. Both sliding doors frame the view of Lake Beluthahatchee. The northeast elevation features no doors and two windows only on the first floor.

Naturally, Kennedy deviated from the original Linda! Cedar Home Chalet Vail plan and made this catalogue design into a home. An exterior door was inserted on the first floor, between the bathroom and kitchen. The kitchen was then squeezed in closer to the dining and living spaces, while creating a more cozy space and the kitchen wall removed opening up the space. The second floor's bathroom was squeezed into a smaller space allowing for more room in the bedroom, creating a master bedroom. The original master bedroom was opened up into a library and writing area, overlooking Lake Beluthahatchee.

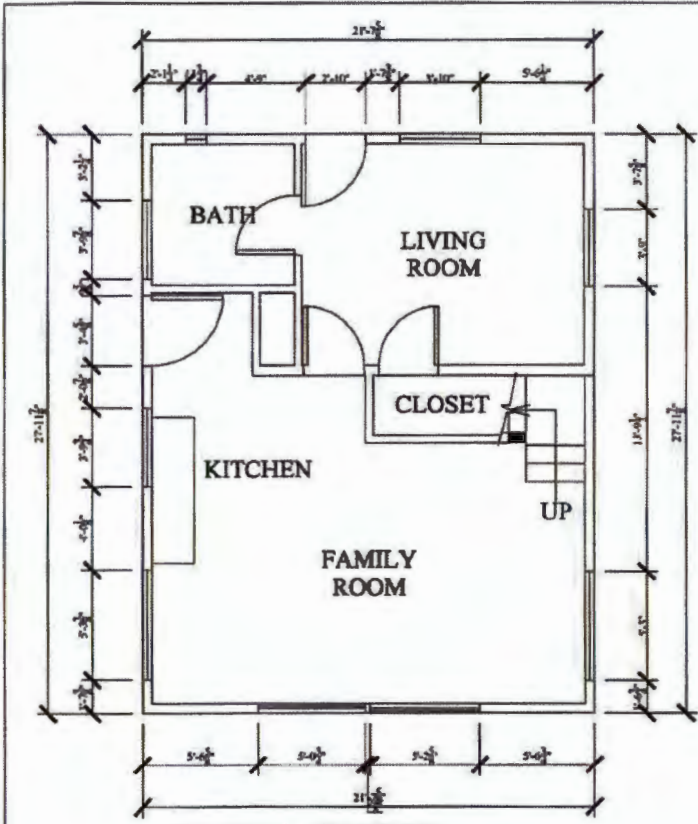
Property Significance

Beluthahatchee originated out of the 10,000 acre land grant given to Francis Philip Fatio 1774. This land grant created the Switzerland community today located in St. Johns County, Florida. In 1945, George Wallace Kennedy, dammed Mill Creek that originally ran through the property to create Lake Beluthahatchee. His son, William Stetson Kennedy (October 5, 1916 – August 27, 2011), acquired the 50-acre property in 1948 and added a further 20 acres. Stetson Kennedy was an author, folklorist, labor and human rights activist, and environmentalist. Kennedy worked for the WPA in the 1930s, helping collect Southern Folklore with individuals like Zora Neale Hurston. When he acquired Beluthahatchee, he intended this property to become a space for artist creativity, human interaction with nature, and a location for civil and intellectual discourse around racial equality and human rights; all ideals he practiced personally. Kennedy, who hailed from a southern aristocratic family, helped expose the Ku Klux Klan with his book *Southern Exposure* (1946) and ran for the US Senate in the 1950s using a platform of “Total Equality”. Beluthahatchee became Kennedy’s campaign base and headquarters. His campaign culminated in oppositional residents running him out of the country for a few years.

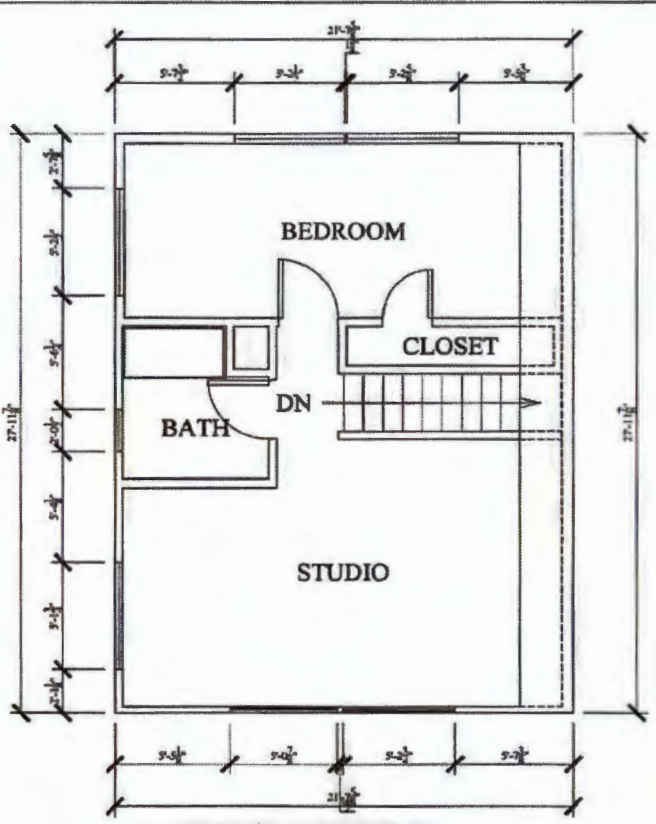
Kennedy left his friend, Woody Guthrie, to watch over the property. Woodrow Wilson “Woody” Guthrie (July 14, 1912 – October 3, 1967) used folk ballads for social observation and protest. His most popular work “This Land is Your Land” was not written on the property, but he produced a vast amount of works while on visits to Beluthahatchee. This includes more than 80 songs, including “Beluthahatchee Bill”, and the final draft for his autobiography *Seeds of Man*. Guthrie and Kennedy remained friends until Guthrie’s early death.

When Kennedy returned to the States in the 1960s, he returned to St Johns County and his property. He became highly involved in the Civil Rights Movement and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King in St. Augustine, FL. By the 1970s, Kennedy wanted to make Beluthahatchee is permanent home, building a more substantial house that replaced more primitive camp-style cabins on the property. He finished his book *After Appomattox* on the property in 1995. Kennedy remained at Beluthahatchee until his death in 2011.

This property is already designated as a St. Johns County Historic Landmark and Florida State Historical Landmark. It is also a Literary Landmark location twice over; once for Stetson Kennedy and once for Woody Guthrie.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN
NOT TO SCALE



SECOND FLOOR PLAN
NOT TO SCALE

W. Stetson Kennedy House
St. Johns County Recreation and Parks
4040 Lewis Speedway, St. Augustine, FL 32084

Floor Plan

9.22.2014



St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

Parks & Recreation Department

June 26, 2024

Division of Historical Resources
Florida Department of State
R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dear Division of Historical Resources,

On behalf of the St. Johns County Recreation Advisory Board, I am writing to formally request that the Parks and Recreation Department apply to the State of Florida to have the Stetson Kennedy House at Beluthahatchee Park in listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This designation would honor the significant cultural, historical, and environmental contributions of this unique property.

Beluthahatchee Park, located on the William Bartram Scenic Highway, holds immense historical and environmental value. The park spans four acres within a 70-acre tract purchased by Stetson Kennedy in 1948. This area, with its 18-acre Beluthahatchee Lake created in 1945, was envisioned and developed by Kennedy as a living testament to the harmonious coexistence of human and natural habitats. The park's diverse native vegetation and its role as a critical wildlife habitat, supporting species such as ospreys, eagles, and snowy egrets, underscore its environmental importance.

Stetson Kennedy, a revered author and human rights advocate, made profound contributions to American literature and social justice from this residence. His works, including "Palmetto Country," "Southern Exposure," and "The Klan Unmasked," reflect his commitment to documenting and challenging social injustices. The house also served as a creative haven for Woody Guthrie, the legendary folk musician, who composed significant works during his time at Beluthahatchee.

The Stetson Kennedy House is not only a National Literary Landmark, as recognized by the Friends of the U.S. Library, but also a symbol of the enduring legacy of Kennedy and Guthrie's shared commitment to human rights, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation. The property, preserved in its natural state through the Florida Community Trust's land acquisition program, continues to inspire and educate visitors about the rich cultural and environmental heritage of Florida.

Listing the Stetson Kennedy House on the National Register of Historic Places would provide formal recognition of its historical and cultural significance, ensuring its preservation for future generations. This designation would also enhance public awareness and appreciation of the property, aligning with Stetson Kennedy's vision of promoting harmony between human and natural environments.

We respectfully urge the County to pursue this designation, thereby honoring the extraordinary legacy of Stetson Kennedy and Woody Guthrie. Your support in this endeavor is crucial to preserving an essential piece of Florida's cultural and historical landscape.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to your favorable response and are available to provide any additional information or support needed for this process.

Sincerely,

Lauren Watkins

Lauren Watkins, Ph.D.
Chair, St. Johns County Recreation Advisory Board
watkinslaurena@gmail.com
904.377.6778

CC: Christian Whitehurst, Commissioner and RAB Liaison
Ryan Kane, Director