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PEACOCK SPRINGS STATE PARK RENAMED FOR WES SKILES

*~Special event commemorates new park name honoring world-class explorer, diver,
cinematographer and photographer~*

LIVE OAK - The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Florida State Parks hosted a special naming event today at Peacock Springs State Park in Live Oak to honor the late world-class explorer, diver, cinematographer and photographer Wes Skiles. The park will now be known as Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park.

"Wes Skiles' passion for Florida's environment was evident in his dedication to portraying the wonders of Florida through his masterful imagery," said DEP Secretary Mimi A. Drew. "Knowing Wes as I did, I'm sure he would be thrilled to have one of his favorite places named after him where it will be a reminder of his lasting contribution to Florida's environment."

During today's event, more than 50 friends, family members and other guests witnessed the unveiling of a new park sign by the Skiles family designating the park after his namesake. Speakers included DEP Secretary Mimi A. Drew, former coordinator of the Florida Springs Taskforce Jim Stevenson and Wes Skiles' brother Jim Skiles. The event was a touching occasion as Skiles' commitment to Florida's environment, passion for Florida's imagery and love of state parks were recounted.

"We are honored to leave a legacy for Mr. Skiles in the state park system", said Florida State Parks Director Donald Forgione. "There is no better place to do so than at Peacock Springs, where the avid diver, cave explorer and springs advocate contributed so much of his time and expertise."

Skiles passed away earlier this year while on a diving assignment off the east coast of Florida. He was a great proponent of the protection and preservation of Florida's water resources, particularly springs and nature-based recreation.

"The Skiles family is greatly honored knowing that Wes's relentless work in creating awareness of our springs will be remembered by future generations. Wes understood that the abundance of fresh, clean water was critical to a healthy community, environment and economy," said Jim Skiles. "His love of photography and cave diving became his passion when he realized Florida Springs and her aquifer were our most important resource. Wes referred to Peacock as the heart of cave diving with its many

passages. Today, the Skiles family and friends celebrate that the heart and soul of cave diving will be remembered in Florida history."

The Peacock Springs cave system represents one of the most extensively mapped cave systems in the continental United States and one of the longest in Florida. Skiles' company, Karst Environmental Services, spent hours documenting the cave systems at Peacock Springs. One notable achievement was Skiles' discovery that Bonnet Spring has the only entrance to a separate cave system that may be hydrologically linked to the Peacock system via smaller conduits. Skiles also made major contributions to the understanding and awareness of the Floridan aquifer and its impact for springs and water resources in the state.

"We did more to educate Floridians about the plight of Florida's springs than anyone else," said Jim Stevenson. "His legacy is his outstanding films, beginning with *Polluting the Fountain of Youth* in 1998 that has been aired often on PBS and *Waters Journey: Hidden Rivers* that was produced in 2003 at the request of the Florida Springs Task Force."

About Florida State Parks

Created in 1935 by the Florida Legislature, the Florida State Park system has grown from eight to 160 parks in the last 75 years. Today, the Florida Park Service manages more than 700,000 acres of Florida's natural environment, including 100 miles of beaches, eight National Historic Landmarks and 39 sites on the National Register of Historic Places. Florida State Parks has been recognized by the National Recreation and Park Association as the nation's first and only two-time Gold Medal winner for the nation's best park service. For more information about Florida's state parks, visit www.FloridaStateParks.org.

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