

Mark your calendars

April 22

Earth Day

Numerous Community Activities Throughout the Month.

May 3 & 4

Pinellas Living Green Expo at Harborview Center
300 Cleveland St.
Clearwater

May 7, 7:00 pm

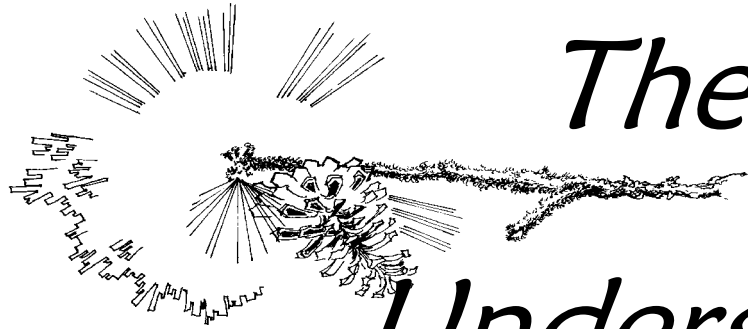
Monthly Meeting Moccasin Lake Nature Park
Topic: "Plant Pirates! Quick and Easy Propagation Techniques".

May Field Trip

None Scheduled due to State FNPS conference

May 15 - 18

28th Annual FNPS State Conference "Uplands to Estuaries: Celebrating Florida's Native Plant Heritage" at the Manatee Convention Center in Palmetto. For conference information, including schedules and registration information visit www.fnps.org



The

Understory

Sustainability Meeting and Field Trip

Monthly Meeting:
April 2nd, 7:00 pm.
Moccasin Lake Nature Park
"What, Why & How: Sustainability"
Speaker James Stevenson,
Pinellas Cooperative Extension

Field Trip: April 5th, 9:00 am
216 84th Ave N.E., St Petersburg
"The Greenest Home" tour led
by builder Darren Brinkley.

Please call Bill Bilodeau to confirm your tour attendance at 727/488-3163 or email billbilodeau@verizon.net

For more information on the home go to:

<http://www.realbuilding.com/modelhome/index.html>



The mission of the Florida Native Plant Society is to promote the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

"The Understory" is looking for a Newsletter Editor/ Assistant Editor

If you have experience with Microsoft Publisher or are willing to learn and would like to help produce our bi-monthly newsletter, please contact Lisa Curry at lkcurry1@tampabay.rr.com or 727/698-3136

Deadline for the Jun/Jul Newsletter is May 1st
Contact Lisa Curry with suggestions or story ideas at lkcurry1@tampabay.rr.com or 727/698-3136

President's Message

A white snow bank of dwarf Walter's viburnum, mockingbirds singing loudly, the sounds of different warblers high in the oaks...it is spring again. The season of renewal is here. It is a remainder that we have only two more months of opportunity to re-landscape and garden our yards before the increasing heat and humidity make those endeavors exceedingly more difficult.

This is also a season when unusually heavy demands are placed on our chapter. Many environmental organizations and preserves have weekend days devoted to honoring the earth and educating the public about its natural processes. We are continually asked to participate by having a display table and sometimes a native plant sale. We must pick and choose those events where we can have the greatest impact with the personnel available. It is a wonderful opportunity to talk to people about native plants and to provide helpful literature. There is now widespread interest in finding alternatives to lawns, salt tolerant plants, and, as usual, identifying sources of native plants. We can be helpful with all of these issues and are in need of more volunteers to staff the tables. Check the

"Volunteer Opportunities" list of upcoming events elsewhere in this issue.

We are fast approaching May 15-18 when we will be co-hosting the annual state FNPS conference in the Manatee Convention Center in Palmetto, just south of the Skyway Bridge. Here is an opportunity for many of us to give to our chapter and our colleagues statewide by volunteering to spend some time in the activities that support a successful conference. We need additional help with registration, silent auction set-up, the chapters' vending table, and several room monitors where programs will be presented. Training is provided. Bonus: for every ½ day volunteered, you get ½ day of free registration to attend programs. It's also a good way to meet new potential friends who share similar values. These slots must be filled soon. Please create some space in your life so that you can give to this important event. Call me at 727-488-3163 or email me billbilodeau@verizon.net and I will connect you to the activity of your choice.

Enjoy the season. May we all spend some quiet time in just being present to its natural unfolding.

-Bill Bilodeau

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

May 3rd & 4th Pinellas Living Green Expo
Harborside, Clearwater Staff Table

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May 15th-18th FNPS State Conference
Manatee Conference Center Various Needs

Please don't wait to be called. To volunteer contact
Bill Bilodeau 727/488-3163 or email billbilodeau@verizon.net.

FNPS Visits P2000 Parcel

On Wednesday, March 5th, Debbie Chayet spoke to the Pinellas Native Plant Society about the restoration of a prime piece of pine flatwoods within the county and on the following Saturday we had the opportunity to visit the site. This parcel is located directly east of the Gulf Coast Art Museum, the Florida Botanical gardens, and the Pinellas Extension center. It is on the east side of McKay creek and had formerly been owned by the Whitesell family. The property was purchased with Preservation 2000 funds and restoration was funded by a grant from the Pinellas County Environmental Fund, a partner program of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The parcel of land is divided into three pieces. The south parcel which has been ruthlessly restored, the piece the Whitesell family still owns, and the north parcel, which got a light touch of restoration but remains mostly intact. Ruthless restoration is just that....tearing out exotic trees and vines, grinding up oversized saw palmetto, cutting back the grape vine and cat briar (native, but can take over if not burned regularly), lopping the tops from queen palms. Then restoration starts with re-seeding and replanting with plants that are native to a pine flatwoods.

The surprise was the number of plants that came back on their own. Their seeds and root stock had been hiding beneath the overgrowth of grape, cat briar, and saw palmetto that once given a chance at a little sunlight of their own, grew back as nature intended. We saw lots of wire grass and elephant foot, some shiny blueberry, chalky bluestem, pawpaw, lopsided indian grass, St. John's wort, native thistle, rose rush, and broomsedge.

The parcel still looks a little rough, but it will fill in beautifully with the summer rains. The pine flatwood was open and easy to penetrate without being choked by saw palmetto which would naturally be kept in check by fire. This piece of the restoration, the southern part east of the Gulf Coast Art Museum is open with some signage and easy walking.

We then hiked past an old homestead and along the edge of the Whitesell property to the northern parcel. This piece of land had low spots which, since it had rained the night before, had sundew (*Drosera* spp) blooming in the standing water. Passing through a live oak hammock we found 5 good sized clumps of butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*) much to Debbie's delight since she had not inventoried it before.

You can visit this site on your own. I suggest you do so while the spring wild flowers are in bloom and then go back in the fall for another show.

- Jane Williams

County Extension Wildlife Programs

Migratory Bird & Nature Tour

Sat., April 5th (and Sat. May, 3rd), 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

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Africanized Bees in Florida and the Southeast

Wednesday, April 9th, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

For more information or to register, call 727-582-2673.

Explorations in the Amazon

From a very early age, I had always dreamt of going to the Amazon Rain Forest. Sure, everyone wants to go there! But then it happened when I saw a notice for a FNPS sponsored trip to the Peruvian Amazon Basin. This article is the first in a series in which I will relate this exciting experience of boating down the Amazon and staying in four separate lodges deep in the forest.

In the beginning, the idea of the trip started as something of a joke. When we were with my husband's friends and business acquaintances, I would tell them that I wanted him to take me to the Amazon. When he eventually told me he could arrange the time off and we would go, I was ecstatic! But then the worries set in. What about earthquakes? The Shining Path Gorillas were also a concern. Not speaking Spanish also posed the problem of the language barrier. All these worries, however, quickly melted away when we were at the Miami airport waiting to board the LanPeru flight for Lima.

As we soon discovered, LanPeru Airlines is not celebrated for its timeliness. Not only was our flight late in leaving Miami, but there was also a 5 hour delay once we reached Lima, Peru. Nonetheless, our travel company, Explorations Inc., turned this unexpected delay to good advantage by providing our group with day rooms at a very nice hotel. They also arranged for a very pleasant educational tour of the city. We especially appreciated this tour since we were told that it was unsafe for Americans to roam freely about Lima unless one was with a group. Our Lima tour included a leisurely drive past many beautiful architectural structures and a visit

to the Catacombs where over 25,000 bodies are buried under an ancient church. One memorial in the town square also served as a great example of the importance of good communication. A bronze statue of a lady was prominently displayed in the middle of the square with a llama sitting on top of her head. In reality, she was supposed to be depicted with a flame hovering over her head instead of the llama! In Spanish, however, the words for "llama" and "flame" are the same. Unfortunately, the city council who originally commissioned the statue apparently was not clear enough in their directions and the statue



was delivered with a llama instead of the flame! Another interesting sight that we observed in this picturesque city was an example of what surely must have been the original turf block. In many residential areas, old squares of concrete outlines held blocks of grass between the sidewalks and roads, which distinctly reminded us of present day turf block!

After an enjoyable day in Lima we eventually caught our flight to Iquitos, the gateway to the Amazon. This city of 500,000 is accessible only by plane or boat. We were picked up at the airport in one of the old tour buses that were imported to the city over 30 years ago. Because of space limitations on the boats that originally transported the buses, the bus tops were cut off. When they reached their destination in Iquitos, new tops were built for the buses entirely from local mahogany. Our destination this night was a comfortable hotel with a special and delicious late night dinner arranged for us.



Following a good nights rest, we were met the next morning by our Indian guide, Julio, and transported to the river docks where we boarded our boat, the Amazon Queen. Along our way to the boat, we viewed another popular mode of transportation in Iquitos, the 3-wheeled motorcycle cart, which provides for an exciting traffic pattern!

In the next article, we board the Amazon Queen and head out for unknown adventures at our first lodge with Julio!

- Melody Staunton

"Go Native Beyond the Garden Gate"

Home & Garden Tour featuring Vera Lea Rinker Formal Native Plant Garden at the residence of Stetson University President Dr. H. Douglas Lee, 418 N Woodland Blvd, DeLand Florida

Saturday, April 19, 2008, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Sunday, April 20, 2008, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Tickets: \$15 advance/\$20 at event,
For advance tickets make check payable to
The Garden Club of DeLand
Attn: Ronny Kyle
3614 Royal Fern Circle
DeLand, FL 32724

Sponsored by: Garden Club of DeLand, Karen Hall, Chairman.



Where Does the Money Go?

A Financial Summary for the 2007 fiscal year of the Pinellas Chapter of the Native Plant Society

How much did we make as an organization?

- How much merchandise did we sell? \$2,920 worth of T-shirts, CDs, silent auction items, home-raised native plants, books, and seeds.
- How much did we make in collected membership fees? \$1670 distributed by the state chapter to its member chapters based on a percentage of their membership enrollment.
- How much revenue came from our annual off-site plant sales? \$3,760
- How much did we receive in generous donations? \$330

How did we spend it?

- How much did our monthly general membership meetings cost? \$610 with help from a wonderful someone who donated the cost of the meeting announcement flyers
- How much does it cost to run the organization, buy the supplies, pay for the licenses, pay for the phone and the Web page? \$1700

And how much did we spend on projects? \$7,930

- Booth fees and handouts for exhibitions such as Green Expo, Earth Fest and others? \$850
- Support memberships in other organizations? \$200
- The bi-monthly newsletter? \$220
- Scholarships for local summer camps and the UF environmental education scholarship fund? \$2,500
- Signage for Heritage Village? \$3,575
- Other projects including donations to Moccasin Lake Nature Park, Brooker Creek Preserve, Boyd Hill Nature Park, Boca Ciega Millennium Park - \$1230

It was a very good year. Thank you to all who attended our meetings, passed out flyers, planted native plants, removed exotics, bought our T-shirts and books and CDs, contributed plants to our meeting auctions, contributed to our December silent auction, bought plants and gifts, sold gift memberships and so much more. **Thank you all for a successful year.**

Weedon Island Preserve

“Our Florida Legacy”

Artist Christopher Still from Tarpon Springs

This exhibit of limited edition prints and reproductions brings the incredible talents of nationally recognized Florida artist Christopher Still to Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center. On exhibit are 10 compositions that connect multiple levels of symbolism and historic references created for the Florida House of Representatives. Still’s recent work in this collection captures the beauty of our Florida waters in fine art.

**On display through May 31
during normal Center hours.**

Prehistoric Fiber Technologies

Sat, April 19, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Florida native plants have played an important role in the lives of people for thousands of years. Take a hike and learn about the types and uses of native plants for woven fibers. Practice the prehistoric techniques, from gathering, preparing and spinning, of making cords from fiber. Participants work with Spanish moss, palm and willow to make cordage.

This event is free and open to the public.

Pre-registration is required. Recommended for adults, suitable for ages 12 and up.

Contact Weedon Island Preserve Cultural and Natural History Center at (727) 453-6500 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/Environment/pagesHTML/se10.html to learn more about these and upcoming programs. Learn about the history of the Preserve by visiting their homepage at www.weedonislandcenter.org

Brooker Creek Preserve

“Exposing Florida”

Through the Lens of Conservation Photographers

Members of the Florida Conservation Photographers are a group of passionate photographers who aim to spread awareness of, and raise funds for, local conservation issues.

This exhibition highlights species and ecosystems of special conservation concern in Florida.

**On display through April 29
during normal Center hours.**

Compost Happens

Sat, April 12, 10:00 am – 11:30 am

Just add your kitchen scraps and yard clippings and compost happens! Adding compost to Florida’s sandy soils provides much needed organic material and improves the soil’s water holding capacity. Join us to learn about the composting process and what types of materials can be successfully composted. Workshop attendees receive a free plastic compost bin courtesy of Pinellas County Utilities Solid Waste Operations Department. Admission: Free. Recommended for adults – suitable for children age 12 and older.

Contact Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center at (727) 453-6800 or visit www.pinellascounty.org/Environment/pagesHTML/se10.html

Learn how to become a Friend of Brooker Creek at <http://www.friendsofbrookercreekpreserve.org/>
Members of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve receive a discount on admission fees.

Wall Springs Park Addition Gets Makeover

On Wednesday, January 16th, the Pinellas County Parks Department hosted a stakeholders meeting to review design plans for an expansion of Wall Springs Park in Palm Harbor. The property to be developed encompasses 125 acres of sandhill, coastal scrub, pine flatwoods, wetland and mangrove communities and is known colloquially as the McMullen property or the Wall Springs "coastal additions." It is due north from and connected to Wall Springs Park and adjacent to Camp Wai Lani, a Girl Scout camp.

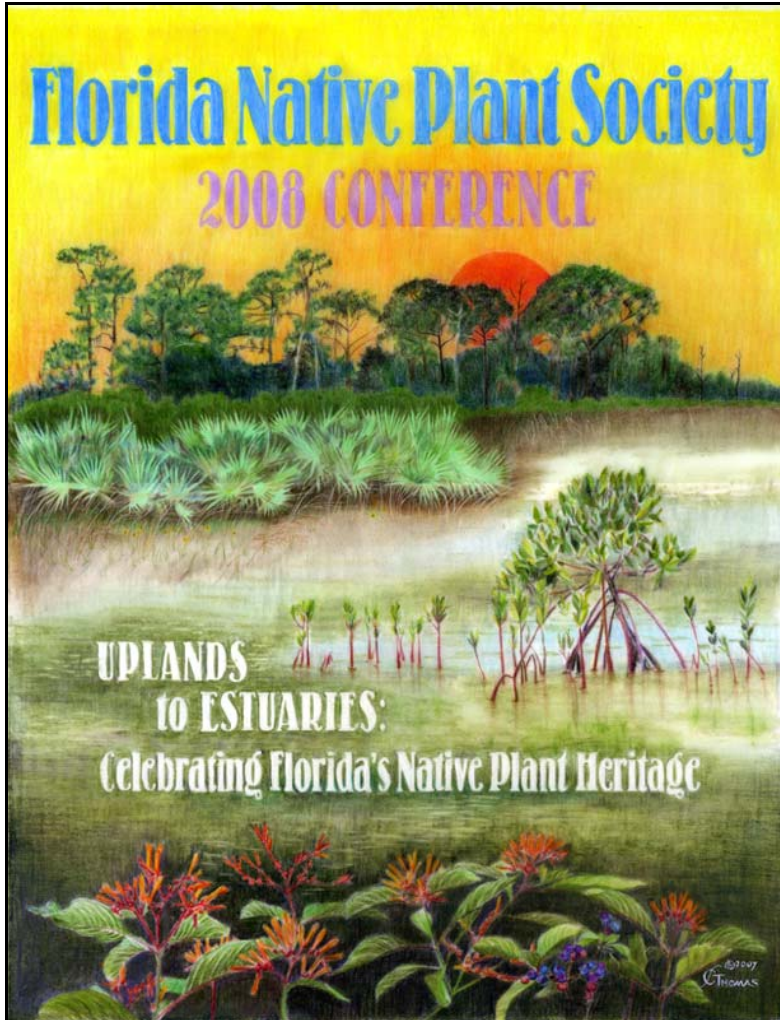
Pinellas County has applied for and received several grants to develop and improve the property. These fund removal of exotic vegetation, facilities for public safety, recreation, and education, habitat and water quality improvements and coastal restoration plantings. Pinellas County grant writer (and Pinellas FNPS board member) Debbie Chayet explained that these include a Florida Communities Trust grant and a Southwest Florida Water Management District grant. The terms of the FCT grant require a management plan for the property and that is in place. She said that much work has already been done to remove invasive plants and dilapidated structures left by the former owner. The original conceptual plan for the park was produced by a planning consultant firm in September 2005, but it received criticism from many who believed that it unnecessarily impacted sensitive habitat areas and placed too much emphasis on recreation and not enough on environmental preservation.

Partly in response to public feedback and partly due to budgetary constraints, the original conceptual plan has been scaled back considerably. Paved roads/recreation paths have been reduced and rerouted, there is one canoe/kayak launch instead of two, nature trails will be left unpaved, and a fancy "sunset pavilion" has been replaced with a simple elevated deck. The existing homesite and garage buildings will be used to house an education center for community and school groups. Parking for the education center will be not be paved but will be on an already-impacted grassy area.

This addition to Wall Springs Park is absolutely beautiful. I visited it the Saturday before the meeting and it's a fascinating place, teeming with wildlife and hosting diverse plant communities with interesting native species. Its proximity to the Gulf and abundant habitat types make it a magnet for migratory bird species. Clapper rails, Sherman's fox squirrels and gopher tortoises live here. Canoeists and kayakers will want to use the launch site to access Boggy and Sutherlin Bayous and explore the mangrove fringe. I can't wait until the park is open and we can have a field trip there! The valuable coastal habitats in this park will be preserved because citizens spoke up and told the County what they wanted, and because the County listened. That, as Pinellas FNPS past president Alexa Wilcox would say, is "awesome."

Parks department staff predicted that design and permitting for the revised plan will take several years. Once a final plan has been drawn up, the County Commission will approve it and finalize a contract with an engineering firm to complete the work. Parks director Paul Cozzie and his staff are to be commended for producing a plan that is sensitive to environmental considerations while complying with the terms of grants that the County has received. The result should be something that all Pinellas County residents can be proud of.

- Jan Allyn



28th Annual Conference

May 15-18, 2008

Manatee Convention Center

Palmetto, Florida

*Hosted by the Mangrove, Pinellas,
Serenoa & Suncoast Chapters*

Purpose of Conference:

To provide educational programs to FNPS members and the general public about the planting, preservation, conservation and restoration of Florida native plants and their associated plant communities.

For registration information visit
www.fnps.org

Notable conference activities:

- Field trips to over 20 locations highlighting native plant communities, native trees, shrubs and wildflowers led by botanists and local plant specialists.
- Native plant sale providing locally grown trees, shrubs and wildflowers throughout the event. Hundreds of new native plants for home landscapes!
- Educational exhibit tables; many vendors.
- The latest news in conservation, preservation and restoration of Florida native plant communities.
- Workshops for landscape design, making plant specimens, nature photography, scientific information regarding the "Real Florida" and much more.
- Social and networking events.

For information about sponsorship opportunities and benefits, please contact:

Karina Veaudry (executivedirector@fnps.org / 407.895.8446) or
Ray Wunderlich (rayrunner@yahoo.com / 727.577.4344)

