

# The Understory

Newsletter of the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Inc.

December 2011 - January 2012

## President's Message

By: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel

Friends,  
 Hopefully many of you were able to attend our November meeting when we revived our old tradition of an annual “Turkey & Pot Luck Dinner” meeting, (complete with table cloths shared with us from the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve) and with beautiful native plant table decorations arranged by former presidents Barb Hoffman and Marcia Warren. Our program was a wonderful PowerPoint slide show of “2011 Year in Review” assembled by Cindy Smith, complete with relaxing and calming classical music in the background. Mary Campbell, Director of the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension, presented our Chapter with an award recognizing the contribution our volunteers have made to their program with our numerous volunteer hours. Jan Allyn and Jane Williams put together a very fun presentation from our Photo Contest entries, showed slides of the winning photos, and presented the winners' awards (see page 7). Since November is traditionally the annual business and elections meeting for our Chapter, we gear that meeting more to our members (rather than public outreach) and try to do things that are fun and give us more opportunity to interact with each other. Everyone seemed to have a great time, and really enjoy the time together.

I am really excited about our Conservation Celebration on December 14th this year. Manley Fuller, President of the Florida Wildlife Federation will be the speaker, and is bringing us a needed and timely topic (see page 4). We will again have numerous environmental organizations attending with their displays, so come early to have time to look at them as well as make your bids for the interesting and ‘artsy’ items in the silent auction.

Our January program will be an exciting one too (see page 5). Environmental journalist Craig Pittman will speak to us about a topic that keeps rearing its head in Florida....our precious water resources. This is one of the most important topics for the current and future health and sustainability of this state. As we have

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Scarlet hibiscus

(Alexa's President's Message, cont. from p. 1)  
learned from Aldo Leopold, E.O. Wilson, Rachel Carson, and others, only the voices of 'many' can reach through the insanity of greed to fix the underlying problems. Craig has written on this topic in great depth and will share his thorough understanding of it with us.

This will be my last message as President, and I am happy (and relieved) to step down leaving the leadership in the very capable hands of Jan Allyn. She and all the others Board members, are dedicated to our FNPS mission and will continue working to make this Chapter a vital part of preserving and conserving "REAL" Florida. Each President brings new ideas and life to the Chapter, so these changes are welcomed and I think our chapter will be stronger for it.

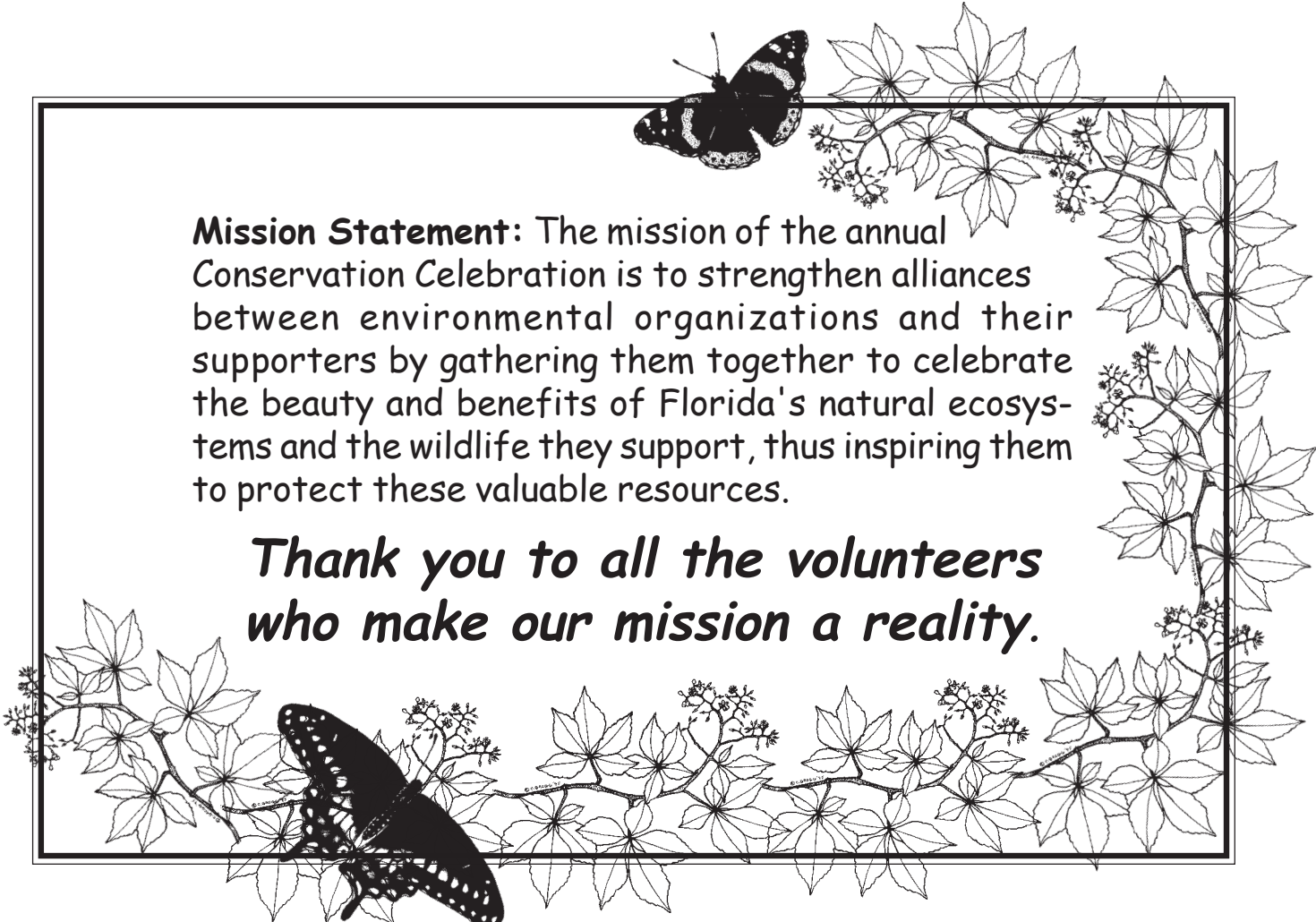
As always we welcome anyone who wishes to be more involved to join us and lend input and ideas. It has been an honor to serve as President these last two years, and

though I am relieved to let go of some of the obvious responsibility, I will continue on the board of directors and continue to be active in chapter events, but in a different role that will hopefully give me a little more time to pursue career and family activities. Looking forward to seeing you all at the meetings and field trips.

Alexa

### Welcome New Members

Mary Campbell, Carmela Castle,  
Linda Emslie, Mrs. Christina Johnson,  
Monique Kerstein, Joanne & Jerry  
Osburn, John Schultheis, Sylvia Scott  
and  
Darby Jones is a Life Member



**Mission Statement:** The mission of the annual Conservation Celebration is to strengthen alliances between environmental organizations and their supporters by gathering them together to celebrate the beauty and benefits of Florida's natural ecosystems and the wildlife they support, thus inspiring them to protect these valuable resources.

***Thank you to all the volunteers  
who make our mission a reality.***

Pinellas Native Plant Society, St. Petersburg  
Audubon Society and Pinellas/UF Extension

Invite you to our annual

# *Holiday Conservation Celebration*

## *Wed., Dec. 14, 2011*

### Presenting Speaker Manley Fuller

Get Involved -- Saving Florida's  
natural lands and vital water resources

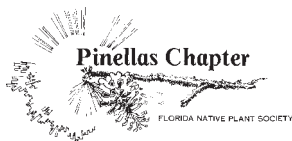


6:30 --  
Mix & Mingle  
Environmental Exhibits  
Silent Auction  
Appetizers

7:30 -- Welcome  
Conservation Awards

8:00 -- Speaker

Manley Fuller,  
President of the Florida  
Wildlife Federation, will show us why and  
how we can take an active part in helping to  
make our legislative representatives aware  
of the importance of our natural resources,  
and how we can communicate our interest  
in saving and protecting these vital places  
for the generations to come. Manley will  
present concrete ideas and ways for us to  
take action.



Public Invited \* Free Admission \* Program Begins at 6:30  
Pinellas Extension Service, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo  
Map & Info: <http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/map.shtml>  
[www.stpeteaudubon.org](http://www.stpeteaudubon.org) \* [www.fnps.org/chapters/pinellas](http://www.fnps.org/chapters/pinellas)



## 2012-President's Message

By: Jan Allyn, 2012 Pinellas Chapter President

Soon a new year will be upon us. To be frank, the one just passed has been lousy. Our economy is still inching its way out of a deep hole, our governor and state legislature have laid waste to decades of environmental progress, and budgets for state and local preservation efforts have been slashed. But we can hope for better times, and vote for more responsible leaders, and continually remind the leaders we have . . . as well as the ones who aspire to represent us . . . about the value we place on our natural lands and the wildlife they support. We can be grateful that we live in a beautiful, complicated, and interesting state. We can realize that Florida has subtle natural charms that are appreciated by too few people, and gently try to expand the thinking of friends and neighbors who associate flamingos and hybrid hibiscus with Florida instead of white ibis and beach sunflowers, and who complain about missing fall foliage instead of exclaiming over muhlygrass, goldenrod and blazing stars. We can escape the too-crowded spaces where we live and work and commute to find refuge in parks and preserves, feeling fortunate to have so many right here in our own county. We can create natural oases in our own yards and neighborhoods and feel blessed when they are visited by wild creatures. We can enjoy each other's company, and share our knowledge, and volunteer our time, and be in awe of the mysteries of the natural world. We can look forward, instead of back, and every day find a way, no matter how small, to make the world a little greener place. These are things we can all do to make the new year brighter and better, no matter what it brings.

Jan



## Upcoming Meetings

**December Program: Conservation Celebration**  
**Wednesday, Dec. 14**

The public is invited to the "Holiday Conservation Celebration," an annual event jointly hosted by the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and the St. Petersburg Audubon Society. The event is a fund-raiser for both organizations, which use the proceeds for conservation projects throughout Pinellas County. These include protection of birds and their habitats, promotion of sustainable landscape practices that use native plant species, environmental advocacy, and public education programs focusing on wildlife, nature and sustainable living.

The Holiday Conservation Celebration will take place beginning at 6:30 p.m. on Wed., **Dec. 14**, 2011 at Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo. The event is sponsored by Pinellas County Extension/IFAS and admission is free. There will be refreshments, exhibits by local environmental groups and government agencies, conservation awards, a silent auction of nature-themed books, crafts, plants, and holiday gift items, door prizes and a special guest speaker.

Manley Fuller has served as President of the Florida Wildlife Federation (FWF) since 1987, and is also a registered lobbyist with both the Florida Legislature and the executive branch of state government working on behalf of FWF. Previously, Mr. Fuller served five years with the National Wildlife Federation as a Wetlands and Wildlife Specialist in their Southeastern Natural Resources Center working on wetlands conservation programs, primarily in North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida. Under Mr. Fuller's leadership, the FWF has undertaken many significant projects to benefit Florida's natural resources and wildlife, including: lobbying to preserve/increase federal aid to state wildlife programs, litigation to increase water levels in Lake Okechobee to benefit snail kites, litigation to preserve panther habitat, protect sea turtles, key deer and other species, collaboration with other environmental groups to lobby for Florida Forever funding, advocacy for Everglades restoration, protection of Florida's springs, and many other efforts.

**January Program: January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012; 7:00pm**

**Place:** Pinellas County Cooperative Extension

**Topic:** Florida's Endangered Water Resources

**Speaker- Craig Pittman**, Environmental Journalist- St. Petersburg Times

Craig Pittman is a native Floridian who graduated from Troy State University in Alabama. Since 1998 he has reported on environmental issues for Florida's largest newspaper, the St. Petersburg Times. He is co-author of "Paving Paradise: Florida's Vanishing Wetlands and the Failure of No Net Loss"; author of "Manatee Insanity: Inside the War Over Florida's Most Famous Endangered Species", and his latest book "Scent of a Scandal: Greed, Betrayal, and the World's Most Beautiful Orchid", will be out in Spring 2012.

In 2004, Craig won the Waldo Proffitt Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism in Florida for exposing a secret plan by the state's business leaders to transfer water from sleepy North Florida to booming South Florida. The stories caused such an uproar that Gov. Jeb Bush scuttled the plan. Pittman shared the 2006 Waldo Proffitt Award for the series "Vanishing Wetlands" written with colleague Matthew Waite. The series, which found that federal and state wetland protection programs were a sham that enabled development to wipe out swamps and marshes, also won a national award, the Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting, from the Society of Environmental Journalists. Pittman and Waite shared a second Proffitt Award and a second Carmody Award in 2007 for a series called "When Dry is Wet" that exposed the flaws in the wetland mitigation banking industry. That led to their book, "Paving Paradise." Pittman and Waite invited regulators, lobbyists, governors, senators and citizens to describe, in their own words, their own roles in the asphaltting of our state. The colorful cast of characters is shameless, and astonishingly frank. And by the way, many of the same characters depicted in this book are hammering Florida's 2009 Legislature right now, hoping to further weaken what wetland protections we have.

Paving Paradise isn't just about egrets and panthers and cypress trees going down the tubes. Pittman and Waite help us understand that when private citizens and big businesses wipe out wetlands, dry out springs and dump pollution into our underground drinking water, taxpayers suffer the consequences and foot an enormous bill.

Fortunately, the writers offer a refreshingly clear-cut 12-step program toward a more honest accounting of wetlands protection in Florida. That in itself is worth the read and ought to be widely circulated.

Craig Pittman will help us to better understand what is at stake in the years ahead of us.

## Chapter Directory

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## Winter is Planting Season

By: Craig Huegel

As a former “Yankee”, I arrived in Florida believing that you plant in the spring and summer, and rest in winter. Many of us come here burdened by this ingrained notion and too many of us retain it. Despite years of knowing better, or worse yet ignoring what is in front of our faces, too few of us look at winter with excitement because it is the time to get planting. What was true “up North” is virtually turned upside down here.

Spring, March-May, is the absolute worst time to add plants to your landscape in this part of Florida. Temperatures start to rise and established plants flush with new growth, but those rising temperatures are not often accompanied by reliable rain events. So, soils dry during these periods and at the depth where new roots are planted the soil becomes dry as a desert in short order. Realize that roots are designed to grow downward deep. In a pot, healthy root systems go only as deep as the pot, and these are used to daily watering. A 1-gallon plant normally has a ball of soil about 4 ½ inches deep; a 3-gallon about 6 ½ inches. For these roots to grow downward, the soil beneath this root mass must be moister than the soil above. This is often not the case, or even reasonably possible, in most landscape settings in mid-to late-spring.

In Alexa’s and my landscape, the surface soils rapidly dry by April without regular rain. Once they are dry, they do not rehydrate easily. If I water a patch of this land, let it soak in and later take a trowel to see how deep the water has penetrated, I find that the region where the root ball would be for a 1- or 3-gallon plant is still powder dry. The water has only wetted the upper couple of inches; not the region at 4 ½ or 6 ½ inches. Over time, newly planted specimens survive if watered regularly, but the roots keeping them alive are mostly surface roots; the deeper roots at the base of the root ball are in dry soil and dead. At worst, they are struggling and unhealthy. That is why so many plants wilt so quickly at this time of year despite regular watering and die if they are not watered frequently.

In the nearly 25 years I have lived here, I can count the number of years where we had regular spring rains on one hand. It is a rare year to get even one good rain event every 2 weeks in late April and May. We plant and try to overcome the lack of rain with watering, but

even that is difficult to do effectively in most landscape soils around here. And, to compound the problems, the rains get more and more scattered until temperatures are scorching once more in mid-June. Unless plants are well-established by early June, they are unlikely to prosper. It is plant torture to add them under this scenario.

Over the years, our Chapter’s Spring Plant Sale has always been significantly more robust than the one we hold in fall. But, as fall works its way to winter, all of us should be jumping out of our chairs to get out and plant. Summer rains have (hopefully) rehydrated our soils. Cooler weather means slower rates of evaporation so soils stay moister longer after a rain event, and cold fronts from the north are rather predictable and bring good rain showers weekly. If we dig a hole to plant something, chances are the soil at the bottom of the hole is moist. Once we plant it and water it in, chances are the soil at the bottom of the root ball will stay moist with regular watering combined with rainfall. Roots grow downward and plants become established before spring droughts can cause stress.

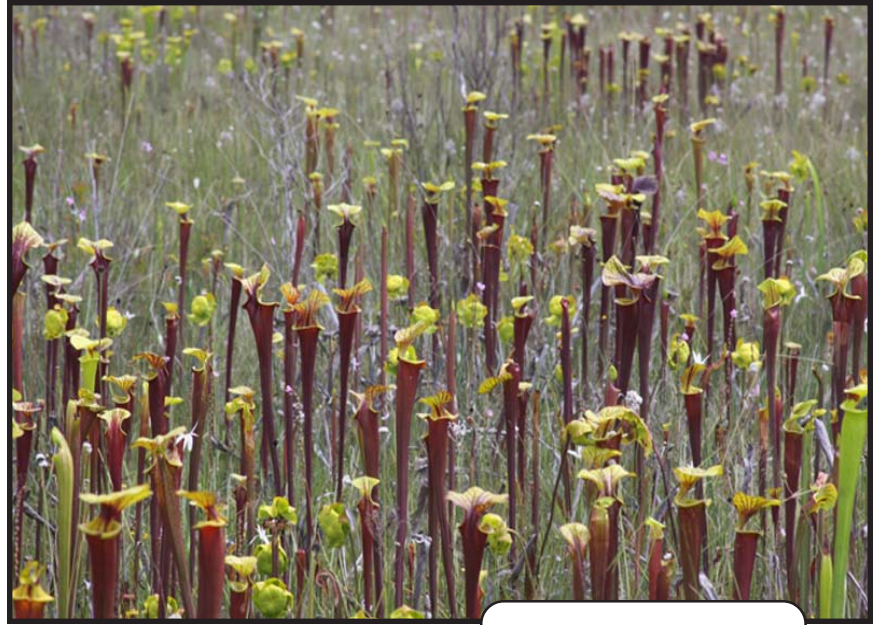
Folks often seem perplexed by winter planting. If plants are deciduous, we worry because we can’t see them growing. But, a lack of leaves means plants do not need to support an above-ground biomass with their developing root systems. Roots can grow and that energy is not required for top growth. That is a good thing. Even evergreen plants do not grow as quickly in winter, or transpire water at the same rate. Life is far easier in winter if you are going from the comfort of pot growth to the rigors of life in a landscape.

Folks often also seem to worry about freezes. This might be a problem for non-adapted tropicals, but natives adapted to our locale do not blush at a good freeze. Even seedlings are remarkably tolerant of truly cold temperatures. Over the years I have dabbled with growing plants, I have never lost seedlings to hard freezes. Larger plants might lose leaves, but seedlings are better equipped to emerge unscathed. Small plants are not weaklings; most are tougher than more-established ones of the same species. Lastly, why not find an excuse to be out working in your landscape during the nicest weather we have all year? Cooler temperatures, less biting insects, less humidity, and fewer issues with plant pests and disease. Do not shy away from planting in the winter. Quite the opposite, it is the best time in this region of Florida to add native plants to our landscapes.



## Photo Contest Results

Congratulations to the winners of our first "Native Images" photo contest! Winners are listed below. Congratulations to all of them, and thanks to all of you who submitted photos. Next year's contest will include a category for photos taken on FNPS field trips, so pack those cameras along with the granola bars, field glasses, and bug spray!



Pitcherplant Bog  
Photo by Debbie Chayet



Everglades  
Photo by Karen Mason

### Category: Native Plants & Plant Communities

First Prize - Debbie Chayet,  
"Pitcherplant Bog"

Second Prize - Karen Mason,  
"Everglades"

Third Prize - Tiffany Custer,  
"Corkscrew Swamp"



Corkscrew Swamp  
Photo by Tiffany Custer



# Photo Contest Results

## Category: My Native Landscape

First Place -- Barbara Jackson (Ixia Chapter) --

"Purple Coneflowers"

Second Place -- Ed Schoen --

"Salvia" (Tropical Sage)

Third Place -- Ed Schoen --

"I'll be Watching You"

(Screech Owls in Wild Lime Tree)

Note from Barbara Jackson, President, FNPS, Ixia Chapter: ". . .one of my chapter members surprised me with the gift certificate from Reflections of Nature Nursery at our recent meeting! I did not expect a presentation! . . . Please extend my deepest thanks to your members once more for this award."



Barbara Jackson, with a rain barrel wearing the Purple Coneflower image. Photo by an Ixia Chapter member.



"Purple Coneflower"  
Photo by Barbara Jackson



Left, "Salvia"  
Above, "I'll be Watching You"  
Photos by Ed Schoen





## 2012 Contacts

### Officers:

President: Jan Allyn  
Vice-President: Mary Jackson  
Secretary: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel  
Treasurer: Cindy Smith  
Chapter Representative: Debbie Chayet  
Past President: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel

### Board of Directors Members-at-Large:

Andy Karpinski, Mary Ann Beekman, Tiffany Custer,  
Monica Pinnell, John Pinnell, and Shreeram  
Krishnaswami

### 2011 Committee Chairs/ Coordinators:

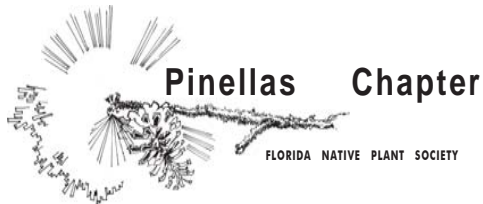
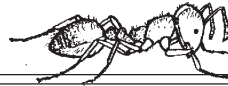
Advocacy/Conservation: Jan Allyn  
Displays: Marie Hughes  
Field Trips: Dr. Craig Huegel  
Hospitality/ Info Greeter - Meetings: Andy Karpinski  
Membership: Ellen Clayton  
Newsletter Editor: Dr. Craig Huegel  
Co-editor/Publisher/ Artist: Cathy Vogelsong

Programs/ Special Events: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel  
Publicity: Cindy Smith  
Refreshment/Hospitality Coordinator:  
Mary Ann Beekman & Ginny Nelson  
Sales/Merchandise: Jane Williams & Jan Allyn  
Scholarships: Cindy Peacock  
Speakers Bureau: Mary Jackson  
Volunteer Coordinator: Mary Ann Beekman  
Web Master/Pinellas News: Jan Allyn

### Interim Committees:

Budget Committee: Jane Williams, Chairperson  
Plants Sales: Tiffany Custer, Chairperson & Bruce Turley  
Landscape Tour :  
Mary Jackson & Michael Stallings, Co-chairs  
Nominating Committee: Ginny Nelson, Cathy Quindiagan,  
& Alexa Wilcox-Huegel  
December Conservation Celebration:  
Cindy Peacock & Katy Roberts

**See Directory of phone numbers  
and e-mail addresses on page 5**



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**Pinellas Chapter web address:**  
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**FNPS Blog**  
<http://fnpsblog.blogspot.org/>

