

The Understory

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

February - March 2012

President's Message

By: Jan Allyn

The Florida Native Plant Society is a scientific nonprofit, not an environmental advocate. It is how the IRS defines us, and we must toe that regulatory line as we work for the preservation, conservation and restoration of native plants and native plant committees. We pursue this mission in a number of ways: through support for the acquisition of conservation lands and good land stewardship, through environmental education, research on native plant species and communities, and promotion of local landscaping practices and policies that preserve natural resources and our native plant heritage.

But in pursuit of our mission we must also be advocates, both individually and collectively, because research – science – tells us that the number of our wetlands is shrinking, and that our water is polluted. It shows that the number of imperiled species is increasing and that rare habitat types are disappearing. It shows that urban sprawl is detrimental to native plant communities and the wildlife they support. It shows that good public policy can have a positive impact on environmental problems, and bad public policy can have disastrous consequences that erode the quality of human life as well as threatening the health of ecosystems and the survival of species.

Recent judicial decisions and legislative actions have thrown the door wide open for commercial interests to contribute unlimited amounts of money to our elected officials. The only way to counteract such enormous financial clout is to create a deafening clamor. While there is a benefit in our Chapter, or our Society, voicing its “official” support for (or objection to) a particular policy initiative, such letters are easily dismissed because they come from “those environmentalists.” it is infinitely more valuable for a chorus of individuals to speak up—the more the better. Numbers count more than

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Newsletter Editor / Designer Wanted

The team of Craig Huegel and Cathy Vogelsong has done a stellar job of creating our newsletter *The Understory* since they assumed the positions of editor and designer, respectively, in June 2008. They have worked together to create a publication that is the envy of every other FNPS chapter, and we are indebted to both of them. This is the last issue of the newsletter that Craig will edit, and Cathy would like to retire as designer. If you enjoy writing, photography and/or graphic design, and would like to use your talents to benefit the Chapter and spread the word about native plants, please contact Jan Allyn [by email](#) or by phone at 727-244-0312 to explore this opportunity!

eloquence. You need do no more than write “Vote Yes on Bill 100” or “Bill 999 is a terrible idea. Please don’t vote for it.” You can get your point across in the subject line of an email; it’s all that is necessary, but it is terribly important.

The Legislature is now in session, and we all know what an absolute catastrophe last year was. Every day more bills are introduced that have the potential to affect our native plants and native plant communities—for good or for ill. So how does a citizen concerned about the state’s natural resources learn what the legislature is up to? You can visit MyFloridaHouse.gov and FLSenate.gov to read the text of bills and monitor their progress, but that’s a tedious and time-consuming process. Fortunately, there are many good websites and listservs that are timely and informative. You can also visit our Chapter Facebook page, where our members often post action alerts, as well as the Facebook pages of other environmental organizations. Share information that you receive with others, so that they too can act. Below is a list of sites that are helpful. Use them, share them, and add your voice to the growing citizen chorus that demands responsible environmental policies from Tallahassee. (some require membership)

Florida Conservation Coalition

www.floridaconservationcoalition.org

Audubon of Florida News: Florida Legislative Tracker

www.audubonoffloridanews.org

Environmental Voice of Southwest Florida

www.eco-voice.org

Alliance for a Livable Pinellas

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/pinellasenvironment/>
Sierra Club

<http://www.sierraclubfloridanews.org/>

The Florida Current

<http://www.thefloridacurrent.com/>

Bills to Watch (description to right):

HB1103/SB1362 – Ordinary High-Water Mark
for Navigable, Nontidal Waterbodies

HB639/SB1086 – Reclaimed Water

HB503/SB716 – Streamlining Environmental
Permitting

HB999/SB820/HB115/HB7 -- Septic Tanks/
Septage

HB7003/SB1354--Wetlands permitting

HB421/SB604 – Limited Certification for Urban
Landscape Commercial Fertilizer Application

HB157/SB560/SB1834/SB2142 – Water
Management Districts

2012 Florida Legislature: Bills to Watch

HB 1103/SB 1362 Changes the definition of “ordinary high water,” a move that could trigger the loss of tens of thousands of acres of state-owned sovereign submerged lands at the edge of rivers, lakes and streams, subjecting them to pollution and development pressure, threatening valuable wetland wildlife habitat and reducing public access to navigable waters.

HB 639/SB 1086 Takes control of reclaimed water away from water management districts and gives it to water utilities, moving us a step closer to privatizing water resources in Florida.

HB 503/SB 716 Streamlines environmental permitting. The bill prohibits cities and counties from requiring state or federal agency approvals for a local development permit, expands the use of general permits for filling wetlands, and creates regional action teams for expedited permits for certain businesses. It also loosens rules related to septic tank inspections and allowable septic discharges.

HB 999 / HB 115 / SB 820 / SB 558 These bills weaken regulations that regulate septic tank inspection and maintenance, and the spreading on land of “septage,” minimally treated waste material from septic tanks. These bills threaten water quality.

HB 7003/SB1354 Consolidates wetlands and stormwater permitting to create a statewide rule, potentially weakening wetlands protection in the effort to create one-size-fits-all legislation that applies to both natural wetlands and artificial stormwater ponds.

HB 421/SB 604 Exempts certified landscape professionals from being subject to local fertilizer ordinances. This will reduce the effect of the ordinances by creating additional opportunities for inappropriate fertilizer application.

HB 157/SB560/SB1834/SB2142 These bills affect funding sources and levels for Water Management Districts, as well as their governance, some bills for the better, some for worse. WMD budgets were slashed last year, causing the elimination of locally-controlled Basin Boards and layoffs of knowledgeable and dedicated employees.

Jan

Proposed Transit Plan for Pinellas County

By: Judy Fisher

Pinellas County Government is seeking public input on its plans and routes for an interconnected regional transit system. See <http://www.pinellasontrack.com/>, which includes a link to two maps.

The light rail portion starts in Clearwater, runs through Largo along East Bay Drive, zig-zags toward I-275 and zips down into St. Petersburg. The plan suggests new and/or improved connecting routes to neighborhoods and there is an assumption that there will be a connection to Hillsborough County too.

Take a look and see what is planned for the areas you are familiar with, perhaps considering the following:

- Do the sections that don't follow existing transportation routes, avoid properties that have significant plant and wildlife value? Do they avoid unnecessary fragmentation of habitat?
- They are planning on clustering new development around the new station areas. Will this new development be on properties that are being redeveloped or will they be removing what is now green spaces from Pinellas?

Workday at Dunedin Hammock Park 1900 San Mateo Drive, Dunedin Saturday, March 17, 9am to noon

Pinellas Chapter FNPS will have a workday at Dunedin Hammock Park to remove invasive species. Bring water, gardening hand tools, gloves. This is a joint event with the Friends of Hammock Park. For more information call James Polgar, President Friends of the Hammock, (727) 734-5057, james.polgar@verizon.net.

The Hammock is a unique 90-acre natural park inhabited by various forms of wildlife and plant life. It has five miles of nature trails, three picnic shelters, an observation platform, rest rooms and a playground area. The park is located at the northeast end of San Mateo Drive and is open every day from sunrise to sunset. Many birds can be seen at Hammock Park and the park is listed in the "Great Florida Birding Trail Book."

Spring Plant Sale – Save the Date

Our spring plant sale is just around the corner! Mark your calendars for Saturday, April 14th. Come and stock up on spring-blooming wildflowers and other plants for your garden. Speakers will give presentations on aquatic plants, how to create a pond, and wildlife gardening. Volunteers will be needed at Wilcox Nursery in Largo, both on the day of the sale and on April 11-13 for prep work. If you'd like to help, please contact volunteer coordinator Mary Ann Beekman (mbeekman@tampabay.rr.com) to let her know when you are available.

Proud of Your Native Landscape? Share It!

We're already scouting for attractive gardens for the 2012 native landscape tour. You can inspire others to learn more about natives and incorporate them in their own yards by sharing your knowledge and your landscape. Your yard should be landscaped mostly with native plants, be free of invasive species, and well maintained. This year the tour will be the weekend of October 6-7. Typically we have 8-10 homes on the tour, with half in north Pinellas and half in south Pinellas. If you'd like your yard to be considered, please contact Mary Jackson at (727) 542-7138 or maryjack99@aol.com.

Want to Have a Wild Weekend?

Boyd Hill Nature Park will hold its annual Wildlife Weekend event March 10-11. The Chapter will have an informational booth and needs volunteers to staff it both days. This involves handing out literature and chatting with people who visit the booth about the joys and benefits of gardening with native plants, and about the importance of preserving, conserving and restoring our native plant communities. If you would like to volunteer at this event, please contact volunteer coordinator Mary Ann Beekman (mbeekman@tampabay.rr.com).

Farewell from Editor Craig Huegel

This will be my last newsletter for the Pinellas Chapter FNPS. It has been a good 3+ years, but it is time to step down and allow someone else to put their stamp on it. My work and private life have made me rethink some of my commitments and to pull back a bit on some of them. Frankly, I am tiring out a bit and seeking just a little “me time”. I hope all of you have appreciated the effort both Cathy Vogel song and I have made to make this a first-class newsletter, and I trust that whoever takes up the reins will improve upon it. This newsletter is only as strong, however, as the nurturing and input it receives, so I encourage all of you to become more involved. Contribute an article and provide feedback. If there is something you like, let the new editor know, and if there is something you want to see included, either write it or ask that someone else does. Speaking now as a former editor, I can assure you that working in a vacuum of input can be very frustrating.

I will continue to contribute articles as my time allows and remain active in other ways. If you are interested in wildflowers specifically, I encourage you to explore my wildflower blog: <http://hawthornhillwildflowers.blogspot.com/>. I have written extensively over the past years about Florida wildflowers, their ecology, and their use in landscapes and you may find it useful. And, if you ever have questions on plants, I hope you will feel free to call or email me. The Florida Native Plant Society and its core mission have always been important to me and that will not change. I am not going away – just stepping aside from some of my duties.



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Upcoming Meetings

February Program: Wed., Feb. 1, at 7:00 pm

Program: The Florida Scrub-Jay, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow; an overview of how its habitat was formed, the life cycle of a scrub-jay group, and what the future holds for the species and its habitat.

Presenter: Melanie P. Higgins, Florida Master Naturalist, Quest Ecology.

Location: Pinellas County Extension.

February Field Trip: Sat., Feb. 4

Florida Scrub-Jay Festival

Mark your calendar now for the Florida Scrub-Jay Festival to be held on Sat., Feb. 4 at Oscar Scherer State Park in Osprey from 9 am to 4 pm. The festival will feature tram tours of the scrub-jay habitat, guided nature walks and more. The Florida scrub-jay is a threatened species. Learn about this species, its successes and its challenges.



To Carpool: Meet at 8:00 am (leave promptly at 8:15am) at Home Depot on 22nd Ave N, NE corner of parking lot.

To meet at the site: 1843 S. Tamiami Trail, Osprey, Florida 34229. Meet us at the Nature Center at 9:30. The Nature Center is open for visitors and includes an interpretive exhibit. The Nature Center is located adjacent to Lake Osprey and a large picnic area, and a short walk from the campground. (it is near the Lake Osprey parking lot).

"If you are interested in camping on your own, information can be found at this link: <http://www.floridastateparks.org/oscarscherer/activities.cfm#12>. There is an admission fee for entering the Park: \$5.00 per vehicle (2-8 people) or \$4.00 (single occupant)."

March Program: Wed., March 7, at 7 pm.

Program: Butterfly Gardening With Florida's Native Plants. Learn which butterfly species are most likely to visit your urban central Florida landscape, how to identify different species, which plants are most attractive to adult butterflies and to caterpillars, and what "tricks" butterflies use to protect themselves from predators. March 7th at 7 p.m.

Presenter: Katy Roberts

Location: Pinellas County Extension.

March Field Trip: Sat., Mar. 17, 9am-noon (times are tentative).

Work Day at Dunedin Hammock Park, 1900 San Mateo Drive, Dunedin

Be green on St. Patrick's Day! We will join the Friends of Hammock Park for a work day removing exotic invasive species. This ancient 90-acre mixed-hardwood forest is filled with more than 300 native species of trees, shrubs, ferns, wildflowers and small animals. In addition, over 100 species of birds inhabit the preserve throughout the year. (On a prior field trip we observed blooming jack-in-the-pulpit here.)

Of the 90 acres, 75 acres are a "low" hardwood and palm hammock, with a dark, rich soil that supports more varied, dense vegetation than the surrounding sandy uplands. One of the most conspicuous features of the hammock are large, 100-year-old hardwood trees, some upward to 3 feet in diameter. The tallest trees, reaching 80 to 90 feet, are Sweetbays. They are becoming rare as they succumb to age, drought and invasive vines.

Spring Plant Sale: Sat., April 14
Save the Date!

2011 Conservation Celebration Awards:

2011 Chapter Award of Excellence:

This award is for individuals within the Chapter or community that have promoted the FNPS mission (the conservation, preservation, restoration of native plants and native plant communities) by their work or efforts. This year, the award was given to Barbara Hoffman for her leadership of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve as they sought ways to keep the Preserve open to the public and effectively managed when the County was considering closing the education center and reducing staff due to cut backs. Barbara was tireless as she sought ways to counteract these initial County proposals. Under her leadership, the many volunteers of the Friends group have been able to:

1. Re-establish the Kid's summer day camp for environmental education at Brooker Creek Preserve (BCP);
2. Enable the north Pinellas County 4th- grade environmental education program to be held at BCP; making full use of the wonderful educational facilities it has to offer and teach the upcoming generations the value of nature to our way of life;
3. Secure funding and invite an environmental educational consulting group to provide a comprehensive assessment of the Environmental Education Center at BCP and produce a report of their recommendations on how to make it more effective. The ANCA Peer Consultant team, a non-profit group invited by the County and the Friends, was composed of four professional and experienced nature center administrators from Arkansas, Colorado, and Florida. They toured the Education Center and Preserve and conducted numerous interviews with staff, Friends, volunteers, and other stakeholders. One of their recommendations was to create a new self-supporting independent 501(3)(c) organization that would assume the primary responsibility to manage the Brooker Creek Environmental Education Center and Brooker Creek Preserve itself. Since that report was issued, the Friends and the County have held numerous discussions about how to effectively implement these recommendations.

Barbara's enthusiasm, leadership skills and management of the Friends organization have helped the Friends organization sponsor a number of fundraising projects that



have brought record numbers of visitors to the Preserve and helped make many of them aware of its value to the environment of this County. She has helped organize the reopening of the BCP gift center, expanded the hours the Center is open, and has increased the hours that the hiking trails are open to the public.

Presidents Award:

The President's Award is presented to an FNPS member who has helped the Chapter meet its goals for the year. The 2012 award was presented to Debbie Chayet for her work in advocating for our natural areas, both at the county and state levels. Debbie is the lead County employee for writing and applying for conservation grants. Her work has resulted in securing many important funds; most significant a multi-million dollar grant that will help offset the costs of obtaining and managing the Wilde parcel – much of which will eventually be added to Brooker Creek Preserve. Debbie has also led and supervised plants surveys of the endangered Florida goldenaster in the Preservation 2000 properties, served as our Chapter representative at the state FNPS meetings, and helped lead some of the Chapter's field trips during the past year.



Jack-in-the-Pulpits

By: Craig Huegel

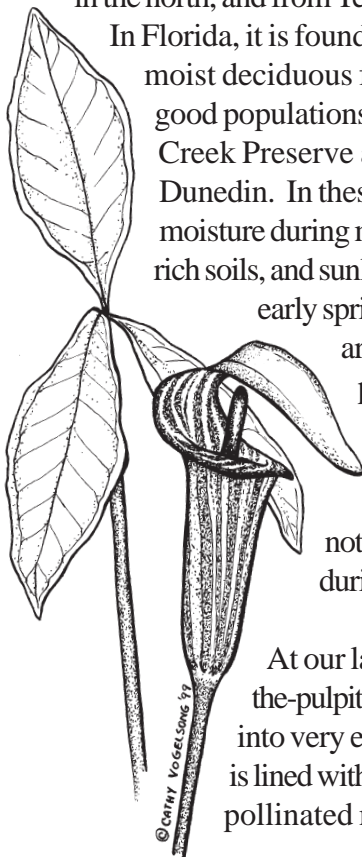
For those of us who originally hail from “up North” somewhere, it often comes as a bit of a surprise when we find a treasured wildflower that also occurs here in Florida. We have plenty of violets, for example, in our spring wildflower flora. We also have two species of *Arisaema* – the genus of jack-in-the-pulpits.

Arisaema species are in the aroid family; the same family that gives us so many ornamental flowers, such as the Anthuriums. Aroids have specialized flowers comprised of an often showy “spathe” – the colorful bract surrounding the flowers, and a fingerlike “spadix” that the tiny flowers are attached to. In the jack-in-the-pulpits, the familiar “pulpit” with the hood is the spathe, while the white “jack” in the center is the spadix. Aroids are common throughout the world and we have several species here in Florida besides the two *Arisaema* species. This article, however, only concerns itself with *Arisaema*; jack-in-the-pulpit (*A. triphyllum*) and its close cousin, the green dragon (*A. dracontium*)

The familiar jack-in-the-pulpit is found throughout the eastern half of North America, from Quebec to Manitoba in the north, and from Texas to Florida in the south.

In Florida, it is found pretty much statewide in moist deciduous forest settings. There are good populations, for example, in Brooker Creek Preserve and in Hammock Park in Dunedin. In these settings, they get ample moisture during much of the year, relatively rich soils, and sunlight during the winter until early spring. All of these conditions are required for this plant to prosper. You will not likely find it, for example, under live oaks as these evergreen canopy trees do not allow sufficient sunlight in during the winter.

At our latitude in Florida, jack-in-the-pulpits bloom in January – maybe into very early February. The spadix is lined with tiny whitish green flowers pollinated mostly by small bees and



Arisaema triphyllum
Jack-in-the-pulpit
Flower and ripe fruit
Photos by the author

flies. Each pollinated flower becomes a round green fruit that eventually ripens in late fall into a bright red berry. Though I have never eaten them, the red berries are supposedly edible, but quite fiery – a natural equivalent of a candy “red hot.” Small rodents, such as deer mice do consume them and spread the plant across the forest floor.

Jack-in-the-pulpit is a deciduous perennial. It loses its leaves by late summer; if the spadix flowers are pollinated, the stalk with the ripe fruit persists well past the disappearance of the leaves. Each leaf is large, with three lobes – hence the Latin name.

Its close cousin, the green dragon, is similar, but has unique leaves and flowers that make it distinct. It has a nearly identical geographical range as jack-in-the-pulpit, but its range in Florida goes only as far south as Pasco County in the west and Brevard County in the east. I have never seen green dragons in Pinellas County. Throughout its range, green dragon tends to occur in somewhat more upland settings than its cousin; deciduous woodlands with just a bit better drainage. I have never seen the two species growing together, but I have found them in the same park or preserve in different locations.

Green dragon also seems to bloom a week or two later. The spathes are smaller and less showy than jack-in-the-pulpit, and the tips are extended to an elongated tip – the “dragon” tongue. The two plant species differ also in terms of their foliage. Green dragons have leaves often with seven lobes, sometimes five. The leaves are also often taller than the flowers.

Both species have not been propagated in Florida by any of the nurseries associated with FANN, the Florida



Association of Native Nurseries and I have had very limited success over the years keeping plants alive in my landscape that were purchased from native nurseries to our north. So, for now, these are plants to be appreciated solely in the wild.

Friday, March 2 is DEADLINE day for submitting proposals and applications to the following important FNPS programs:

Chapter Grants: http://www.fnps.org/pages/programs/programpg_no_pic.php?keyword=ChapterGrants

Conservation Grants: <http://www.fnps.org/pages/programs/programpg.php?keyword=ConservationAwards>

Endowment Research Grants: http://www.fnps.org/pages/programs/programpg_no_pic.php?keyword=Endowment

Landscape Awards: http://www.fnps.org/pages/programs/programpg_no_pic.php?keyword=Landscape

Winners in all these programs will be announced at the FNPS Conference in May in Plant City. Landscape Award winners will see their winning projects featured in a conference program.

Please let your friends and colleagues know about these opportunities and encourage them to apply by the FRIDAY MARCH 2 deadline. Details including application forms and instructions are posted at the webpages listed above.

Thank you for your continued membership support. FNPS Administrative Services

2012 Contacts

Officers:

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Secretary: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel
Treasurer: Cindy Smith
Chapter Representative: Debbie Chayet
Past President: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel

Board of Directors Members-at-Large:

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Monica Pinnell, John Pinnell, and Shreeram
Krishnaswami

2011 Committee Chairs/ Coordinators:

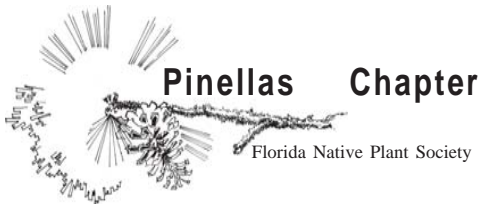
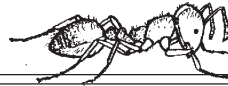
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Membership: Ellen Clayton
Newsletter Editor: vacant
Co-editor/Publisher/ Artist: Cathy Vogelsong

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Plants Sales: Tiffany Custer, Chairperson & Bruce Turley
Landscape Tour :
Mary Jackson, Chairperson
December Conservation Celebration:
Cindy Peacock & Katy Roberts

See Directory of phone numbers
and e-mail addresses on page 4



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