

# CONSERVATION GUIDELINES

Conservation is one of the major goals of the Florida Native Plant Society, but so far no explicit policy has been developed. As Conservation Chairperson, I would like to receive more input from the general membership about what the conservation goals and activities should be. To stimulate thought on this topic, I have prepared the following tentative guidelines as a proposed policy statement and action plan for the Society's role in Florida's conservation movement. The guidelines below are organized by specific topic. I welcome comments from all members so that these guidelines can be revised and formally submitted to the Board of Directors for approval.

## **General Goals:**

1. To encourage the preservation and restoration of sustainable examples of all of Florida's native ecosystem types.

2. To encourage, for each of Florida's native ecosystem types, the perpetuation of ecosystem structure, function, and integrity, where:

a. structure refers to characteristic species composition, diversity, and relative abundance patterns, encompassing complete food webs, genetic diversity within and among species, and all aspects of the physical habitat.

b. function refers to the suite of ecological and evolutionary processes associated with that structure, including nutrient cycling, hydrological regimes, fire, other natural disturbance processes, and evolutionary change.

c. integrity refers to the emergent qualities associated with natural structure and function, and includes wilderness character, naturalness, and beauty.

3. To foster the preservation and recovery of populations of plant species native to Florida, in their natural habitats, and in natural relative abundance patterns. Devote special attention to endemics, rare species, and other taxa particularly threatened by human activities.

4. To encourage the use of native plant species in landscaping, thus saving individual plants that would otherwise be destroyed by development, inhibiting the spread of exotic species, and promoting conservation of water, nutrients, and energy. Discourage removal of native plants from the wild, except during legitimate salvage programs.

## **Specific Areas of Concern**

**Managed Areas:** Encourage public and private land and water management agencies to manage areas in accordance with the above goals, to the extent that their legal mandates and financial

limitations permit. State and national parks, state preserves, and state reserves should be managed strictly for preservation and restoration of natural systems. State recreation areas and wildlife management areas, water management areas, national preserves, national wildlife refuges, and national forests have broader multiple-use mandates, but because private lands are rapidly deteriorating, ecological preservation and restoration should be the primary functions of all public lands.

We specifically must encourage public land stewards to devote more attention and effort to natural systems protection and management. An ecosystem approach to land and water management should mimic the natural environmental regime. Restoration of presettlement-type fire and hydrological patterns is of particular importance in many Florida ecosystems. In keeping with our emphasis on natural systems management, we must always encourage agencies to minimize road construction, economic resource development, and facilities development on public lands.

Although Florida has one of the most aggressive land acquisition programs in the country, it is not keeping up with the rate of habitat destruction. Therefore, encourage major increases in land acquisition on the part of federal, state, regional, and local agencies throughout Florida. Focus on the most ecologically critical areas, and on optimal buffering and interconnection of these areas.

**Corridors:** Support implementation of the proposed statewide wildlife corridor system. Because many plant species are dispersed by animals (from ants to bears) and because many large wide-ranging animals are important regulators of ecosystem function, corridors that maintain animal populations will also generally benefit plants. Encourage intensive research to determine optimal design of specific corridor segments and preserve networks. Encourage application of the corridor and buffer zone concepts at multiple scales (e.g., municipal, county, regional, and statewide).

**Exotics:** Encourage removal of exotic plant species from public lands, as an essential element of native ecosystem restoration. Also encourage removal of exotic animal species, especially in those cases where the animals (e.g., feral hogs) are damaging native vegetation.

**Endangered Species:** Encourage vastly increased efforts to identify, list, protect, manage, and recover populations of endangered and threatened plant species in Florida, on the part of federal (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) and state (Department of Agriculture) agencies. Support major land acquisitions to protect listed species, and encourage all land-managing agencies to address more adequately the needs of these species in land

management plans. Support revision of federal and state endangered species laws to better protect all listed species on private lands.

Communicate information on rare plant populations and communities directly to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory.

**Removal of Native Plants from the Wild:** Encourage nursery operations to develop their stocks from captive propagation, with only seeds and limited cuttings taken from the wild. Live, whole plants should not be removed from natural areas except as part of a legitimate scientific collecting effort, and then only under stringent guidelines such as those produced by the "Plant Conservation Roundtable" (Campbell, McMahan, and Morse, editors).

Conduct salvage projects ("rescue from the bulldozers") only in sites that are scheduled for imminent destruction, and then only after all attempts at conservation of those sites have failed. Do not allow economic motivations for sale of salvaged plants, or esthetic motivations for landscaping with natives, to undermine the primary objective of preservation of plants *in situ* (i.e., in natural ecosystems, where they fundamentally belong).

**Environmental Pollution:** Support stricter air and water quality standards in order to protect native ecosystems from eutrophication, acidification, toxicity, and other effects of pollution. Encourage agencies to consider the effects of pollutants on natural systems and nonhuman species, rather than only the effects on human health.

**Cooperation with Other Organizations:** Cooperate with other organizations on issues of shared concern, such as public lands, endangered species, and growth management. Encourage cooperation among local FNPS chapters on conservation issues.

### Appropriate Conservation Strategies for FNPS

Each conservation-oriented organization contributes in its own unique way to the pluralistic effort of protecting Nature. The Florida Native Plant Society must develop and refine strategies that complement the efforts of other groups. The proper role of our society in the Florida conservation movement should be a focus on native plant species and communities and the perpetuation of these elements in the larger landscape.

Appropriate general strategies to implement our goals include:

1. **Education** of Florida citizens, including public officials, legislators, and other policy-makers, to the values of native plants and natural ecosystems.

2. **Advocacy** of a land ethic, in the sense of Aldo Leopold, to be applied to all land and resource management decisions.

3. **Direct action** to demonstrate

appropriate protection, stewardship, and restoration strategies, and to protect natural elements at every opportunity.

Specific methods to implement these strategies include:

1. **Environmental review** of land management plans, environmental impact statements, policy statements, endangered species recovery plans, etc., with detailed comments submitted to appropriate authorities.

2. **Letters of support or criticism** sent to agency administrators, legislators, and political leaders on general or specific natural resource issues (including legislation, policies, and funding priorities).

3. **Articles and letters** to newspapers, magazines, and newsletters on conservation issues, advocating our conservation goals.

4. **Participation in meetings** and public forums to clarify and advocate our position on conservation issues.

5. **Exemplary action** on the part of individual members to demonstrate the land ethic in stewardship, landscaping, business, politics, and attitudes on environmental issues.

### Responsibility

Responsibility for implementing the above strategies belongs to the Conservation Committee and other interested FNPS members. Specifically, the Conservation Chairperson is responsible for addressing issues of statewide to global concern, with help from other committee members as appropriate. Issues of local (e.g., county) or regional (within Florida) concern might be better addressed by local FNPS chapters. Level of concern might not be always straightforward, but can be estimated by the level of significance or endangerment of the natural elements in question. For example, a management plan for a park containing federally endangered plant species or high-quality endemic communities of global significance should be reviewed and commented on by the Conservation Chairperson. On the other hand, issues such as local tree ordinances, landscaping codes, and county land-use plans should be addressed by local chapters.

Every FNPS member is responsible for alerting the Conservation Chairperson to issues of major conservation significance, and for demonstrating a personal commitment to the quality of Florida's environment at all times.

● Reed Noss, Conservation Chmn.

