

BUREAUCRACIES AND DISAPPEARING NATIVE HABITAT

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All native habitats are disappearing in South Florida. We are pleading now for the last of South Florida's scrub, but the last of South Florida's pine flatwoods may not be far behind. Anything native that holds still is endangered, including people. We have had discussions about concentrating on "quality" habitat for preservation. For those concerned with keeping from extinction diverse samples of unique historic flora, this is the correct approach. For those lobbying at the state level with limited funds and energies, this is the best approach. For those buying land, this is best. But, for those concerned that at least some parts of South Florida might have some character other than asphalt and concrete, preservation of special places is not enough. For those who believe in the many and varied benefits of habitat preservation, rareness and uniqueness are not necessarily an issue.

I'm a little hesitant to review again these many and varied benefits. We stand in danger of talking to ourselves. I will go down the list again because I think it is important to remember that there is logic as well as truth on our side.

Quite frankly, I have always loved the woods because they are wild. I'm with Gerard Manley Hopkins: "What would the world be once bereft, of wet and wildness, let them be left!" Yet, after ten years in the bureaucracy, I am convinced that there is clear public purpose in habitat preservation whenever and wherever possible. Why?

- 1) Beauty and diversity.
- 2) Butterflies and scrubjays.
- 3) Cutting down on pesticides and herbicides.
- 4) Preventing nutrient problems from fertilizer.
- 5) Shade and climate.
- 6) Screening and buffering of conflicting areas.
- 7) Hurricane resistance.
- 8) *Money*: no clearing, no buying trees, no planting, no maintenance.
- 9) *Water*: This is the big inescapable reason that may make bureaucracies and taxpayers sit up and take notice.

We've seen some very interesting examples in our area recently. We're watching a condo developer, who bought a piece of scorched earth from the old-fashioned bulldozer days, unable to get approval because no one will sell him the massive amounts of water he needs to landscape a desert. There is no water on site because of salt intrusion. The franchised utility has a limited allocation and will sell only enough for potable water.

We're looking at a major Development of

Regional Impact (DRI) where the old joke is coming true: "The good news is we'll be drinking sewage. The bad news is there won't be enough." A closer look shows that it is the golf course and re-landscaped areas that have the intemperate thirst. Potable water needs for this particular development are .95 million gallons/day (MGD). Irrigation needs are figured at 1.7 MGD. Effluent will cover only 1/2 the irrigation need.

We're looking at an area in North County where we can save water users \$2.4 million dollars if we require all future development to use water-saving plumbing and water-saving landscaping.

I think it is important to look at some numbers. If you look at a harvestable water crop of 12 inches you're looking at 893 gal/acre/day: enough for nine people or three units. That means an awful lot of land has to remain empty somewhere if higher density developments are going to have enough water.

Even more appalling is a look at the demands of grass whether in a golf course or a manicured common area. Such areas need two inches a week for irrigation or a total of 104 inches per year. One acre of well-watered grass requires 8.7 acres of un-watered recharge area. Looked at another way, one acre of grass wants as much water as 77 people.

For all these reasons, our bureaucracy has taken some legal steps toward habitat preservation.

Our first enemy is ourselves. We have told ourselves in our Comprehensive Plan that county projects shall preserve native trees and natural plant communities for the purpose of conserving water, energy, and natural resources. We're still having trouble getting our attention. We bulldozed flat a ten-acre site for our water plant and then came back with a \$25,000 landscape plan. But we're getting better: putting a landscape architect on staff has helped.

Our second direction was toward special places and creatures. We require preservation of rare, threatened, and endangered species and the habitat to support them. Further protection has been given to unique habitat and natural ecosystems. With this provision we have preserved acres of scrub, a tropical hammock, a hand fern and surrounding woods, and other good places.

The Plan says that golf courses should be encouraged to retain and preserve native vegetation over 30% of the total upland area of the course due to their high water needs and nutrient loads.

There are broader objectives which deal with generally preserving natural resources including native vegetation. These generalities have been used to require better site planning on individual projects. One developer howled when he discovered what the condition meant that he had accepted on approval. It said there must be no removal of the understorey in all areas where actual site work was not necessary. He said he didn't

know that meant he couldn't clean all those bushes out. "Why," said he, "they make us clean that stuff out in Palm Beach County." Incidentally, he is happy now and bragging in his advertisements about an ecologically sensitive development.

Case by case is never the best way for bureaucracies to function. We're looking at more definitive rules in our updated Land Development Code. We haven't adopted it yet, but there are some interesting ideas running loose. Staff is recommending that we stipulate that half of the required open space be retained in native vegetation.

For those of you whose bureaucracies still think that palmettos breed snakes, it may seem dangerously radical to require that 25% of all residential development be left in native vegetation. It's important to remember that ordinances that simply say "should consider" tend to get ignored where they are most needed. When the ordinance says "shall do" the developer and his planners know from the start what the rules are.

In conclusion, I would say that the bad news is that "The Preservation of Tropical Florida" has not gained appreciable enthusiasm with Floridians since Gifford's day. Only in the last ten years has there been any outspoken feeling that it might *not* be better to bulldoze it all and plant something from Madagascar. The good news is that, if you do speak out and educate and convince, there are cost effective, enforceable, legal ways for bureaucracies to preserve native habitat instead of hastening it on its way to extinction.

ENDANGERED SPECIES REGULATION The Statute Entitled "Preservation of Native Flora of Florida"

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A law protecting native plants was passed prior to 1962. This law named certain species of plants as protected and disallowed their sale. No specific agency was named to administer the statute with the responsibility for enforcement resting on local law enforcement officers.

In 1978, the present statute was passed. This statute has several provisions which are a positive step:

Designation of endangered species. The earlier law had a long list consisting of mostly large categories like orchids, bromeliads, palms, etc. The majority of the public is law abiding but expects the laws to