

In What Way a Mentor?

What I Should Have Said ...

Letter from Grace B. Iverson, 2001 Mentor Award Winner

With deep appreciation, I received the FNPS Mentor award at the 2001 Conference, recognizing my work in teaching, research, and preservation of native Florida ecosystems. In Broward and Palm Beach Counties, I studied the plants and physiography, writing, speaking, and educating for preservation of the native ecosystems. Broward County's Fern Forest and Florida's MacArthur Beach State Park are last surviving sites of their kind on the Atlantic rim of the Everglades. In this region, Pleistocene dunes and dune-back lagoons held back vast wetlands, and through these old dunes, Everglades rivers overflowed into the ocean, once a sweeping wild display of wilderness! Who was protecting this subtropical eastern rim of the Everglades, where expanding municipalities have joined into a city-coast? Should we, could we, leave at least islands of wilderness for ourselves and future generations, a spectrum of living history on this unique peninsula of North America? Local leadership and effort needed to arise; and it has.

We wanted to establish a system of wilderness islands for Palm Beach County. Many, including FNPS, agreed, and we formed the Coalition for Wilderness Islands (CWI). Under pressure of rapid development and vanishing possibilities, CWI proposed to the county: 1) a scientific search to locate by aerial photography, examine on the ground, and evaluate surviving sites, so that we could acquire the best examples of each ecosystem type; 2) developing means to buy sites by bond issue, and other strategies, and; 3) planning to make Wilderness Island Preserves publicly accessible.

With skill and dedication, our members educated each other, government, and other citizens, explaining the concept. Palm Beach County added staff for the preserves and established DERM (Department of Environmental Resources Management), bringing together its permitting, enforcement, and other environmental staff. CWI members turned out to promote both the county and Boca Raton bond issues, and serve on county and city committees related to preserve purchases and planning. As consultants to the county, Dan Austin and I did the survey to locate all types of native

ecosystems, in more than 500 square miles, and examined each on the ground. The *Inventory of Native Ecosystems in Palm Beach County*, Iverson and Austin, 1988, is a detailed database of our work. CWI composed stated goals that appear in every plan, read as much of the management plans as possible, continued voicing questions, concerns, and alternative ideas. Many people gave time toward these first steps. To remain successful, citizens will have to maintain a caring vigilance!

Thanks to those who have believed and participated in preserving wilderness. Whether you actually enter into wild Florida, study its many facets, show others your interest, relax as you drive by, or simply want to be sure native Florida survives—all are deeply important values for people. Pre-history environments have produced this wilderness over eons of time. Since it is impossible to make wilderness

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ecosystems, the values we are protecting are all that anyone can ever have here. No monument we could build in their place is as valuable as these historic, living, functioning ecosystems.

Recognizing and preserving historic Florida serves both the life of native ecosystems and the

prosperity of people. I look to the past, observe, research, and educate in the present, and think how best to preserve.

It is with gratitude that I receive what no other award could bring together, recognition from the FNPS as a mentor. With thanks,

Grace Iverson
Palm Beach Chapter FNPS