

Get Involved!

by Frank Mann

Frank Mann, former state senator from the Fort Myers area, presented a speech at the FNPS Conference in May, 1989, encouraging listeners to become involved with the legislative process. He enumerated ways to be effective in saving native plant communities.

1. Know the staff that works for officials. Talking with them is less intimidating, they're more accessible, they're more likely to talk to your group. And they're probably *more* influential, for they are doing the actual writing of the laws, they're advising officials and influencing their vote.

2. Serve on advisory boards. There's a lot of turn-over on citizen advisory boards, so volunteer! This puts you in the arena of influence. You begin to know people. Any council will do: beautification, housing, whatever.

3. Invite one elected official, or his/her spouse, to serve on *your* board. Even if he never attends a meeting. Keep him/her advised of what goes on, thank him/her for serving. He can't vote against you!

4. Don't wait for the big issue, or the final vote. Let them get to know you. Write thank yous, not nasty letters, in advance of the "big meeting". Let them know your interest group. But be nice to people — even politicians. Say please. Be quick, be simple, be short. Now come the "hard-core" suggestions.

5. Get in touch with politicians. Meet

them in their office, one on one. Be normally friendly, not obsequious. Let them know in advance if you want to see them. You can even see your senator in Washington, D.C. Then, when you send them a letter, they'll be able to put a face to your name.

6. Don't talk to the *wrong* official. Don't go to Tallahassee about local issues. Talk to local politicians about local issues. Find the local chairman of the environmental committee. Ask local committeemen to approach the legislator.

7. Campaign contributions: I hate 'em. Money is a major influencing factor, particularly in Florida because we're so big. To get elected, a politician needs to get his/her name and face before the public on radio and TV. It's expensive. Ten dollars won't influence anybody. But you can invite a politician and 25 people to your home to donate \$10 each. \$3000 is a minimum corporate donation.

8. But you can be an influence with no money at all by being involved. Offer yourself for public office, particularly appointed advisory boards. Do it yourself.