

## HOW TO GET DEVELOPERS TO WEAR "WHITE HATS"

by K. Terrance Mock

As a developer, I believe I can offer a unique perspective to FNPS members, whom I think primarily see themselves as "white hats" and pro-growth advocates as "black hats." The trouble with this attitude is that, as in life in general, very few things are either all "black" or all "white". As someone who has experienced the development regulation process first hand, I can testify to the fact that fault for our environmental crisis rests not only with the builders who supply the product, but with the ignorant public who demands it, and with the current county and state subdivision, building, and environmental regulations which require it.

The FNPS should not underestimate the ability of the development sector to outwit any well-intentioned but misguided efforts to restrict their ability to meet a free market demand in order to earn a livelihood. I currently know of three distinct options being considered by development-minded landowners which would undermine even the strongest vegetation protection ordinances that I have seen.

Owners who feel that they are being unduly restricted from putting their property to the highest and most profitable use because of on-site vegetation could:

1. bulldoze any agriculturally zoned land (most of the State) and put it to bona-fide agricultural use (how long?) before seeking development permits on land (now devoid of vegetation).

- 2) allow owners of off-road vehicles (trucks, swamp buggies, or motorcycles) to use endangered wetland areas until wetland vegetation (vegetation defines "wetland") is eradicated.

- 3) seed endangered wetlands with melaleuca or other pests until pristine wetland conditions are lost and clearing is justified.

This is just a sample of the problems that we will face if we insist on forcing the pro-growth people to the wall. For every well-intentioned restriction that we impose, their high paid attorneys will come up with several loopholes. The big loser? The environment. *This is why I strongly believe that the Society should adopt as its highest priority the*

*joining of pro-native environmental and pro-growth forces. The only way that this can be accomplished is through economics.*

Builders, for the most part, are not anti-environment, but they are pro-profit. If we can succeed in demonstrating to them that preserving and restoring native vegetation is important in protecting and enhancing their monetary return then they will become the most important allies we could have.

This argument cannot be won on the basis of aesthetics, abstract philosophical statements, or any cost figures yet developed. We need cold, hard facts. Facts that prove that in any given geographical area, soil condition, or plant community, the development cost to the builder and the maintenance cost to the owner/buyer is less for a native-landscaped project than for a comparable exotic-landscaped project.

I'm convinced that the results for such a study would be favorable to our environmental cause. The 1981 Spring drought is helping us make our point. But we need the dollars-and-cents facts.