THE FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY: What it is, Why Florida needs it, What it hopes to accomplish, Who's going to help do it.

On Saturday morning, February 7, 1981, ten members of the Florida Native Plant Society met in Winter Park to discuss the future of the yearling organization. Ideas flowed thick and fast as each one expressed his or her interests and concerns about the loss of the old — the "real" — Florida. Dick Workman, Senior Environmental Scientist for Missimer and Assoc., perhaps said it best: "We are digging up the plants that are native to Florida and throwing them away, and replanting with crotons and Brazilian peppers, and exotics from China and Australia. We need to create an awareness of what's happening, and what to do about it."

What the Florida Native Plant Society hopes to do about it, then, is:
- to educate — educate children in public schools, educate officials in municipal and county governments, educate developers, educate the public at large;
- to develop guidelines for community ordinances to encourage the use of and protect native plants;
- to develop resources of information about where and how to get native plants, about relocating native plants, about propagating native plants;
- to develop guidelines for the management of public lands, wildlife areas, and private woods;
- to lobby for legislation and for funds to support the legislation as needed;
- to create a slide show of native plants for educational use;
- to work with developers in saving the existing landscape;
- to promote chapters throughout the state for local membership, education, and participation.

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FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP

The FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY has been organized for less than a year, but the first statewide Conference and Workshop is already scheduled. It will be held, appropriately, during Earth Week, on April 24th and 25th, in Crummer Hall, Rollins College, Winter Park. The program will be co-sponsored by the Florida Conservation Foundation, the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, and the Environmental Studies Program at Rollins College.

Dr. F. Wayne King, director of the Florida State Museum in Gainesville, will be the keynote speaker, presenting "The Values of Wild Plants to Native Areas."

Other participants in the Conference will include:
- Dr. Gail Baker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, on "Endangered Species";
- Richard Workman, Senior Environmental Scientist with Missimer and Associates in Cape Coral, on the role of the Florida Native Plant Society;
- Norma Jeanne Byrd, manager of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation Native Plant Nursery, on "Developing a Native Plant Nursery" in an extended session that will include getting your hands dirty while learning propagation techniques.

Carolyn Ruesch, of the Trust for Public Land, a national organization to acquire land for conservation, on the role of private organizations in preserving wild areas.

And more — on the economics of using native plants; on the role of Florida's institutions in use and protection of native plants; on landscape design with native plants; on control of exotic pests — and more.

The Conference will run from noon to 4:30 P.M. on Friday, April 24; and from 9 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. on Saturday, April 25. Two field trips are planned for Sunday morning.

The registration fee for the weekend is $15 for members, $20 for nonmembers. The fee includes Saturday lunch. See page 7 for membership and registration form.

People are needed to help. Can you give some time to make this project succeed? Needed are volunteers for typing, publicity, registration, coffee-making, lunch, and "runners" who can make sure that speakers know where to go and can get into their rooms and have chalk or projectors or whatever. Please contact Bill Partington, Environmental Information Center, 935 Orange Ave., Winter Park, FL 32789.
AN EXOTIC PLANT PEST

by Taylor R. Alexander

The ecosystems of Florida have been drastically changed since 1900. Drainage, fires, lumbering, land clearing, and water management have modified every habitat. These stressed habitats have proved vulnerable to invasion by numerous exotic plants and animals. Two independent workers, Dr. Austin (1) of Florida Atlantic University and Dr. Morton (2) of University of Miami have published lists of exotic plant species and both lists number in the order of 200 species. Some of these have proven to be overwhelming competitors for the native flora. They dominate the habitat by killing off the natives and suppressing their reproduction. Three well known examples from the southern part of the state are Australian Pine, Cajeput, and Brazilian Pepper. The last had its population explosion after the mid-1950s and now is a problem over much of the peninsula.

Downy rosemyrtle (Rhodomyrtus tomentosa) is becoming another one of these pests.

Downy rosemyrtle is an attractive ornamental at all stages, vegetatively and in flower and fruit. It is evergreen with opposite leaves that are up to four inches long and with grayish hairs on the underside. In flower, it is covered with pink flowers much like apple blossoms. The fruit, up to one inch long, is guava-like (same family as guava), purple, and full of small disc-like seeds.

Pest exotics seem to have five things in common: desired by man for ornamental or food purposes; numerous seeds that are wind or animal spread; wide tolerance for soil conditions; fire and frost resistant; few pests and diseases; and a tremendous ability to out-grow natives. Downy rosemyrtle fits the pattern, although it seems to be restricted by limestone and brickish soils. Nevertheless, much of peninsula Florida is available for successful invasion. Near Naples there are areas of pinelands, both sand pine and flatwood types, that are totally over-run — even to smothering out saw palmetto. Cypress stands nearby are having their native shrub and herb understory shaded out by ten foot high thickets of myrtle.

Downy rosemyrtle was first introduced from China in 1925 as an ornamental shrub at Chapman Field, Miami. It did not thrive on the local limestone soil. However, it has prospered from later introduction on the more acid sands and organic soils elsewhere in the peninsula. The Miami Daily News of August 19, 1951, carried an article by A.H. Andrews of Estero headed "Downy Myrtle Fruit Tree Isn’t Hard to Grow Here." He stated that "While introduced into Florida some years ago, it is not generally grown in the State, and according to Reasoner (a pioneer nurseriesman), it grows as far north as Putnam County,... It succeeds remarkably at Bradenton where it has almost become naturalized... In Bonita Springs it has gone native by the hundreds in an open field on the Codwise grove property." Like Brazilian Pepper, downy rosemyrtle seems to be following a common pattern: escape from cultivation, local build-up of population, and then a rapid spread into the wild. It is worthy of note that downy rosemyrtle had become a noxious pest in Hawaii by 1954.

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A Steering Committee of the following people agreed to help get the Florida Native Plant Society under way:

Education Committee - Barbara and Henry Whittier. Hank is Professor of Biological Sciences, University of Central Florida. Barbara is a teacher at Lyman H.S. in Longwood, in Biology and Environmental Science.


Library Committee - Clay Thompson, student in botany at University of Central Florida.

Legislative Committee - Dick Workman, Environmental Scientist with Missimer and Assoc., Cape Coral, and Bill Partington, Director of the Environmental Information Center in Winter Park.

Community ordinances Committee - Carol Lotspeich, Environmental Consultant in Winter Park.

Anyone wishing to comment on any of the above items, or add some further suggestions, or serve on any committee, is invited to contact one of the Steering Committee members, or the editor of The Palmetto (see masthead above).

A membership form is on p. 7.