

The Quarterly Journal of the Florida Native Plant Society

Palmetto



Florida Magnificent Wilderness: State Lands, Parks and Natural Areas

Review by Mike Wisenbaker

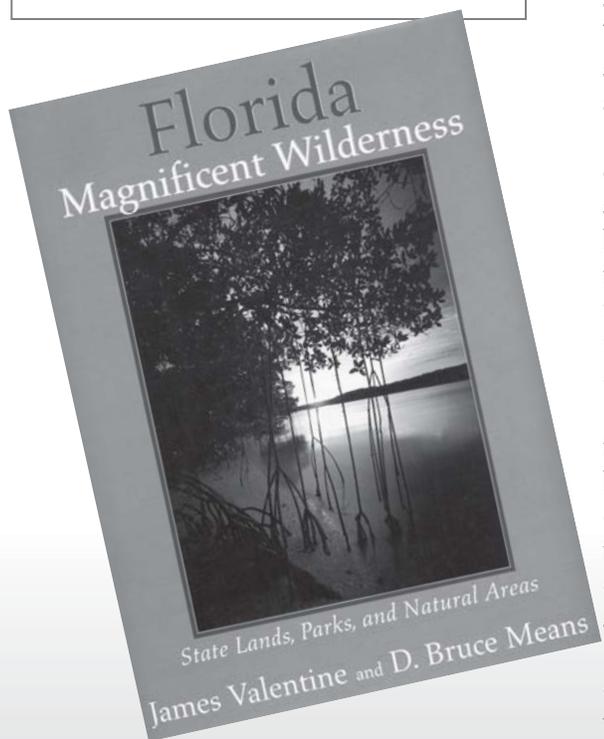
**Florida Magnificent Wilderness:
State Lands, Parks and Natural Areas**

By James Valentine and D. Bruce Means

2006. Pineapple Press, Sarasota, FL.

147 pages, hardcover. \$29.95

ISBN: 1561643610



In fall 2006, Pineapple Press released an eye-riveting coffee table book. It is packed with James Valentine's captivating pictures and the plain words of Dr. Bruce Means. While Valentine is one of Florida's best nature photographers, Means wears the mantle of one of the state's most avid ecological advocates.

This book impels us to explore, respect and protect the vanishing vestiges of Florida's incomparable natural places. For armchair enthusiasts or folks unable to get to these sites, *Florida Magnificent Wilderness* brings them to our fingertips.

The book reveals that "biologically Florida is Eden." The Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), for example, defines 66 distinct major habitats for the state. These include upland, wetland and aquatic ecosystems. Unfortunately, this tantalizing tome reveals that many of our native ecosystems have been forever altered by invasive and exotic species. Still, the state sustains 275 species of trees – more than any state except Hawaii. It also boasts 2,780 species of vascular plants – more than any place in the U.S. east of the Mississippi River. One hundred and forty species of "herptiles" such as turtles, lizards, snakes, frogs and salamanders also find safe haven here. Florida also harbors 210 species of freshwater fishes, 400 species of marine fishes and 348 kinds of birds.

With its array of soil types, benign climate, abundant rainfall, unique geological history and marked variations in latitude, no wonder Florida claims such diversity. The state bears many rivers, streams, lakes and ponds (more than 7,800 greater than one acre in size). It also holds a massive underground aquifer. From this aquifer, 730 known springs issue forth – including almost 40 percent of our nation's first magnitude springs (those pumping 64.7 million gallons or more of water per day). This state also bears thousands of miles of coastal beaches and estuarine shores where land and sea embrace. All of these wonders are illustrated and discussed in the book.

Our natural lands also cradle wet savannas filled with cunning carnivorous plants such as pitchers, bladderworts, butterworts and sundews. Hardwood forest, pinelands, tropical hardwood forest, rock-land hammocks and scrub dot this state. Some of our shrinking habitats include longleaf pinelands called sandhills. While this ecosystem claims the greatest number of breeding birds and flowering plants in the state, 90 percent of its original range has been gobbled up by development over the past 60 years.

Fortunately, our state's efforts to buy land have been instrumental in maintaining this marvelous biodiversity. "Altogether, publicly owned lands in Florida in 2005 amounted to little more than five million acres or about 14% of all the lands and waters of the state. In some ways that is an impressive record, but it is sad to learn that natural Florida will one day be dispersed among islands of publicly owned lands in a sea of suburban and urban humanity."

Once you get your hands on this gem, you'll want to share it with others. I highly recommend *Florida Magnificent Wilderness* to anyone that wants to know more about Florida's remarkable natural habitats. ❁



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The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society

is to conserve, preserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Official definition of native plant:

For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

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Editorial Content

We welcome articles on native plant species and related conservation topics, as well as high-quality botanical illustrations and photographs. Contact the editor for guidelines, deadlines and other information.

Editor: Marjorie Shropshire, Visual Key Creative, Inc. palmetto@fnps.org • (772) 285-4286 • 1876 NW Fork Road, Stuart, FL 34994