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# Palmetto



Everglades Tree Islands • *Schizaea pennula* • Pricing the Priceless

# 2010 FNPS Conference Highlights

By Bruce Vanderveen

Imagine an early morning hike through the mists of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, a hike led by a renowned Florida State University botany professor. Imagine two days of camaraderie with fellow native plant enthusiasts. Imagine seminars on ecology, community and the latest native plant research.

Then, imagine social events every evening – events with outdoor dining and dancing. Relaxing soirees in exotic locations such as the 22nd floor of the Florida capitol building, the Tall Timbers Research Station, and the San Luis Mission in Tallahassee.

But no, it wasn't a dream. It all really happened in the middle of May at the 2010 Florida Native Plant Society Conference in Tallahassee.

## From Field Trips to the Florida State Capitol

We accompanied trip leader extraordinaire Dr. Loran Anderson, professor emeritus from Florida State University, through the pine lands, sand hills and pond habitats of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Many native plant species were seen, including sundews (*Drosera* sp.), St. John's wort (*Hypericum* sp.), and candyroot (*Polygala nana*). Inkberry, or gallberry (*Ilex glabra*) was in glorious bloom.

Our next stop in Sopchoppy gave us a look at false dragonhead (*Physostegia purpurea*) blossoming profusely along the riverbanks, bearded grasspink (*Calopogon barbatus*), yellow colicroot (*Aletris lutea*), and the Ogeechee tupelo (*Nyssa ogeche*). Seeing the tupelo was a real treat.

Thursday evening we attended the traditional "Meet and Greet" social, held on the top floor of the capitol building. Impressive panoramic views of Tallahassee stretched out in all directions. Drinks and hors d'oeuvres were followed by a lively "plant jeopardy" contest. As Team A, we were unfortunately edged out



Above: Dr. Loran Anderson

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The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society is to preserve, conserve, 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.

**Organization:** Members are organized into regional chapters throughout Florida. Each chapter elects a Chapter Representative who serves as a voting member of the Board of Directors and is responsible for advocating the chapter's needs and objectives. See [www.fnps.org](http://www.fnps.org).

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by the hard-to-beat Team B, headed by Dr. Walter Taylor, who graciously came over after the event to express his condolences.

Friday morning we walked a half mile or so to the cavernous Leon County Civic Center, where conference programs – native plant sales, breakout sessions and workshops – were located. We found it hard to choose from among the many interesting talks featuring ecology, community, and research.

A stand out was Dr. Bruce Means' presentation titled *The Wild, Wild World of the Florida Panhandle* which detailed the area's amazing diversity of native plants. We learned that Ice Age remnant plant populations survive, with species such as columbine and trillium, and that other unique species are found only in the area, including *Taxus floridana* (Florida yew) and the endangered *Torreya taxifolia* (Florida torreya).

Twenty miles north of Tallahassee lies the Tall Timbers Research station, whose name derives from the giant *Pinus echinata* (shortleaf pine) growing on the grounds. Shortleaf pine does not occur naturally in peninsular Florida but grows from the Tallahassee area west to the Ozarks in Arkansas, and north to southern New York.

After a hot day, the evening social at Tall Timbers was cool and pleasant. Outside tables were set up for a delicious meal of fish, barbecue chicken and beans. A live band, *The Weeds*, provided entertainment that let many people dance the night away. Nearby, hanging gourds housed a thriving colony of Purple Martins.

The FNPS Conference is an annual event, and the wonderful experiences to be had are just one more reason to join the Florida Native Plant Society. We're looking forward to next year's conference in Maitland.



*Physostegia purpurea* (false dragonhead)



### **The Palmetto**

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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.

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