

South Florida Scrub Ecosystem Working Group  
2016 Spring Meeting  
May 31, 2016  
Juno Dunes Natural Area

Attendees: Twenty-five people representing nine different agencies including FFWCC, FFS, FDEP, and Broward, Palm Beach St. Lucie, Martin, and Indian River county governments and conservation ecologists.

Meeting coordinated by Steering Committee member Barbara Bobsein, Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Mgmt, field trip led by Melissa Tolbert

- 569 acre tract includes 12 native vegetative communities: beach dune, coastal strand, maritime hammock, hydric hammock, scrub, scrubby flatwoods, xeric hammock, mesic flatwoods, wet flatwoods, basin marsh, depression marsh, and mangrove swamp.
- Extends from the beach to the Intracoastal Waterway
- Bounded by roads, residential development and Intracoastal Waterway, makes fire mgmt. challenging.
- Prior history w/o burns resulted in high fuel loads, so mechanical fuel load reduction was needed prior to re-introducing fire.
- Property separated into several mgmt. units – fire return intervals vary based on habitat type, fuel loads, and ability to meet burn prescription.
- More than 20 state-listed and federally-listed threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna, highlighted by over 500 Four-petal paw-paw (*Asimina tetramera*), an endemic woody shrub that is restricted to Paola sand communities in Palm Beach and Martin Counties.
- Other protected species include gopher tortoises, Curtis' Milkweed (*Asclepias curtissii*), nodding pinweed (*Lechea cernua*), spreading pinweed (*Lechea divaricata*), large-flowered rosemary (*Conradina grandiflora*) and various *Tillandsia* air plants.
- Invasive non-natives have required on-going attention, but are now in maintenance mode.
- Have had problems with some native species, including wild grape and cabbage palms, which can function as fire ladders carrying fire from the scrub and flatwoods into oak hammocks
- No scrub jays remain on the property.
- Wetland restoration has been completed on a Dredged Material Management Area previously used by the Florida Inland Navigation District. Fill has been removed to create depths for seagrass recruitment, mangroves initially planted and are now recruiting naturally.
- Floating dock installed in an interior basin; boardwalk allows access to educational kiosk, observation tower and hiking trails.
  
- FWC regional gopher tortoise biologist Rachel King demonstrated use of a burrow scope, which helps determine the extent to which tortoise burrows are active – nobody home today

After-lunch presentations held at the Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center

Melissa Tolbert on 4-petal paw-paws:

Total worldwide population is approx. 1800 individuals, so ERM's 500 are a significant part of the population

Some live over 100 yrs, so natural recruitment/seed survival is very low.

Biggest threat to their survival is competition when lack of fire allows other shrubs and trees to shade them out and prevent pollinators from finding them.

Some that were mowed flowered within 4 years after removal of competing adjoining vegetation

Associated fauna include tortoises, zebra swallowtails and long-horned beetle (*Aethecerinus horni*).

Rachel King FWC on gopher tortoises

FWC looking for properties in SE FL as recipient sites for tortoises.

Sites needn't be permitted as permanently-protected recipient areas if they are only to accept waif tortoises (A waif gopher tortoise is a gopher tortoise that has been removed from the wild but is not associated with a FWC-permitted relocation effort). A scientific collecting permit is required and up to 2 tortoises/acre may be kept. Property perimeter needs to be temporarily fenced. More information can be found at: [http://myfwc.com/media/2358811/GT\\_FactSheet\\_Waif.pdf](http://myfwc.com/media/2358811/GT_FactSheet_Waif.pdf)

Update on All Aboard Florida – Surveys for tortoises completed along the existing rail line have revealed the presence of many potentially occupied burrows, and preliminary cost estimates were higher than expected for tortoise-related activities. No wildlife underpasses are proposed that we know of, due to potential safety/security concerns.

Natasha Warraich (FDEP – Park Service) on bats at JDSP

Recently completed a survey for bats in Jonathan Dickinson State Park, assisted by interns from PB State College.

7 species of bats known to inhabit S. Florida. Calls can be linked to the different species when analyzed acoustically. One species Florida Bonneted bat (*Eumops floridanus*) is designated as endangered by both the state and federal government.

Typically use natural cavities (e.g., snags, under palm fronds) for roosts, but may also use man-made structures (e.g., under roof tiles).

Study in JDSP was conducted from sunset to sunrise for one week periods during January thru April.

3 species confirmed: Brazilian free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), Seminole Bat (*Lasiurus seminolus*) and Northern Yellow Bat (*Lasiurus intermedius*). Florida Bonneted bat and Evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis*) possibly present, but electronic analysis of audio files inconclusive.

Brainstorm potential locations and topics for fall meeting:

St Sebastian Buffer Preserve – Northern Indian River County

Unique feature: unusual convergence of pineland habitat for red-cockaded woodpeckers and scrub habitat for Florida scrub-jays. Jay monitoring within the preserve has documented several double-nesting of FSJs in individual years, particularly when first nesting was successful, so that young-of-the-year assist parents during subsequent nestings.

St. Lucie County's Bluefield Ranch Preserve, southwestern St. Lucie County

Notable features: Inland Scrub (approx. 20 miles west of the US 1 corridor), a mosaic of natural habitats including: scrub (507 acres), scrubby flatwoods (279 acres), baygall and prairie hammock (525 acres), mesic and wet flatwoods (328 acres), wet prairie (594 acres), dry prairie (265 acres) and depression marsh (129 acres). Natural and restored habitats support a diverse population of wildlife and plant species, including 13 animals and 5 plants on the threatened and endangered species lists.

Post-meeting behind the scenes tour of the Marinelifelife Center

Marinelife Center staff provided a narrated tour of the facility – including interpretation of displays, description of loggerhead, green, hawksbill and Ridley's turtles that are undergoing rehabilitation prior to release, and a visit to the hospital wing where x-rays and various medical procedures are performed

The steering committee consisting of Barbara Bobsein, Greg Braun, Rachel King, Natasha Warraich and Scott Tedford appreciates the participation and involvement of all attendees. If you have comments on this meeting, suggestions for future meetings or would like to serve on the Steering committee, please contact one of the members.