

Southeast Florida Scrub Working Group
2015 Spring Meeting
November 3, 2015
Savannas Preserve State Park

This meeting was attended by 27 people, representing organizations including Bok Tower Gardens, FFS, FPS, FWC, Indian River and Palm Beach counties and the St. Lucie Co Conservation Alliance.

Tour of Savannas Preserve State Park, led by Doug Rogers

- Visited a zone burned yesterday, a combination of mixed pine flatwoods and scrub
 - Savannas PSP is a long linear preserve. The burn unit visited today is surrounded on 3 sides by development, and the Rx has to push smoke into neighborhood to avoid road, schools, hospitals, etc.
 - Send out media release before burn, communication with the public is very important
 - 1 jay in adjacent zone
 - Attempted to save old growth pines, reduced vegetation under the pines by 10 to 20 feet, slow and low intensity fire under these pines, point source fires around selected old growth trees
 - There were two prior burns of adjacent units next to the residential area
 - The entire edge of the burn unit was roller chopped 2 years ago. This helped keep flame heights down
- Palmetto berry pickers are a safety concern
 - Berry picking is illegal, but done anyway
 - Berry pickers can be in a burn zone the day of a prescribed fire
 - Have law enforcement drive perimeter, announcing that zone will be lit
 - Berry picking season Aug-Oct
 - Palm Beach County has a deputy drive around the burn unit and announce the burn. Need to be able to have a bi-lingual announcement so berry pickers understand what is about to happen
- The Endangered fragrant prickly-apple cactus, *Harissia fragrans*, occurs along the railroad tracks.
 - It is associated with nurse plants, usually cabbage palms
 - 9 of the 10 known populations are at Savannas PSP
 - Doesn't tolerate fire well
 - Thought to originally found in tropical hammock. Most were found in coastal strand and are now gone. An edge species, needs a nurse species, cabbage palms, and some canopy protection
 - Round cactus with 7 to 9 spines with 1 very long one
 - Can get 7 to 10 feet tall
 - Historic range was from Monroe to Brevard counties
 - Fragrant night-blooming red flower
 - Humans are the biggest threat to this species
 - Other predators include scale or hog damage from rooting
 - Can be relocated; Dr. Jon Moore from FAU has done some relocation

- Savannas Preserve is a reintroduction site for Savanna's mint, *Dicerandra immaculata* Lakela var. *savannarum*
 - 990 plants introduced
 - Cheryl Peterson, biologist working with the plant
 - Sub-species of Lakela Mint
 - Doing very well
 - Collaboration between Bok Tower Gardens and FPS
 - Larger plants will survive fire but smaller ones won't

All Aboard Florida Impacts, Chris Vandello, FPS

- Savannas PSP is 6750 acres, 13 miles long, 0.5 miles wide at widest point, long narrow parcel
 - High spp. diversity
- FEC corridor follows historic Flagler line, borders 75% of East side of park
 - Historically double lined, in 1970s removed a track, currently single track
 - Their property goes ~60 ft either side from center line
 - There will be impacts to listed species especially, gopher tortoise, scrub jays, and many plants including the prickly pear cactus
- Park is able to use right of way along West side of tracks because of a lease agreement
 - This provides the only access to several areas of the park
 - 433 acres of scrub and 207 of flatwoods will be inaccessible, and park will be unable to burn those
 - Increased wildfire risk, decreased ability to deal with it
 - If second track is installed, park likely to lose access
 - much of the existing access will be lost for Savannas Preserve
- Cannot install new road because of inholdings and marsh; Creating access to inholdings allows those inholdings to be developed, so park unlikely to do so
 - Price of exotic hog and plant control will go up as access gets more difficult
- On map, scrub and scrubby flatwoods shown in pink
- There are 150 *Harissia fragrans* cactus within 50 ft of rail line
 - Translocations of this spp. have been successful
- Visitor experience also impacted
 - Less visitation and more noise near tracks
- Impacts to marsh likely to include increased erosion

All Aboard Florida (AAF) Potential Impacts to Gopher Tortoises, Rachel King, FWC

- Gopher tortoises are a keystone species, loss of tortoises leads to loss of habitat for other species
- Tortoises and their burrows are protected by state law, and are a candidate for Federal listing
- Different permit types for different types of development
- AAF will need a conservation permit, which requires tortoises be relocated
- Relocation to long-term protected sites is much cheaper than relocation to other sites
 - Long-term sites must meet stringent requirements and have gopher tortoise management plans

- FWC is looking for more long-term sites
- AAF will be 240 miles long: Existing track will be expanded, curves reduced, fiber optic cable installed, and new track laid to connect to MCO
- Tons of gopher tortoise habitat along impact area. Many public lands supporting large stable populations adjacent to impact area.
- Small populations not on public land further south also impacted
- Few studies of rail impacts to tortoises, but tortoises can get stuck between rails, overheat, and die. They get between rails when gravel builds up along outside of tracks, creating a ramp, or by veering off railroad crossings.
- Railroad may be a barrier to movement as species move inland due to sea level rise
- All tortoises within 25 ft. of the impact area will likely need to be relocated. If this area extends onto property not owned by the rail, landowner can refuse.
- Indirect impacts, incl. habitat fragmentation

Side discussion in the vehicle with FWC staff. Mary Trugilio mentioned the Imperiled Butterfly Working Group. There is an annual winter meeting on December 15, 2015 in Homestead. The working group also meets a couple of times a year in the WPB office.



Figure 1. One day post-fire.



Figure 2 Members gather around a map of the park.



Figure 3 Doug Rogers points out a Fragrant prickly-apple, *Harissia frangrens*.



Figure 4 Close-up view of the fragrant prickly-apple.



Figure 5 Angela Tringali photographs *Dicerandra immaculata* Lakela var. *savannarum*