

Serenoa Notes

The Serenoa Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

March 2015

The Other Face of Fire – Fran Palmeri

Last spring driving Route 681 I noticed rangers at Oscar Scherer State Park burning the pine Flatwoods. I pulled over and was photographing over the fence when Tony Clements, the park manager, called to me. He'd seen some "bell-like" wildflowers along the edges of the conflagration and asked if I wanted to photograph them. Minutes later, I was stepping through smoldering embers to photograph the Pine Hyacinth (*Clematis baldwinii*).

While some plants were in fine shape, others were singed but it didn't matter. Six months from now would see an explosive growth of wildflowers including the Clematis, which favors recently burned areas.

It was at Oscar Scherer I discovered the other face of fire. In 2005 I found the scrubby Flatwoods in smoking ruins. Just a pine or two with charred trunks were left standing. I was horrified as I saw the charred roots of Saw Palmetto snaking along the ground. But then, like a doubting Thomas, I watched as the woods came back to life.

Within days the Saw Palmetto put out green shoots; Bracken Fern and Gopher Apple pushed up out of the ashes. Fetterbush, Myrtle Oaks and Sand Live Oaks grew inches per week. In a year or two, pale pink

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Monthly meetings at Selby Gardens:

Every third Monday.
811 South Palm Ave. Sarasota.
Doors open at 7:00 p.m,
business meeting at 7:30,
followed by program.
Everyone welcome!

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Prescribed burn at Oscar Scherer State Park



PHOTO BY FRAN PALMERI



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Visit our chapter on the Florida
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www.fnps.org

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If you change your home address
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The Other Face of Fire *continued from page 1*

blossoms of Beautyberry, Sky Blue Lupine, and the delicate blooms of Butterfly Pea lit up the landscape. It looked like an army of farmers had been at work but it was Mother Nature planting with fire.

Historically she did. Fire is as vital to Florida habitat as sun, wind and rain. Traveling through Florida in the 18th century William Bartram documented the "firing" practiced by Seminoles to enrich grazing for their cattle. John Kunkel Small, curator of New York Botanical Gardens, who did field work in Florida over a 30-year period, understood the benefits of wildfires. In 1918 he wrote how the Gopher Apple in scrub habitats was revitalized by fires "which continuously sweep the country in which it grows." Charles Torrey Simpson who lived in Florida around the same time called fire "the friend of the piney woods."

Although scientists have noted over the centuries how fire revitalizes habitats and invigorates plant growth, it wasn't until the '60's and '70's that prescribed burns began to be adopted as a land management tool.

At Oscar Scherer, biologists write a "burn prescription" designating the temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction for a successful burn. Clouds determine how dry the habitat is. It's better to burn scrub, a desert-like habitat on a clear day but with pine Flatwoods, clouds are preferred. If conditions change after a burn is started, it is aborted. In the dry scrubby Flatwoods, burns are 10 to 15 years apart; in the pine Flatwoods, intervals are 3 and 5 years. Now because of a large backlog, the park burns year-round to catch up.



Today, fire suppression is one of the causes of extinction. Bartram's *Lixia* (an exceedingly rare plant) blooms only after fire.

Reducing the Damage from a Wildfire

—Carolann Cahill

With Florida's growing population and increasing development, fire isn't allowed to roam the landscape as it once did and the resulting fire suppression is fueling many of the catastrophic wildfires we see today.

With regular landscape management, homeowners can reduce the damage to their property in the event of a wildfire.

- Hire an arborist to prune trees so the lowest branches are 6–8 feet from the ground, reducing the chance of the fire climbing up the tree.
- Don't allow debris to build up in gutters and on roof tops. Be aware that dead trees and brush located too close to the home create a fire hazard.
- Palmetto and Cabbage Palms are highly combustible. Palmetto burns even if it is green and sweats an oily, flammable resin. Cabbage Palms often have a build up of debris packed in the roots. Remove dead fronds and vegetation that would easily ignite.
- Create a buffer by keeping vegetation 6 feet away from buildings.

Researchers at the US Forest Service, University of Florida, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology have three categories indicating how intensely a shrub will burn. When landscaping around your home, consider using plants with a low flammability rating which include:

Adam's Needle (*Yucca Filamentosa*)
Anisetree (*Illicium Floridian*)
Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
Beautyberry (*Callicarpa dichotoma*)
Coontie (*Zamia pumila*)
Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*)
Walter's Viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*).

Resources:

Know the law. Before you burn call (941) 751-7627
Florida Forest Service: www.floridaforestservice.com
Firewise Communities/USA: www.firewise.org/usa
Fire Adapted Communities: Download a free home wildfire risk assessment and checklist at www.fireadapted.org
University of Florida: <http://fireinflorida.ifas.ufl.edu/landscaping.html>
Florida Division of Emergency Management: <http://floridadisaster.org/EMTOOLS/wildfire/wildfire.html>



PHOTO BY FRAN PALMERI

The FNPS mission to conserve, preserve, and restore Florida native plants and their communities is largely supported by its members. Thanks to the outstanding efforts of our membership chairman, Peter Price, our chapter keeps on growing.

Welcome New Members:

Erin Alvarez
Victoria Bannister
Scott Dacton
John Dolan
Mark Eubanks
Claudia Marvin
Nancy Miller
Sarah Mitchell
Edith Norby
Katherine Oliver
Bennet Pafford and Cathy Petti
Richard Prager
John and Rosanne Roble
Robin Schoch
Anne Sikkema
Johanna Willis

Prescribed Fire and Florida Habitats

—Leah Wilcox

“We are uniquely fire creatures on a uniquely fire planet... stuffed with organic fuels, its atmosphere saturated with oxygen, its surface pummeled by lightning”
—Stephen Pyne

Florida’s natural areas were formed by the synergy of wind, water and fire. Local habitats are no exception and all bear the marks of these natural forces.

Flatwoods and prairies may flood briefly or up to two months each year and historically have been subject to frequent, vigorous fires caused by lightening or by humans. Scrubs and Sandhill communities occur on drier sites and are subject to infrequent, intense fires. Mangroves may burn after being damaged by a hard freeze or a hurricane. Hammocks are usually shady, have a layer of moist litter covering the ground and support little to no understory vegetation. Normally the interior humidity is high and prevents a hammock from burning except around the edges. During exceptionally dry years the moisture evaporates and fire will burn completely through this plant community.

Human activities have interrupted natural processes, so prescribed burns are now critical for ecosystem survival. After years of believing that all fires are bad, this concept raises some doubts in many people. Below are some frequently asked question (and answers) about prescribed burns and habitat management.

Why should we burn native habitats?

Fire and water shaped evolution in Florida’s wild areas. Burning cycles nutrients, helps control exotics and other invasive vegetation and can restore degraded habitats so native plants and animals can survive.

Why can't we just “let nature take its course?”

People have changed the course of nature by redirecting water and extinguishing fires. Without natural fires and flooding dead plant material build up and invasive plants take over. Destructive wildfires may start and damage habitats because of the unnaturally high fuel load. A habitat’s natural vegetation may be strangled or shaded out. Animals that depend on fire to maintain nesting and foraging sites cannot reproduce and may even starve.

Are animals trapped or killed during a prescribed burn?

Florida’s native animals evolved with fire and know how to escape flames. Very young animals may not be able to get away, so burn personnel try not to allow fire or smoke into historic nesting areas or known active nests during nesting season. Fires that might encircle and trap animals are also avoided.

Prescribed fires are generally low to the ground, pass through an area quickly and have a short burning edge allowing creatures to escape the flames.

PHOTO BY CAROLANN CAHILL



Prescribed fire is a safe and effective management tool

Is fire the best restoration technique for Florida's ecosystems?

Fire alone cannot rehabilitate a system. Mechanical equipment and herbicides are also valuable management tools. An overgrown area can't be burned until excess vegetation is reduced. A combination of techniques may be used in areas infested with exotic plants to prevent the spreading of the plants. A system may even need hydrological repairs before it can function again. Sometimes fire isn't practical because of problems with smoke, public objection to the aesthetics of burned areas, or in areas fire may have adverse effect on historic sites or recreation.

Many native habitats cannot survive without fire as part of their management plan. Trained personnel, adequate equipment and supplies are also necessary. Appropriate management of our natural areas requires our understanding, our support, and funding sufficient to accomplish this important task.

Thanks to Belinda Perry and Jeff Webber who provided information and technical help with this article.

Resources:

"The Essential Element of Fire" National Geographic Vol. 190, No. 3

"Ecosystems of Florida" Meyers, Ronald L. and Ewel, John J.

"Seasonal Effects of Prescribed Burning in Florida" Robbins, Louise D. and Myers, Ronald L.

"Fire in South Florida Ecosystems" Wade D., Ewel J., and Hofstetter, R. Myakka River State Park, personal communication, Perry B.



PHOTO BY FRANK PALMERI

Pine Hyacinth (*Clematis Baldwinii*) photographed at Oscar Sherer State Park during a prescribed burn.

BORN TO BURN

FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

35TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MAY 28-31, 2015

Challenger Learning Center
Tallahassee, Florida

CONSERVATION, PRESERVATION &
RESTORATION ON PUBLIC & PRIVATE LAND

Mark your calendars for the FNPS annual conference. "Born to Burn": Conservation, Preservation, and Restoration on Public and Private Land will be held from May 28 - May 31 in Tallahassee. <http://www.fnps.org/conference>

Trial by Fire –Anonymous in Bradenton

Amendment 1 spending priorities:
The Florida Senate has launched a web page allowing you to leave your comments on how the best direct these funds. Your voice is important. Visit <http://www.flsenate.gov/media/topics/wlc>

Save the date

2015 Florida Wildflower Symposium will be held September 25-26 at Leu Gardens in Orlando.

I recall conversing with a fellow FNPS member who lived in an older, established neighborhood in Sarasota. He related how he would periodically set fire to his Muhly Grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*). Being reassured he had received no complaints from the neighbors, I (living in an older, established neighborhood in Bradenton) decided that instead of cutting back my Muhly Grass as I usually do, I would hold my own private burn.

Being cautious, I choose a day when fire conditions were low and made sure my garden hose was close at hand. Then I pulled all the mulch away from the area surrounding the plants and proceeded to set one of the three clumps of grass on fire. Soon a tremendous amount of smoke filled the air. As visions of the Bradenton Fire Department pulling up to my property filled my head, I quickly extinguished the fire. It was then I decided to revert to my tried and true method of clump grass management so I grabbed my pruning shears and cut the remaining two clumps of grass back, cleaning all the dead material out by hand.

I may not have accomplished the task exactly as I had planned, it did prove to be a sort of non-scientific test. It didn't take long for the plants to recover and as I observed the re-growth I concluded that the clump that was burned appeared to be healthier and more robust than the two specimens I had cut back by hand.

In his book "A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants (University Press), Rufino Osorio states, "Since their foliage is one of their principal assets, one should cut them back to within an inch or two of the ground once a year to remove old foliage. This may sound severe, but bear in mind that most of our grasses are fire adapted and they are actually rejuvenated by being cut to the ground periodically. This cutting back is best performed in late winter just before the plants begin their spring growth."



PHOTO BY NANCY WEST
The different stages of recovery following Muhly Grass burning.

Spring is in the air and may have you thinking about updating your landscape. Don't forget Plant Real Florida has a handy tool to help take the guess work out of plant selection. Just plug in your zip code or County and you will find a list of plants that grow naturally in your area.

Visit plantrealflorida.org

Fire Fest 2015

On January 31, our chapter participated in the 2015 Fire Fest held at Carlton Reserve. Over 400 visitors enjoyed a beautiful day in the park and the prescribed burn demos were a great way for people to learn how fire is used safely and effectively to manage our natural lands.

Three weeks prior to the event Nancy started burning a container of Muhly Grass at one-week intervals. The results were a wonderful visual tool that showed the different stages of recovery. The display was a hit!

With so many people unfamiliar with native plants, the colorful display surrounding our booth helped attract attention and people were able to see first hand how beautiful our native plants are. Many wanted to purchase the plants but as they were for display purposes only, we were able to promote our plant sale coming up in April.

Thanks to our volunteer efforts, we were able to support our community and promote the use of native plants in the home landscape.

Serenoa Scuttle-butt

Join us on Facebook! Find our group page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/serenoafnps/> Click on the “send request” to join and we will respond to your request ASAP.

Our newsletter comes out three times a year (Sept, Dec, March), and we want as much diversity in its content as we have in our membership. Whether it’s a favorite (native) plant, a memorable nature walk, personal gardening escapades, an upcoming event, or a nature related poem, send your submission to slacker1030@comcast.net

Executive Board meetings are a great way to get involved in our chapter and all members are invited to attend. We meet once a month from September to May on the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30. If you would like more information feel free to ask any one of our chapter officers.

Help spread the word. Grants up to \$500.00 are available to schools, neighborhood & homeowners associations, businesses, non-profit organizations, and government organizations located in Manatee, DeSoto, Sarasota, and Hardee Counties. For more information, or for a PDF version of the application, please write to srepens@gmail.com.

Our chapter has joined The Science and Environmental Council of Southwest Florida. The council is active in promoting ecotourism and their mission is to promote and advocate science, conservation, and environmental issues that improve the quality of life in Southwest Florida. You can find out more at <http://www.scienceandenvironment.org/>

April 11 is our Spring Plant Sale held at Sweetbay Nursery in Parrish and we need volunteers. You don’t have to be a plant expert—there are many ways you can help out. If you have a couple hours to help out, contact Nancy West.



PHOTO BY CAROLANN CAHILL

Representing Team Serenoa at this year's Air Potato Round-up at North Water Tower Park. From left to right: Carolann, Erica, Nancy, Peter, Julia. Front: Nancy's nephew, Bryce.

*Congratulations
Matt and Karen (Fraley) Willey!*

FNPS Membership Enrollment

Serenoa Chapter Newsletter

Name _____ E-mail _____ Phone (day) _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Membership number, if renewing _____ **Dues:** Life: \$1,000 Donor: \$250 Business or corporate: \$125

Supporting: \$100 Contributing: \$75 Not-for-profit organization: \$50 Family or household: \$50

Individual: \$35 Full-time student: \$15 Library subscription: \$100

Payment: Check/MO Visa MC Discover

Check/Money Order # _____ Please do not mail cash. Make Checks payable to FNPS

Credit Card # _____ - _____ - _____ - _____ Exp. Date _____ 3-digit CV code on back _____

Name on card _____

Billing address and zip code if different from above _____

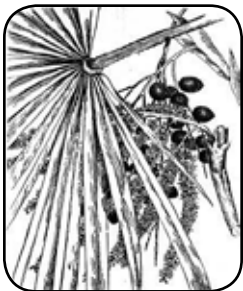
Credit card payments can be faxed to (815) 361-9166; or mail this form to: FNPS, PO Box 278, Melbourne, FL 32902-0278

Florida Native Plant Society Membership benefits: *Serenoa Notes* newsletter, Member discounts at events, subscription to the quarterly magazine *Palmetto*, Bi-monthly newsletter *Sabal Minor*

Events Calendar

Monthly general meetings at Selby Gardens: Every third Monday, Sept. through May at 7:00 p.m.; speaker begins at 7:30.
Selby Botanical Gardens Activity Center, 811 South Palm Avenue, Sarasota. Everyone welcome!

- Mar. 16** GENERAL MEETING 7 P.M. —THE AMAZON OF NORTH AMERICA. The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, a rich repository of native epiphytes and orchids is still giving up some of its secrets. Longtime Park Biologist Mike Owen will fill us in on new plant discoveries and efforts to conserve the “rarest of the rare.”
- Mar. 21** FIELD TRIP 9 A.M.—FAKAHATCHEE STRAND PRESERVE STATE PARK, COLLIER COUNTY. You’ll have a choice of an unforgettable swamp walk for the hardy or a landlubber’s ramble along some of the old tram roads through the strand.
- Apr. 11** PLANT SALE 9 A.M. TO 3 P.M. SWEET BAY NURSERY, 10824 ERIE ROAD, PARRISH, FL 34219, MANATEE COUNTY. <http://www.sweetbaynursery.com> Volunteers needed!
- Apr. 19** EARTH DAY CELEBRATION 10 A.M. TO 4 P.M. OSCAR SCHERER STATE PARK, SARASOTA COUNTY. Exhibits, plant sale, music, food, guided walks.
- Apr. 20** GENERAL MEETING 7 P.M. —PLANTING A REFUGE FOR WILDLIFE. Retired Broward County Environmental Administrator Gil MacAdam who created three National Wildlife Federation yards will tell us how he did it.
- May 18** GENERAL MEETING 7 P.M. —NATIVE PLANT GARDENS/THREE APPROACHES. Mary Foster will tell us how she landscaped her sunny yard; Nancy West will talk about gardening in drier uplands near the Manatee River. We’ll also hear about native plantings at the Manatee County Courthouse thanks to the great efforts of Cindy Shore.
- May 23** FIELD TRIP 9 A.M.—A VISIT TO THE FOSTER/WEST YARDS plus a Stop at the Manatee County Courthouse
- May 28–31** FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE, TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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of the Florida Native
Plant Society**

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