

## *Message from the President*

by Rick K. Joyce

Florida is a botanical paradise. It is estimated that over 3,500 species of native plants occur in Florida reflecting temperate, coastal plain influences as well as tropical, West Indian (Caribbean) influences. Approximately 300 plant species are endemic to Florida (endemic species have very limited population ranges).

In 1980, a few friends concerned about native plants and natural systems got together with an idea: "We should start a native plant defense group in Florida." Those pioneers argued about whom, what, when, where, and how, but managed to establish an organization known as The Florida Native Plant Society, now in its fourteenth year of service.

FNPS membership and activities, especially the Annual Spring Conference, have steadily grown through the 1980s and '90s. There have been lots of growing pains and triumphs. Currently, FNPS includes 23 local chapters and approximately 3,000 total members ranging from university botany professors to new homeowners from totally different biomes. This diversity in members provides the synergy to keep FNPS moving forward on many issues.

This magazine, *The Palmetto*, has evolved to the excellent publication it is today. Most of *The Palmetto* articles are written by FNPS members and illustrate the incredible diversity and regional differences of native plants in Florida.

Have you seen the September, 1993, issue of *Florida Grower's Ornamental Outlook*? "Florida Natives" are featured on the cover and in several articles. The FNPS is featured in an article by our *Palmetto* editor that is also tied to articles on "Landscaping with Native Plants" and "The Ancient Scrub of Lake Wales Ridge". This kind of exposure and promotion will propel the FNPS to new levels of appreciation.

I love to read descriptions of Florida written by early botanists and naturalists. One of my favorite chapters is in the 1920 book, "In Lower Florida Wilds", written by Charles Torrey Simpson, a companion of Dr. John K. Small. Chapter VIII of this book is titled "The Lure of the Piney Woods". As the author describes the scientific elements of the pine flatwoods he also provides an artistic description of the forest:

"... Such are the piney forests of Lower Florida, and to him who is in harmony with nature there is nothing more alluring in all the land. No more attractive place for the botanist can be found, . . . here are always beautiful, odd and interesting things in blossom and they present a succession of rich color throughout the year."

Florida and its native plants are special. Stop your car. Get out and smell the Simpson's stopper flowers. Poke around in Florida's incredible forests and herbaceous systems. Look at the cutin on a tree leaf. The more we all appreciate the natural systems of Florida, the more motivated we will be to do something about it.

I personally challenge all individual members to take part in meeting the FNPS purpose, which is, that Florida native plants require preservation, conservation and restoration. Education of the fundamental values of native plants are critical to fulfilling our purpose. Request native plants at your local garden center, become active in your local FNPS chapter, require native plant protection language in your local Comprehensive Plan, support state/local environmental land acquisition programs, and help create/restore native plant communities in your local public open space -- parks, schools, road right-of-ways, colleges, libraries.

A renaissance of our native plant spirit will be the key to achieving the purpose of FNPS.