

# FIFTH ANNUAL FLORIDA NATIVE

by Georgia Tasker

(Georgia Tasker wrote about the Florida Native Plant Society Conference at Rollins for the Miami Herald. With their permission, here are some excerpts.)

Gov. Bob Graham and the cabinet have endorsed a move to banish exotic plants and plant Florida natives at all state sites, from parks to buildings. Where possible, says the governor, exotic plants will be ripped out and replaced with natives.

The news spread like fire in a pines woods through the Florida Native Plant Society conference recently.

For three days, people from all over the state came together to discuss the scrub and the seashore and the backing of the governor.

"Florida's native trees, shrubs and plants are part of the natural heritage that built this state," said keynote speaker David Wilson, who heads the society's Charlotte Harbor chapter. "The continuing disruption of these natural systems is detrimental to the long-term economic stability of the state of Florida."

The Governor's resolution spells out the state's support of planting and preservation efforts begun five years ago by the Florida Native Plant Society.

"We seem to have reached a point of awareness of the workings of our planet," David Wilson said, "where we realize there is nothing left to do."

"What happens when all 350,000 lots fill up in the Charlotte Harbor area? It's the native vegetation being



*Best wishes, Bob Graham*

removed and the drainage being dug that is robbing Florida of its water."

Development pressure on the scrub was a concern of several conference speakers, from Don Richardson, who is studying the chemicals that keep the scrub unto itself, to University of Central Florida professor Jack Stout, who has looked at how much scrub should be preserved in a chunk, to federal botanist Dave Martin, who will propose several scrub plants for the federally protected endangered

species list.

The isolated character of the scrub community means it burns naturally only about once every 70 years, Richardson said, and by then the pines are full of branches and tend to burn to death. But only then will the pine cones pop open to release the seeds so a new scrub can regenerate.

Fire management is a necessary part of saving scrub, if we're not to see it all burn up every 70 years, said Stout. In addition to the peculiar and rugged plants here, you can find the scrub jay, gopher turtles, hog-nosed snakes, true bugs and the Florida mouse, he said.

"The biggest existing area of scrub in the state is Ocala National Forest," Martin said, "but it's poor in endemic species [plants that live in one area]. The paradox is that it's managed by the federal government, but it doesn't have the interesting plants."

The remaining interesting plants — the endangered scrub balm, the endangered four-petal paw-paw and others — are in a few coastal areas and Panhandle because scrub grows on those sandy ridges left by receding ancient seas.

Martin, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Jacksonville, said that agency is actively looking at protection for the state's endangered plants, and that scrub is high on his



Dr. Dick Wunderlin of USF selects a specimen to pass around in his identification workshop.

# PLANT SOCIETY CONFERENCE

Photos by Bill Partington

list.

While there are only five federally listed endangered plants in Florida — Key tree cactus, *Cereus robinii*; Lakela's mint, *Dicerandra immaculata*; Harper's beauty, *Harperocallis flava*; Chapman's rhododendron, *Rhododendron chapmanii*; Florida torreya, *Torreya taxifolia* — there are about 100 on the proposed list.

The state is updating a 1979 law regarding plant protection. Called the Preservation of Native Flora of Florida law, the revision is now before the legislature.

Dennis Hardin, a staff botanist for The Florida Natural Areas Inventory, said the proposed law revision lists 129 species of plants endangered in Florida; 77 kinds of plants listed as threatened (including all native orchids, ferns, palms and bromeliads); 9 species as commercially exploited, including silver and needle palms, coontie, royal fern, and two native bromeliads.

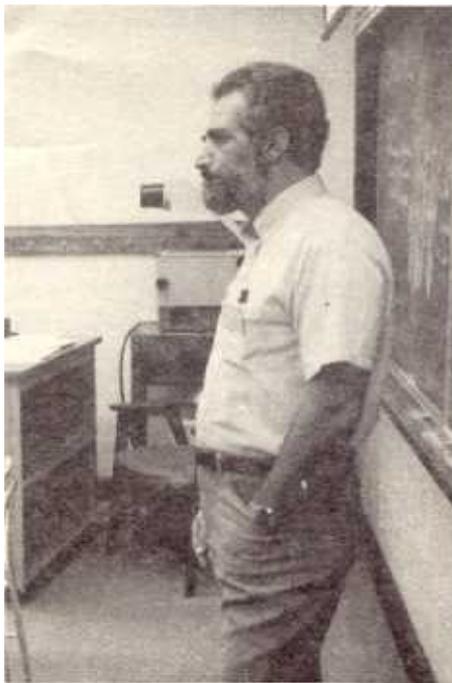
And while the law should be supported — "Write everyone [in Tallahassee] if you support it." — it is "mostly gums and no teeth," Hardin said.



**Orange County Commissioner Vera Carter and environmental designer Richard Manchester take questions on landscape ordinances.**

When you see pine trees lean to one side from constant buffeting by the wind, when you find clumps of rosemary, stubby oaks and some aromatic herbs, you have found what is called, rather dourly, Florida scrub. You sometimes hear it called sand pine scrub because *Pinus clausa*, sand pine, obligingly forms its skimpy canopy.

Do not be deceived by attributes that appear sparse. You have found a viable community of plants, a safe



**Dr. Bijan Dehgan of UF leads a workshop on propagation.**

harbor for 5 kinds of lichens, 2 kinds of mosses, 4 ferns, 35 herbs, 34 shrubs and 4 kinds of trees, including the sand pine, the shrubby Chapman oak and the saw palmetto.

What's more, it's a community that almost willingly keeps to itself, shunning all invitations to the dance. It does so, says Don Richardson of the University of South Florida, because the rosemary plants are able to emit certain chemicals in March, April, May and June that keep out other plants. You take a pine from a nearby sandhill habitat — a group of plants that nearly always grows next to the

scrub — and try to transplant it into this place, and it simply won't make it.

Such a strategy, says Richardson, protects the community from growing too dense and becoming vulnerable to fire.

In spite of this wonderful ability to shore up its own, the scrub is now the habitat under greatest pressure from development in Florida.

Robert Craig spent 35 years with the USDA's Soil Conservation Service "looking at plants that solved conservation problems."

In Florida, beach erosion is a problem well known because hotels have needed to restore their beaches at exorbitant cost. But it's a problem for the critters of this habitat, too, especially the sea turtle, which builds its nest in sand.

In the mid-1970s, Craig and his colleagues looked at the erosion problems on Hobe Sound, a wildlife refuge.

What Craig found studying this three-and-one-half-mile stretch of beach was a lot of shifting sand. "The dunes move up and down, in and out constantly. They are so dynamic the data drives you crazy. You can't predict them." By 1982, the scientists had even lost four so-called permanent markers.

Appropriate plants on these dunes will change that picture, Craig said.

"Plantings will keep the sand in the system and help stabilize it. But if you put in a jetty or a house, the sand is taken out of the system."

For the Hobe Sound area, Craig told the Native Plant Conference, five



**Gary Henderson divulges a few nature photography tips.**

are especially important.

Those five — pioneer plants — are sea oats, a grass called bitter panicum, cucumber-leaf, sunflower, another creeping grass called seashore paspalum, and saltmeadow (or marsh hay) cordgrass.

What's more, the plants for dunes don't require fertilizing after they're established and some even do poorly with too much care (sea oats hate mollycoddling and come down with fungus).

Yet, most coastal dune plants don't produce much viable seed; they spread on runners. Once trampled, they will not regenerate, Craig said.



The troops get fed Saturday noon near the Rollins campus.



Eve Hannahs warms up her audience to planting their yards for butterflies and other wildlife.

Florida is blessed with 1,200 species of birds, mammals, amphibians and fishes, says biologist Susan Cerulean. Unfortunately, most of them are unprotected by any law.

Past efforts to save wildlife concentrated on game species because hunters have paid to pursue their sport — “though (game species) comprise not more than 10 percent of the total,” she adds.

Endangered species — those plants and animals that State Museum director Wayne King calls “basket cases” — make up only 5 percent of the whole.

That leaves 85 percent of the wildlife — vertebrates, invertebrates and plants in this state — unprotected, says Cerulean.

But there is hope, she adds. A six-month-old statewide program aims at “developing a broad understanding of what's happening before extinction.” It's the Nongame Wildlife Program of the Florida Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission.

Cerulean, who works with Nongame Wildlife Program, and Wayne King, co-chairman of the

nongame council, took their case to the state conference of the Florida Native Plant Society at Rollins College recently, asking the society's cooperation in a wide range of studies.

The nongame program, set up by the Legislature, was without funds for the first year, King said. The nine-member council figured out how to get money: A \$4 tax on all out-of-state vehicles being registered by new Florida residents and an optional \$1 donation that can be made to the program by checking a box on the back side of a driver's license renewal form.

The council also decided to set up a grants program for studies of plants and nongame animals, rather than spend money on adding new staff to the Game Commission.

Grants will go to people who come up with studies on the council priority list. Among these priorities are:

- Assessments of the kinds of habitats in Florida

- A listing of the endemic plants and animals
- An identification of things causing major change or loss of habitats
- Incentives for private land owners to keep and enhance habitats on their property
- Threats to nongame unrelated to habitat change [such as air pollution, highway mortality].

For the Florida Native Plant Society, King suggested a number of ways in which it could help, including studies of carnivorous plant communities, guidelines for pinelands that need fire management, even specific plant studies.

“I hope all of you will be vigilant. You ought to be fighting like mad to stop local agencies from using exotic species. Every time they build a playground or a park, you ought to be there to see they use native species that will cut down on the use of water and pesticides. We must do it now, or it's gonna be gone,” King said.



Ken Morrison's sign of the times for nature preserves — no killing or collecting of anything, but walking through is fine.