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# Palmetto



Rare Plant Conservation at Bok Tower Gardens ● Yaupon Redeemed ● The Origin of Florida Scrub Plant Diversity

## Palatlakaha Environmental and Agricultural Reserve

In August of this year a team made up of representatives from FDEP, FWC, Florida Forest Service, Lake County Parks and Trails and myself (representing both the Lake Beautyberry Chapter of FNPS and the local Audubon Chapter, OVAS) met to review the resource management of Palatlakaha Environmental and Agricultural Reserve, also known as P.E.A.R. Park. The team was led by Wendy Poag of Lake County Parks and Trails, who oversees the resource management of the property.

This 268-acre reserve, located in central Lake County, was farmed by UF/IFAS as an agricultural research station from 1955 to 1996, growing grapes, watermelons and other cucurbits. In 2001, the land was leased to Lake County and has since been managed with the goal of restoring its historical native ecosystems, and to provide for native wildlife, preserve cultural resources and offer passive recreation to the public. Before restoration began, the upland areas of the preserve were covered by exotic grasses and other nuisance species.



**Above:** Wendy Poag, of Lake County Parks and Trails, and the P.E.A.R. review team.  
Photo: Peg Urban.

After viewing the property, the team commended various accomplishments that have been achieved as a result of cooperative efforts between the county and dedicated volunteers of the P.E.A.R. Association and the local community. Numerous grants aided these efforts, funding projects including a 50-acre scrub oak restoration for the endangered scrub jay, demonstration and educational native plant and butterfly gardens which contain several listed plants, widening of the riverine corridor using native trees and understory plants, a meadow area of native bunch grasses and wildflowers, a bluebird nest box trail, a memorial grove of native trees and shrubs, a nature/science center, and a heritage grape arbor and community vegetable garden that provide an agricultural component. Volunteers continue to maintain many of these areas.

In 2007, the county began work to restore native ground-cover to most of the remaining acreage and will eventually restore scrub oak, sandhill, flatwoods and pine flatwoods areas. Methods employed include prescribed fire, seeding, herbicide application and planting. Hand pulling of weeds is used whenever possible. Wetland restoration of altered depressional ponds has been undertaken with great success and was commended by the land review team.

Diversity has been increased and resident wildlife is abundant. Birds such as northern bobwhite, eastern towhee, eastern bluebird, raptors, and many species of wintering and migratory birds including grasshopper sparrows and bobolinks can be found at P.E.A.R. Species of concern such as Florida scrub jay, American kestrel, gopher tortoise, American alligator, eastern indigo snake, and Florida sandhill crane either reside or have been observed on property. The team recommended documentation

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### **The Palmetto**

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### **Editorial Content**

We welcome articles on native plant species and related conservation topics, as well as high-quality botanical illustrations and photographs. Contact the editor for guidelines, deadlines and other information.

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**Above, from upper left:** A wildflower garden planted along the hiking trail; Wendy Poag, of Lake County Parks and Trails (far left), and Bobby Bonilla, Lake County Parks and Trails director (far right), with the P.E.A.R. review team; beautifully colored native meadow grasses; team members descending from the P.E.A.R. overlook; the Meadow Trail surrounded by wildflowers. Photos: Peg Urban.

of the population of these species and their breeding success. Bird and butterfly surveys are being conducted on a regular basis and populations are increasing.

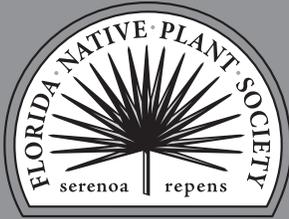
The county has provided beautiful pavilions, walkways, and trails that enhance the enjoyment of this peaceful preserve. One pavilion is atop “Pear Peak”, an overlook that offers a panoramic view of the property. A trail along the Palatlahaha River meanders through a relatively undisturbed mesic hardwood forest that could be considered an outstanding native landscape unto itself.

The review team commended the variety of educational opportunities for the public that are provided by Lake County Parks and Trails, including special events, walks, and nature programs. Signage, brochures, and artistic panels that depict the historical resources, ecosystems and wildlife of the area are on display, adding to the learning experience, and educating visitors about future restoration goals.

The team hopes that these efforts will continue and that adequate funding, staff and volunteers will be available to accomplish the worthy goals planned for P.E.A.R. Park’s future.

#### **About the Author**

Peg Urban is a self-taught naturalist. In 2002, she completed a module of the Florida Master Naturalist Program. Peg is also a photographer whose work focuses on the relationships between the native flora and fauna of Florida, and captures the beauty of the natural world. She is a long-time volunteer active in native ecosystem restoration work at P.E.A.R. Park.



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**The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society**

is to conserve, preserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

**Official definition of native plant:**

For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.



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