



The Mission of the Palm Beach County Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society is to promote the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

December 9th, 2016

Palm Beach Delegation
301 North Olive Ave., Suite 1101
West Palm Beach, Florida 33401

RE: Introduction of the Palm Beach County Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society
and 2017 Legislative Agenda

Dear Legislator,

This letter is to formally introduce the Palm Beach County Chapter of the Native Plant Society (PBCC FNPS) to you and your staff in the hopes that we can work together to increase native plant populations in the state of Florida. We are working locally with planners and county and city commissioners to try to expand the use of native plants in Palm Beach County, and we are looking to amplify our work by offering incentives, possibly within Chapter 163 of our state statute. There is an urgent need to protect and preserve clean freshwater in our natural areas. PBCC FNPS is committed to enhancing and preserving water quality and quantity. Attention to this valuable resource must be a top priority in the 2017 legislative agenda. The essential need for attention to water is a critical aspect of PBCC FNPS' three-fold policy focus for this year through our call for attention at the highest level of the State to conservation, preservation, and restoration of the native plant community in our unique state.

The Benefits of Native Plants

PBCC FNPS works to promote the understanding of the dependency of the people of Florida, the nation, and the world on native plant communities. Preservation and perpetuation of native plant communities are important in part because:

1. Native plant communities **protect clean water resources**. Upland forests stabilize soil preventing erosion and the consequent degradation of receiving waters. Wetland plant communities purify water by filtering particulates and assimilating nutrients contained in run-off.

561-247-FNPS (3677) or palmbeach@fnpschapters.org
<http://palmbeach.fnpschapters.org>



2. Native plant communities **help protect air quality**. Plants, especially forests, remove carbon compounds from the air and store them in woody plant tissue;
3. Native plant communities **provide genetic diversity**. The continued production of food for humanity depends on seeking out disease and pest resistant native plant strains related to agricultural crops. Medicines to combat pestilence must come, as in the past, from plant species which may not be there when we need them.
4. Native plant communities **provide habitat and forage for pollinators** and are therefore, essential to food crop production.
5. The **wildlife and fishery resources** which provide a substantial portion of humanities protein and recreation **depend on the primary productivity and habitat quality** of native plant communities.
6. **Disruption of native plant communities leads to invasion by exotic pest plants**. Exotics proliferate away from natural controls and reduce habitat value for wildlife, recreation, and resource management.
7. Native plant communities **stabilize our fragile barrier islands and estuary coastlines** which buffer the mainland from cyclonic wind and storm surge.
8. Native plant communities **provide aesthetic enjoyment and recreation** to millions of Floridians and visitors, who in turn support a vast outdoor recreation industry.

Why is Water So Important?

To protect, preserve and restore our native plants and native plant communities, we must maintain the physical environment that supports them. The PBCC NPS supports strong regulations and individual and community actions that will maintain or improve the natural hydrologic regimes upon which our native plants rely.

Our state wide legislative agenda reflects the importance of water primarily, as we recognize that the quality, timing, and distribution of water throughout the state can make all the difference in the quality of the habitat and ultimately the native plants that feed and shelter wildlife.

As we have seen in 2016 from the devastating toxic algal blooms in Martin County, if water managers do not get the quality, timing and distribution of water correct, our homes lose value, our businesses suffer and tourism drops dramatically. The cheapest, most effective way to clean water is to allow more time on the land or “residence time” before runoff occurs. Therefore, **we support the protection of existing conservation lands** throughout our state which offer these benefits. **We also support increasing the amount of land in public ownership**. This allows for more flexibility during flood events, it allows for a greater recharge of our

561-247-FNPS (3677) or palmbeach@fnpschapters.org
<http://palmbeach.fnpschapters.org>



groundwater resources and it allows for more flexibility to treat and store water that has unacceptable water quality concerns to send to our estuaries. This will also allow us to send much needed clean freshwater south to the Everglades which is an international treasure as a world heritage site and crucial to healthy plant, animal, and human communities.

Following is a list of our priorities for the upcoming legislative session. We look forward to meeting with you all individually so we can discuss and review their importance to Palm Beach County. Because we rely heavily on surface water in Palm Beach County our delegation should make water preservation and land preservation a top priority in 2017 and beyond. In 2012 the county's largest city, West Palm Beach, came within two days of running out of water to provide to residents, businesses, and our natural areas. We want to be sure the proper planning and resources are available so we may learn from this crisis and improve our system. The future of climate stability is in question, and we may need to store more water as the duration and intensity of wet and dry seasons change.

State-Wide Legislative Agenda

1. Adopt a comprehensive approach to protection of our water resources:

Such an approach must account for the health and viability of our springs, rivers, estuaries, and other water-dependent natural systems. Consumptive use should not be a guarantee. We must balance the needs of natural systems and human communities to ensure we can store and treat enough water so that we have a healthy percentage available for the natural environment. As the climate changes, we will see shorter wet seasons with heavier rains, and longer dry seasons, making it harder and harder to meet the needs of existing users and continue to supply water to the environment. It is important we either increase our storage capacity for water or tighten regulations on its usage so that natural areas do not suffer from lack of clean freshwater. We have seen how this will impact our economy.

2. Amendment 1 Funding:

Do not spend Amendment 1 funds on items previously provided from other funding sources, such as staff salaries. Amendment 1 was intended to supplement funding for conservation and other natural resource protection needs, not replace pre-existing funds that came from other sources. 74% of Florida voters understood the need for conservation lands and a clean and healthy freshwater supply, we must honor Florida voters by using these funds to improve our collective quality of life.

3. Restore Florida Forever funding:

With the overwhelming support of Amendment 1 several years ago, a large portion of the funds were to be used to conserve and manage land. Annual funding for the Florida Forever land acquisition program should at least equal the \$300 million that was allocated before funding was cut in response to the recession. This amount is not cost-prohibitive given that annual Amendment 1 funding from documentary stamp funding will

561-247-FNPS (3677) or palmbeach@fnpschapters.org
<http://palmbeach.fnpschapters.org>



typically exceed \$700 million annually.

4. Manage Florida's conservation lands responsibly:

The land Florida has already conserved represents a valuable investment in our future and our resiliency, and proper management is necessary to protect our investment. Inadequate staffing or funding will short-change management. Funding should be sufficient to implement the management plans that have been adopted for each public property. Surplusing lands should be avoided at all costs, and management funding should not be an adequate reason to remove the lands from State ownership. We should remember that cleaning our water supply is inextricably linked to natural areas for filtering water before it enters the aquifer or runs off into the estuary.

5. Sea Level Rise:

Florida's extreme vulnerability to sea level rise must be recognized as an immediate and long-term threat to our environment, economy, and groundwater resources. It demands a comprehensive statewide response to conserve our beaches, coastal wetlands and seagrasses, and the fisheries that depend on them. We urge the delegation to act on gaining financial support to implement the Southeast Regional Climate Action Plan, created and endorsed by the four southeastern most counties. We must also accelerate Everglades Restoration efforts to improve our overall resiliency so that we may stave off salt water intrusion and provide our natural areas with clean freshwater so they can function properly and support wildlife.

We look forward to working together to improve our collective quality of Floridians' lives through the increased use of native plants which keep our water and air clean, sequester carbon, require less freshwater and offer food for local wildlife. We also encourage the reduction of pesticides and better management practices of our natural areas. We are looking for ways to preserve our native landscapes and incentivize the more extensive, and proper use of native plant communities in both urban and rural areas within our state. We hope to meet with you individually in the near future to discuss the best ways to make this happen legislatively.

Please do not hesitate to contact our policy representative Laura Reynolds 786-543-1926 or via e-mail at: lreynolds@conservationconceptsllc.org with any questions you may have regarding this letter.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Susan Lerner

President, Palm Beach County Chapter Florida Native Plant Society

561-247-FNPS (3677) or palmbeach@fnpschapters.org
<http://palmbeach.fnpschapters.org>