

Wildflower Gazette

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Learn more about the Florida Wildflower Foundation at www.floridawildflowerfoundation.org and www.floridawildflowerfoundation.blogspot.com.

Roadside wildflowers bursting with blooms

The roads of “La Florida” provide a hint of the variety of the state’s bountiful spring wildflowers. Just about any roadside or ditch that hasn’t been mowed will sport natural stands of wildflowers. There are also miles of highway plantings to enjoy, thanks to the Florida Department of Transportation, the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs and plantings funded by the Florida Wildflower Foundation with donations made through the sale of the State Wildflower license tag.



Wildflowers bloom along Florida’s Turnpike at the Okahumpka Service Plaza in April 2008. Photo courtesy of FDOT.

Though the bloom may start late this year because of lack of rain, there should be plenty to see. Here’s a glimpse of what’s in store for motorists:

In North Florida, a yellow carpet of coreopsis welcomes motorists traveling U.S. Highway 17 to “La Florida,” Land of Flowers, at the Georgia border. Meanwhile, phlox and coreopsis are expected to peak soon in Madison, Suwannee and Lafayette counties, especially along County Road 250, State Road 27 (the White Springs and Branford area east to Interstate 75) and S.R. 129. Look for more wildflowers along S.R. 51 off Interstate 10 and U.S. 90 near Live Oak, as well as along Interstate 10 from Madison County to the I-75 interchange.

Wildflowers also have been planted along Florida’s Turnpike at the Okahumpka Service Plaza (Mile Marker 300, Sumter County). On S.R. 91 in Osceola County, expect a good showing of black-eyed Susans, yellow colicroot, and meadowbeauty. Phlox at the Canoe Creek Service Plaza will show when rain starts, with blooms continuing into summer. Beds of naturally occurring Treat’s Zephyr Lily also are in bloom in a median on the Polk Parkway near the I-4 interchange.

Enjoy plantings of blanketflower in Lake County at the intersection of S.R. 25 and

530, black-eyed Susans along U.S. 441 at C.R. 44, and phlox at U.S. 441 and S.R. 19. In Marion County, look for phlox at U.S. 301 and U.S. 441, and a mix of phlox and black-eyed Susans along parts of U.S. 27 and S.R. 40. And in Brevard County, look for coreopsis on C.R. 524 around Mile Marker 4.5, and coreopsis and blanketflower on S.R. 405 around Mile Marker 2.

Nine wildflower plantings on the Suncoast Parkway (S.R. 589) in Hernando County feature coreopsis and phlox with some black-eyed Susans, blanketflower and standing cypress. Phlox also blooms along U.S. 19 between S.R. 50 and the Citrus County line and along S.R. 50/U.S. 98 between Frampton Road and the Withlacoochee Recreational Trail. Pasco County has phlox along S.R. 54 between Duck Slough Road and U.S. 41. In Citrus County, watch for phlox in the medians of U.S. 19/98 north of the U.S. 98 intersection to Homosassa Springs. Phlox is also planted on U.S. 41 between the Hernando County line and Inverness. Coreopsis is also blooming in ditches and moist areas in Hernando, Pasco and Citrus counties.

Newsletter name – we have a winner

Our newsletter now has a name, thanks to Marina Lucas of Brooksville, who submitted it. In all, there were more than 30 names suggested. As our winner,



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The Florida Wildflower Foundation recently funded a large planting project along St. Johns and Flagler counties’ A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway corridor. In St. Johns County, look for the plantings at places such as Anastasia State Park, Mickler’s Landing, Guana Tolomato Matanzas Preserve and Marineland. For more on the grant project, see Page 4.

Bagged a Florida wildflower sighting? Email your photo to us and we’ll post it on our Web site. For submission instructions, see floridawildflowerfoundation.org/whats_blooming.html.

Marina will receive a bag of wildflower seeds for her garden. Thank you to all who participated!

—Lisa Roberts, Executive Director

In the wild: Threatened gopher tortoise lives among wildflowers

By Rebecca Eagan

In her *National Wildlife* article, “America’s Forgotten Forest,” Doreen Cubie calls the longleaf pine community “among the richest ecosystems in North America” with “as many as 50 different species of wildflowers, shrubs, grasses and ferns...in...a single square meter.” Aptly, her piece ends with a close-up of a gopher tortoise, king of his high pine world.

While the threatened tortoise is famous for bunking 400 animals at various turns and times of year in his burrow, his boon to native plant survival is also real. Hearing biologists and land managers in our gopher tortoise advisory group and hosting torts on my own land, I’m convinced that the floral health, beauty and variety in our pinelands tie to whether *Gopherus polyphemus* lives or dies.

It all hinges on management. Overzealous shrubs, hardwoods and wiregrass must be curbed if proper conditions are to persist that invite wildflower bounty and healthy tortoise pods.

Gopher Tortoise Council representative Boyd Blihovde says burn intervals of every three years are necessary to nurture plant abundance and diversity in sandhill systems. The burns squelch oak overgrowth and induce forage grasses to

bloom, which helps fox squirrels, quail, deer, butterflies, birds, tortoises and wildflowers.

It’s hard to count the wildflowers possible in a sandhill community. On my five acres in Columbia County, I’ve seen blue asters, fringe trees, pink mints, butterfly weed and sandhill coneflowers that a week earlier or later I would have missed. My list rotates not just seasonally but with rain or drought and how often I mow or hack overgrowth from gopher tortoise burrow aprons. One year an abandoned den had been choked from the sun by oak saplings, so I chopped these away. By next visit, a tortoise had moved in and a spray of innocence flanked the doorway.

One spring, clearing away dry dog fennel made sedge and mint flourish. And, irksome though sumac and sand live oak are, when my ground-level sawing allows fragrant eryngium or queen’s delight to peek through, it lightens the toil.

Fire is ideal to keep areas open, but it is impractical in subdivided ranchettes, so clippers, loppers, saws, mowers and gloves help groom mini-savannas for



Gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)
Photo by Rebecca Eagan

tortoises and flower seeds. Palafoxias a friend gave me may join in - and more butterfly weed. But even the inconspicuous holds purpose in life’s web. When you lift back bracken fern to find dainty

globes of sensitive briar, you exult in small things. Watching a grazing tortoise savor dayflower you know that even this creeping “weed” has its place.

In her gardening book, *Green Thoughts*, Elsa Perenyi writes: “Wildflowers are never vulgar.” I agree. Who needs dahlias or peonies when you can have butterfly peas? Silk grass. Blazing Star. That sky-blue lupine down the lane could zap seeds to my cul-de-sac lot and form azure torches next spring. Mayhaw and Chickasaw plum draw “winged dryads” like bees and moths and drop fruit to feed my tortoises for months. Narrow-leafed paw-paws mean zebra swallowtails won’t perish — and give my gopher tortoises a tasty dessert. Life rocks.

Rebecca Eagan is a conservationist and gopher tortoise aficionado who lives in Winter Park.

Give the gift of a tag

The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles recently authorized gift certificates to be issued for specialty tags, including the State Wildflower plate. The certificates can be purchased at any Florida motor vehicle office, tax collector office or licensed tag agency.

When you purchase the gift certificate, you’ll provide the full name of your recipient, who can redeem the gift at any tag office statewide.

The tax-deductible \$15 donation made with the purchase of each State Wildflower license tag is used by the Florida Wildflower Foundation to support wildflower research, education and planting projects statewide. To find out more about the State Wildflower tag, http://floridawildflowerfoundation.org/buy_it_here.html.

Plant profile — Tickseed

(*Coreopsis* spp)

This annual herbaceous wildflower has showy, daisy-like heads of bright yellow flowers 2” in diameter. Often used as a component of mixed wildflower and butterfly gardens. Excellent for sunny roadsides, highway medians and powerline easements. *Coreopsis* is Florida’s state wildflower, and it appears on the State Wildflower license tag. Blooms spring, summer and fall.

Hardiness: Zones 8–11.

Growth Habit: 1’ - 3’ tall.

Soil: Prefers moist, acidic soils.

Exposure: Full sun.

Uses: Mixed wildflower and butterfly gardens; excellent for sunny roadsides, highway medians and powerline easements.



Foundation board maps plan for next decade

The Florida Wildflower Foundation board and four guests in January took part in an intense two-day workshop that helped the organization map a strategic plan for the next decade. The meeting was held at the Florida Natural History Museum in Gainesville.

During the workshop, facilitators Pete Colverson and Ondine Wells of Pandion Inc., Gainesville, lead participants through a series of exercises and discussions that examined the organization's mission, vision and core values while identifying strengths, weaknesses and goals.

Among the future projects identified were:

- The addition of highly visible wildflower plantings at Florida's 36 highway rest areas.
- The establishment of research gardens in key areas.

- Development of curriculum for elementary education statewide.
- The establishment of Florida wildflower tourism.

Pandion delivered a draft of the strategic plan in late February. "It's especially satisfying to see the plan come together, with so many agencies, organizations, and individuals participating," said Jeff Caster, FWF board vice chair and chair of the strategic planning committee.

The Foundation thanks Pete and Ondine for their patient direction, as well as volunteers Herb Hiller, Cammie Donaldson, Elizabeth Pate and Jeff Norcini, who, as longtime supporters of the Foundation, added valuable insight. We also thank Doug Jones, the museum's director; Thomas Emmel, McGuire Center director; and Betty Duncel, informal science education director, for their warm welcome and assistance.



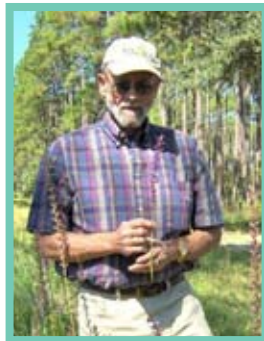
Board Chair Anne Mackay (left), Treasurer Carolyn Schaag, and Vice Chair Jeff Caster discuss the Foundation's future direction at the strategic planning session. *Photo courtesy of Pandion Systems Inc.*

What's next: Foundation board members are reviewing the draft of the plan and will soon have a final document that will lead the organization's efforts through 2020.

Meet board member Gary Henry

By Barry Glenn

When Florida's State Wildflower license tag went on sale in 2000, it surprised no one that Gary Henry was the first in line. After all, the longtime landscape architect for the state Department of Transportation (FDOT) was a driving force behind the creation of the plate, which has raised more than \$2 million to fund native wildflower planting, education and research across the state.



Henry always has been at the forefront when it comes to nurturing the state's native wildflowers. Well, almost always. When his FDOT bosses told him to develop a state wildflower program 37 years ago, neither they nor Henry considered it a key element in improving the appearance of the state's roadways.

However, pressure from the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs (FFGC) convinced Henry that these botanical natives could work wonders along the blacktops.

Henry found that native wildflowers were harder than out-of-state specimens and

required less maintenance. And using seeds was more economical than putting down plants. But seeds, public education and research took money. The FFGC had twice tried to persuade the state to produce a license plate that would raise funds. In 1996, Henry and other groups got behind the effort and, four years later, the Legislature

approved the plate.

Producing seed is still a delicate process. "Not much is known about what it takes to raise a crop of native Florida wildflowers," Henry says. "You need to go out in the wild to collect some seed without hurting that population," then figure out germination rates and watering needs. "To get a good crop going takes several years."

Henry, who retired from DOT in 2001, was executive director of the Florida Wildflower Foundation from 2003 to 2007. The Tallahassee resident still serves on the group's board and works tirelessly to sow the good word about native wildflowers.

Florida grasses book published

University Press of Florida has published *A Guide to Florida Grasses*, by FWF board member Dr. Walter K. Taylor, a University of Central Florida professor emeritus of biology. The guide, \$49.95, describes more than 200 native and non-native grasses, and includes more than 500 color photos, line drawings and scans of specimens. The book is available from University Press of Florida (www.upf.com) and through major Internet booksellers.



"The more people see how beautiful wildflowers are and how easy they are to grow," he says, "the more we'll see an increase in enthusiasm and the spread of them."

Planting grant spreads beauty on A1A Scenic Byway

The A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway in St. Johns and Flagler counties is now even more beautiful, thanks to a grant from the Florida Wildflower Foundation.



Dye flower (*Coreopsis basalis*) now blooms near Mickler's Landing in the A1A Scenic Byway corridor.

During the 2008 grant year, the Foundation awarded more than \$30,000 to the Friends of Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway to fund the planting of wildflowers at 21 locations in the 72-mile corridor.

The route, which hugs Florida's northeast coastline, was driven several times during winter by Florida Wildflower Foundation Executive Director Lisa Roberts, who noted beach sunflower and blanketflower already

were showing in several locations. "When blooms peak this spring, they will add even more enjoyment to what is already one of the most beautiful drives along Florida's coastline," she says.

Many of the species planted along A1A are expected to be in full bloom in May, reports Sallie O'Hara, the byway's program administrator. Some plantings are already impressive. For instance, the blanket flower along State Road 312 approaching A1A near St. Augustine Beach is cascading from the medians.

Wildflower grower Terry Zinn, a FWF board member, consulted with the Byway

GRANT SPOTLIGHT

to customize the project's seed mixes. Species used include softhair coneflower, wand goldenrod, standing cypress, phlox, black-eyed Susans and several types of coreopsis.

News releases and public meetings continue to raise awareness of the project. Flagler Beach City Commissioners even were presented with framed photographs of wildflowers, which are displayed in City Chambers. Jacksonville.com also featured a beautiful photograph of coreopsis taken by Craig O'Neal at Mickler's Landing last May.

For more information and a map showing the planting locations, see the project report on the Florida Wildflower Foundation Web site at floridawildflowerfoundation.org/past_recipients.html.

Our membership benefits are growing!

Discounted paddle trips: Florida Wildlife Foundation members now enjoy free membership in the Adventure Outpost "wanna go" group. Benefits include member discounts on more than 50 paddle tours in North and Central Florida. Each trip is lead by Florida Master Naturalist and author Lars Andersen. Join Lars' weekly email list, which includes his lyrical

narratives of upcoming trips, by emailing riverguide2000@yahoo.com, or visit www.adventureoutpost.net for trip descriptions and dates.

Buy 5 seed packets, and get a 6th free: FWF members will receive a packet of free seeds when they purchase five packets from the Wildflower Seed and

Plant Growers Association, a co-op of growers from around the state.

Packets are \$3 each. For a list of species, visit www.floridawildflowers.com/seedpacket.htm. Call the co-op to order (352-988-8117), and mention you're a Foundation member.

A look at the Butterfly Rainforest

After the strategic planning workshop in Gainesville, participants were treated to a tour of the Florida Museum of Natural History's Butterfly Rainforest exhibit (above). The soaring screened vivarium that holds hundreds of butterflies. The visit included a stop at the "nursery," where pupae from all over the world develop then are released into the exhibit as butterflies.



FWF Calendar

Where we've been

- Board members Terry Zinn and Brightman Logan recently gave talks to Florida Native Plant Society chapters.
- Board member Walter Taylor and Executive Director Lisa Roberts hosted a table at the Winter Park Garden Club's Nature's Bounty event Feb. 21.
- The Foundation also had booths at the Wekiva Riverfest in Apopka on March 7 and the Florida Wildflower Festival in DeLand on March 28.

Where we'll be

- Terry Zinn will host a booth at the Jacksonville Green Expo on April 25 and 26.
- Lisa Roberts will pass out educational material and free wildflower seeds during the May 16 Field Day & Bird Festival at Lake Louisa State Park in Clermont.
- Carolyn Schaag and volunteer Elizabeth Pate will keep wildflowers front and center during the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' annual meeting April 16-17 in Daytona Beach.