

ENVIRONMENTAL TIMES

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THE SPARK OF LIFE

Prescribed Burns Restore Habitat at Three Local Natural Areas

The red-orange flames advance upon a grove of slash pine trees. The flames lick along the forest floor, blackening saw palmetto fronds and charring small trees. Department staff closely monitor the fire as it moves through the forest. Their job is not to put the fire out, but to make sure it remains controlled and orderly. This fire was intentionally set; a prescribed burn used by natural area land managers to restore the benefits of fire to the land.

Plants, animals, and people benefit from prescribed burning. It returns nutrients to the soil for young plant growth. It encourages seed germination in fire-adapted species and removes invasive exotic plants. Prescribed burning improves wildlife habitat. Sun-loving plants colonize the areas opened by fire, providing a wider variety of food sources for wildlife. Prescribed burning reduces hazardous fuel loads (dead plants and thick underbrush) which lowers the risk of potentially large and uncontrollable wildfires that may threaten residential areas.

Natural areas containing fire-dependent plants and animals are divided into management units that are burned in rotation. Depending on the type of habitat, the units may be burned every 7 to 15 years. Within weeks of the burn, the area begins to "green up" as new grasses, wildflowers, and tree seedlings emerge from the blackened soil.

For more information on prescribed burning check out the Department's "Spark of Life" brochure or the Florida Division of Forestry Forest Protection Bureau website at flame.fl-dof.com.

By Ann Mathews



Department staff use a drip torch to start a prescribed burn at the Juno Dunes Natural Area



A section of pine flatwoods forest burns at the Unit 11 Natural Area



In just a few weeks this charred area will be covered in new vegetation

During the last half of 2002, the Department of Environmental Resources Management conducted prescribed burns at the Unit 11, Juno Dunes, and High Ridge Scrub Natural Areas. A combined total of more than 350 acres were burned.

Public Invited to North County Natural Areas Workshops

Where do you think new hiking or riding trails should be? What about environmental education facilities? Come and share your ideas, and help identify additional lands to be acquired to complete greenway systems in northern Palm Beach County and southern Martin County!

Two public workshops have been scheduled as part of the master plan study for the conservation lands in the project area - from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Okeechobee and from Southern Boulevard to southern Martin County. One workshop will be held in the north side pavilion at Grassy Waters Nature Preserve on Wednesday, February 5 at 7:30 p.m. Grassy Waters is located on the north side of Northlake Boulevard, just west of the Bee Line Highway. The second workshop will be held in the Jupiter Town Council Chambers on Wednesday, February 12 at 7:30 p.m. The Town Council Chambers is located at 210 Military Trail, on the west side of Military, just south of Indiantown Road.

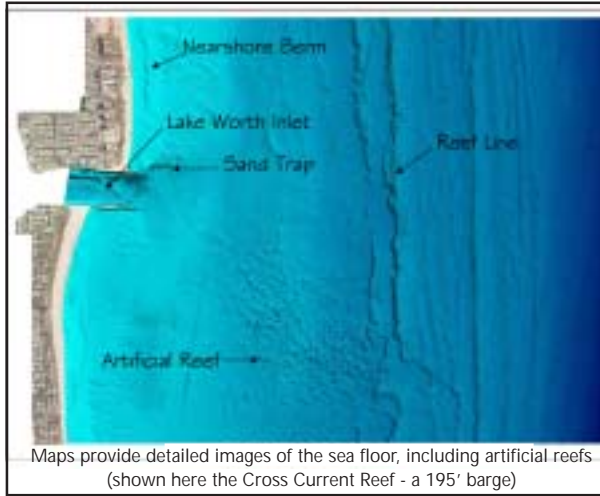
Consultants for Palm Beach County will incorporate your ideas and their recommendations, based on those ideas and other information, into a natural areas master plan for use by state and local government land managers such as Palm Beach County, the City of West Palm Beach, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the South Florida Water Management District. For further information, call Kay Brennan of the Department of Environmental Resources Management at (561) 233-2451.

By Kay Brennan

A NEW VIEW OF THE SEA

Sea Floor Mapping Project Provides Detailed Images of the County's Coastline

This fall, the Department of Environmental Resources Management worked with the Australian firm, Tenix LADS Corporation, to create a detailed map of the ocean floor along the coast of Palm Beach County. The survey was conducted from an airplane using a high-tech laser depth sounding system that took a reading every 12 square feet from the coastline out to depths of 180 feet. Approximately 30 million depth readings were collected in just 7 nights.



From these data, very detailed and accurate maps are created that will be invaluable to resource managers and researchers. The Department staff will utilize the maps for refining the location of sand borrow areas and sediment volume analysis for beach nourishment projects. The maps will also be used to determine sites for future artificial reefs, locating gaps in the reef for cables and pipelines, and conducting wave refraction analysis for beach projects. The maps will be available for download from the Department website once data processing is complete in the spring of 2003.

By Bud Howard

ARTIFICIAL REEF CREATED

Riverwalk Reef Receives a New Tenant as the M/V Thozina Joins Three Other Ships



The M/V Thozina begins her descent to the sea floor

The 174-foot M/V Thozina became the County's newest artificial reef when it was scuttled on December 15, 2002 at the Governor's Riverwalk Reef site south of Lake Worth Inlet. The Thozina is the fourth drug-smuggling ship turned over to Palm Beach County by the U.S. Customs

Service as part of Governor Jeb Bush's Operation River Walk, a program designed to eliminate drug smuggling operations on the Miami River. The Thozina rests in 90 feet of water 1.5 miles south of the Lake Worth Inlet. She joins three other ships: the M/V Sasha Buccaneer, the St. Jacques, and the Gilbert Sea. All four ships at the Governor's Riverwalk Reef can be explored by scuba divers on a single-tank dive when conditions are favorable. For a brochure listing the locations of Palm Beach County's artificial reefs, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: The Department of Environmental Resources Management, 3323 Belvedere Road, Building 502, West Palm Beach, FL 33406.

By Carman Vare

Upcoming Meetings

- AREEC - March 6, May 1
- CLASC - February 3, March 3, April 7
- NAMAC - February 21, March 21, April 18
- PBCBSC - February 10, March 10, April 14
- PBCRRT - February 11, March 11, April 8
- SLWIAC - March 13, May 8

For times and locations, please call (561) 233-2400. Dates and times are subject to change.

- AREEC - Artificial Reef and Estuarine Enhancement Committee
- CLASC - Conservation Land Acquisition Selection Committee
- NAMAC - Natural Areas Management Advisory Committee
- PBCBSC - Palm Beach Countywide Beaches and Shores Council
- PBCRRT - Palm Beach County Reef Research Team
- SLWIAC - South Lake Worth Inlet Advisory Committee

Beachfront Property Donated to ERM

The Department of Environmental Resources Management has acquired more beachfront property, thanks to a generous donation from local residents near the town of Briny Breezes in Ocean Ridge. Two large Australian pines were removed from the 0.07-acre property in August 2002. Since then, the dune area has been restored with native vegetation including sea grapes, sea oats, and four large sabal palms for shade. The site offers public beach access along a sandy post-and-rail lined trail.

By Jill Rozycki



These sabal palms will eventually provide shade for beach-goers

KEEPING TRACK OF SEA GRASSES

Initial South Lake Worth Inlet Post-Construction Seagrass Monitoring Completed



Seagrass bed at the Boynton Beach Boat Club Channel

The Palm Beach County South Lake Worth Inlet Dredging Project was initiated in November of 2001 and continued to September of 2002. The construction project included maintenance dredging of 1) sand from within the Interior Deposition Basin (sand trap), the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, and the Boynton Beach Boat Club Channel; and 2) rock from within the sand trap and throat of the inlet.

The total acreage of seagrasses within the survey areas of the dredging project increased from 40.2 acres in 2001 (pre-construction) to 61.6 acres in 2002 (post-construction). The overall increase in observed seagrass cover from 2001 to 2002 is likely due to several factors, including, but not limited to, an unseasonably mild 2001 winter, natural annual changes, and better survey conditions (good water clarity) in 2002.

The project area supports four species of grasses (in order of predominance): Johnson's seagrass (*Halophila johnsonii*), shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*), paddle grass (*Halophila decipiens*), and a few patches of turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*). Seagrass density within each bed was extremely variable, as was seagrass distribution.

The observed changes in the sand trap and rock removal area are primarily due to an overall shifting of the seagrass bed westward approximately 15 to 100

feet. This westward migration is likely a secondary result of the shifting of the substrate from the deepening of the sand trap, especially in the rock removal area, where the westward shift is more pronounced. In addition, this area is exposed to very high currents, and the substrate likely experienced some shifting over time, even if dredging did not occur in this area.

The seagrass beds west of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway expanded up to 585 feet eastward from the 2001 to the 2002 surveys. The seagrass bed in the northern portion of the Waterway remained fairly constant. Within these areas, no direct or indirect impacts associated with the dredge project were observed.

The primary purpose of completing the dredging of the sand trap was to increase the volume, so that most of the sand entering the inlet is deposited into the basin and removed from the water column. This is important because sand is prevented from drifting westward and smothering the existing seagrass beds. In addition, by deepening the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway and the Boynton Beach Boat Club Channel and providing boaters with marked channels, navigation is improved and further prop damage to the seagrass beds is minimized. Overall, there were some minimal impacts to seagrasses associated with the dredge project, but the long-term benefits should create a healthier seagrass environment.

By Allison Holzhausen



An aerial view of the South Lake Worth Inlet seagrass beds

Record Nesting Season for Green Sea Turtles

During the 2002 sea turtle nesting season, 2,338 green sea turtle nests were laid in Palm Beach County - a 20% increase from the previous record of 1,942 nests set in 2000! Palm Beach County typically has the second highest green sea turtle nest count in the United States (Brevard County records the most nests), with over 70% of our green sea turtle nesting occurring north of Singer Island.

The endangered green sea turtle is the largest of the hard-shelled sea turtles, growing up to 600 pounds and 3.5 feet in length. It is the only herbivorous sea turtle and feeds primarily on seagrasses and algae. Though currently numerous throughout the Caribbean and southern Atlantic and Pacific waters, the green sea turtle was almost hunted to extinction by the 1970's. Now protected under the Endangered Species Act, south Florida's green sea turtle population appears to be slightly increasing.



Good news for sea turtles

By Carly Pfistner

Help Us Protect Sea Turtles

Do not observe sea turtles nesting at night without a permitted guide.

Do not disturb or handle any sea turtles, their eggs or their nests.

Report injured, stranded or dead turtles to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC.

Report lighting visible from the beach during the nesting season - call (561) 233-2400.

Properly dispose of litter - especially plastic bags and fishing line.

SAVING OUR NATIVE VEGETATION

The Palm Beach County Vegetation Preservation and Protection Ordinance

The Palm Beach County Vegetation Preservation and Protection Ordinance is designed to help preserve and protect south Florida's native vegetation. In affect since 1992, the Ordinance covers the removal or eradication of prohibited and invasive non-native vegetation and mitigation procedures for native vegetation lost during land development activities. The Ordinance applies to all land parcels, whether improved or unimproved; residential, commercial, industrial, or agricultural; small or large; public or private; and, can include utility, road rights-of-way and canal easements.

Within the Ordinance there are requirements for obtaining permits for removal of native and non-native vegetation. Some of the permits have a cost (standard, specimen tree removal, and vegetation removal notice), and some do not (general - typically used for removal of prohibited and invasive non-native vegetation, and De Minimus approvals).

There are no permits required for the removal of non-native trees including, but not limited to citrus, mango, coconut, areca or queen palms, black olive, ficus (other than *Ficus aurea*), Norfolk Island pine, or eucalyptus. Examples of trees and vegetation which require permits to remove include, but are not limited to, slash and sand pines, oaks, cypress, dahoon holly, cocoplum, gumbo limbo, red maple, strangler fig, sabal and Florida royal palm, and seagrape.

The Ordinance also provides for potential penalties for violations. State law allows the County

to assess penalties up to \$1,000 per day, per violation for the first offense and \$5,000 per day, per violation for a second offense. If the offense is deemed to be irreparable or irreversible, the penalty can be up to \$15,000. Violations may include, but are not limited to, removal of native vegetation without a permit, excessive alteration (trimming) of native vegetation, or the demise of native vegetation due to various activities including compacting the root zone by heavy equipment and the improper use of pesticides.

For more information concerning the Ordinance, a copy of the Ordinance, or questions relating to the information in this article, contact the Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management at (561) 233-2400. The Ordinance can also be found in the Unified Land Development Code, Section 9.5 at www.co.palm-beach.fl.us/pzb/new/html/publications.htm.

By Allen Trefry



Removal of these native plants require a permit: live oak (top), sabal palm (bottom left), dahoon holly (bottom right)

Endangered Plant Survey Results



The endangered celestial lily

The endangered celestial lily is a plant of Florida's wet places - swamps, marshes and wet flatwoods forests. It has small, delicate purple flowers which bloom only between 2:00 p.m. and dusk for two months of the year (October and November). Each individual flower will only bloom one afternoon and then die, with new flowers coming from the same plant on subsequent days. This unique life cycle makes finding the plants a challenge.

Recent surveys of the Royal Palm Beach Pines, Loxahatchee River, and Loxahatchee Slough Natural Areas noted the presence of the celestial lily. The celestial lily populations in Royal Palm Beach Pines have been surveyed annually since 1995. This most recent survey found 231 individual plants, a 115% increase from the 2001 total of 107 plants. The Loxahatchee River and Loxahatchee Slough celestial lily surveys were the first conducted on the sites. The surveys found 64 plants at Loxahatchee River and 34 plants at Loxahatchee Slough.

Besides plant surveys, the Department of Environmental Resources Management also conducts wildlife surveys on its natural areas. These surveys track population trends, giving natural area managers a warning of possible problems if the data show unusual population declines.

By Mike Cheek

GRANT AWARDS EARMARKED FOR NATURAL AREAS

Pondhawk, Hypoluxo Scrub, and Acreage Pines Receive Funds

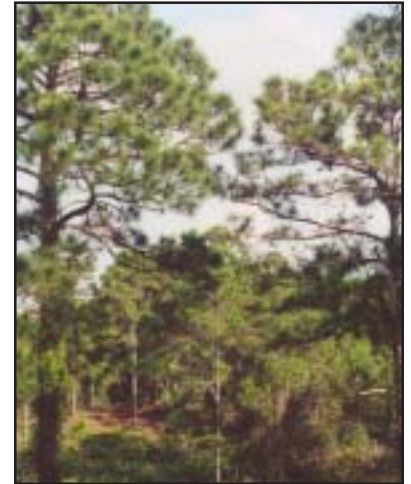
The Florida Community Trust released the rankings for 2002 grant applications. There were 114 applications, requesting \$185 million in grant funds for the \$66 million that was available in cycle #2 of Florida Forever.

The Pondhawk Natural Area (formerly known as IBM/Blue Lake) application did very well with a score of 160 and will be funded. The dollar value of this grant should be approximately \$5.7 million.

The Limestone Creek application was not ranked in the funding, or even included on the contingency funding list. However, the Florida Community Trust informed the Department that several large projects from last year's cycle may not be funded because of lack of progress in acquiring the lands. That money could be freed up and used in this year's cycle to fund additional projects. This may include the Limestone Creek project which would bring in



The Pondhawk Natural Area (above) in Boca Raton and the Hypoluxo Scrub Natural Area (right) in Hypoluxo will receive funding from The Florida Community Trust



approximately \$1.25 million in additional grant dollars. The Florida Community Trust also approved the Department's project plans for the Hypoluxo Scrub (formerly known as Overlook Scrub) and the Acreage Pines Natural Areas. The Grant Award Agreements for both sites were approved by the Board of County

Commissioners on December 17, 2002. The Florida Community Trust will fund 40% of the acquisition costs for Hypoluxo Scrub and 50% of the acquisition costs for Acreage Pines, for a total of approximately \$2.14 million.

By Dave Gillings



DEPARTMENT PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Public Outreach - The Link Between the Department and the Public

The Public Outreach Program of the Department of Environmental Resources Management provides information on Department programs, works with landowners on invasive exotic plant issues, works with the Department of Transportation to "rescue" native trees in the path of road-widening projects and relocate them to natural areas, and offers the public a chance to get involved through its volunteer and natural areas stewardship program.



Kiosk poster at the Royal Palm Beach Pines Natural Area

Information managing is a big part of the day-to-day duties of the Public Outreach Program. One minute the staff is working on a press release about the sinking of a ship to create a new artificial

reef, the next minute they are working on creating a display highlighting the restoration projects along the Loxahatchee River Watershed. Other responsibilities include creating natural area trail guides and kiosk posters, designing brochures, and producing the Department's quarterly newsletter.

The program also deals with the invasive exotic plant problem plaguing Palm Beach County. Public Outreach staff distribute native tree seedlings at local special events while educating the public about the threats of invasive exotic plants. Staff are currently working on the implementation of the County's Prohibited Invasive Non-native Vegetation Removal ordinance which includes an



Tree seedling distribution

incentive program to assist landowners with removal and replacement costs.

The Public Outreach volunteer program offers the public several ways to become involved. One way is through the Volunteer Work Project Team. Volunteers can sign up for monthly projects that include tree planting, trash removal, or exotic plant removal. Volunteers with a little more time on their hands can join the Stewardship program. These volunteers are assigned to a local natural area near their home. They survey it weekly, noting wildlife sightings and reporting any problems to the Department.



A Volunteer Work Project Team at the Hypoluxo Scrub Natural Area

By Ann Mathews

PALMS RELOCATED TO NATURAL AREA

Hundreds of Trees Rescued from Southern Boulevard Road-widening Project

The Department of Environmental Resources Management, in an effort to preserve native Florida plants, relocated approximately 400 sabal palm trees from Southern Boulevard. The Florida Department of Transportation (DOT) recently began its massive Southern Boulevard road-widening project from Military Trail to west of 441/State Road 7. The construction project involves the purchasing of numerous properties along Southern in order to make room for the widened road, along with the construction of large overpasses at Military Trail, Haverhill Road, and Jog Road. DOT notified the County about the availability of the trees, and allowed the Department

the opportunity to rescue as many trees as possible. The Department hired Tree Locators, Inc. to dig up the trees and transport them to Winding Waters Natural Area, a recently acquired 550-acre natural area located on Haverhill Road, 1/2 mile north of 45th Street. The sabals were planted inside the property along Haverhill Road in order to provide an aesthetically-pleasing buffer between the property and surrounding developments. If feasible the Department will be relocating other native vegetation from Southern Boulevard to Winding Waters Natural Area or other properties in the County.



A portion of the 400 sabal palms relocated to the Winding Waters Natural Area

By Matthew King

EXOTIC INSECT DAMAGING LOCAL PLANTS

Lobate Lac Scale Feasts on a Variety of Landscape Plants



Lobate lac scale on wax myrtle

There is a new invasive pest in town, and no, it's not a plant, it's a scale. The lobate lac scale (*Paratachardina lobata lobata*) to be exact. This little pest insect, first found in 1999 in Davie, Florida (Broward County), feasts on a wide variety of landscape plants, including several

species of fruit trees, ficus, buttonwood, cocoplum and wax myrtle to name a few. The scale originally hails from India and Sri Lanka and probably made its way to the United States hitching a ride on an imported ornamental plant. The scale spreads by the larvae which can travel on air currents.

According to the University of Florida, this sapsucking scale has the potential to be one of the most devastating pests of trees and shrubs in the state's history. The scale causes its damage by forming dense colonies along the stems and branches of

host trees where it covers itself in a hard, light to dark reddish brown coat of armor. Under this armor, the scale sucks vital fluids from the tree. In addition, the scale secretes honeydew (a sugar waste) that eventually sprouts sooty black mold, giving the plant a black painted look.

The scale has been found damaging native vegetation in the tree islands of the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, the Everglades National Park, and at the Gumbo Limbo Nature Center in Boca Raton. As of October 2002, 120 species of plants have been found to be susceptible to the scale, with 39 of those plants native to Florida. Observational experiments



The end result of a lobate lac scale infestation on wax myrtle bushes

have shown that the systemic insecticide imidacloprid effectively controlled the scale on a *Ficus benjamina* tree. The U.S. Department of Agricultural Research Center is actively looking for a biological control agent for this pest.

By Matthew King

A Few of the Exotic Pests Found in Palm Beach County

- Animals
- Marine Toad
- Red Fire Ant
- Walking Catfish
- European Starling
- Asian Tiger Mosquito

- Plants
- Air Potato
- Melaleuca
- Carrotwood
- Ear-leaf Acacia
- Australian Pine
- Brazilian Pepper
- Old World Climbing Fern

VOLUNTEERS LEND ALOT OF HELPING HANDS

2,166 Hours Donated in Four Months for a Yearly Total of 4,791 Volunteer Hours

SEPTEMBER - FLORIDA COASTAL CLEANUP & MANGROVE SEED COLLECTING - More than 150 volunteers removed trash from the shorelines of Lake Ida and Lake Osborne on September 21. Cigarettes were the most collected trash item at both sites (2,125), followed by caps & lids (1,480). The Olympic Heights High School National Honor Society removed 540 pounds of trash and exotic plants from the Yamato Scrub Natural Area. Mangrove seed collecting began in earnest as students from the Jupiter Community High School



Lake Ida cleanup volunteers and their trash pile

Environmental Research & Field Study Academy (JERFSA), members of the 4H club God's Army and clients of VOCA searched local mudflats for red mangrove seeds. The National Public Lands Day cleanup event on September 28 brought local scout groups and school groups to the Jupiter Inlet Natural Area to help remove invasive vines and pot red mangrove seeds.

OCTOBER - HYPOLUXO SCRUB & MORE MANGROVE SEED COLLECTING - It was hard work, but a group of volunteers removed 1,460 pounds of trash and exotic plants from the Hypoluxo Scrub (formerly known as Overlook Scrub) Natural Area on October 19.

Members of the Bnai Torah Synagogue performed double duty on October 27 as one group removed invasive plants from the Delray Oaks Natural Area and



Volunteers remove the exotic plant mother-in-law's tongue from Hypoluxo Scrub



Smiles all around as volunteers collect and pot thousands of red mangrove seeds

one group removed trash from the Yamato Scrub Natural Area. Mangrove seed collecting continued as Girl Scout Troop 194, Cub Scout Pack 774 Dens 5 and 12, members of the 4H clubs Inquisitors, Trailblazers, and His Handiwork, Forest Hill High School, JERFSA, and VOCA roamed the mudflats.

NOVEMBER - ROYAL PALM BEACH PINES NATURAL AREA & MANGROVE SEED POTTING - Boy Scout Troop 120 and Cub Scout Pack 120 spent the morning of November 16 roaming the wetlands of



Melaleuca seedlings don't stand a chance against these exotic-busting scouts

Royal Palm Beach Pines Natural Area pulling melaleuca seedlings. Hands-On United Way volunteers and students from Lake Worth High School planted 90 trees and shrubs and removed trash from the Juno Dunes Natural Area while the Olympic Heights High School Friends of Animals Club removed the invasive exotic rosary pea vine from the Delray Oaks Natural Area. In November emphasis shifted from collecting red mangrove seeds to potting them in trays. Volunteers included members from the 4H clubs His Handiwork and Trailblazers, students from the Florida Atlantic University Honors College, Lake Worth High School, JERFSA, and clients from VOCA.

A very special "Golden Mangrove Thank You" goes out to Mrs. Mitchell's class at the Jupiter Community High School. From September through November they collected and potted more than 11,000 red mangrove seedlings which they are caring for in the school's nursery.

All in all, volunteers collected and potted more than 30,000 red mangrove seeds. By next fall the seedlings will be planted at various sites throughout the county to restore vital estuary habitat. Mangrove trees are an important component of a healthy estuary - their decomposing leaves feed microscopic organisms that in turn feed bigger animals and their tangled roots provide hiding places for juvenile fish, crustaceans, and other sea life.

DECEMBER - SWEETBAY CORNER - Volunteers boldly went where no volunteers had gone before as they erected a 330-foot post and rail fence at the Sweetbay Corner habitat restoration area at the corner of Lake Osborne Drive and Lantana Road. This was the first fence construction project ever attempted by a volunteer group. Volunteers not only erected the fence in under three hours they also picked up trash around the Lake Osborne shoreline.

By Ann Mathews



Volunteers erect 330 feet of fence at Sweetbay Corner



THE BACK PAGE

Last But Not Least...

The Department welcomes the following new employees: Angela Jeters (Natural Resources Stewardship), Johanna Kitson (Natural Resources Stewardship), Michelle Lawrence (Finance & Support Services), Marilyn Newell (Finance & Support Services), Grant Novak (Natural Resources Stewardship), Ryan Del Rosario (Finance & Support Services), and Leanne Welch (Natural Resources Stewardship).

The Department received a grant for \$100,000 for the control of invasive exotic aquatic plants (Hydrilla, water lettuce, water hyacinth) in Lakes Osborne, Ida, Eden, Pine, and Clarke.

If you would like to be notified via email when the *Environmental Times* is available online, send your request to amathews@co.palm-beach.fl.us. If you would like the *Environmental Times* mailed to you, call (561) 233-2426.

The Department is giving away free tree seedlings at the following local events:

- ◆ South Florida Fair (weekends only) Booth located in Building 5
- ◆ Everglades Day at the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge - February 8
- ◆ Wakodahatchee Wetlands Day at the Palm Beach County Water Utilities Wakodahatchee Wetlands - February 21
- ◆ Spring Family Festival at the Mounts Botanical Gardens - March 9

The Department welcomes two international students to its hallways in January and February. Kritika Singh and Alana Hall, both from New Zealand, are pursuing careers in environmental science. They will spend six weeks working along side staff on projects ranging from water quality testing to natural area monitoring.



Kritika and Alana help out in the Department's nursery

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