



Summer 2022 Newsletter

Florida Master Naturalist Program

Dear Friends,

We hope you're enjoying summer and getting outdoors, wherever you may be. I've spent some time in a cabin on a lake in northern Wisconsin (my birth state), listening to loons, watching the resident bald eagle, and catching a few northern pike. I've also been updating and revising FMNP core courses to include new information and an updated look that are planned for release in January.

A lot has been happening with the FMNP during the past year. We've completed 40 FMNP courses and are preparing for the busy fall season. We continue to offer in-person, hybrid, and online courses and our innovative FMNP instructors keep finding new and clever ways to make FMNP courses fun and informative. Courses fill quickly, so keep an eye on current [FMNP course offerings](#). Also, we've awarded 7 FMNP scholarships this year – for more info see [FMNP scholarships](#).

The FMNP continues to grow. We added several new FMNP instructor teams and team members this year and the FMNP Endowment surpassed the \$50,000 mark this spring. FMNP 2022 endowment stickers and window clings are still available for a donation of a dollar (or a thousand dollars...) [FMNPendow](#). Other changes include a fond farewell to Savannah who will be leaving our FMNP admin team, and welcome to Maddie who is joining us. Caitlin and Shelby continue to anchor the FMNP admin team - for general questions contact Caitlin at fmnpcoordinator@gmail.com and for all things registration, contact Shelby at msowder@ufl.edu. For questions about specific course agendas please contact the FMNP instructor listed for the course. We also added a new FMNP Advisory Board member, Catherine Vecchio, who represents FMNP Friends Groups. Information about joining or forming an FMNP Friends Group is available on the [FMNP website](#).

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So a lot is going on at the home office, none of which compares, however, to the important role all of you provide in sharing your enthusiasm and knowledge for nature with others. The FMNP isn't just an educational program, it's a grassroots movement to open peoples' eyes to the amazing world around us. Whether to family, friends, students, or strangers, that's the role all of you provide.

All the best, Marty



Photo courtesy of Marty Main.

Saw Palmetto Survey

Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) is a sprawling, multi-trunked palm with large fan-shaped leaves. Palms typically grow between 5 to 10 feet in height and 4 to 10 feet in spread, however some specimens have been found with much longer horizontal growth. Saw Palmettos are extremely slow growing with only about 3 cm of growth per year. Some specimens in south Florida are documented at over a thousand years old. Native to Florida, Saw Palmetto can be found throughout the peninsula from USDA hardiness zones 8-11. It typically dominates in pine flatwoods ecosystems where growth is managed through frequent natural disturbance by fire. The palm flowers occur on stalks that appear in spring and are covered in fragrant white flowers favored by bees. Fruits are initially yellow but develop throughout the summer, ripening from August through October until fully black. The plant has been used by wildlife and humans throughout the long history of the Florida peninsula. It provides not only a food source but also cover for wildlife. While ubiquitous in Florida, the Saw Palmetto is often overlooked as a species worthy of consideration or protection. The ripe fruits however, have been harvested by humans and animals alike, and at times competition for the fruits has lead to an imbalance in availability.

Humans have a long history of using Saw Palmetto fiber for rope and fishing nets, leaves for fans and thatch for roofs, and fruits for food and medicinal uses. Modern day uses for Saw Palmetto fruit include treatment of prostate issues, with Florida being the largest supplier of Saw Palmetto extract in the world. Some estimates put the crop value at \$50 million per year. The mass harvest in south Florida is regulated and overseen by the state of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. A survey to assess the status of Saw Palmetto fruit harvest throughout Florida has been developed that seeks to determine whether harvest is occurring, how the harvest is documented by local agencies and whether any local oversight is occurring. The survey is specific to agency personnel and volunteers on Florida's publicly managed lands. Take the survey at [this link](#). For more information, contact **Alyssa Vinson—alyvinson@ufl.edu**.

- Alyssa Vinson, UF/IFAS Extension Residential Horticulture/Master Gardener Agent



Fond Farewell to Savannah Gardner

Dear FMNP Family,

After working with the FMNP team for nearly one year, I am excited to share that after earning my master's degree from the University of Florida, I am moving to Atlanta, GA to embark on a career in marketing and sales. Although my time with the FMNP was limited, I have grown to admire all of the individuals involved in the program across the great state of Florida. My appreciation for Florida's natural environment and vast ecosystem has grown immensely, and I am very thankful for the chance to work for such an incredible organization. Thank you to Marty, Caitlin, Shelby, and each of you for giving me this opportunity to learn and grow with the Florida Master Naturalist Program.

I am pleased to introduce you all to the newest Program Assistant, Maddie Magrino. Maddie has experience working for University of Florida's Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Department (WEC) for the past year as their communications program assistant. Maddie is beginning her second year as a masters student at UF and is working alongside Dr. Marty Main on the development of a Freshwater Wetland Restoration course for the FMNP! Maddie looks forward to being a part of such an outstanding program and is excited to learn from this phenomenal team.

Warmest regards,
Savannah



Photo courtesy of Savannah Gardner.



Photo courtesy of Maddie Magrino.

"Thank you to Marty, Caitlin, Shelby and each of you for giving me this opportunity to learn and grow with the Florida Master Naturalist Program."



A SW Florida Small Pond Make-Over

Three students in the Fall 2021 Lee County Freshwater Systems Module, Ginger Davidson, Daniel Gauzens and Barb J. Wyskowski, presented their Final Group Project on how small community HOAs can contribute to the care and proper functioning of their community storm water retention ponds.

After the class, Ginger met with Ernesto Lasso de la Veg, coordinator of the Lee County Pond Watch program. They discussed the condition of the pond in her SW Florida community and began a water sampling program. Ernesto also encouraged Ginger to submit an application to WETPLAN for a contest to win a Mini Make-Over of the HOA's pond.

WETPLAN (Watershed Education Training – Ponds, Lakes & Neighborhoods) is a partnership of water quality and lake management experts that provide education and resources to communities, like Ginger's, to improve neighborhood lakes and ponds. Ginger followed through, applied for the Mini Make-Over grant and her pond project won! Along with a fellow FMNP graduate, she began spreading the word about the upcoming pond Make-Over to the rest of her community.

Ginger prepared an information sheet of "Pond Make-Over Frequently Asked Questions" so that residents could understand the overall benefits of the Make-Over. The highlights of the Make-Over would be establishing native plants in the littoral zone and education on plant maintenance. Ginger also invited the community to come out to the pond on the project's work day to help out or mingle.

Overall, the entire community was very excited about the plants that would soon surround their pond. On April 22, 2022 littoral plants were delivered and installed around the pond, along with background information on plant care from Lee County Natural Resources, the Florida Native Plant Society and GHD Consultants. Neighbors also helped with the project and a sign was installed to help showcase and inform residents and guests about the pond Make-Over.

This project is an example of the importance of the final project that students present during FMNP courses and how students can apply their class efforts well past the class itself. It is certainly a great success for Ginger and her SW Florida community.

- Kevin Doyle, Abercrombie Executive in Geology, Wichita State University



Photo courtesy of Kevin Doyle.



Peter's rock agama on the Florida Treasure Coast

Sean MacWilliam is finalizing his eight-week summer internship with Ken Gioeli, FMNP Lead Instructor and UF/IFAS Extension Agent in St. Lucie County. Ken asked Sean to work on a live trap for Peter's rock agama which are becoming one of the most seen nonnative lizards in South Florida. Since their arrival, which most likely took place through the pet trade, these lizards have quickly taken off.

The Peter's rock agama is easily recognized. They grow to 12 in. in length and adult males are boldly marked with an orange or red head, a black body, and an orange and black tail. Females, juveniles and males during nonbreeding seasons are more cryptically colored. These lizards are common in recreational areas including parks, construction sites, and strip malls. Materials needed to build a live trap to capture these lizards include a mesh baitfish trap (available online or in bait stores), fresh bait, screen material, bread ties, and scissors. Crickets available in pet stores are a good bait as they are like the insects that agama would prey upon in nature. Trapping began when Sean found an area with agama present. Sean always had luck in areas that had lots of trees nearby or concrete structures for them to hide in. For trap placement, he would put some crickets outside of the bait bucket, because agama are visual predators. Being a visual predator means that they sit and wait for prey to move in front of them before running it down to consume it. The lizard would investigate the trap and try to find a way by probing the sides. Since the probing was happening every time, the decision was made to cut the trap to make a slit 2.5 inches wide and 1.5 inches tall on the bottom of the trap for the lizards to enter, which worked well. Once the agama entered the trap, it was unable to figure out how to get out. The slit should be near the bait bucket, as that is the reason they are trying to get it. Since this trap has six entry points, Sean took some screen material and bread ties to close off the holes. He made them into little doors, this way agama could still enter through them. Sean also zip-tied the two closest holes to the bait bucket. This is to prevent the agama from climbing right into the top of the bait bucket and forces them to use the slit at the bottom. To learn more about the trap, please read Sean's [blog](#). For more information about Peter's rock agama, see <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/UW476>.



Photo courtesy of Sean MacWilliam.



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- Sean MacWilliam, Intern, UF/IFAS Extension St. Lucie County



Hello from the Space Coast Friends Group!

We have had some great firsts this year:

- ⇒ Two in person classes complete with those educational outings.
- ⇒ We have hit the trails with the help of our members, Kim and Peter Connolly and Mark Pryronski who have led us into the fields.
- ⇒ We visited Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area and the Maritime Hammock Forest, to name a few.
- ⇒ Introducing a “weekday walkabout”. We have met on a weekday morning for a 2 hour walk and membership has had interest so we will continue this offering.
- ⇒ Scholarship applications are being accepted until September 30, 2022, to be awarded in November. Visit our friends group website for information and application.
- ⇒ Earlier this year we had our first member picnic held at Erna Nixon Park. It was great to see members out and reconnecting with each other and nature. Thanks to Kerri Lubeski for creating what we plan to be an annual event. She had another great idea to spotlight a member each month. This has been a great opportunity for members to learn just how diverse our group is and how much impact we have in our community. We publish this spotlight in our monthly newsletter.
- ⇒ We also asked Dr. Main to attend our quarterly membership meeting via zoom. Members had some questions about the Endowment, and he was there to answer. Thanks Marty!
- ⇒ We made a donation to our Endowment Fund this year and are thankful for members who go beyond and make individual contributions. Individually our members are stepping up and giving many hours to the community.
- ⇒ We have our first group event in July for a waterway cleanup in the Indian River Lagoon. Every bit helps. Now we are staying connected through our facebook chat group. This idea came from member Julia Clark. After attending zoom courses she saw the opportunity for graduates to stay connected.
- ⇒ We now have a social media manager! Thanks to all our members and Facilitator, Holly Abeels and the FMN coordinators who contribute to the success of our Friends Group. If you find yourself in our region and want some ideas while visiting, let us know.



Photo courtesy of Catherine Vecchio.

Let's Get Connected!

Hello graduates and facilitators of the FMNP. Recently the FMN Advisory Board has added the position of a Friends Group Representative and **Catherine Vecchio** will be filling that position to represent you. She is currently the President of the Space Coast Friends Group and has been working to encourage members to get engaged! Catherine looks forward to creating that same engagement and connections across our great state. In the coming weeks she will be reaching out to your group facilitator and Board of Directors. In the meantime, anyone with an idea or concern please don't hesitate to contact Catherine directly. She looks forward to growing with you!



Photo courtesy of Catherine Vecchio.

Have a great summer!

- Catherine Vecchio, Space Coast Friends Group President and Friends Group Representative

vecchiocatherinefab22@gmail.com



SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Sabrina Cummings

Congratulations to the first FMNP Diversity Scholarship recipient, Sabrina Cummings!

What is your name and your background in natural resources and environmental education?

My name is Sabrina Cummings! I'm currently the Environmental Education Manager at Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, a non-profit land conservancy based in Osprey, Florida. Although my education is in archaeology, I've been involved in natural resource management and environmental education since 2017.

What FMNP course did you take with the Diversity scholarship?

I took the FMNP Uplands module in Sarasota County.

Why were you interested in participating in the Florida Master Naturalist Program?

My career journey has led me to all kinds of natural communities all over Florida. As an environmental educator and Florida native, I find it imperative I continue to learn as much as I can about the place I call home in order to share that knowledge with others, especially the kids I work with. The Florida Master Naturalist Program challenged me to learn even more about the places I'm already familiar with, and continues to remind me that there's always more to learn.

What was the biggest takeaway from the course?

Florida's uplands are more diverse and more dynamic than I thought! I need to keep my eyes peeled even more than before; there are so many small animals and plants that I've completely overlooked in my years of hiking in scrub and pine flatwoods. There's so much to learn and see, and they're so varied that there's always something new to observe or point out to others. I thought I already knew that, but my understanding was elevated to a new level in this course.



Photo courtesy of Katherine Clements and Sabrina Cummings.



SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Sabrina Cummings

How do you plan to share what you learned in your FMNP course with others?

In my professional life, I get to show kids our native habitats and open their eyes to what Florida has to offer. I'm excited to show them as much of it as possible and encourage them to see the forest, the trees, and what lives all around. I enjoy being a natural encyclopedia for them and developing their foundations of knowledge about the natural world. Florida is a unique place, and I look forward to continuing to show kids that. In my personal life, my friends already have to stop with me on hikes more often so I can tell them about more plants and critters! Whether that makes me more popular is yet to be seen, but it gives me joy.

Incredibly, I'm becoming the knowledgeable Black woman I would have liked to see when I was younger but never experienced. The programming I do at Conservation Foundation focuses on youth in populations that historically lack equitable access to nature. For many young Floridians, parts of our natural landscape feel far away, inhospitable, and unknown. Whether the barrier is physical access due to a difference in ability, a social barrier from not feeling welcome in parks and preserves, or the barrier of not knowing enough, my job is to address and work to overcome the barriers to a meaningful relationship with nature. Nature is for everyone, and I work to make that ideal a reality.

A huge part of my job is demystifying the outdoors, especially the uplands. Out of the three areas, I have the hardest time convincing others of the beauty and importance of our uplands; coastal habitats are what we're often known for, and freshwater habitats are, in our area at least, relatively charismatic. For the kids I work with, overcoming the barriers that keep them from being confident in any Florida habitat starts with trusting their guide and feeling safe in the space. The knowledge I got from this module, in particular, has made me even more confident in my ability to be that well-informed guide that they can put their trust in, which gives me the connection I need to truly open the natural world up for my students.

- Sabrina Cummings, Environmental Education Manager, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast





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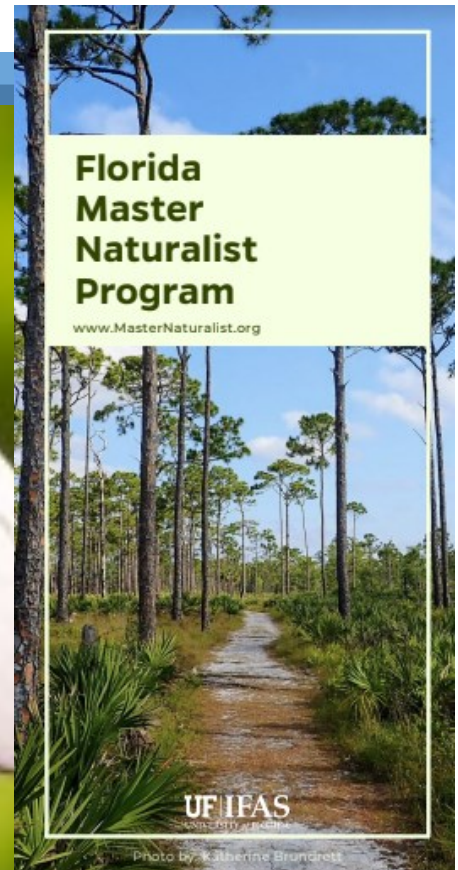
Help us raise awareness and support for the FMNP Endowment!

The mission of the Florida Master Naturalist Program is to promote awareness, understanding, and respect of Florida's natural world among Florida's citizens and visitors. By making a donation to the Endowment fund, you are moving the mission of our program forward. Your gift will help create a permanent endowment and ensure the long-term sustainability for the Florida Master Naturalist Program. Everyone that donates to the FMNP Endowment will receive a limited edition 2022 FMNP sticker (above) and/or window cling while supplies last!

[CLICK HERE](#)

Follow the link above to donate to the FMNP Endowment





BROCHURES

If you are looking for a flashy new marketing item to display at your organization, please request a shipment of our new and improved FMNP brochures.

We would love to reach individuals across the state, so help our team and distribute the FMNP brochures! To request a shipment of 50, 100, 150, or 200 brochures click [here](#) or email FMNPcoordinator@gmail.com with your address and quantity request! Thank you!



Connect with us!

Stay up to date on the latest FMNP news:

To view our current our current course schedule, click [here](#).

Find us on Facebook and Instagram, and sign up for our listserv by clicking their respective icons below.



FMNPCoordinator@gmail | [masterynaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:FMNPCoordinator@gmail)

VOLUNTEER

OPPORTUNITIES WANTED

Do you have a volunteer opportunity that you'd like to share with FMNP instructors, graduates, and community members? Is your organization looking for environmentally-minded Floridians to take part in volunteering? If so, you've come to the right place!

We are happy to post community volunteering events to our [Florida Master Naturalist Program Facebook page](#). To request posting, email our program office at fmnpcoordinator@gmail.com with a brief description of the activity, point of contact, location/time, and registration link (if applicable). Also free to include relevant pictures! Please include "Facebook Volunteer Opportunity" in the subject line.

