



FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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Policy and Legislation Committee Report
FNPS Board of Directors Meeting/39th Annual Conference
May 16, 2019
Plantation Inn and Resort, Crystal River
Eugene Kelly, Chair

Members: Joan Bausch; Susan Carr; Scott Davis; Kara Driscoll; Dave Feagles; Karen Moser; Sue Mullins; Laura Reynolds; Winnie Said

Proposed Legislation of Concern to FNPS

The Policy Committee remained engaged throughout the 2019 legislative session, and a final end-of-session report is included as an addendum to this report. Overall, the session was extremely disappointing for the bills that passed, and the lack of action on bills that had merit but did not pass (e.g., bills that would have addressed coastal management issues, water quality improvements and management of biosolids). Florida Forever received only \$33 million in funding, despite projections that Amendment 1 proceeds will exceed \$900 million. SB 1104, which would have created a Florida Native Plant Society Specialty License Plate, did not pass, although there as a companion bill in the House and neither chamber presented any objections. The bill was one of many that did not have an opportunity to pass because the chambers ran out of time. We are hopeful if may pass next year. The biggest disappointment was passage of SB 7068, described below. See the end-of-session report for additional details, including acknowledgement that the session set a new record low in the number of bills that were passed.

SB 7068: Transportation

GENERAL BILL by Infrastructure and Security

Transportation; Creating the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance Program within the Department of Transportation; specifying that projects undertaken in the corridors are tolled facilities and certain approved turnpike projects, and are considered as Strategic Intermodal System facilities; requiring the department to identify certain opportunities to accommodate or co-locate multiple types of infrastructure-addressing issues during the project development phase, etc.

Veto Request Submitted to Governor DeSantis

Preserving, conserving and restoring the native plants and native plant communities of Florida

A letter was submitted to Governor DeSantis requesting that he veto SB 7068. At the time this report was prepared, the legislation was still awaiting his action. An action alert asking members to contact the Governor and request a veto was also released. A copy of the alert is included as an addendum to this report.

Recommendation that NRCS Practice Standards Emphasize Use of Native Plants

FNPS joined 70 other conservation organizations, including 7 other Native Plant Societies (California, Colorado, Illinois, Montana, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia), in asking the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to place an emphasis on the use of native plant in the Practice Standards they use while implementing various Farm Bill programs. Landowners can apply for funding assistance – typically on a cost-share basis – to make changes to their agricultural practices that achieve a variety of conservation benefits. Our friends at the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council were also included.

The general substance or goal of a particular Practice Standard can often be surmised from the title. Examples of Practice Standards promoted by NRCS include Field Border, Forest Stand Improvement, Hedgerow Planting, Streambank and Shoreline Protection, and Upland Wildlife Habitat Management. And the conservation benefits of the practices are aligned with such Farm Bill objectives as reducing erosions, enhancing habitat for wildlife, and attracting pollinators. A notable deficiency in current Practice Standards is a lack of emphasis on use of native plants when they are appropriate, and even advantageous.

The National Wildlife Federation apprised FNPS of this opportunity to recommend changes to the Practice Standards and invited us to combine our voice with theirs. The eventual result was a joint letter to USDA recommending that most Practice Standards be updated to recommend the preferential use of native plants when they are suitable for the objectives of the practice.

Bill Filed in US House of Representatives Supporting Use of Native Plants (HR 1572)

US Rep Mike Quigley of Illinois filed a bill in the House of Representatives that would promote the use of native plants. Its formal title is the ***Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration, and Promotion Act***. We have just become aware of this proposed legislation and have made initial contact with Rep Quigley's office to inquire how FNPS can help promote passage of the bill. We anticipate coordinating with other Native Plant Societies and other organizations to promote the bill, which lists two Florida members of the House as co-sponsors: Rep Francis Rooney who represents the Naples area, and Rep Debbie Wasserman-Schultz of the Weston/Pembroke Pines area. Among other things, the bill would promote the use of native plant materials in habitat restoration projects, require the use of locally-adapted genotypes whenever possible, and provide funding for research on native plants. A copy of the bill is incorporated by reference into this report.