

Nomination by Lynn Sweetay of the Palm Beach Chapter

THE AMAZING STORY OF THE SNOOK ISLANDS NATURAL AREA MARITIME HARDWOOD HAMMOCK RESTORATION PROJECT

Planting Coordinator

This is the story of how one person can make a difference through perseverance and lots of emails. It takes place in Palm Beach County at a site adjacent to the Lake Worth Lagoon, where the County had planted mangroves to create underwater habitat. The outcome is creation of the Snook Islands Maritime Hardwood Hammock through a public-private volunteer partnership inspired and implemented by the Snook Islands Volunteers on Lake Worth Lagoon (SIV-LWL) led by David Niemi.

The public use facilities at the Snook Islands Natural Area were under construction for a year. During that time, David Niemi and fellow volunteers decided that the “weedy”, overgrown construction site had potential as an upland restoration project. He contacted local native plant growers and asked if they had any “cast-away” native plants that they could donate for such a project.

One local grower, FNPS member Jane Thompson of Indian Trails Native Nursery, responded with an offer of approximately 200 native plants from her January overstock. Jane met on site with a few local volunteers. She measured and mapped the potential planting area, then designed a maritime hardwood hammock restoration plan for the upland area at the edge of the lagoon. Her design included over 400 native plants, which she donated. However, the plants needed to be transported from the nursery, located west of U.S. 441, to the edge of the lagoon.

A few more emails and telephone calls by Dave and Buck Thornton, a resident of Lake Worth and owner of J.D. Thornton Nursery in Clewiston, volunteered to transport the plants with two truck/trailers and two crews of men. Buck also donated and delivered approximately 32 cubic yards of melaleuca mulch to the site. Now all the SIV-LWL needed was volunteers. Dave once again sat at his computer and contacted numerous organization and found six environmental and native plant groups, including the Palm Beach Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS), who responded by placing requests in their newsletters for volunteers to help install the plants on March 3, 2012. Approximately 100 volunteers responded. By the end of that day, all of the plants were in the ground, mulched and watered in. The total cost of the project was \$220 for fertilizer, which was donated by the Palm Beach Chapter of FNPS.

Once again through Dave’s contacts, the City of Lake Worth Grounds Maintenance Department, under the supervision of Dave McGrew, was an active partner in the project. The Maintenance Department, Indian Trails Native Nursery, J. D. Thornton Nursery, Palm Beach Chapter FNPS and the SIV-LWL teamed together to create the maritime hardwood hammock. The hammock is a living museum of native vegetation, giving visitors a glimpse into the pre-development past.

