

Nominated by JeanMcCollum

## Nomination of Nancy Bissett for the FNPS Mentor Award

Ah, with Nancy, where to begin! She has been involved in so many aspects of native plant propagation, restoration, and research, as well as natural area protection and acquisition.

Nancy has been an active member, including a board member of the Florida Native Plant Society, is a founder of the Polk County Heartland chapter of the FNPS, is a founder and has been a board member of the Florida Association of Native Nurseries, is a very active board member of the Florida Wildflower Foundation, and is on the board of Green Horizons Land Trust.

Nancy and Bill Bissett own and operate The Natives, Inc. where they, along with son Paul Abel and daughter Sarah Kiefer, grow native plants, collect bulk seed, and are involved in all aspects of urban and natural area restoration, including pioneering large-scale direct seeding, removal of exotic plants, and restoring severely disturbed lands to healthy natural landscapes ranging from wetlands to scrub communities.

Promoting natives in landscaping: Nancy and Bill have actively promoted the use of native plants in landscaping for over 30 years. They have developed propagation techniques for many native species and shared what they learned with not just the native plant industry throughout Florida, but with innumerable researchers and land managers as well. Archbold Biological Station's new Learning Center and Lodge are stunning examples of what they have done with native plants and how to put the right plants in the right places. Nancy is always willing to share what she has learned with others, greatly furthering the growth of native plant nurseries and landscaping with native plants in Florida.

Land protection and acquisition: Nancy's work with the Green Horizons Land Trust is one example of her many efforts to identify and acquire quality natural lands before they are gone. The Trust has acquired over 5000 acres in Polk, Osceola, and Citrus counties including 172 acres at 3 sites in the Green Swamp, the Flying Eagle Ranch Preserve of 504 acres, and a 160-acre Reedy Creek Swamp property. She has also been active in the Polk County Environmental Lands Program on the team that evaluated sites nominated for protection.

Restoration: Nancy is one of the most important people we know in natural area restoration. She has pioneered techniques for collecting and direct seeding large areas, including equipment design, site selection and design, removal of difficult exotic plant species like natalgrass and torpedograss, site preparation, and seed planting. She has pulled together and trained one of the best crews for spot treating exotics in planted restoration sites and has shown us all how important this step is to restoration. She has used her vast knowledge of natural systems and where plants live in these systems to combine direct seeding with plantings of native species with great success. The sites she has restored are too numerous to even begin to list here. And along the way, she has nurtured a generation of natural area restoration biologists, including many of us sponsoring her for this award. Nancy has advised many, many NGO's and government agencies on how to manage and restore land, including projects with the Nature Conservancy, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, South and Southwest Florida Water Management Districts, and Florida Forest Service. An example of her recent work is a project with Highlands County and Archbold Biological Station at the Tony Circle site; her restoration plan was a win-win for the county and a far superior alternative to the original plan that called for clearing the uplands to restore the wetlands. She created a plan to restore both the existing wetlands and uplands, achieving all the county's mitigation goals plus earning them extra credits for future projects, all for no additional cost to the project.

Botanist: Nancy is an incredible botanist. Her ability to identify plants in all stages of growth, including seedlings, and her knowledge of their edaphic requirements and how they function in natural ecosystems is invaluable. Nancy and fellow botanists have described new native species, including *Carphephorus subtropicanus*. She has taught many of us how to identify and understand the ecology of native plants, including a whole line of staff and monitoring interns at The Nature Conservancy's Disney Wilderness Preserve, where she also did the initial rare plant surveys, and worked on pasture restoration and wetland restoration monitoring.

Research and Monitoring: Nancy has been involved in rare plant and site restoration research in many areas, including work with the phosphate industry, Bok Tower Gardens, The Nature Conservancy, and the Plant Ecology Program at Archbold Biological Station. She is currently working with the Florida Wildflower Foundation on funding research projects on native plants. Nancy was an integral part of Bok Tower's first-ever successful introduction of a *Lupinus aridorum* population at the Lake Blue Scrub site in 2008, which is producing hundreds of seedlings this year. Nancy has been a strong proponent of monitoring restoration sites to further our knowledge of what works and why, often participating in the monitoring herself and spending endless hours interpreting and disseminating the results.

Teaching us all: Nancy has led so many tours, given I'll bet hundreds of talks, written articles and papers, done countless numbers of site visits, and provided advice and encouragement to so many of us that I expect most of us can recall our own examples.

The extraordinary list of her activities and accomplishments only touches the surface of what makes Nancy such a great person and mentor to us all. The heart of it is that she so willingly shares what she knows with others, us. And she knows so much, is so creative and practical at the same time. Her cheerfulness always makes her a pleasure to work with. Her gentle, but persistent style creates bridges between diverse interests and accomplishes great things. Her encouragement and support, her positive can-do attitude means so much to so many of us. She has given her all to the many projects she has done and it has paid off handsomely,

providing wonderful examples for us all. She has mentored, prodded, and encouraged us and has made an incredible difference. We owe her so much and think she is very deserving of the Mentor Award.