Our Wildflower grant project is underway at the St. Lucie County fairgrounds. Master naturalist volunteers began the soil solarization process last week in July. After a lot of research and planning by project manager Joanna Huffman, combined with the help of the volunteers, we are now preparing to broadcast the seeds! Great job, Joanna and crew!

Mark your calendars!! The 2014 Florida Master Naturalist statewide conference will be held on March 28-30, 2014 at the Radisson Resort at the Port in Cape Canaveral. Scheduled activities will include presentations, workshops, field trips and an awards presentation. Exhibitors and vendors will be on-site as well. John Nelson and I will be doing a photography workshop on photographing protected species for the conference and a possible field trip. More information will be available as soon as details are confirmed.

There has been a lot written in the news lately about invasive species. In Port Salerno (Martin County) a 12-foot python was captured in Port Salerno in a woman’s front yard. It had eaten two feral cats. The snake was wrapped among hedges on the property and it took three people to extricate it. The snake was not microchipped and the owner is unknown. The snake is even too large to be kept at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary where it was transported by FWC; so the sanctuary will have to find another facility to adopt the snake.

You can report sightings of non-native species to the Exotic Species Hotline: 888-IveGot1 (888-483-4861), www.IVEGOT1.org or smartphone application IVEGOT1. If it’s an emergency, call 911 or FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline: 888-404-3922.

FWC will be holding an invasive species summit on lionfish on October 22-24 in an effort to find solutions to their expansive population. Lionfish are invading in places they have never been seen before and are negatively impacting our marine resources.

The Lionfish Summit will be in Cocoa Beach. You can learn more at FWCLionfish.Eventbrite.com -Mary White, President

Upcoming Events

- October 23, 2013: Bat-tastic Night Out w/Manatee Center. $8. Call Lesley at (772) 466-1600 X3337
- November 16, 2013: Photographing Wildlife and Florida’s Special Places. Location and details to be announced.
- March 28-30, 2014: FL Master Naturalist State Conference, Cocoa Bch

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CONGRATULATIONS TO KEN GIOELI

Congratulations are in order to our master naturalist instructor and chapter facilitator, Ken Gioeli, St. Lucie County Natural Resources Extension agent who has recently been appointed Secretary of the new Master Naturalist statewide governing board by Dr. Marty Main of the University of Florida (I.F.A.S.). Ken, along with two others will oversee the statewide master naturalist program. Ken will continue to work locally, be actively engaged with our chapter and will have instructor credentials. He will have increased statewide responsibilities to include instructor and territory assignments, program development and evaluation and capacity building. Our chapter is very proud of the work Ken has done and is looking forward to continuing to work closely with him.

- Mary White, President

Photography Course Offered

Join photographers Mary White and John Nelson for a day of classroom and hands-on instruction at the Audubon of Martin County in Stuart. Florida’s wild outdoors are full of special places and species that are found nowhere else on earth. This class will teach photographers of all levels not only the “How To’s” of photography but also the basics in species identification.

Instructors

Mary White is an award winning wildlife and nature photographer, and is currently the President of the St. Lucie Chapter of the Florida Master Naturalists.

John Nelson is a wildlife videographer, a Florida Master Naturalist, and owner of Florida’s Wild Outdoors. John has produced educational video for non-profit groups including the St. Lucie Conservation Alliance, Audubon of Martin County, and Friends of Savannas Preserve State Park. He currently serves as Vice President of the St. Lucie Chapter of the Florida Master Naturalist Program.

Together, our instructors and team of volunteer naturalists will provide you with a great experience to take your nature and wildlife photography to a new level.

What: Photographing Wildlife and Florida’s Natural Places

When: November 16, 2013, 9 a.m.—3:30 p.m., Audubon of Martin County

Registration: Online only at http://stlucie.ifas.ufl.edu

Registration Fee: $50

Equipment: Must have your own camera for optional field excursion.

Inquiries: John Nelson, floridawildoutdoors@gmail.com (772) 485-8129

Our Mission...

As Master Naturalists, our mission is to act as stewards for our environment, protecting what is critical to the survival of all species including our own. Our mission is to propagate this awareness through the use of research-based information and through teaching events, nature walks, and community activities. Master Naturalists will also engage with others who are striving to protect and nurture our natural resources. The Master Naturalists are affiliated with the University of Florida / IFAS St Lucie County Cooperative Extension and partner organizations including the Oxbow Eco-center, Savannas Preserve, Manatee Observation and Education Center and Wrensong Science & Environment Education.
The Wildflower Grant Project is now underway at the St. Lucie County fairgrounds. On July 27, master naturalists Illona Christie, Mary White, and Friend of the master naturalists Nick White, led by project manager Joanna Huffman met at the project site at the fairgrounds to prepare the circle area for the sun solarization process.

The circle, which is 92 feet in diameter, was originally covered in weeds and mulch. The staff from the fairgrounds were able to assist us, and came in and scraped off the weeds and mulch. Soil from the show arena replaced what was scraped off to give us the original height in the bed. This was all completed the day before our group arrived at the project site.

First, a small trench had to be made around the entire edge of the circle area. Then, sections of 4-6 mm plastic tarp were laid down over the top of the soil with overlapping edges and taped together with industrial tape to keep the wind from getting underneath the plastic. Bits and pieces of sticks and stones were removed from under the plastic to keep from piercing it. The edges of each sheet of plastic tarp were then buried in the trench and covered with soil to further stabilize it.

The solarization process takes about six weeks. During that time, the plastic that has been laid out “bakes” the soil increasing the temperature so that other plants, nematodes and weeds in particular do not grow in that spot, rendering less competition for the wildflower seeds. The best time of the year to sun solarize is July and August when the sun is most intense.

Wildflower seeds were ordered and have just recently arrived. The next step in the process is the broadcasting of the seeds. This is an easier task and will require a few volunteers to complete. Following that, there will be some periodic maintenance.

Don’t forget to turn in your volunteer hours. The program data sheet can be found online at http://stlucie.ifas.ufl.edu/master_naturalist.html The Friends of the Master Naturalist Chapter application, meeting minutes and other information are also on that site.
The Land Managers’ Feral Hog Management Practices Inventory in Florida was selected by the Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals (ANREP) to receive its first place national 2013 Gold Award in the Educational Material – Short Publication category. UF/IFAS St Lucie County Natural Resource Extension Agent Ken Gioeli and Florida Master Naturalist Joanna Huffman are the award winners and co-authors of this published work.

Feral hogs are now found in every county in Florida and in at least 35 states and Canadian provinces. Southeast Florida’s feral hog population is second only to Texas and is estimated to have 500,000+ wild hogs in a relatively stable population, with 1 to 2 million in the southeastern U.S. Feral hogs can be aggressive to people and cause damage to the environment by rubbing or tusking small trees and by rooting up native vegetation. Unfortunately, feral hogs are difficult to manage.

The co-authors of this published work conducted feral hog management practices research to (1) determine what control practices are being employed by managers of both public and private natural areas and (2) to determine whether or not these practices are effective. This research was conducted as part of Joanna’s Florida Master Naturalist final project. Findings were published in the Proceedings of the Florida State Horticulture Society (Proc. Fla. State Hort. Soc. 125:370–372. 2012). The national award-winning document is intended for use by natural areas managers, hunters and trappers and anyone else experiencing difficulty managing feral hogs.