

Since 2001, FLEPPC's Kathy Craddock Burks Education and Outreach Grant program has provided funding to organizations or individuals wishing to educate Floridians about non-native invasive plants and their impacts on Florida's native plant communities. A decade of operation has provided start-up money for more than 60 different projects, from the panhandle to the Keys. Every year, the education grant committee carefully considers all applications, looking for projects that creatively engage the public. In this issue of *Wildland Weeds*, we feature reports from four recent projects. Each is a unique program, but all share a common result: Florida residents—especially kids—began to notice the invasive plants in their surroundings. We hope they inspire you!

P.S. This November, watch the list-serve and website for the 2012 request for proposals!

—Jennifer Possley, Committee Chair

City of Sanibel Air Potato Exchange Day

By Holly Downing

Since the early 1980s, the City of Sanibel has been waging war against invasive exotic plants that threaten Sanibel's natural areas. In 1996, the City enacted legislation regulating eight invasive exotic plant species that were determined to be the "worst of the worst" invaders on Sanibel. Many of the names may be familiar to south Floridians—Melaleuca, Brazilian pepper, air potato, earleaf acacia, exotic inkberry, java plum, lead tree, and Mother-in-law's tongue. The city does not allow planting, transplanting or introduction of these eight species on Sanibel and developers are required to permanently remove them as a condition of all city development permits.

Although the war is far from over, the City and its conservation partners, the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, have won several battles. The last known melaleuca tree on Sanibel was cut down in September 1989. Brazilian pepper has been removed from all of Sanibel's conservation areas (nearly 70% of the island) and from most of the island's residential and commercial properties.

Building on the success and community support of these efforts, the City asked residents and visitors to join forces in a new fight against the FLEPPC Category I invasive exotic vine, air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*). The commercial and residential areas in the heart of the island are currently experiencing the worst infestations.

Thanks to a 2010 Kathy Craddock Burks Education and Outreach Grant from the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC), the City held its first annual "Air Potato Exchange Day" on Sunday, January

16, 2011. To spread the word about this new opportunity, the City established an information booth at the popular Sanibel Farmer's Market. The booth, staffed by members of the City's volunteer Vegetation Committee, included a 3-panel display, a variety of handouts (including the FLEPPC 2009 List of Invasive Plant Species), and live specimens of air potato vine and bulbils. A "Guess How Many Air Potatoes" contest was a great way to entice passers-by to check out the display and learn from the volunteers about air potato and other invasive exotic plants. Over the course of eight weeks, more than 140 people submitted their best guess with hopes of winning a 3-gallon native plant.

The City also advertised Air Potato Exchange Day through several articles in local newspapers, press releases posted on the City's website and sent to more than 7,000 email subscribers, and a "Wanted" poster displayed at more than 15 locations across the island. A YouTube video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJwYjNQKoZY>) was posted to the City's website and Facebook page.

Air Potato Exchange Day was a thrilling success when more than 30 Sanibel residents brought in nearly 500 pounds of air potato bulbils. Participants bringing in at least 25 air potatoes were rewarded with a native plant of their choice. FLEPPC grant funds were used to purchase 3-gallon plants from the SCCF Native Plant Nursery. There were more than 10 native species to choose from, including wild coffee, elderberry, sweet acacia, and Everglades paurotis palm. Nursery manager Jenny Evans helped participants select the right plant for their landscape. A "grand prize"



15-gallon dahoon holly tree was awarded to the person bringing in the most (by weight) air potatoes. Additional prizes, courtesy of SCCF and the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, were awarded to several residents for noteworthy air potato specimens including the biggest, smallest, and most unusual air potatoes.

Following Air Potato Exchange Day, a final press release encouraged residents to help protect Sanibel's natural areas by removing air potato and other invasive exotic plants year-round and reminded folks to dispose of these invasive plants with their household trash (which goes to the county incinerator), not with their normal yard waste (which is recycled or sent to the landfill). View more information about air potato at <http://www.mysanibel.com/Departments/Natural-Resources/Vegetation-Information/Exotic-Vegetation/Air-Potato>.

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