

Q&A with Great Results

Question:

I review landscape plans for new construction on Florida's Turnpike system. A lot of plans are calling for *Washingtonia robusta* in groupings for accent trees.

I usually argue that it's preferable to use native species and recommend booted sabals in lieu of washies. Knowing that Dade County has put some restrictions on the use of washingtonias, is there a stronger argument that this tree may soon be on the [FLEPPC] List of Invasive Species, or is this just a concern in extreme southern Florida?

Bruce Mantell, ASLA, Florida's Turnpike Enterprise

Answer:



The FLEPPC list committee has kept *Washingtonia* palms (Fan Palm) on its unpublished "To Be Watched (TBW)" list for the present. This is because, despite numerous reports of "escapes" and establishment from many regions of the state (Pinellas, Okeechobee, Brevard, MiamiDade Counties, for instance) few vouchered specimens and no reports of large, dense invasions have been made. Richard Wunderlin's "Guide to the Vascular Plants of Florida (1998)" reports the Fan Palm as "Escaped from cultivation,"

strongly confirming the need for concern regarding Fan Palm populations already found in Florida's natural areas.

As I'm sure you're aware, many invaders exhibit low-level invasions, often for decades, before some factors or thresholds are met allowing wider incursions. It is often a nonnative plant's continued use and persistent intentional plantings that enable such thresholds to be overcome and widespread invasion to proceed.

Several strategies aiming to predict plants' invasion potentials have found palms, as a family, to have relatively low invasive characteristics. This includes the IFAS nonnative plant assessment strategy (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/AG/AG10000.pdf>, <http://agronomy.ifas.ufl.edu/IFASassessmt.pdf>) However, *Washingtonia robusta*, in the considered opinions of numerous field biologists and the published record of Florida flora, already exhibits the ability to establish widely throughout many regions of Florida, and I must argue that it is wiser to err on the side of caution than to encourage the continued use of this plant in horticultural plantings.

The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council strongly recommends that the Florida Turnpike Enterprise not use fan palm in its plantings and would strongly support the adoption of an all native planting palette.

Best wishes,

Mike Bodle, Chair, Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council

Results:

Thanks for the information. This was forwarded to the Turnpike's Landscape Architect in the Planning Office. He passed the information to all Turnpike landscape design consultants. They have been advised to drop *Washingtonia robusta* from the plant list for all upcoming Turnpike landscaping projects that aren't already under contract.

As a point of information, FDOT District 6 (Dade & Monroe Counties) also discourages new plantings of WR's on state roads within their jurisdiction.

Bruce Mantell, ASLA, Florida's Turnpike Enterprise

P.S. We have an upcoming District Landscape Managers meeting in November. I'll be more than happy to bring up the subject with my northern counterparts.



"Escaped" *Washingtonia robusta* found on the rim of Lake Okeechobee. (A. Ferriter)

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