

The 3rd Annual Great Air Potato Roundup

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Now in its third year, the Great Air Potato Roundup is a continued success. The Roundup again focused awareness on the problem of invasive non-native plants at the community level through education and direct stewardship activities within Gainesville's natural areas. Modeled after popular litter cleanups, volunteers pick up air potato tubers instead of trash. The Third Annual Great Air Potato Roundup took place on February 2, 2002 when over eight hundred volunteers gathered approximately six tons of air potato tubers from twenty-one nature parks and privately owned sites that have connections to local creeks. In addition to picking up air potato tubers, the event expanded this year to include collection of coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*), wandering jew (*Tradescantia fluminensis*), English ivy (*Hedera helix*) and other invasive plants as they were encountered. Trash was also collected from the designated sites. Site leaders and local organizations, such as the University of Florida Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants and the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC), provided educational materials and information in the form of brochures, informational displays, and hands-on experience with invasive non-native plant removal.

Partnerships & Sponsors

The City of Gainesville Nature Operations Division again organized the event, providing staff assistance, project planning, flyer advertising, and

a portion of the funding. Media coverage also contributed to the event's success, including newspaper articles, local television advertisements and radio announcements of the event. Local businesses generously provided advertising, which allowed awareness of the problem of invasive plants to reach a wide audience. In addition twenty-one businesses donated prizes to be included in a drawing at the Celebration festival. Contributed prizes, food, services, volunteer labor, and donations totaled more than \$20,000 and included a FLEPPC Education and Outreach grant.

Volunteers

Recruitment of volunteers was extremely successful, increasing 16% from the first event in 2000. Just over

eight hundred volunteers donated their time, in addition to thirty-two site leaders and several AmeriCorps members. The volunteers included Girl and Boy Scout troops, University of Florida and Santa Fe Community College students and community service groups, and families and individuals willing to donate their time and learn about invasive non-native plants. In just one morning of collection, over six tons of air potato tubers were collected, as well as 250 fifty-gallon bags of English ivy, coral ardisia, and wandering jew. The accumulated trash filled two 20-yard dumpsters!

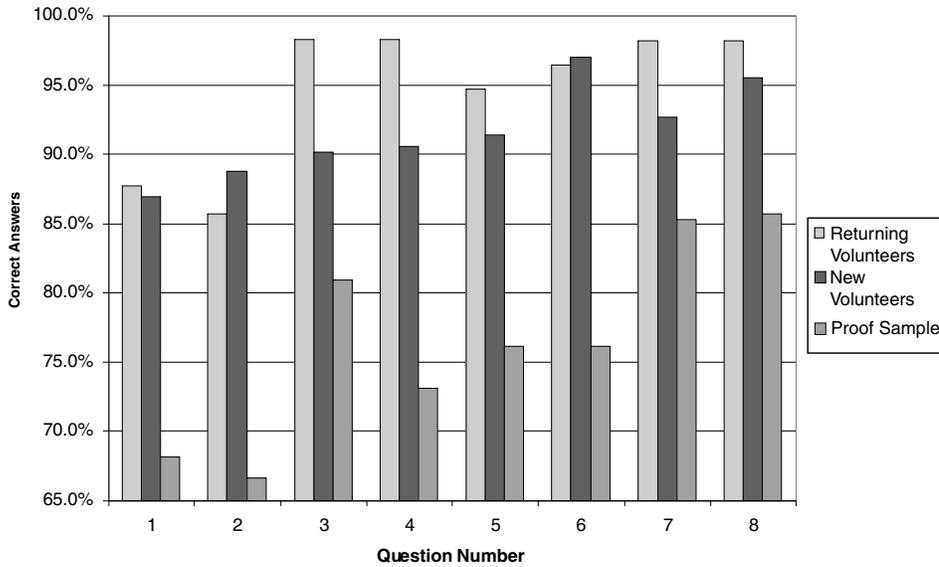
Implementation

The Great Air Potato Roundup was designed as a hands-on experiential approach to learning. Education began

Table 1: Evaluative Survey Quiz Questions, Third Annual Great Air Potato Roundup, 2002

1	Invasive non-native plants: A) are often the single greatest threat to natural areas B) are plants that have dispersed outside their natural range C) have self-sustaining populations within native plant communities D) all of the above
2	All non-native plants are invasive. True/False?
3	Invasive non-native plants are dispersed by: A) creeks & waterways B) birds & animals C) wind D) people E) all of the above
4	Invasive non-native plants disrupt natural communities by: A) altering ecological processes such as fire and water regimes B) Competing with native plants for resources such as sunlight, water, & nutrients C) Displacing native plants that wildlife depend on D) all of the above
5	Invasive non-native plants have an advantage over native plants because of the absence of predators and pests from their native region. True/False?
6	Homeowners' landscaping decisions affect Florida's ecosystems. True/False?
7	Invasive non-native plants are brought into the country by: A) Horticulture B) Agriculture C) Tourists D) Accident E) All of the above
8	New non-native plants are constantly being brought into Florida and have the potential to become invasive plants. True/False?

Figure 1: Comparison of General Invasive Non-Native Plant Knowledge, Great Air Potato Roundup, 2002



with the site leaders giving short informational talks before the collection began to inform the volunteers about invasive non-native plants. Educational materials provided to site leaders included maps, fact sheets, pressed plant samples, and photographs. Site leaders were volunteers

that are involved in the management, stewardship, or study of North Florida ecology to varying degrees, either professionally, as a student, or through organizational membership.

After two hours of gathering invasive non-native plants, air potato tubers and trash, a celebration was

launched at a local community park where volunteers were given the opportunity to view informational displays, received free food, drink and a t-shirt. Two hundred volunteers also completed an evaluation survey that was designed to measure volunteers knowledge of invasive plants as well as provide feedback about the event.

Evaluation Methods & Outcomes

A knowledge-based quiz consisting of eight true-false and multiple choice questions attempted to test the volunteers' comprehension and understanding of invasive non-native plants (Table 1). Fifty randomly selected individuals not involved in the Roundup also completed the survey, making up the proof sample. To ensure that a diverse sample was obtained, surveys were taken at the local mall, various parts of the University of Florida campus, and a local neighborhood park. To safeguard against bias in the proof sample, previous participants of the Great Air Potato Roundup were excluded.

Typically, returning volunteers scored higher on the quiz portion

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than new volunteers and individuals included in the proof sample (Figure 1). This corresponded to an average of 95% correct answers across all eight questions by returning volunteers, 92% by new volunteers, and 77% by the proof sample. The questions in the survey were purposely leading in order to enforce the educational message of the event. This may have contributed to the high success rate, even within the proof sample. However the correctly answered questions were significantly higher amongst volunteers than the proof sample, suggesting that volunteers are in fact gaining knowledge on invasive plant issues (ANOVA, $P < .05$).

The most commonly missed question (13.1% incorrect answers) involved differentiating between invasive non-native plants and non-invasive non-native plants (Question 2, Table 1). The question may have been perplexing for some people because the terms *non-native* and *invasive* are often perceived to be synonymous.

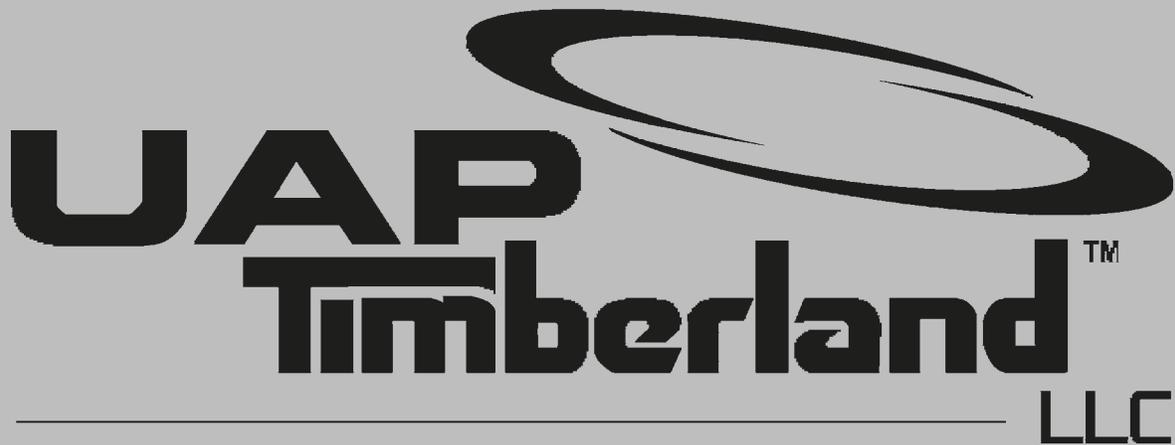
Perception of one's own knowledge

is crucial to becoming more educated in any subject. The survey included a question asking volunteers to state whether or not they feel knowledgeable about invasive non-native plants. Comparing that answer with the number of questions the individual missed on the quiz portion of the survey, the difference between perceived and actual knowledge is appar-

ent. Less than half of the volunteers who scored high (>75%) on the quiz thought they were knowledgeable about invasive non-native plants whereas their quiz scores indicated otherwise. In contrast, approximately one-quarter of volunteers with lower scores (<75%) perceived themselves to be knowledgeable on the subject (Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of Missed Questions and Perceived Knowledge of Invasive Non-Native Plants, Third Annual Great Air Potato Roundup, 2002

Number of Questions Missed	Knowledgeable	Not Knowledgeable
0	47.7%	52.3%
1	35.9%	64.1%
2	26.7%	73.3%
3	25.0%	75.0%
4+	28.6%	71.4%



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The survey results demonstrated that individuals who have previously participated in the Great Air Potato Roundup are more educated regarding invasive non-native plants than new volunteers and the general population that is represented by the proof sample. Of all volunteers surveyed, 94.8% stated the Roundup was an educational experience. Considering that 73% of surveyed volunteers had not previously participated in the event, it is clear the educational objectives about invasive non-native plants are being conveyed to community members.

Challenges for the Future

An issue that needs to be addressed is providing public education by delivering factual information and ensuring it is properly understood. The survey results indicate that a significant portion of people had either no knowledge of invasive non-native plants or had a false impression of their own knowledge. Public education is a major goal of the Great Air Potato Roundup, and measures need to be taken to connect with the community and provide information that is exciting and valuable. By achieving this, a more complete understanding of the importance of invasive non-native plant control is attainable for community members. Increasing the number of volunteers at the event by focusing on advertising methods and target audiences is a means to achieve this goal. According to the survey results, television and radio advertisements were the least effective in attracting new volunteers (4.1% and 3.2%, respectively). However, there is no method to measure what portion of the general population was made aware of the problem of invasive non-native plants but did not participate in the event. Promoting community involvement in the removal of invasive plants, both within public and private lands, and spreading a message of land conservation and stewardship is the ultimate goal. Efforts should be made in the future to develop a more diverse advertising campaign that will reach a larger segment of the population.

Creative Project Combination Extends Grant Value

The Bay Area Resource Council (BARC) is a group of elected officials in the Pensacola, FL area, committed to building environmental awareness in the two counties and three cities within the jurisdiction. BARC was awarded a \$550 grant from FLEPPC to provide education on exotic invasive plants, and used an existing project to springboard in a different but related direction to get the most "bang for the buck." "There is a lot of wonderful information available on the web, and we didn't want to reinvent the wheel," stated Eleanor Godwin, Project Coordinator.

"Help Stop Pointless Pollution" is the theme of a year-long project for the BARC and a grassroots organization, the Bayou Texar Foundation, funded by a Florida Coastal Management Program grant. Programs, workshops, booth displays, and literature focused on what the individual can do to help keep stormwater runoff cleaner.

Landscaping tips included use of Florida native plants and removal of exotic plants. To supplement the initial project literature, FLEPPC funds paid for flyers that featured information on the characteristics of exotics and reasons why they should be removed. The flyers also included several good websites with color photos and listed common exotics in this area of the state.

The "Help Stop Pointless Pollution" booth was used at many local events such as a Waterfront Living workshop, Earth Day, "Picnic in the Plaza" in downtown Pensacola, an Open House at a local public community center on Bayou Texar, and a "State of the Bay" symposium sponsored by the BARC. A second booth was created for the invasive plant project, using the photo-

mural available from the University of Florida Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants. Information in the two booths complemented one another at the above events.

In addition, a scout troop distributed the flyers to members and volunteers engaged in the removal of Chinese privet on the University of West Florida Campus. A local Florida Native plant nursery took a large stack of the material to distribute to customers. This vendor keeps a display of desirable natives and exotic invasive plants at his nursery to educate his customers. (Photo below.)



Earth Day 2002, Pensacola, FL, joint display with Florida Native Plant Society and the Echo Center, a Florida native plant nursery, that educates the customers with a display of desirable vs. invasive native plants.

BARC staff explains information on exotic invasive plants to attendees at the Picnic in the Plaza event in Plaza Ferdinand, Pensacola, FL.

