

# Flagler Beach Residents Prepared to Fight Back

by Terri Newmans and Lauren Swanson • photos by Terri Newmans

A group of Flagler Beach residents is now prepared to fight local exotic plant invaders thanks to FLEPPC's Kathy Craddock Burks Education and Outreach Grant, awarded to Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area (GRMSRA) at Flagler Beach in 2009. State park staff, along with experts from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Sea Grant and the University of Florida, conducted two five-hour workshops that highlighted the effects that invasive exotic plants have on Florida's ecosystems.

In fall 2009, Flagler and Volusia County residents joined *The Great Invaders: Invasive and Non Native Plant Workshops* to discover how some plants, while beautiful, can have a devastating effect on Florida's ecosystems. In order to attract residents, GRMSRA staff sent press releases to local media outlets, advertised on the park website, distributed flyers within the park and at local businesses, and notified staff of organizations with similar interests.

Workshop participants learned how to identify the area's most common invasive plants and remove these invaders from their property. Participants discovered native plant alternatives that are beneficial to the environment and equally as attractive as their invasive exotic counterparts. The two five-hour workshops had a total of approximately thirty attendees, and materials were sent out to additional residents who were unable to attend the workshops but who volunteered at one or more of the three exotic plant removal workdays scheduled following the workshops.

Dr. Maia McGuire of the Florida Sea Grant Extension Office began the workshop with a presentation on the impacts of invasive exotic plants and how to identify these species. Using real samples of the workshop's target plants, Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), Chinese tallow (*Sapium sebiferum*), cathedral bells (*Kalanchoe pinnata*), Britton's wild petunia (*Ruellia simplex*, also known as *R. brittoniana*), asparagus-fern (*Asparagus setaceus*), creeping oxeye (*Sphagneticola trilobata*, also known as *Wedelia trilobata*), castor-

bean (*Ricinus communis*) and air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), participants were provided with hands-on exposure to these nuisance plants. Identification materials also were provided to help homeowners identify targeted plants upon returning home.

Mark Warren from the UF/IFAS Flagler County Extension Office followed Dr. McGuire's presentation with an overview of the proper control methods available to homeowners. Mr. Warren demonstrated several methods including cut surface, foliar, and basal bark herbicide applications.

Terri Newmans, Park Services Specialist, explained the *Volunteer Exotic Control Program* that was created to track the effectiveness of these workshops. Participants were provided with five post-card-sized reporting forms that could be mailed to the park after they removed invasive exotic plants from their land or from their communities. In addition, participants were invited to participate in three invasive exotic plant removal workdays to be held at GRMSRA and North Peninsula State Park. Half of the workshop attendees signed up to participate in the workdays, and many additional volunteers assisted with the projects throughout the year.

The final portion of the workshop addressed native plant alternatives. Alice Bard, Environmental Specialist II with the Florida Park Service, provided participants with an extensive list of native plants that are not only beautiful, but environmentally friendly. She was assisted by Southern Horticulture, a nursery in St. Augustine, Florida that provided approximately 35 native plant samples, including groundcovers, shrubs, perennials and trees. These plants built a critical connection between the workshop participants and local native plant providers. It also allowed participants to see and enjoy the recommended native plant alternatives.

To promote the FLEPPC mission, the logo was displayed on flyers and workbooks, and the name was mentioned in press releases and radio station announce-



Attendees not only learned to identify invasive exotic species, but also learned about the importance of using native plants when landscaping.



Dr. Maia McGuire instructs workshop participants on the impacts of invasive exotic plants in Florida's ecosystems.

ments. FLEPPC also was named in a Flagler Palm Coast News Tribune article written by a reporter who was on site to cover the workshop.

The workshops were a great success and have instilled in participants a new sense of awareness about plants that pose a threat to the biodiversity of our beautiful Florida ecosystems. The park staff hopes to continue working with the community to utilize this exciting new program to battle Florida exotic plant invaders.

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Terri Newmans, Park Services Specialist, Ft. Mose State Park; Lauren Swanson, Park Services Specialist, Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area at Flagler Beach, Lauren.Swanson@dep.state.fl.us