

MELAPALEUZA 2005 ROCKED!

by Cressida Silvers

The Areawide Management and Evaluation of Melaleuca, or TAME Melaleuca project, just wrapped up its Melapaleuza 2005 tour of educational workshops at demonstration sites throughout south Florida, and even though there was no music, it rocked. The workshops covered the latest information on melaleuca management tactics with a strong focus on biological control and its integration with chemical and mechanical approaches.

Two types of workshops were offered, one for professional land managers and one for homeowners. Professional workshops lasted all day and offered continuing education credits for certified pesticide applicators, arborists and horticulturalists. The morning sessions consisted of classroom presentations followed in the afternoon by guided walking tours of treatment plots at one of the demonstration sites. During the field tours participants could see for themselves the results of different control tactics discussed, including mechanical removal with heavy machinery, aerial herbicide application, hack and squirt, herbicide treatment of cut stumps, and biological control alone or in combination with chemical or mechanical treatments. While the classroom sessions provided the familiar formal educational experience, the field portions of the day provided a more relaxed venue for participants and presenters to interact, ask questions, and share experiences. Lively and mutually enriching discussions often resulted.

Workshops for the public were truncated versions of the professional format, lasting three to four hours. Classroom presentations were tailored to the interests and knowledge level of homeowners, with more explanation of what invasive plants are, why melaleuca is a problem and what private citizens can do to help. Field tours were limited to biological control treatments, and herbicide and mechanical treatments appropriate for homeowners. Participants also were encouraged to collect insects from the field site if they wished, although many were so enthusiastic about finding specimens they didn't need any encouragement.

Melapaleuza 2005 ran from February to April, with at least one workshop at each of TAME's five demonstration sites, for a total of four professional and three public workshops. Attending the professional events were arborists, landscapers and horticulturalists,

and land and resource managers responsible for vegetation control on over 14 million acres of the state's natural areas. Seventy private citizens from three counties attended the events for the public. Many of these were environmental educators and active community members who we hope will pass the information they learned on to others. Of all Melapaleuza participants surveyed, 83% said they were already using or were interested in using biological control for melaleuca and 32% signed up to have biological control releases made on their property or property they manage. Fifty-three participants requested free copies of TAME's 18-minute educational video.

A big part of what made the workshops a success was the cooperation from a number of agencies and organizations. The TAME project itself is a collaboration between USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences (UF IFAS). For Melapaleuza, we had a lot of additional help planning and presenting some of the workshops from county cooperative extension offices and the Audubon Society. Classroom presenters, field speakers and other assistance came from USDA-ARS, SFWMD, UF IFAS, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, US Fish and Wildlife, Florida Division of Forestry, Lee County Parks and Recreation, Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management, and FLEPPC.

There were some challenges to overcome. Unseasonably warm weather during our February 15th professional event in Fort Myers made the long hike through the sparsely shaded treatment plots seem longer. But all the participants rose to the challenge and even seemed energized by it. Our March 11th event in the Everglades buffer strip near Holiday Park was preceded by 3 inches of rain two days earlier, making the mucky soil at the demonstration site almost impassable. We discovered this about a quarter of the way through the tour when the five swamp buggies carrying participants through the 100-acre site got bogged down (see cover photo). It took the Division of Forestry and their tracked "Bombardier" to liberate them. Most participants were not deterred but rather took advantage of the situation by getting a



Scott Ditmarsen guides participants through aerial treatment plots at Broward County site.

CHUCK NOHEIL

Left: Tour participants review results of mechanical removal by the Barko chipper, Fort Myers.



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Right: Matthew Purcell, visiting scientist from the biological control lab in Brisbane, Australia, and Paul Pratt describe insect feeding damage at Fort Myers site.



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closer look at treatments as they walked through the site. We'll do better next year, we promise!

Melapaleuza will be repeated in 2006 so participants can see the effects of demonstration treatments more than one year after implementation and make assessments on longer-term impacts. In addition, by 2006 a third biological control agent for melaleuca, the gall fly *Fergusonina turneri*, is expected to be established and incorporated into demonstration site treatments along with the two agents already established, the melaleuca weevil *Oxyops vitiosa* and the melaleuca psyllid *Boreioglycaspis melaleucae*.

All we'll need to make Melapaleuza complete are some cool bands.

For more information on TAME Melaleuca and Melapaleuza, please visit our website at:

<http://tame.ifas.ufl.edu>

Cressida Silvers is a Project Coordinator for TAME Melaleuca at the USDA-ARS Invasive Plant Research Laboratory in Fort Lauderdale, 954-475-0542 x144, email: csilvers@saa.ars.usda.gov

