

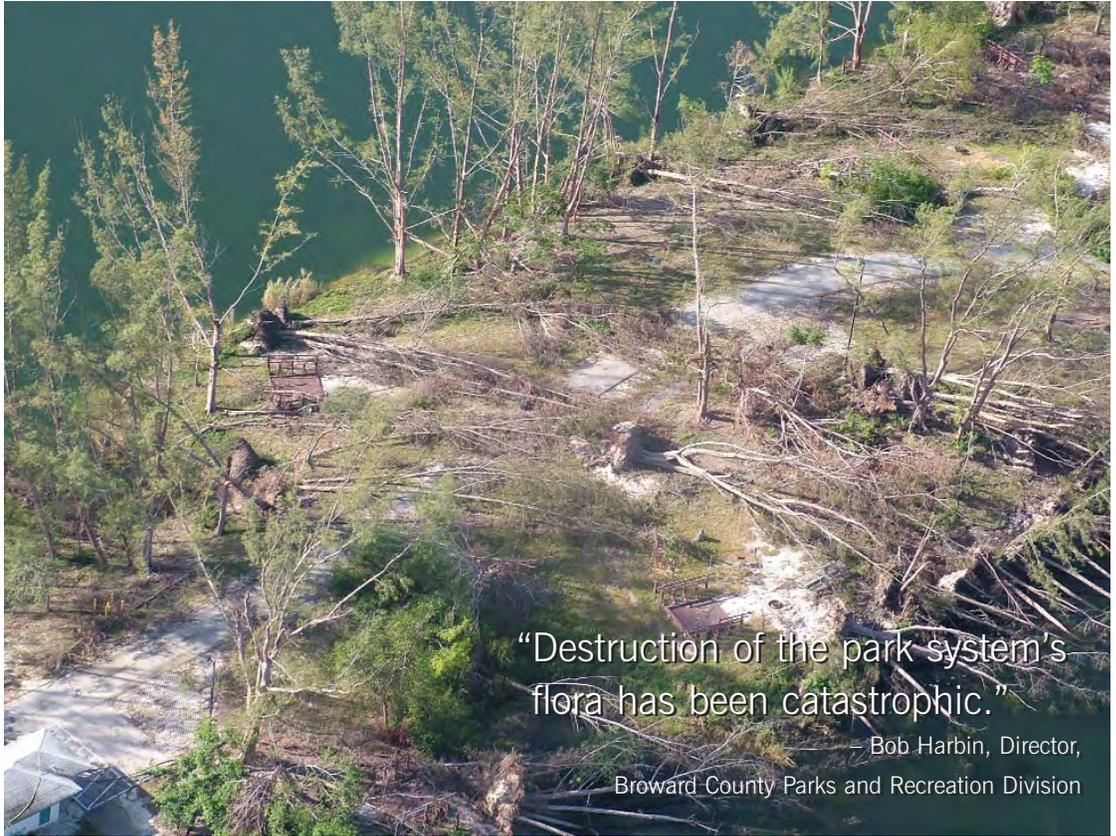
While Hurricane Wilma helped rid Broward County of some 200,000 invasive exotic trees, the destruction of their parks was massive.

Broward County Parks Recover from Hurricane Wilma

Hurricane Wilma, an intensely powerful hurricane that formed in the Atlantic basin last October, struck Broward County with devastating force on October 24th, 2005. Broward County high-rises, the 14-story Broward County School Board building and the county courthouse all were heavily damaged, and schools were closed for two weeks. The storm struck the west coast of Florida between Everglades City and Marco Island as a Category 3 hurricane (wind speeds of 111-130 mph). After severely damaging the city of Naples and surrounding areas, Wilma traveled east across the state, exiting into the Atlantic Ocean. The western side of the storm spawned several tornadoes as it moved across the state, compounding the damage from the hurricane's rain and wind.

Fully six months later, Broward County's Parks and Recreation Division is still recovering from the devastation wrought by Wilma. Their local and regional parks and natural areas were decimated, with tree casualties estimated at 200,000 – 250,000. To date, approximately \$20 million has been spent on debris removal, with more still to accomplish. Bob Harbin, Director of the Parks and Recreation Division, estimates that they are 85-90% finished with clean up. They expect FEMA to reimburse them for approximately 20% of their expenses.

The silver lining in this dark cloud is that more than 200,000 exotic invasive trees were removed by the forces of nature, leaving Broward County's parks and natural areas wide open for restoration with an emphasis on native species. In response to the damage from Hurricane Wilma, a Tree Replacement Action Plan for County Parks was prepared in March 2006 for the Broward County Board of Commissioners. The report states that exotic invasive tree species accounted for 90% of the tree casualties in the county park system.



“Destruction of the park system’s flora has been catastrophic.”

– Bob Harbin, Director, Broward County Parks and Recreation Division

Toppled Australian pine trees in Quiet Waters Park after Hurricane Wilma.

Broward County's Tree Replacement Action Plan includes a hurricane resistant landscape design with a target of 70% native species that are wind and disease resistant, and drought tolerant. These include live oaks, gumbo limbo, cypress, silver buttonwoods, sea grapes, lignum vitae, and others. The county parks department has not yet received approval from the county commission of the more than \$11 million budget request, but hopes to begin soon repairing the “desolate and damaged landscape remaining in many park areas.”

– KB, Ed.

Tree Casualties from Hurricane Wilma

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| Australian pine | 65% |
| Melaleuca | 15% |
| Ficus | 5% |
| Brazilian pepper | 5% |
| Others | 10% |

For more information, contact Bob Harbin, Director, Broward County Parks and Recreation Division, 954-357-8106, rharbin@broward.org