

Florida Invasive Plant Teams Win National Conservation Award

Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne awarded the U.S. Department of the Interior's highest honor, the Cooperative Conservation Award, to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Upland Invasive Plant Management Program, and The Nature Conservancy's Florida Keys Invasive Exotics Task Force at a ceremony on May 9th in Washington, D.C. Greg Jubinsky, the Environmental Administrator of DEP's Upland Invasive Plant Management Program, accepted the award on behalf of the Bureau of Invasive Plant Management team, and Alison Higgins, chair of the

The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Florida Keys Task Force, accepted the award on behalf of her group.

The U.S. Department of Interior's Cooperative Conservation Award recognizes conservation achievements that involve collaborative activity among a diverse range of entities, including federal, state, local and tribal governments, private for-profit and non-profit institutions, other non-governmental entities and individuals.

The Upland Invasive Plant Management Program was honored for establishing and incorporating science-based ecosystem management concepts into field and on-the-ground operations. A collaborative effort between DEP, the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the program has helped control more than 250,000 acres of upland weeds in 105 locations,

dedicating \$8.5 million in state funding toward the effort.

The more than 22 member organizations of The Nature Conservancy's Florida Keys Invasive Exotics Task Force have collaborated on a number of projects to eliminate invasive non-native species throughout the Keys. In particular, the Interior Department recognized the task force's "Green Thumb Certified"

"The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council is proud to congratulate the members of DEP's Bureau of Invasive Plant Management, Upland Plant Management Program, and TNC's Florida Keys Invasive Exotics Task Force, on this prestigious award from the U.S. Department of the Interior. Efforts such as these, and team leaders such as Greg and Alison, are why many other states look to Florida as the model to emulate. This award is a well-deserved tribute to your excellent work and valuable contributions to exotic plant management over the last ten years. Congratulations!"

— Alison Fox, Chair, FLEPPC

"It was a wonderful day seeing both the Florida Keys Invasive Exotics Task Force and the Upland Section of the Florida Bureau of Invasive Plant Management receive Cooperative Conservation Awards from the Secretary of the Interior at the same event. Together they made quite a statement for the type of partnerships that are underway in Florida. Quite a few of the Washington staff made a point of coming up to meet and congratulate them."

— Kathy O'Reilly-Doyle
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Naples, FL

"Florida is proud to be recognized for our partnership program that is protecting native species and improving the quality of public conservation lands. The work of the Upland Invasive Plant Management Program is preserving the state's natural beauty and preventing the environmental and economic damage caused by invasive exotic plants."

— Michael W. Sole
Secretary, Department of Environmental Protection

campaign. Under the leadership of Alison Higgins, TNC's Florida Keys land conservation program manager, the task force has been able to bring in matching state and federal dollars to implement this and other successful programs.

In an effort to reach out to home gardeners, the task force partners developed a nursery certification program that not only addresses sales of invasive plants, but also increases native plant purchases and use of appropriate fertilizers, mulches and irrigation products. The "GreenThumb Certified" program works with 30 business owners, providing them with free advice, materials and promotion. The nurseries, in turn, provide their customers with Keys-friendly landscaping plants, products and advice. Land managers can now refer citizens to trusted resources for native plants.



Top: U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne and Alison Higgins, The Nature Conservancy, Florida Keys

Sam Hamilton, Director, Southeast Region, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Greg Jubinsky, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Invasive Plant Management