

The agony that has been the history of Australian pines on public lands on Sanibel Island is all but over.



Australian pines cover Periwinkle Way after hurricane Donna in 1960. Photo by Jim Pickins

One of the founding families of Sanibel planted [Australian] pines along both sides of the main road, Periwinkle Way, in the 1920's, thereby establishing an unnaturally tall and shady canopy popular with those that didn't know any better. Gaps of light after Hurricane Donna in 1960 allowed Australian pine seedlings to form virtually total monocultures at the beaches including Bowman's Beach, Lighthouse and Algiers public parks. Efforts to remove these scourges to re-establish native plant communities and wildlife habitat have previously been met with horrifically emotional resistance including death threats against land managers and people chaining themselves to pine trees. When Hurricane Charley hit on

Friday the 13th, such nonsense came to a screeching halt. Sanibel's roads were blocked for days, hundreds of homes had direct serious damage from falling pines and power was out for weeks due solely to pines falling on power lines and breaking whole stretches of power poles off like so many toothpicks.

Now the City has finished removing all of the scores of Australian pines in the Periwinkle Way right-of-way and is rapidly finishing removal of all pines at the beach parks, both those downed and those that remained standing (many shattered and broken off). Very few complaints have been heard from any who saw the mess following the storm. These trees are just too tall with too much wind loading to be

appropriate for barrier islands, not to mention the overwhelming damage they cause to natural systems. When the logging operation is over, the City will have removed approximately 370 acres of pines in just over 2 months with the financial help of FEMA, Greg Jubinsky and his DEP invasive species management team and physical labor assistance on Periwinkle Way from the USFWS. Most pine work was accomplished with feller-buncher, front-end loader and whole tree chipper machines. Plans are well underway for revegetating all of these areas with 100% natives. The missing habitats of these parks including beach dune, rare coastal scrub, West Indian hardwood hammock, salt marsh and mangrove forest will be



finally re-established and maintained. Hopefully, now that the public lands are free of pines (and Brazilian pepper and Melaleuca I might add), an effort to remove the remaining Australian pines from Sanibel's private lands will be next.

As far as hurricane effects on trees go, it was abundantly clear that properties well vegetated with 20-40' trees of either the native or exotic variety fared far better in terms of structural wind damage than those with grassy lawns, on golf courses or with tall exotic trees that tended to fall on roofs. Exotic fig trees, particularly *Ficus benjamina*, also did terribly, second only to the Australian pines, almost all being knocked down and many causing serious property damage. Of the natives, seagrapes appeared to fare the worst with palms and other native hammock species surviving the wind best.

Pictures say a thousand words. The photo to the left is a ringer, Periwinkle Way after hurricane Donna in 1960; we've finally learned our lesson only now, in 2004.



— Robert K. Loflin, Ph.D.
Natural Resources Director, City of Sanibel

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