

The Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP)

Invasive Species Know NO Boundaries – Do We?

by Kristina Serbesoff-King

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Chances are good that if you've been working with invasive non-native species issues in Florida, you've been hearing more and more about partnerships, and perhaps something about a really cool private land incentive matrix and an entity that calls itself "FISP."

The history of FISP – the Florida Invasive Species Partnership – goes back to 2005. FISP started as the Private Lands Incentive subcommittee of the Florida Invasive Species Working Group (ISWG). The ISWG, formed in 2001 by direction of Governor Bush, was directed to develop a comprehensive plan that would coordinate the responsibilities of the agencies that manage and prevent biological invasions. The plan that resulted identified the need to evaluate incentive programs and funds that were available to private landowners to assist with the control of invasive species. Kathy O'Reilly-Doyle with the US Fish and Wildlife Partners for Fish and Wildlife program was asked to chair this group and she quickly roped in a group of unsuspecting partners with the promise that we would only have to attend three meetings – ever.

More than three years later, the Private Lands Incentive group is still meeting voluntarily with full knowledge that we have long passed our original commitment to Kathy. Based on our strong partnership, subcommittee members decided to become the Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP) in early 2008. Our group is composed of individuals who are willing to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of current programs, including our own, and work together to be more efficient and effective in our approach – realizing that conservation of our natural lands and wildlife habitats are critically important to us all.

A new, sustained commitment has formed, fueled by our desire to foster successful partnership approaches to invasive species prevention



VIP Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior (right) visits the FISP poster and Kathy O'Reilly-Doyle and Debbie DeVore (USFWS) at the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (GEER) meeting

and management in Florida. We developed the following action plan to focus our efforts on the prevention and control of invasive non-native species.

Action Plan

Goals:

1. Think Locally – Act Neighborly. Increase effectiveness and decrease costs by working together.
2. Provide tools to develop a unified approach and bridge the gap between landowners' and land management agency efforts.
3. Encourage development, implementation and sharing of new and innovative approaches.

Objectives:

1. Develop a matrix of existing incentive programs that can be used for invasive species control and target the problems on public and private lands.
2. Establish the matrix on a single web site, and provide links to specific information to address and resolve the problem. Provide outreach and training to the following audiences: public, private and technical service providers.
3. Promote partnerships and collaborative efforts to address invasive species on statewide, regional and local levels

If landowners and land managers in Florida wish to achieve long-term success in combating invasive species, it is critical to collaborate with all stakeholders, focusing on prevention as well as treatment.

(e.g., Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs), Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs), Invasive Species Task Forces, Invasive Species Councils, etc.)

4. Provide an information clearinghouse for these efforts.

Target Audiences:

- Public land managers/owners
- Private land managers/owners
- Technical Service Providers (i.e., agencies and organizations that provide funds or technical assistance such as the FFWCC Landowner Incentive Programs, NRCS Farm Bill Programs, UF-IFAS Extension Agents, FFWCC Invasive Plant Management Section, contractors, etc.)
- CISMA organizations

This action plan was developed after the realization that we could not adequately address the invasive species threat to natural lands and wildlife habitats by only working with private landowners or public land managers. Invasive species know no boundaries. The challenges to effective invasive species control on both public and private lands are very similar: lack of resources and funds, limited staff, limited knowledge of problem species, limited knowledge of assistance programs.

However, the solution to these challenges is not as simple as providing money to each group and hoping for success. All the money in the world is not effective if the land you are managing for invasive species is continually being re-infested by a neighboring property. Great benefits can be derived from working side by side with your neighbors; not only can you pool resources, time and funds, but you also build strong partnerships that will continue into the future.

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FISP members have started working towards our goals and objectives through two main actions: 1) enabling private landowners through the creation of a searchable database of private land incentive programs (the “matrix”), and 2) fostering CISMAs to provide a consistent and efficient approach (i.e., not reinventing the wheel). This has

been accomplished primarily through the creation of our website, floridainvasives.org, providing a monthly conference call/online meeting for individuals involved or interested in Florida CISMAs, and by speaking at multiple conferences, land manager meetings and CISMA start-up meetings.

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Cooperative Weed/Invasive Species Management Area (CWMA/CISMA)

What is a CWMA/CISMA?

A CWMA OR CISMA is a partnership of federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, individuals, and various interested groups that manage noxious weeds or invasive species in defined area.

While Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) has become the generic term nationally, and this term is widely used in western states, Florida and other eastern states are expanding this approach to address animals as well as plants. In Florida, CWMAs are more often referred to as Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) to capture this broader definition.

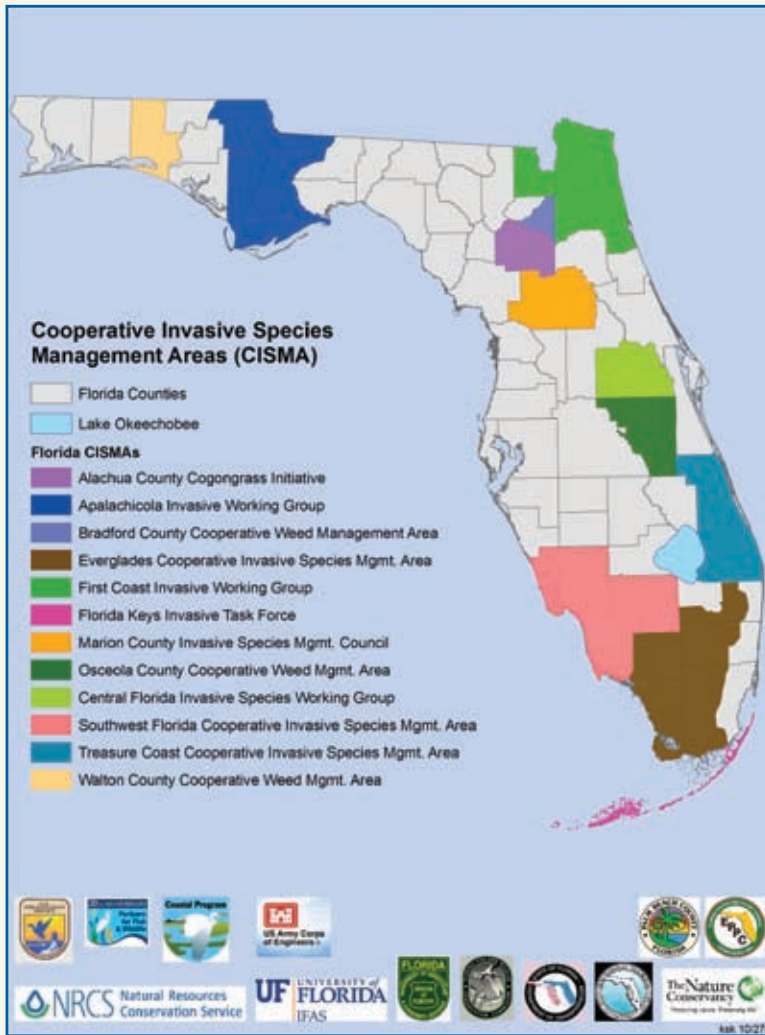
What are the five basic characteristics of a CWMA/CISMA?

(from www.weedcenter.org)

1. Definition of the geographical area distinguished by a common geography, invasive species problem, community, climate, political boundary, or land use.
2. Involvement or representation of the majority of landowners and natural resource managers in the defined area.
3. Establishment of a steering committee.
4. Commitment to cooperation.
5. Development of a comprehensive plan that addresses the management or prevention of one or more invasive species.



Private landowners at cogongrass demonstration meeting hosted by Osceola CWMA.



Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) in Florida

The FISP website will serve as a clearinghouse for invasive species partnership information in Florida. The searchable matrix of private land incentive programs will be hosted at this site and updated on a quarterly basis. Other information will include maps of CISMAs in Florida, a calendar of FISP events, CISMA and other important meetings, and links to other websites for additional information on identification and control of invasive species. The intent is to link private landowners and public managers to existing resources such as the plant list at www.fleppc.org or the invasive plant control information at plants.ifas.ufl.edu. In fall of 2008, FISP was able to secure additional funding that will allow us to provide individual websites to CISMAs in Florida. These sites will be similar to the Everglades CISMA site (evergladescisma.org) and will provide an online resource for each CISMA to exchange ideas, post materials, keep a calendar and collect data.

FISP began hosting monthly conference calls/online meetings for CISMAs in May 2008. This idea was borrowed from similar meetings held in New York for their Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs). The idea is to allow participants of CISMAs (or folks interested in creating or joining a

CISMA) a monthly forum to exchange ideas, share successes and lament about challenges. Besides allowing each CISMA to provide updates, we have also used this call for specific presentations on topics such as Exotic Animals in Florida, Setting Objectives, Florida Rights-of-Ways (presented by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)), and Early Detection/Rapid Response to Pythons in the Florida Keys. Contact Kristina Serbesoff-King (kserbesoffking@tnc.org) if you are interested in being placed on the e-mail list for these calls.

Members of FISP presented information at over 40 different venues in Florida during 2008. Locally, we have spoken at the formation meetings for the Central Florida Invasive Species Working Group and the Southwest Florida CISMA. Regionally, we have spoken at the District 3 FDOT meeting, multiple forest health workshops, as well as at Bureau of Invasive Plant Management annual regional working group meetings. Statewide, we have spoken at the statewide FDOT district engineers meeting, coordinated a workshop at the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) conference and presented posters at the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration meeting (GEER) and Organization of Wildlife Lands and Realty Specialists meeting (OWLS). Nationally, we presented at the first national CWMA Conference and helped coordinate a symposia session at the national meeting of The Wildlife Society. The purpose of these presentations has been to raise awareness of the benefits of using partnerships to combat the threat of invasive species at all levels of land ownership, management and involvement.

The sums of FISP successes are too many to list, however, none of them can be attributed to an individual effort. Our strength is truly in the partnership, camaraderie and conservation ethic that is shared by our members. This is the approach and success that we wish to develop in Florida through engaging private landowners and fostering CISMAs. The threat of invasive non-native species is great, but it can be effectively and efficiently addressed through coordinated, collective effort. One of our founding members, Chuck McKelvy with FFWCC, always reminded us that this isn't rocket science, but that there were some necessary ingredients for long-term success:

- Multiple agencies and organizations in partnership;
- Involve private landowners and interests;
- Recognize and respect differences and commonalities in missions;
- Conservation leverage, i.e. using each other's programs and assistance to strengthen and support conservation work.

For information on FISP or any of the ideas, programs or solutions discussed in this article, please contact the current FISP co-chairs, Kristina Serbesoff-King at kserbesoffking@tnc.org or Erin Myers at erin.p.myers@fl.usda.gov.

FISP has no formal authority and does not exert any control over the work of any individual or institution; it exists to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of partnership approaches to preventing and controlling invasives species through increased communication, coordination and shared resources.