

## **Annual Report of Natural Area Teaching Laboratory (NATL) Advisory Committee: 1998-99**

During the 1998-99 school year the University of Florida NATL Advisory Committee consisted of Mark Clark (Wetlands Club), Donald W. Dickson (Entomology & Nematology), Donald A. Graetz (Soil and Water Science), Kaoru Kitajima (Botany), Carmine A. Lanciani (Zoology), Alan J. Long (Forestry), Bruce J. MacFadden (Florida Museum of Natural History), Maria Minno (Florida Native Plant Society), Clay L. Montague (Environmental Engineering Sciences), Francis E. Putz (Botany), Joseph M. Schaefer (Wildlife Ecology & Conservation), Clay W. Scherer (Entomology & Nematology Student Organization), Thomas J. Walker, ch. (Entomology & Nematology), Gerald Kidder, ex officio (Lakes, Vegetation & Landscaping Committee).

The Committee met three times: 25 Sep 1998, 14 Jan. 1999, and 1 Apr 1999. Minutes are posted at <http://csssrrv.entnem.ufl.edu/~walker/ann-mins.htm>. (Between meetings, business is conducted by e-mail.)

### **1. Road name changed to Natural Area Drive**

Upon request of the Advisory Committee, the road from Hull Road to NATL, formerly named "Surge Area Drive" was changed to "Natural Area Drive." The Honorary Degrees, Distinguished Alumnus Awards and Memorials Committee approved the renaming and in early April a new street sign was installed.

### **2. SEEP dedicated, planted, and fenced**

On 17 April 1999, the Wetlands Club held a dedication and community planting for its Stormwater Ecological Enhancement Project (SEEP). Brief ceremonies included the unveiling of a plaque and the planting of cypress trees by representatives of the six organizations that contributed the \$65,000 used to re-contour NATL's retention pond. Re-contouring the pond to create diverse hydrological cycles was the first phase of SEEP. In May 1998, immediately after the re-contouring, the Club started SEEP's second phase: the introduction of native plants characteristic of the newly established hydrological cycles. The planting held in conjunction with the dedication completed this second phase. More than 20 volunteers planted more than 750 representatives of approximately 40 wetland species. The Club is now undertaking the third phase, the long-term monitoring of SEEP and the development of learning opportunities. To forestall establishment of erosion-prone paths directly from Natural Area Drive to SEEP's shoreline, the wooden fence at the eastern entrance to NATL was extended along SEEP's eastern and northern boundaries.

### **3. 34<sup>th</sup> Street berm approved and funded; construction started**

To reduce the noise and visual impact of 34<sup>th</sup> Street's six lanes of traffic, the Advisory Committee approved construction of an earthen berm 6 feet high and 23 feet wide at the base along NATL's western boundary south of the DPI compound. The berm was subsequently approved by the Lakes, Vegetation and Landscaping Committee and the University Land Use and Facilities Planning Committee. The \$22,000 required to build the berm was raised from three sources: College of Agriculture (\$7,000), IFAS (\$5,000) and Office of Research, Technology, and Graduate Education (\$10,000). Construction began in May but when the berm was about two-thirds complete, summer rains began and completion of the berm was postponed until drier conditions return.

#### **4. Restoration of upland pine continued**

On 16 March 1999, Alan Long directed a successful burn of most of the upland pine south of Gasline Trail. The Gainesville Fire Department provided a pumper and crew to help control the fire when it was near Regency Oaks Apartments. Shortly after the burn, all smoldering material was extinguished, and smoke caused no problems

#### **5. Preparation of old-field-succession plots continued**

Of NATL's five successional plots (A to E), only Plot D, a 10-year rotation plot, has been started (by clearing and tilling in 1997). Plots C (40-year rotation) and A (10-year rotation) were partially readied for their starts, which are scheduled for 2000 and 2002.

#### **6. Native plant hedge planted along east DPI fence**

Marilyn Roberts, FIMNH Education Programs Coordinator, proposed that a native-plant hedge be established along the east DPI fence to visually isolate the DPI compound from docent-led tours of NATL. The Advisory Committee and the LVL Committee approved and, in late spring, volunteers started the hedge by planting wax myrtles, coral honeysuckle, and dahoon holly along the fence. Some of the plants were donated by Claudia Larson and San Falasco Nurseries. Jody Rosier of the Native Plant Society headed the volunteers.

#### **7. FIMNH docents headed NATL tours**

During the school year, Florida Museum of Natural History docents took 2,431 students, teachers, and chaperones, from 10 nearby counties, for one-hour tours of NATL.

#### **8. Student Geomatics Association undertook mapping and grid-point survey**

The UF Student Geomatics Association undertook and more than half completed the precise location and permanent marking of all points in NATL's 50-meter grid. At the same time they made all the necessary measurements to locate (relative to the grid) NATL's boundaries and internal physical features. When they complete their work this fall, they will prepare a new, more accurate map of NATL.

#### **9. NATL to be used to teach about soils**

John Galbraith and Mary Collins (Soils and Water Science Department) presented a plan to survey the soils and near-surface groundwater resources of NATL and to use NATL for teaching about soils. The Committee approved most aspects of the plan but withheld approval of digging exploratory soil pits, pending agreement on the sites of the pits and the extent to which vegetation may be disturbed.

#### **10. Long-range management plan modified**

The Advisory Committee approved two changes in NATL's long-range plan: (1) The area originally delimited as a wildlife corridor from the hammock to the retention pond was made part of successional plot E, which is scheduled to begin a 40-year rotation in 2020. (2) A low area at the south edge of successional plot D will be shallowly excavated to establish an ephemeral pond conducive to amphibian breeding. Revised land-use maps can be viewed at <http://cssrvr.entnem.ufl.edu/~walker/aerigall.html>.

### **11. Invasive plants battled**

Spraying with Roundup and hand removal reduced, but failed to eliminate, these invasive exotics in NATL: cogon grass, johnson grass, elephant grass, mimosa, climbing tree fern, and air potato.

### **12. NATL made the news**

These stories appeared in the local press and helped inform the public and the UF community about NATL:

23 Oct 1998. "Club seeks volunteers for cleanup." *Alligator*; Environmental Management and Agriculture Club's cleanup of NATL advertised; location map included.

5 Apr 1999. "Making a wetland: UF pond undergoes overhaul." *Gainesville Sun*; front-page, 3-image article on NATL's Stormwater Ecological Enhancement Project.

14 Apr 1999. "Dedication of Stormwater Ecological Enhancement Project is Saturday." *Alligator, University of Florida Digest*; article with photo of Larry Connor changing the Hull Road street sign from Surge Area Drive to Natural Area Drive.

18 Apr 1999. "Volunteers plant trees." *Gainesville Sun*; page 1B continuation of article on Earth Day activities; describes community tree-planting at SEEP dedication.

June 1999. "Outdoor classroom." *Impact* [IFAS magazine, spring issue]; illustrated, one-page spread about how NATL enhances UF's academic programs.

### **13. Committee membership changed**

Carmine Lanciani, Bruce MacFadden, Clay Montague, and Joe Schaefer left the committee at the end of the school year. Taking their places will be Doug Levey (Zoology), Marilyn Roberts (Florida Museum of Natural History), Mark T. Brown (Environmental Engineering Sciences), and Susan Jacobson (Wildlife Ecology and Conservation).