

University of Florida

Natural Area Teaching Laboratory (NATL)

2002-2003 Annual Report

During the 2002-2003 school year the Natural Area Advisory Committee consisted of Michael Bond (Ethnoecology Society), Mark Brown (Environmental Engineering Sciences), Mark W. Clark (Soil and Water Science), Donald W. Dickson (Entomology & Nematology), Deb DiPietro (Florida Museum of Natural History), Donald A. Graetz (Soil and Water Science), Tina Gurucharri (Lakes, Vegetation & Landscaping Committee), Shane Hill (Entomology & Nematology Student Organization), Susan Jacobson (Wildlife Ecology & Conservation), Linda Jones (Teaching & Learning), Kaoru Kitajima (Botany), Doug Levey (Zoology), Chris Lewis (Wetlands Club), Alan J. Long (Forest Resources & Conservation), Francis E. Putz (Botany), Marilyn Roberts (Florida Museum of Natural History), Erick Smith (Lakes, Vegetation & Landscaping Committee), Carol Stiles (Plant Pathology), Thomas J. Walker, chair (Entomology & Nematology).

The Committee met twice: 10 Dec. 2002 and 23 Apr. 2003. Minutes are posted at <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/ann-mins.htm>. (Between meetings, business was conducted by e-mail.)

Academic pavilion put into service

With funds provided by Provost David Colburn and CALS Dean Jimmy Cheek, a 32×27 ft academic pavilion was erected near the NATL kiosk and put into service during Fall Semester. It offers shelter, seats, and tables for classes and individuals using NATL and is frequently occupied.

Natural Area Park established

In December 2002, the Natural Area Advisory Committee (NAAC) undertook to establish a park to serve as an interface between NATL and UF's Cultural Complex. Such a "Natural Area Park" just north of NATL's Stormwater Ecological Enhancement Project (SEEP) was part of the Cultural Complex master plan completed in fall of 2001. The park provides a place for K-12 groups visiting the Florida Museum of Natural History (FLMNH) to eat their picnic lunches and for the public to enjoy nature. It also provides information about SEEP and NATL and invites park users to enter and explore. A subcommittee consisting of Mark Clark, Deb DiPietro, Susan Jacobson, Erick Smith, and Marilyn Roberts (chair) oversaw the development of the park, which now has five picnic tables, a kiosk with information about SEEP and NATL, a trash can, and boulders on the north and east boundaries to discourage vehicles from entering. FLMNH and NAAC shared the cost of the tables and FLMNH provided the kiosk. Special thanks are due Physical Plant Division for supplying the trash can and the boulders and for agreeing to erect an official UF sign that will read "Natural Area Park."

Restoration of upland pine advanced

During Summer Semester, Alan Long arranged for a Wildland-Urban Interface fuel reduction team of the Division of Forestry to use their heavy equipment to mulch the undergrowth and most of the logs and stumps left from cutting and girdling laurel oaks in NATL's upland pine. This will lessen the intensity of fires during prescribed burns and will reduce the chances of smoke problems. These effects will in turn make it easier to find days suitable for burning. The mulching of the undergrowth also made it possible for Ken Prestwich and Tom Walker to plant 248 young longleaf pines in the public portion of NATL's upland pine. UF Urban Forester Erick Smith provided the young pines, and the Division of Plant Industry provided water (via their hose bibs) to facilitate the transplanting.

Ethnoecology garden

NAAC approved a proposal by the Ethnoecology Society to establish an ethnoecology garden in Natural Area Park. The garden was to have plants to demonstrate food, fiber, and medicinal uses by native and early European Americans. The Society was unable to complete its preparations in time to start the garden this spring but is interested in doing so in spring of 2004.

Miscellaneous improvements

During Fall Semester, Susan Jacobson's class in Environmental Interpretation (WIS 6525) used NATL's Public Area and especially the development of Natural Area Park as a class project. Among the improvements prompted by their studies were a new map for the NATL pamphlet and a revision of the NATL grid map.

In December, Shane Hill and other volunteers from the Entomology and Nematology Student Organization planted 63 wax myrtles, provided by Physical Plant Division, along the east fence of the Division of Plant Industry. Urban Forester Erick Smith helped oversee the planting.

In February, wireless networking was implemented for the pavilion area of NATL.

A new trail (SEEP Trail) was established along the fence on Natural Area Drive for travel between Natural Area Park and the academic pavilion.

An extension of the East Trail was established between Gasline Trail and South Trail to improve access to NATL's sink and sinkhole pond.

Two bluebird houses were installed on the fence north and east of SEEP.

The poppy mallows that were transplanted into eight 5 x 5 ft plots in NATL's upland pine in July 2002 survived and are thriving.

The run-down barbwire fence that ran along the south side of Division Trail was removed.

NAAC fiscal status

On 15 Aug. 2002, the balance in NAAC's account was \$124.69. In November, Provost Colburn added \$1,000. On 14 Aug. 2003, the balance was \$88.38. Expenditures greater than \$100 were \$188.58 for Garlon herbicide and \$618.94 for picnic tables for Natural Area Park.

NATL in the news

3 Feb 2003 *Alligator*: "Teaching lab area could be reduced for new road."

26 Feb 2003 *UF Digest* (in *Alligator*): "UF's hidden wilderness area has new pavilion."

26 Mar 2003 *Alligator*: "Connecting campus road may damage ecosystems."

Four lane road proposed to cross NATL

During Spring Semester, at meetings of the Alachua County Commission and the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization, UF administrators promised to recommend that the UF Master Plan be amended to provide right-of-way for a four-lane extension of SW 24th Avenue across the southern edge of NATL. This promise has yet to be fulfilled. NAAC worked to have the costs and benefits of the proposed right-of-way donation openly considered by the university community but failed. Details are at <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/24thAve.htm#history>.