

## **NAAC presentation at County Commission's hearing on 24<sup>th</sup> Ave.**

**25 March 2003**

Each of three speakers will speak for no more than 5 minutes and use a PowerPoint presentation to show images. [These presentations will be at UF's NATL website (<http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/>)

### **Tom Walker (Emeritus Professor and Chair of Natural Area Advisory Committee)**

Before you commit scarce transportation dollars to the development of a four-lane 24<sup>th</sup> Ave., you should be sure that UF will follow through on its Feb 20 commitment to donate the right-of-way east of 34<sup>th</sup> Street. Three members of NAAC are here to show you that you should be anything but sure.

Incidentally, everything we will say, and much more, is thoroughly documented on UF's NATL website, and we have provided Commissioners with representative printouts from that site.

According to the Gainesville Sun's report of the Commission's Jan. 31 meeting with Ed Poppell and Clark Butler about a vision of a 4-lane 24<sup>th</sup> Ave, Poppell said, when asked about where the road would pass through campus, "We need to go out and see what's there."

Screen 1 (relevant UF advisory committees)

He of course knew that it was part of NATL and UF Preservation Area 1, but he must have known little else. The reason he could know so little is that he did not ask for input from any of the three advisory committees that UF Administration maintains to help them properly weigh the effect of proposed projects. For example, NAAC must win approval from LVL and LUFPP prior to even minor projects--e.g. erecting a fence along the south border of NATL.

*Lakes, Vegetation and Landscaping Committee*, which advises on the "management and well being of natural areas containing non-domesticated plants and animals."

*Land Use and Facilities Planning Committee*, which advises on "the overall appearance and development of the campus" and "the enforcement of the UF Master Plan policies and guidelines."

*Transportation and Parking Advisory Committee*, which in conjunction with the Land Use and Facilities Planning Committee advises on "development and updating of the University Master Plan" and which is charged with "reviewing and recommending approval/denial of all requests for land use changes."

These committees will eventually be asked for their recommendations in regards to the ROW donation. I suggest you urge President Young to hear what they have to say before he writes another letter like the one you received today--unless he wishes to leave a terrible mess for the next President to correct.

In the rest of my time I will summarize what these committees will learn of the effect of the donation on UF academic programs. Then Botany Professor Jack Putz will tell you what they will learn about the donation's effect on the Conservation Element of UF's Master Plan. Lastly, Environmental Engineering Professor Mark Brown will tell you of water issues that the donation will raise and that the designers of the road will need to address (should the County invest enough money to reach that stage).

*Academic aspects of NATL*

Screen 2 (preservation areas)

As you will see, NATL is in UF's finest upland preservation area

This is no accident: faculty who were already using it banded together in 1993 to see that it was a Preservation Area in the first Master Plan and then formed the NAAC to develop it as an outdoor laboratory and classroom for the environmental sciences.

Screen 3 (NATL plan)

This is the plan they proposed. The southern half (the best part) was reserved for academic uses (public excluded) to permit equipment and markers to be undisturbed. This plan was soon approved by the LVL committee and has always (until now) been positively received by UF administrators. To illustrate:

Screen 4 (UF investment in NATL)

Every project proposed has been approved and funded--including berm (1999) and 34<sup>th</sup> Street berm (2002).

Screen 5 (Pavilion with class)

Wonder what Provost Colburn and CALS Dean Cheek think about the recent announcement that NATL could be moved?

Screen 6 (2000 usage survey)

Screen 7 (summary of 5-page list of academic area projects)

Screen 78 (ROW through NATL)

Road takes 3.1 acres, 1.6 acres is cut off. 4.6 acres is constitutes 21% of the 22 acres of the academic area that remained after the 34<sup>th</sup> Street berm was erected

**Francis E. ("Jack") Putz (Professor of Botany)**

See attachment

**Mark Brown (Professor of Environmental Engineering)**

See PowerPoint presentation at <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/24BrownPP.ppt>

## DEFENDING THE CAMPUS NATURAL AREA AND TEACHING LABORATORY by Prof. Francis E. ('Jack') Putz

Apologize in advance if I seem a bit down-trodden---with developers holding sway in the county and military instead of diplomatic solutions being the new world order, it obviously isn't a good time to be a liberal environmentalist. Today, instead of being out in the forest training the new generation of naturalists and field researchers, I am here defending what shouldn't need defense. Frankly, I am appalled that the option of building a road through the Campus Natural Area and Teaching Laboratory is even being considered.

I am a field biologist and teach field biology courses. In my 22 years at UF, the destinations of my field trips have changed. We don't go out to the forests and wetlands of Sugarfoot Hammock---now Oaks Mall. The old fields of what is now Royal Plaza on University Avenue and Butler Plaza on Archer Road were also biologically rich and convenient field trip destinations for my courses and field trips run by Archie Carr, Peter Feinsinger, Jack Ewel and many others. I feel like an old man, bemoaning the losses in the name of Progress and Development (note the upper case letters---I'm trying to be politically correct in the modern sense). Well, in any even, about 10 years ago, I started using what in 1994 became the Natural Area and Teaching Laboratory for research and teaching, about which Tom Walker has already spoken. I should note that the award winning Stormwater Ecological Enhancement Project (SEEP) grew out of a project in one of my classes, as have several research projects that have been published or are underway.

The 44 acres of NATL includes a diversity of representative habitat types. Unfortunately, the best developed examples of the most threatened habitats are directly in the path of the proposed road.

### AIR PHOTO of NATL

When we were inventorying the flora of the area, with its total now at 363 species of vascular plants, we worked from the north end southwards. We thought we were reaching an asymptote---getting close to the total, when we were down about half way towards to southern boundary. Then we hit the SW corner, and we started to encounter dozens of new species. This trend continued, as we moved from west to east along the southern boundary.

### BIG TREE

Not only were there additional species, we were getting into vegetation with better structure, both the sandhill on the western side, and the hammock towards the east. The largest trees in the area are along the road corridor. We haven't done a complete inventory, but in the 20 x 20 m plots that we have been monitoring since 1997, there are some really impressive trees, including huge longleaf pines, and, even more impressive, some of the nicest swamp chestnut oaks I've ever seen---also known as basket oaks because the wood splits so nicely to make picnic baskets, this species is a good indicator of nutrient-rich and well watered sites.

### PATH THROUGH HAMMOCK

Here the overburden of Pleistocene sands is thin, limestone outcrops near the surface, and clay lenses perch the water table—we haven't yet done a full soil analysis, but I believe that some of these clays are phosphatic, which explains the tree diversity and growth rates in the hammock plots. Amazing that within 100 m there is such habitat diversity, from xeric sandhill to super mesic hammock. The hammock needs protection, whereas the longleaf pine sandhill vegetation needs active management, which we have underway.

### FIRE

The diversity of habitats, and the diversity of management needs, is one of the reasons that the NATL is so critical to our teaching program at UF. It's no wonder that the area figures in so prominently in the Conservation Element of UF's Master Plan. And no management technique is more important to understand than controlled burns, such as the one you see here. Conducting a burn at the NATL is no small feat—what with its surroundings of roads and hospitals, but we are doing it. And the impacts of active management are becoming obvious—we're seeing increased flowering of native herbs, removal of the dense litter that accumulated during a few decades of fire suppression, is promoting regeneration, and the whole aspect of the area is changing. There aren't many campuses in the world where students can get experience with controlled burns.

### FLOODED SINKHOLE

And then just a few minute's walk away, is another world, a world of bluestem palms around sinkholes and an overstory of a dozen different species of hardwoods. All of this along the road right-of-way, through an area that is classified as "hydrologically sensitive" according to UF's Stormwater Management Master Plan. I don't even want to consider the collateral damage of a road passing through this area---I'm already too disappointed that the proposal has gotten this far. But, disappointed as I am, I will join what I suspect will be the majority of staff, faculty, and students in working to avoid damage to the NATL. Hopefully plans for this damage will stop here, and so will I, and pass the microphone to Professor Mark Brown.