

**ENSO**

**Entomology and Nematology  
Student Organization**

P.O. Box 110620  
Gainesville, FL  
32611

April 4, 2003

To whom it may concern:

We are writing in regards to the expansion of SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue through the University of Florida Natural Area Teaching Laboratory (NATL) to Archer Road. We appreciate the Natural Area, as we affectionately call it, and continuously use it for research and extension purposes. It would be devastating to us if that area were harmed.

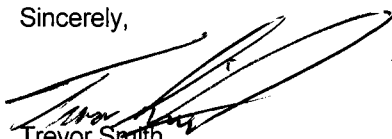
Due to its richness of diversity and its location, we are able to use this area to teach not only college students, but community groups as well. We have worked with the Florida Museum of Natural History in teaching classes to elementary and middle school aged children on a variety of topics from paleontology to chemistry and entomology. Each one of these topics included some use of the NATL whether it be for observation of nature, learning about ecosystems or for collecting insects. We have also introduced 4-Hers from across the state to the NATL during the 4-H Congress Entomology Day Camp. The NATL is regularly used in our departmental Outreach and Education program where hundreds of children are able to enjoy a natural setting while having the safety and convenience of the university campus. It is a wonderful place for nature scavenger hunts and for catching and observing insects in different habitats including, upland pine, old-field, mesic hammock, and aquatic. Not only is the NATL a wonderful outreach tool during the day, but is a great place to introduce night insect collecting techniques. We feel secure taking groups into the NATL after dark. The NATL provides us with a place in which to place our light traps so that they are not influenced by the illumination of the city and gives us the safety of being on campus. By encompassing such a diverse number of habitats, the NATL sustains a variety of insects and other wildlife.

As students, we use the NATL for aerial collecting, aquatic collecting, old-field succession studies, and southern pine beetle monitoring. We utilize the area for many classes including, Insect Ecology, Immature Insects, Insect Identification, Principles of Entomology, Insect Diagnostics, and Principles of IPM just to name a few. The southern area of the NATL is reserved for our use as scientists. We can set up traps and let them run for days without fear of them being disturbed by the public. The southern section of the NATL contains a lotic system that flows under Surge Area Drive and provides the only flowing habitat in the NATL. This area is important to us. As entomologists, it provides an area where insects that can only be found in or around flowing water can be collected. This aquatic system also feeds the "sinkhole pond" that is located south of the Entomology and Nematology Building. If the road extension is built as suggested, the "sinkhole pond" and the surrounding wildlife will become isolated from the rest of the NATL.

The paving of a portion of the NATL will disturb or eliminate portions of the established ecosystem and could affect the trophic balance in the immediate NATL and in outlying areas. Not only will the diversity of insects decrease, but the diversity of the other wildlife such as raccoons, armadillos, opossums, fox, squirrels, amphibians, reptiles, and birds will decrease as well. Whatever wildlife survives the initial disturbance will then have to contend with becoming road kill on the expanded SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The proposed plan places the expansion on the edge of the NATL, seemingly an innocuous place, however it will result in the removal of an important buffer zone that currently lessens the chance of animals entering the highway.

The NATL is an important teaching tool and needs to be preserved.

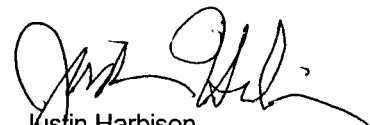
Sincerely,



Trevor Smith  
ENSO President



Rebecca Baldwin  
4-H Resource Volunteer

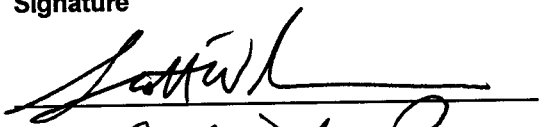


Justin Harbison  
Outreach Coordinator

ENSO Members

Signature

Printed Name

  
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