

Stewardship Notes

Florida Master Naturalist Program – A Resource and an Opportunity



Dr. Martin Main (blue shirt and hat) leads Florida Master Naturalist staff and graduates on a tour of Corkscrew Swamp. Photo by Ginger Allen.

By Shelly Foy



Shelly Foy

There is nothing quite like late summer in Florida, right? Is it going to rain, or not rain (currently we are below our annual rainfall, but that can change quickly). Are we going to be spared from hurricanes (Darn that Charley! Frances! Ivan! Jeanne!)? Are we going to get the summer renovation projects finished on time? The list goes on.

In the Foy Family we add the worries of our older kids starting college and every morning trying to convince the youngest that kindergarten is a lot of fun! Life is full of complications and full of fun moments, and making sure we take the time to savor them both is so very important. Our hearts go

out to all of the people whose lives were affected by hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne, and we hope they will be able to put their lives back together as quickly as possible.

In stewardship news these days, I found a great program that all golf course superintendents should consider. The University of Florida IFAS Extension has a program called the Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP). The mission is to promote awareness, understanding, and respect of Florida's natural world.

There are three courses, Freshwater Wetlands, Coastal Systems, and Upland Habitats. The cost of each course is \$200 and each course has 40 hours of educational contact hours including classroom learning, field trips, and practical experience. Oh, by the way, there are no tests or final exams, and that is a definite perk!

You have to be 18 to take the class, which I am sure is not a problem for any of you. I scoped out some of the course schedules and the one I was looking at was every Saturday from 8 a.m.

to 4 p.m. Upon completion of each course you receive UF certificates, patches and pins that announce your area of expertise, example Wetlands Naturalist, Coastal Naturalist or Upland Naturalist. Once you finish all three classes you will be registered in the UF database as a Florida Master Naturalist.

Now, I know you are all excited about the possibility of receiving patches and pins, but there are other important reasons for doing this! Beyond the fact that it would be “way cool” to be considered an expert in something new, the program fosters principles in sustainability, connectivity and biodiversity. The bottom line is that you will learn about Florida's environment, and more importantly you will be able to share what you learn with others. It goes back to that whole “communication is the key” philosophy we talk about from time to time. As a golf course superintendent, it would greatly benefit you to increase your knowledge of Florida's natural systems, the plants and animals that depend on those systems and the role you and your golf course play in being stewards of the land.

Dr. Martin Main, program leader for the FMNP, believes that other individuals (club members, local residents, etc.) who complete the training could also be important resources for golf course superintendents by leading evening bird walks, developing interpretive signs to explain native plantings, wildlife, wetland values, etc.

According to Dr. Main, “The FMNP has been creating a dynamic human resource that can be used to increase environmental awareness among Florida's citizens and visitors. Golf course superintendents can establish connections with these individuals (FMNP graduates) by taking FMNP training (get to know the folks directly), or by contacting local FMNP training locations and indicating the interest to FMNP instructors, or by posting volunteer opportunities on the FMNP Web site. Superintendents can also e-mail a request directly to info@masternaturalist.org and we will work to assist in the process.”

I know that I have personally spoken with many of you who want to know whom to contact about doing nature walks for your mem-

bers/golfers. Well, there you go, contact the Florida Master Naturalists!

Since the program started in 2001, more than 1500 certificates have been issued and there are 150 trained FMNP Instructors representing 85 organizations/entities, and they are in 43 counties in Florida. Workshops are held throughout the state, and you can find more information about this program and even register for classes through their website, www.MasterNaturalist.org.

Larry Livingston, CGCS at Camp Creek Golf Club in Panama City Beach recently completed the classes and he thinks it is a great program for all superintendents to consider. "I am really glad that I decided to take the class. It not only teaches about our environment, but teaches 'how to teach' as well." So, if you won't listen to me about taking the classes, listen to Larry. He is now the "expert." I really like the quote the FMNP has on its Web site:

"For in the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught." – Baba Dioum

That's very cool and very true.

An Environmental Case Study for ACSP Certification

Butterfly Garden Revamp

Project Title: Butterfly Garden Revamp

Property Name: Chi Chi Rodriguez Golf Course

Location: Clearwater, Fla.

Project Coordinators: Jamye Pecci, program coordinator and Albert Boline, golf course superintendent

Project Description. Give an overview of the project. Why did you choose it? What were conditions like before and after implementing the project?

The project was a revamp of an existing butterfly garden to provide ample food, additional areas for egg laying, and expansion of the garden into another courtyard area. Our purpose in doing this was to create a self-sustaining butterfly garden and attract a wider variety of butterflies. The previous garden had been smaller and had fewer plants to sustain the butterfly population. The

results were quick defoliation of plants, plant death and butterfly attrition as they moved on to search for food.

Goals: Please list your goals for the project.

1. Expand current garden into second garden courtyard.
2. Research butterfly food plants available and stock garden with plenty of plants.
3. Add butterfly houses.
4. Involve students, teachers and aides from on-site fourth- and fifth-grade classes.

NOTE: The Modesta Robbins Partnership School is the only privately funded public school in the United States to be located on a golf course. There are currently two classrooms which house fourth- and fifth-grade students. The school is part of the Pinellas County School System. The school caters to students who are struggling in a large classroom setting and/or have low self-esteem.

Implementation and Maintenance: What specific steps did you take to implement it? What kind of on-going maintenance does it require? Please give sufficient detail so that someone interested in duplicating this project could do so.

1. Research was conducted by the fourth- and fifth-grade students, resulting in a list of plants that attracted butterflies and that grew in our planting zone.

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