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quick facts on...

Fighting Invasive Plants

MARCH 2016

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional governmental agency that manages the water resources in the southern part of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.

Our Mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.

The growing presence of non-native invasive plants throughout South Florida impacts the environment and the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) ability to provide flood control to the region's 8.1 million residents and successfully restore and manage natural systems. The agency has invested significant resources to control these invasive species in order to ensure the continued health of South Florida's valuable natural resources for tomorrow. Since most invasive species are introduced by human activities, we can all be a part of preventing future spread of these species

Invasive Species

There are more than 1,380 non-native plant species found in Florida including 79 species considered highly invasive because of how fast they can grow and take over a habitat. The SFWMD has identified at least 71 species of invasive exotic plants as priorities that need to be controlled in South Florida. Some of the many invasive species being managed include:

- **Melaleuca:** This invasive plant was brought from Australia, for timber production and to "dry out" the Everglades. By 1985, at least 500,000 acres statewide were infested with the plant. The SFWMD and partner agencies has spent more than \$70 million to combat the plant including the use of approved herbicides and introducing biological controls such as insects that

damage the trees. These efforts are showing success at managing melaleuca.

- **Old World Climbing Fern:** This aggressive vining fern was introduced by nurseries in the early 1950s. By the late 1970s, it could be found growing wild in many South Florida natural areas. It takes over tree canopies and causes them to collapse, smothers native plants and increases the risk of wildfires burning into tree canopies. It also destroys critical habitat for native wildlife. The plant's spores are nearly invisible and spread easily.
- **Aquatic Weeds:** Aquatic weeds like hydrilla, water lettuce and hyacinth can clog flood control structures, damage habitat and interfere with navigation.
- **Brazilian Pepper:** This large shrub is known for its red berries. It was introduced to South Florida as an ornamental plant but has since spread to infest more than 700,000 acres throughout the SFWMD's boundaries. It reduces the biodiversity in habitat that is crucial for native wildlife.
- **Australian Pine:** This invasive tree has infested more than 200,000 acres in SFWMD's boundaries from beaches to farmland to the Everglades. It is a fastgrowing and large tree and its mat of falling needles inhibits the growth of many native plant species and reduces the quality of wildlife habitat.

What SFWMD does to control invasive plants

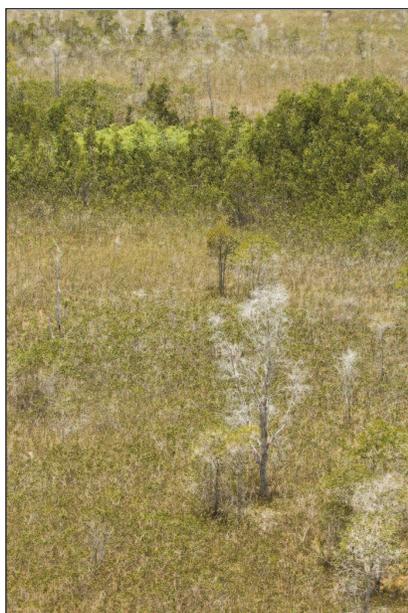
The South Florida Water Management District is responsible for managing invasive exotic vegetation throughout a 16-county region. Control efforts include prescribed burns, mechanical removal, herbicide application and use of biological controls such as insects and herbivorous fish. The agency typically spends more than \$20 million each year managing invasive plants. The cost to manage an inva-



Old World climbing fern overwhelms tree canopies.

sive species increases dramatically the longer it has been established and the further a population expands. Some of the SFWMD's efforts to manage invasive plants include:

- Patrolling more than 250,000 acres of waterways and more than 1 million acres of natural areas to find and eradicate invasive plants.
- Supporting research to find biological controls such as two melaleuca-feeding insects and an Old world climbing fern-feeding moth that specifically damage the invasive plant in question and spend their entire life cycle on that plant without negatively harming native species.
- Investing millions in a partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Department of Agriculture to fund a biocontrol research and breeding facility in Davie to combat invasive species.
- Overseeing management of melaleuca and Old World climbing fern at the 144,000 acre Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.



Melaleuca

Partners include U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. National Park Service, Florida Forest Service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Atlantic University's Center for Environmental Studies and University of Florida IFAS.

What residents can do to help manage invasive plants in South Florida

- Be an educated consumer: Learn what plants are considered invasive in Florida. Buy Florida friendly plants, such as native or non-invasive exotic species, for landscaping.
- Control or remove invasive plant species like torpedograss, Brazilian pepper or Old World climbing fern that can easily spread beyond the yard into the environment and cause damage.
- A guide to Florida friendly plants can be found at the District's website at www.sfwmd.gov.
- Don't dump aquarium plants in any rivers, canals or other bodies of water.
- Florida Friendly Landscaping at www.floridayards.org also provides a list of Florida friendly plants homeowners can use.
- The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council also has a list of invasive plants and information on how to help prevent the spread of exotic and invasive plants on their website at www.fleppc.org
- If you see invasive plants, report them at www.eddmaps.org so they can be controlled before spreading.



Aerial efforts to eradicate Hydrilla.



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