



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SFWMD Plants 3,000 Native Trees, Shrubs to Replace Exotics on Tree Islands**

*Habitat restoration under way at Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area*



*(Click on image for larger version.)*

*(From left to right) Bald cypress, buttonbush and leather fern are among the 17 native tree and shrub species that were recently planted in place of exotic species on tree islands in the Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area.*

**West Palm Beach, FL** — In the ongoing effort to protect the Everglades from invasive species, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is restoring natural habitat in a 19-acre section of the Rotenberger Wildlife Management Area, a 29,000-acre tract of remnant Everglades in southwestern Palm Beach County. A team of workers recently planted 3,000 native trees and shrubs on tree islands in the management area as part of the restoration effort.

District scientists are working in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to remove the exotic Peruvian primrose willow and Brazilian pepper from the tree islands, which prevent native species from thriving in the area.

“The Brazilian pepper may not draw as many headlines as Burmese pythons, but the damage this exotic species does to the South Florida ecosystem can be just as devastating,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Patrick Rooney. “By replacing the Brazilian pepper and other invasive species with native plants, we are restoring this slice of the Everglades to its natural state.”

Tree islands occur in the Everglades at elevations slightly higher than the surrounding marsh areas. The distinctive plant communities provide critical habitat for a multitude of animals, including white-tailed deer, alligators, dozens of bird species and the endangered Florida panther.

The new mix of 17 native tree and shrub species on the Rotenberger tree islands includes buttonbush, leather fern, bald cypress, cocoplum, dahoon holly, gumbo limbo, firebush and wild coffee. With the plantings complete at the site, scientists will evaluate the overall success of the project by measuring soil build-up or depletion, stress levels of the newly planted trees and shrubs, canopy development and use by wildlife.

The SFWMD Vegetation Management Division is responsible for managing nuisance and invasive exotic vegetation throughout the 16-county District. The implementation of a vegetation management program is necessary to ensure the continued use and function of the region's water resources and preservation of South Florida's conservation lands.

For more information on the District's Vegetation Management Program, please visit [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov).

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**About the South Florida Water Management District – [Celebrating 60 Years \(1949-2009\)](#)**

*The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.*