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District Sets Florida Abloom Again

Havana, FL – Wetlands will bloom again after pineland purple, rayless sunflower and dense gayfeather were planted to restore natural wet prairie and hydric pine flatwoods in the panhandle. Since being named “flowery land” by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon in Easter 1513, human impacts have degraded or destroyed many wetlands. In December, the Northwest Florida Water Management District hand planted 32 acres of wet prairie and hydric pine flatwoods wildflowers on wetland restoration sites in Washington and Bay counties.

“The District has purchased over 212,000 acres of wetlands, floodplain, and upland buffers to protect and restore water resources,” said District Executive Director Douglas E. Barr.

“Restoration of wetlands that were impacted prior to District purchase is an important component of the land management program.”

Restoration began with restoring natural water flow to degraded wetlands, then natural fire cycles were introduced and shrubs eradicated. Finally, wiregrass and toothache grass were planted on restoration sites. However, studies indicated that key species were not present in the seed bank, probably due to the many years of fire suppression and habitat degradation. The

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species selected for reintroduction were ecologically important and present in high quality wet prairie and hydric pine flatwoods of the region. Seeds from these species were collected from the District's Garcon Point and grown by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and a private nursery

"Many of these species have not been cultivated before," said David Clayton, District Environmental Scientist. "The ability to grow significant numbers of late successional and rare species at an economical cost and reintroduce them to developing restoration sites is exciting." Clayton helps develop wetland restoration plans and monitors the District's mitigation restoration projects, which offset wetland losses due to highway construction and other development activities.

One of the species added to Ward Creek was Curtiss sandgrass, a state threatened species that is becoming increasingly rare due to habitat loss and fire suppression. Curtiss sandgrass was planted at Ward Creek to preserve the species and create additional populations on state owned lands.

Over 150,000 plants, 22 wetland wildflowers, grasses and sedges were planted in wetland islands on 15.5 acres at the Sand Hill Lakes Mitigation Bank, Washington County, and 17 acres at Ward Creek West Restoration, Bay County. The delicate plants were transported by refrigerated trailer and carefully set by hand.

"Next summer and fall these plants should blossom with a showy variety of wildflowers," said Clayton. "Their seeds should spread to further populate the surrounding wetlands."

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For digital images write Faith.Eidse@nwfwmf.state.fl



Blazing star (Liatrix spicata, or dense gayfeather) and variable leaved sunflowers (Helianthus heterophyllus) were planted in December to bloom in spring on 32 acres of restored wetlands in Washington and Bay counties. (David Clayton photos)