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**Florida Native Plant Society Holds Annual Conference at FGCU May 15-18**

*Plant sale, guided tours among events open to the public*

FORT MYERS, Fla. – Plant sales, expert speakers, campus trail tours, field trips, an art exhibit and much more will be part of the Florida Native Plant Society’s annual conference May 15-18 at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU).

Hosted by the society’s local Coccoloba Chapter, the conference is expected to draw more than 200 society members, scientific presenters, vendors and other partners in the effort to promote the preservation, conservation and restoration of plant species and communities native to Florida. Landscaping with native plants benefits wildlife, water quality and conservation and preserves natural history.

A wide range of topics will be covered at the society’s 34th annual gathering, including restoration of rare orchids at Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, beach plants and coastal landscaping, wildflowers, butterfly conservation and climate change.

Although some of the conference’s technical programs and field trips may be filled by registered members, several events are free and open to the public, including a native plant sale from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 16 and 17 on the Cohen Center lawn. Other activities open to the public on May 17:

* “Walking with the Natives,” from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., includes guided tours every half-hour showcasing the importance of native plants in two campus locations, leaf art projects for families, free plants while supplies last and more. One tour is to the boardwalk west of the Cohen Center; the other is on the north side of FGCU Boulevard North.
* The “FLOR500” art exhibition will open at 10 a.m. at the FGCU Arts Complex. Sixty native plants depicted by 60 different regional artists will be on display in this interdisciplinary art, nature and history project created by Miami artist Xavier Cortada to commemorate Florida’s quincentennial in 2013. FGCU’s Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education will host a reception from 5 to 7 p.m.
* A scientific poster exhibition in the Cohen Center food court from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. will present professional displays and selected regional science fair winners’ posters as an opportunity for young people to learn more about native plants and careers in science.

J.C. Cahill of the PBS show “What Plants Talk About” will be one of the conference’s featured speakers. Others include internationally recognized sea-level scientist Don Chambers, wildflower photographer Roger Hammer, FGCU Professor Emeritus Bill Hammond and Professors James Wohlpart, Win Everham and Brian Bovard.

Everham’s presentation will focus on the ecological state of the FGCU campus over the last 20 years. The university has been fighting to eradicate invasive non-native plants on campus since before it opened in 1997. The university has a goal of maintaining 80 to 90 percent native vegetation and plants 10,000 to 12,000 native trees, seedlings and shrubs each year.

In addition to FGCU, conference sponsors include the Naples Botanical Garden, Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, Bill Smith Appliances & Electronics and Estero Bay Buddies.

Conference registration is $110 per day for Florida Native Plant Society members, $145 per day ($220 for two days) plus $35 membership for nonmembers. For a complete schedule and additional information, go to [www.fnps.org/conference](http://www.fnps.org/conference) or contact Conference Committee Chairwoman Marlene Rodak at (239) 273-8945.

For further information, contact James Wohlpart at (239) 590-1094.