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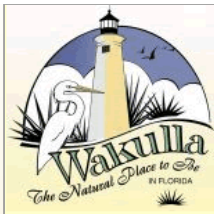
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01-13-2010

Wakulla and Gadsden Counties Lead the Way in Preserving Florida's Roadside Wildflowers

Recognizing the economic and ecological benefits of Florida's wildflowers, Gadsden and Wakulla counties have cleared the way for their conservation and preservation on roadsides.

The Gadsden County commission recently adopted a resolution to preserve and conserve wildflowers by altering roadside management practices and reducing mowing. The resolution also recognizes the cultural significance of wildflowers, which will be celebrated in 2013 – the 500th anniversary of Ponce de Leon's naming of La Florida, "land of flowers."

Gadsden County is working with the Florida Department of Transportation to begin a pilot project on U.S. Highway 90, State Road 12 and County Road 267, which will be managed to produce more wildflowers.

A year ago, FDOT planted wildflowers around oak trees on S.R. 12, which is part of the county's North Florida Arts Trail. "We just had wonderful wildflowers. People were stopping and photographing them," said Gadsden County Commissioner Douglas Croley. That success left the county wanting more. "This new maintenance project is a low-cost way to promote Florida's natural beauty."

Meanwhile, Wakulla County last October joined with FDOT on another pilot project aimed at promoting the growth of more wildflowers along U.S. Highway 98, part of the Big Bend Scenic Byway. The county's aim is to build its growing ecotourism industry while preserving native vegetation and supporting wildlife, said Wakulla Commissioner Lynn Artz. In addition, Wakulla County's Public Works Department has adopted similar mowing practices along county roads and has sown wildflower seeds in several traffic triangles.

The Florida Wildflower Foundation applauds both efforts. "It's clear that officials in Wakulla and Gadsden counties understand that bountiful native flowers hold the potential for enormous economic benefits through increased ecotourism," said Foundation board chair Jeff Caster, who helped craft Gadsden's resolution. "They also recognize that wildflowers play a large role in the culture and heritage of La Florida."

This article originally published on January 13, 2010.

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