

Proper Uses of FLEPPC's List of Invasive Species

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Introduction

Floridians' awareness of problems caused by invasive plant species is rapidly increasing as a result of public education efforts by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) and others. We must now accept the responsibility to ensure that information pertaining to invasive plant species is factual and correctly interpreted, and to maintain constructive relationships with others who may be affected, such as the horticulture industry.

County and City Commissions are increasingly asked to help protect natural areas from invasive plant species by adopting into ordinance the entire "Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's List of Invasive Species" (FLEPPC List) or certain species because they are on the list. These measures may take the form of exemptions to tree cutting ordinances, plant species prohibited from inclusion in landscaping plans, or mandatory removal of certain species. FLEPPC is often asked to provide support in the form of letters or expert witness when adoption of such measures is being considered. The purpose and appropriate uses of the FLEPPC List in tree and landscape ordinances are discussed in this article.

History and Purpose of the FLEPPC List

FLEPPC's early focus was on organizing to manage melaleuca, but efforts soon evolved into a broader focus on all invasive exotic plant species in the state. The FLEPPC List Committee was established to bring plant experts together to list and prioritize all of the state's invasive plant species. The first list was made public in 1991 and has been refined and revised every two years as more information has been collected. The purpose of the FLEPPC List has been clearly stated since its publica-

tion and has always been published along with each subsequent printing and update. In general, the stated purpose is to focus attention on the problems associated with invasive plant species, inform resource managers about which species need to be monitored, and to help managers set priorities for management. Although certain plants on the FLEPPC List are regulated by local, state, or federal statute, it is not intended that all species on the List should be prohibited everywhere in Florida. Certainly, species on the FLEPPC List may be worth considering for inclusion in a local ordinance, but additional information should always be gathered during the decision-making process for a particular city or county.

Prohibited Plant Lists

Prohibiting species from sale or use can cause economic hardship and changes of well-established cultural practices. Before prohibiting species from sale or use, it is imperative that adequate information exists on the degree of invasiveness, the local threat to the environment, and the economic and cultural impacts. Species are placed on the FLEPPC List after being nominated and voted upon by the FLEPPC List Committee because they have been observed to be invasive in natural areas of the state, particularly in parks and preserves. The statement, "... does not rely on economic severity or geographic range of the problem," means that an invasive species does not have to be extremely costly to control or occur in all regions before it is listed. Also, the FLEPPC List does not address the economic importance of a species to the horticulture trade. Species to be addressed in local regulation should be considered on the basis of locally developed criteria, such as the species' local occurrence, severity, or potential to spread further, plus the local economic and cultural impacts.

When asked to assist with identifying plant species to be prohibited by local ordinance, FLEPPC encourages the use of the FLEPPC List as a first

step to identify species, with additional information then included in making any final decision. FLEPPC members should assist local staff in determining those species from the FLEPPC List that are invasive within the jurisdiction of the particular ordinance or in nearby natural areas, and species that are potentially invasive in that geographic region. The FLEPPC occurrence database is a good source of information to determine geographic range and occurrence. A second useful source is the University of South Florida's online *Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants*.

Local growers and landscapers, as members of a potentially affected constituency, should be involved in determining what plant species are listed in local ordinances. While prohibiting invasive plant species from landscapes to limit the source of propagules is one method of protecting natural areas, the economic impact of prohibiting a commercially important species and the cultural impact of eliminating a popular landscape species is of concern to growers and landscapers. These groups understandably will raise opposition to prohibiting these economically or culturally important species. It is important for land managers to work together with local staff, growers and landscapers to find compromises to present to their lawmaking bodies as a unified voice. When agreement cannot be reached, it is then up to the lawmaking body to decide what compromises to make based on economic and environmental considerations.

Since its first public availability, the FLEPPC List has caused concern within the horticulture industry because some species that occur on the list are also important in the trade. The FLEPPC/FNGA Liaison Committee has made great strides in working with the nursery industry to discourage sales of certain plant species on the FLEPPC List, including ones that are still sold commercially but are not considered important in the trade. These plants, hopefully, can be easily agreed upon at the local level as plants to be prohibited. Additional species could be agreed upon based on discussions

between natural resource managers and growers/landscapers at the local level.

Mandatory Removal

Ordinances that require mandatory removal of invasive species will invoke economic and, possibly, cultural hardships on citizens. Therefore, (as in the case of prohibiting invasive species from landscape plans) FLEPPC should encourage the use of the FLEPPC List as a first step to identify species. However, additional information beyond that needed for a species to be placed on the FLEPPC List is necessary for requiring mandatory removal of invasive species. Certain invasive species are very expensive to control; for others, methods may not be available that give consistent results. FLEPPC can assist local governments by providing information on severity of invasiveness, distribution, and the most cost effective control methods for species being considered for mandatory removal.

Exemption from Tree Removal

Many local governments have tree-

cutting ordinances that require property owners to obtain permits before removing trees of certain size. If invasive exotic tree species are included, the ongoing efforts to encourage property owners to remove invasive plants from their property may be deterred. FLEPPC encourages local governments to eliminate such impediments by exempting exotic pest plants from tree-cutting permit requirements. Because tree removal in this case is a voluntary action and will not impose hardship on anyone, the entire FLEPPC List could be exempted from any tree-cutting permit ordinance. Even if species listed are not invasive in the specific region of Florida, these ordinances simply provide property owners with greater flexibility regarding their property.

FLEPPC Policy on Use of its Invasive Species List in Ordinance

While great care has been taken to formulate the FLEPPC list, care also must be given to how it is interpreted and used. FLEPPC encourages the use of the Invasive Species List for

prioritization and implementation of management efforts by natural resource managers, in environmental education programs, and in voluntary removal programs. When species are to be prohibited in some capacity, or removal is to be required by law, FLEPPC encourages the use of its invasive species list as a first step to identify species to be considered. FLEPPC does not promote regulating species for the sole reason that they occur on the list. FLEPPC will continue to work with the horticulture and other industries to develop recommendations that discourage the sale and use of invasive species on the FLEPPC List. FLEPPC also will continue to develop and disseminate information pertaining to these invasive species. FLEPPC will encourage additions to the Florida Noxious Weed List and the Prohibited Aquatic Plant List for certain invasive plant species that are clearly threatening Florida's natural communities and native species, incurring significant ecological and economic losses to the citizens of Florida.