

Panhandle Wildflower Alliance 2018–19 Annual Report

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Pictured: Escambia County Welcome Center at I-10. Photo by Bob Farley

The Panhandle Wildflower Alliance continues to build awareness and support for the goals of the Florida Wildflower Foundation to expand conservation of roadside wildflowers within the 16 counties that comprise FDOT District 3 (D3). Volunteer advocates are working with local governments to request modified mowing of state roads with naturally occurring wildflowers. There are many miles of state and federal roadsides designated for conservation encompassed by the District's Turf Management Plan, and more are pending. Several counties have also developed management plans for roadsides along county roads. Wildflower resolutions are in place for 15 out of 16 counties in D3 (Liberty County being the exception).

2018–2019 accomplishments

- Initiation of the PWA Wildflower Program in Escambia County by providing technical support and recruiting leadership and volunteers.
- Revised and expanded *Native Wildflowers of Florida's Panhandle* brochure published June 2019. The publication features a driving map with expanded wildflower viewing routes. It is available online and at Florida's five Welcome Centers, as well as at regional businesses, state and national parks and county visitor bureaus.
- Quarterly newsletters featuring program progress and the contributions of PWA volunteers, FDOT District 3 staff and others continue to be sent to more than 600 subscribers.
- Ongoing contributions to social media to promote outreach goals of FDOT and the Foundation. There are 2,400 members who follow the PWA Facebook page
- Presentation on the "Importance of Wildflowers Along Roadsides and Home Landscapes" given to multiple conservation interest groups and garden-focused organizations.

FDOT District 3 Regional Accomplishments

Paths of Sunshine Award

In April 2019, The Florida Federation of Garden Clubs announced its annual Ella P. Woods Paths of Sunshine Award winners. The program recognizes the Florida Department of Transportation's commitment to native wildflower and plant conservation and applicants' understanding of the department's policy of conserving and managing naturally occurring roadside wildflowers.

FDOT District 3 Maintenance was awarded third place for a project on State Road 77 near the Bay and Washington counties line. This project is assisting one of Florida's beautiful state-listed threatened native plants, Gulf coast lupine. Before the widening of State Road 77 in Washington County, seed was collected and dispersed across the Bay County line, where the road project was complete. The species continues to multiply and thrive.

Interactive Wildflower Mapping Project

District 3 is working with a contractor to develop an interactive map of existing wildflower distribution in the Panhandle's 16 counties. The project is still under development.

Interstate Management

District 3 has designated approximately 90 acres of median between the Sneads and Grand Ridge exits on Interstate 10 as native plant restoration sites in response to debris removal after Hurricane Michael in 2018. Because there is little in the way of appropriate commercial seed, Vegetation Specialist Bob Farley is collecting seeds from wetland and upland wildflower populations for dispersal in the median.

Status of wildflower program in each county in District 3 (west to east)

Escambia

The county finally has an active wildflower group and is in the process of identifying suitable Naturally Occurring Wildflower Areas (NOWAs) and working with county officials to initiate a designation process. It is focused on designating county roads at present.

Santa Rosa

This county continues its robust wildflower program, thanks to a motivated Master Gardener group and the inspired leadership of Suzanne Spencer, a retired science teacher (pictured). For her achievements, Suzanne was awarded Volunteer of the Year by the Florida Wildflower Foundation at the 2019 Florida Wildflower Symposium in Gainesville. The Santa Rosa Master Gardener group has developed a traveling poster exhibit to take to rural communities in order to promote the wildflower program's benefits.

One road removed:

- S.R. 87 within Eglin Air Force Base from south of the Yellow River to Vonnie Tolbert road was sodded after construction was done, and is no longer in the wildflower program. (14 miles, both sides)

Existing roads:

- S.R. 85 agreement in place in place with Eglin for reduced mowing
- S.R. 285 agreement in place with Eglin for reduced mowing
- S.R. 4 from western boundary to the Blackwater State Forest to the Okaloosa County line (23.2 miles, both sides)
- S.R. 8 from the Okaloosa County line to Escambia Bay (60 miles, both sides)
- S.R. 281 from Romano Street to the south trailhead of Garcon Point Road (10 miles, both sides)



Photo by Liz Sparks

Okaloosa County

MaryAnn Friedman moved out of state and resigned as county PWA leader. A replacement leader hasn't been found.

No changes:

- S.R. 285 from the Walton County line to S.R. 293 (17 miles, both sides)
- S.R. 85 within Eglin AFB from Shoal River to S.R. 123 (17 miles total, both sides)
- S.R. 189 within Blackwater River State Forest from Shockey Springs Road to north of High Springs Road (4.5 miles total, both sides)
- S.R. 4 from Beaver Creek Tower Road to the Santa Rosa County line (3.5 miles, both sides)
- S.R. 85 southbound from Gen. Robert Bond Boulevard to Lewis Turner Boulevard (1.2 miles)



Photo by Suzanne Spencer

Walton

Walton County has no leadership at present after retirement of Vivian Schemel from the county planning office.

No changes:

- S.R. 81, south of the town of Red Bay, from the beginning of the Nokuse Plantation to Seven Runs Creek (3.3 miles)
- S.R. 20 two miles east of Bruce from Choctawhatchee River Bridge to Cowford Road (4 miles)
- West of Bruce on S.R. 20, on the other side of Black Creek Bridge (the south side is already signed as a Wildflower Area). It is about 2 miles in length on the eastbound (south) side of the road (2 miles)
- S.R. 285 (on Eglin Air Force Base): This is a designated and signed Wildflower Area through an agreement between Eglin and District 3. (12 miles)

Bay

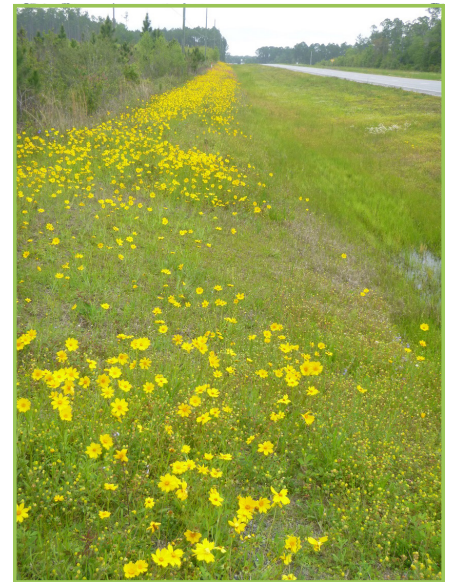
Mila and Ray Bentz from Panama City resigned from PWA following devastation to their home by Hurricane Michael. Prior to the storm, they met with Keith Bryant, Bay County public works director, to submit requests for new state roads for designation as Wildflower Areas. Segments of S.R. 20, S.R. 79 and S.R. 77 were under consideration for wildflower conservation, but the hurricane put plans on hold indefinitely.

Holmes

A volunteer has been identified to initiate a program in Holmes County, but no action to date.

Washington

In the spring 2018, a small group of volunteers and Heather Lopez, head of the tourism development council, met to identify state roads with naturally occurring wildflowers. Construction on S.R. 77 and 79 continues, so the group will not approach FDOT for designation until a future date. Two loop routes were identified that include these two state roads, plus stretches of county roads. The county's tourism development council plans to apply for a highway beautification grant in 2020 after construction on S.R. 77 is completed.



*S.R. 79 in Bay County
Photo by Bob Farley*

Calhoun

One new road:

- In September 2018, Kristy Terry, tourism development council director, submitted a new 2.2-mile segment of S.R. 69 to be designated by D3. Bob Farley has developed a management plan. (4.4 miles)

Existing roads:

- S.R. 71 from the intersection of CR 392, progressing in segments along the west side right-of-way to the S.R. 73 intersection (4 miles)
- S.R. 73 between S.R. 71 and C.R. 392 was designated at the request of the Calhoun County Commission. It was chosen for its diversity of habitats and presence of rare plants. (5.5 miles)

Gulf

One new road:

- S.R. 22 from S.R. 71 west to the Bay County line. The county originally requested the entire road. Bob Farley did a survey and shortened the segment. The request is on hold due to hurricane recovery. (12 miles)

Existing roads:

- S.R. 71 from White City Bridge to Port St. Joe city limit (11.5 miles)
- S.R. 30 from the Port St. Joe city limit to the Franklin County line (19.3 miles)

Local leaders are looking at potential county road sites.

Franklin

The Franklin County Commission submitted a request in April 2018 to revise the mowing plan as follows:

The following roads will receive two full right-of-way mows; one between Dec. 1 and Jan. 31, winter and one between mid-May and June; otherwise they will receive only the 15-foot safety-strip mows the rest of the year.

- S.R. 30 from Gulf County line to Bay City Work Camp (16.2 miles)
- S.R. 30 from S.R. 65 to Carrabelle Beach (20 miles)
- S.R. 30 from Will Kendrick Sports Complex to west of Lanark Village (5.2 miles)
- S.R. 30 from east of Lanark Village to west of Summer Camp (7.3 miles)
- S.R. 30 from east of FSU Marine Biology Lab to Ochlockonee Bay Bridge (19.2 miles)
- S.R. 65 from Franklin Co. Sheriff Office to Apalachicola National Forest (30.8 miles)
- S.R. 377 from S.R. 30 to Ochlockonee River Bridge (10.5 miles)

All areas of state roads that are not addressed in the list above will receive two (2) full mows of the right-of-way. Basically, this revision will increase the mowing width from 6-foot to 15-foot on S.R. 30 (U.S. 98) from the Gulf County line to the Bay Work Camp and maintain a 15-foot safety strip throughout the county on all state roads when normal mowing occurs.

Jackson

In April 2018, Christie Andreasen, the county's tourism development council director, submitted a request for wildflower area designation to D3 and received approval for the following wildflower areas:

- S.R. 2 from Sills Road to Cowart's Creek (13.6 miles)
- S.R. 166 from River Forest Road to Florida Caverns State Park (3 miles)
- S.R. 10 West from London Road to State Correctional Road (<0.1 mile)
- S.R. 10 East from Cypress Roadside Park to the Grand Ridge welcome sign (2.8 miles)

Gadsden

A Gadsden County volunteer has stepped up to lead the wildflower program along with several interested citizens and the support of the Havana Garden Club. Unfortunately, the county's government has not been receptive, and the program has been put on hold.

Liberty

One road removed:

- S.R. 20 west of Hosford from Northeast Chester Street to fenced utility (.4 miles) (presence of rare plants)

Existing roads:

- S.R. 65 from the north boundary of the Apalachicola National Forest to the Franklin County line (65 miles, both sides)

Wakulla

County commissioners considered eliminating the wildflower program in 2018. After citizen protest, the commission reconsidered and voted to modify the program. The following rights of way are designated as NOWAs:

- S.R. 267 from the Leon County Line to U.S. 98 in Newport (29 miles, both sides)
- U.S. Highway 319 (Sopchoppy Highway) from U.S. 98 in Medart to the Franklin County line (12 miles, both sides)
- U.S. 98 from U.S. 319 in Medart to the Franklin County line (8 miles, both sides)
- U.S. 98 from U.S. 319 to the Wakulla River (8 miles, both sides)
- U.S. 98 from the Wakulla River to the Jefferson/Wakulla County line (20 miles, both sides)
- Woodville Highway (S.R. 363) between S.R. 267 and U.S. 98 (2.5 miles, both sides)

Landscaping pending completion of a bike route along U.S. 98 includes wildflower plantings and installation of plants salvaged in 2017 during a rare plant rescue led by Scott Davis, a St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge ranger.

Leon

No changes:

- S.R. 267 from Wakulla County line to S.R. 20 (28 miles, both sides)
- S.R. 20 from Geddie Road to Fort Braden School (9 miles, both sides)

Jefferson

One road removed:

- S.R. 57 (U.S. 19) from CR 149 to the Georgia state line, removed from mowing program due to the many invasive species present (14.4 miles)

Existing roads:

- S.R. 59 from S.R. 20 (U.S. 27) to S.R. 30 (U.S. 98) (35.2 miles)
- S.R. 30 (U.S. 98) from the Wakulla county line to the Taylor county line (14.8 miles)



*S.R. 65 in Liberty County
Photo by Eleanor Dietrich*