

The Natural Areas Training Academy Annual Report, July 2005 – June 2006

Executive Summary

The Natural Areas Training Academy (NATA) completed its fifth year of operation under the leadership of a new Program Manager, Linda Demetropoulos who was hired in October, 2005. Six workshops were successfully presented between November, 2005 and June, 2006. This represents a total of 3,480 contact hours. One hundred and twenty-five participants attended the workshops representing 35 different organizations. Thirty-four instructors representing 11 organizations: university (UF: 6, UCF: 1), The Nature Conservancy (14), public agency (4), and private entities (9) provided their expertise this year to the Academy. Seventeen professional land managers earned the Certificate in Natural Areas Management (CNAM) by completing the five-workshop series. This brings the total number of CNAM graduates to 72. Since its inception, nearly 1000 people have participated in NATA workshops.

NATA continued to expand natural resource extension programming to new audiences by producing a new web site for land managers, participating in key conferences, expanding the participant and instructor base, and soliciting support from governmental agencies. Contracts with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, South Florida Water Management District, and EarthBalance contributed \$44,000 toward NATA this year. A new contract with all five water management districts will provide \$31,500 per year for 5 years starting this summer. The Academy's listserv, supported by the University of Florida IFAS server, reaches over 800 land managers statewide.

The University of Florida demonstrated its continued commitment to the Academy by providing \$30,000 in support, guidance, and instructional staff this year. Development of a business plan for NATA has been initiated.

Table of Contents

Executive summary..... 1
Accomplishments 2005 – 2006..... 2
 New manager..... 2
 Certificate in Natural Areas Management... 2
 Workshops..... 3
 UF/TNC partnership..... 3
 Extramural funding..... 4
 Program expansion via the internet..... 4
 Program evaluation..... 4
Academy statistics for 2005 – 2006..... 5
 Graduates..... 5
 Instructors..... 6
 Recruitment and promotional activities..... 7
Looking forward..... 8
FY 2006 and 2007 budgets..... 9

Accomplishments 2005 – 2006

New Manager

In October, 2005 Linda Demetropoulos was hired as Manager of The Natural Areas Training Academy. Ms. Demetropoulos comes to The Natural Areas Training Academy with many years of land management and supervisory experience working as an Environmental Resource Project Supervisor for Miami-Dade County’s Natural Areas Management program. She has experience in conducting and coordinating training for land management staff, program management, grants administration, education and community relations. She also worked for several years as a senior planner with the Florida Department of Community Affairs, Florida Communities Trust program.

Certificate in Natural Areas Management

Seventeen land managers earned the Certificate in Natural Areas Management (CNAM) during the year. As always, there was strong interagency participation with state, county and local agency professionals as well as private contractors and non-profits in all workshops. Workshop participants represented 35 different agencies. Evaluations from all of the workshops were positive. The new manager will be reviewing comments to make improvements to future workshops.

Workshops Presented

The six workshops presented between November, 2005 and June, 2006 delivered a total of 3,480 contact hours.

Certificate Series Workshops

| Workshop | Date | Participant Capacity | Number of Participants |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Managing for Diversity Across Florida's Unique Landscapes | Dec. 6-8, 2005 | 25 | 25 |
| Conservation Site Assessment and Planning | Jan. 24-26, 2006 | 22 | 22 |
| Working Across Boundaries to Protect Ecosystems | March 14-16, 2006 | 20 | 15 |
| Managing Visitors and Volunteers in Natural Areas | April 18-20, 2006 | 22 | 21 |
| Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Course (Managed by Division of Forestry) | Various | | n/a |

Workshops of Special Interest

| Workshop | Date | Participant Capacity | Number of Participants |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Plant Communities of Florida | May 9-11, 2006 | 22 | 22 |
| Vegetation Monitoring in a Management Context | Feb 20 – 25, 2006 | 20 | 20 |

UF/TNC Partnership

Under a new agreement, the University of Florida IFAS Extension, School of Natural Resources and Environment, and School of Forest Resources and Conservation provided significant financial assistance and support in 2005-2006. IFAS Extension and the School of Forest Resources and Conservation each provided \$15,000, matching the funding provided by The Nature Conservancy. The School of Natural Resources and the Environment have provided administrative and website support. University of Florida faculty and staff also provided technical support and directional guidance. As this partnership continues to strengthen, the Academy looks forward to honing its curriculum, reaching broader audiences, having additional course offerings, and expanding its training locations.

Extramural Funding

Twenty-five participants from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) completed workshops under an agreement that NATA has with the agency. 2005-2006 represented the second year of a \$75,000 3-year agreement. Evaluative comments from FWC participants have been positive. Feedback from FWCC administrators has also been very positive and the agency has expressed a desire to extend the existing contract and provide continued support. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection also provided \$10,000 over two years to secure enrollment for their staff. We have also secured an agreement with all five water management districts to secure enrollment for a total of 31 staff each year for 5 years, providing \$31,500 for each of those years.

Program Expansion via the Internet

Conservation Management Notes, a new website for land managers to share information, was launched during the summer of 2005 made possible with a grant of \$5,850 from EarthBalance. The web site is designed to replace Resource Management Notes, a printed newsletter produced by the Florida Park Service and discontinued in 1998. The Conservation Management Notes website allows land managers to share observations and insights from their work. Land managers from around the state have posted short articles related to a particular topic of interest including; ecosystem management, invasive non-native species, hydrologic restoration, species management, silviculture, habitat restoration, fire management, and conservation planning. Contributing authors represented agencies such as the UF/IFAS Extension, Osceola County, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, The Nature Conservancy, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida State Park Service, Florida Natural Areas Inventory, St. John's River Water Management District, Earthbalance, and FAU's Center for Environmental Studies. The web site is housed on the University's IFAS web server. There are about 20 categories for submission and authors are invited to submit articles with anecdotes, observations and tools they find useful. The web address is <http://conservationnotes.ifas.ufl.edu/> Links to the web site can be found on the Natural Areas Training Academy web site and the School for Natural Resources and Environment's web site.

Program Evaluation

The South Florida Water Management District also provided NATA with \$3,000 to conduct a second evaluation of the effectiveness of the training. Under the terms of the agreement, the NATA Manager will be conducting a survey this summer of all professionals who completed the Certificate in Natural Areas Management at least one year previously. This survey is a continuation of a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the Natural Areas Training Academy initiated in 2003. Responses will indicate the extent to which Certificate holders have implemented new management practices based upon the training they received. Feedback from these surveys will be utilized to improve the Academy's training products and ensure that we are meeting the needs of the participants.

Academy Statistics for 2005 – 2006

Graduates

Seventeen land managers earned the Certificate in Natural Areas Management (CNAM). These graduates join the 55 who had already completed the workshops and earned the Certificate. Congratulations to the following land managers on your achievement:

Brian Beasley – CAPS
Chuck Bedard - St. John's River Water Management District
Mark Brown – Volusia County
Marcus Campion - Manatee County
Matt Cole – St. John's River Water Management District
Max Dersch – Manatee County
Doreen DiCarlo - FAU – Florida Center for Environmental Studies
Serena Edic – FAU – Florida Center for Environmental Studies
Johnny Mcleod - Manatee County
Stefanie Nagid – Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Chris O'Hara – Brevard County
Geoff Parks – City of Gainesville
Allison Perquin – Volusia County
Mark Rizzo – Volusia County
Jacob Stewart - Manatee County
James Richard Sullivan – Hillsborough County
D. Scott Taylor - Manatee County

Workshop Participants

One hundred and twenty-five participants enrolled in NATA workshops this year, bringing the total number of participants to nearly 1000. This years' participants represented 35 different organizations:

Counties

Brevard County
Broward County
Charlotte County
Hillsborough County
Lee County Parks & Recreation
Manatee County
Martin County
Osceola County
Palm Beach County
Pasco County
Pinellas County Parks & Recreation
Sarasota County
Volusia County

Water Management Districts

Southwest Florida Water Management District
St. John's River Water Management District

State of Florida

Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Florida Division of Forestry
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
University of Florida

Other State

University of Idaho

Federal Government

Camp Blanding Joint Training Center
Florida Army National Guard
National Park Service
ORISE
United States Air Force - Eglin Air Force Base
USDA Forest Service

Municipalities

City of Gainesville
Oakland Nature Preserve, Inc.

Private/Non-profit

Biological Research Associates
Florida Center for Environmental Studies
Florida Eco-Safaris
Florida Trail Association
Rinker Materials of Florida, Inc
Selby Gardens/Around the Bend Tours
The Nature Conservancy

Instructors

The Natural Areas Training Academy gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the 34 instructors who generously offer their time, knowledge and expertise to improving the land management practices in Florida.

University

Susan Carr, UF
Fred Gratto, UF
Susan Jacobson, UF
Debbie Miller, UF
Rafael Montalvo, UCF
Taylor Stein, UF
Marty Werts, UF

The Nature Conservancy

Anne Birch
Vernon Compton
Monica Folk
Doria Gordon
Chris Matson
Bob Nelson
Robert Sutter
Robert Mindick
Beatriz Pace-Aldana
Andrea Povinelli
Kristina Serbesoff-King
Doug Shaw
Jodi Slapcinsky
Kate Wilkin

Agency

Dana Bryan, FDEP
Amy Raub, Seminole County
Lew Scruggs, FDEP
Scott Sanders, FFWCC

Private Organizations and Individuals

Nancy Bissett, The Natives
Peter Colverson, Pandion Systems
Ed Edmondson, EJ Environmental Services
Mary Enstrom
Eric Menges, Archbold Biological Station
Hilary Swain, Archbold Biological Station
Jim Stevenson
C. Chadwick Taylor, CCT & Associates
Billy Townsend, The Ledger

Recruitment and Promotional Activities

Recruitment activities for the year included a NATA display at the 2005 Public Lands Acquisition and Management Conference, November 16 - 18, 2005, in Stuart, FL. Presentations were given by the NATA Manager at the Extension Natural Resource Summit, March 9, 2006, in Immokalee, FL, and at the November Science Committee meeting of The Nature Conservancy Board for Florida. The NATA Manager also met with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff to discuss continuation of their contract, which appears positive.

The Academy's Listserv, housed under the University of Florida IFAS Listserv server, has been the primary method of promotion of the Academy's programs this year. The Academy's Listserve reaches over 800 land managers statewide.

Many thanks to staff at the School of Natural Resources and Environment (SNRE) for helping to maintain the Academy's website. The web site has been a primary source of public information, promotion, and registration for the Academy this year.

Looking Forward

Due to the tremendous success of the Natural Areas Training Academy, it has become necessary to hire a full time assistant. We are currently interviewing potential candidates and look forward to having the new NATA program assistant hired by July, 2006.

Within the coming year the NATA manager will review the curriculum to ensure that we continue to provide quality training which meets the needs of Florida's land managers. We are also exploring incorporation of NATA workshops into the curriculum of School of Forest Resources and Environment. Through the development of a Business Plan NATA will reach broader audiences, offer additional and improved courses, and expand its training locations. Marketing and fund raising will also be major areas of focus. We will be soliciting input from agency partners and participants including state, county and local agency professionals as well as private contractors and non-profits. The Academy will continue to build this successful program, thereby having a positive effect on the management of Florida's natural lands and UF Extension and academic programs for years to come.

