



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33406

MEDIA ADVISORY

February 24, 2009

CONTACT:

Gabe Margasak

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 670-1245

www.sfwmd.gov/news

follow us on [twitter](#)

SFWMD Remains Committed to Solving Weedy Worries
District and its partners recognize National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week

 [Audio Interview Available](#)



Shown from left to right:
Lygodium, or the Old World Climbing Fern ----- Brazilian Pepper ----- and the Melaleuca tree (treated).
All are invasive exotics that threaten the native plants and animals of Florida.

West Palm Beach, FL – While exotic pythons in the Everglades have slithered across recent headlines, an invader equally insidious to the natural environment remains at the forefront of the South Florida Water Management District’s (SFWMD) mission to manage and protect the region’s water resources.

Non-native plants continue to stress the natural environment by crowding out native vegetation, which a diverse array of wildlife depend on for food and habitat. Invasive plants can also clog flood control canals and structures, impede waterway navigation and impact recreation and other facets of the Florida economy.

As National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week begins this week, the SFWMD continues its work to control exotic plants while at the same time identifying and mustering

defenses against new invaders. The District has invested at least \$20 million in each of the past five years to remove the most threatening invasive species, such as Old World climbing fern, Brazilian pepper and water hyacinth. In 2008 alone, the District treated more than 92,400 acres to combat *Melaleuca*, torpedo grass, the climbing fern and other offenders.

“Invasion of exotic plant species remains one of the most serious environmental issues facing Florida,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Eric Buermann. “Controlling these invaders is a key component of the District's environmental restoration mission and is crucial to public safety.”

Along with environmental and public safety concerns, exotic plant species cost the agricultural industry alone more than \$20 billion annually, according to the North American Weed Management Association.

SFWMD Invests in Biocontrols and Science:

One of the most visual efforts to control exotic plants inched through Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Martin County. The SFWMD, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, released a thousand *Neomusotima conspurcatalis* moths at the park in 2008. The moths lay eggs that morph into caterpillars that chew through dense stands of the invasive Old World climbing fern without harming native Florida ferns.



The SFWMD supports continued applied scientific research that improves management efforts. To further facilitate that effort, the District participates in key partnerships with agencies including: the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC); the Florida Department of Environmental Protection; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the USDA's Agricultural Research Service; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Department of the Interior.

An example of these partnerships was the coordination between the District and the FWC to combat Brazilian pepper in Water Conservation Area 3, benefiting the native population of deer and birds.

The District has taken several other steps toward curbing invasive plant species:

- July 2008: The SFWMD partnered with Palm Beach County to remove non-native plants from 150 acres in the DuPuis Management Area.
- July 2008: The District Governing Board approved an agreement with the USDA's Agricultural Research Service to continue developing biological controls

– in the form of tiny insects – to fight Brazilian pepper and Old World climbing fern.

- March 2008: Scientists introduced nearly 20,000 grass carp into the North New River Canal by Fort Lauderdale. The hungry fish, which do not breed, feast on the rapidly growing invasive hydrilla plant that can clog structures in SFWMD flood-control canals.



A Success Story:

Melaleuca remains an example of the District's success in managing exotics.

Once covering hundreds of thousands of acres, this species now is only occasionally spotted on District-managed lands. What seemed to be an insurmountable invasive species now is being successfully managed through sustained interagency commitment.

The District-led Melaleuca management program is in its nineteenth year, and resource management agencies estimate this program has cost nearly \$40 million to date. Florida's Melaleuca management program is a model for invasive species management nationally.

Continued Vigilance:

The SFWMD has located two invasive aquatic plants newly discovered in Florida, *Luziola subintegra* and *Azolla pinnata*. Containing these new problems in a "rapid response" effort has required clearly identifying the plants and then determining their best management practices.

Residents also play an important role in the protection of South Florida's environment. One of the primary ways that invasive species, both plant and animal, end up in the natural environment is when they are thrown out or released by people who no longer want them.

For example, emptying a tropical aquarium full of live but non-native aquatic plants can have serious consequences for the environment.

SFWMD Senior Scientist Mike Bodle discussed invasive plants and the District's management efforts.

 [Audio Interview](#)

For more information on the District's efforts to control exotic invasive species, visit <http://www.sfwmd.gov>.

###

About the South Florida Water Management District – [Celebrating 60 Years \(1949-2009\)](#)

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.