

## Preserving Natural Stands

The emphasis of FDOT's wildflower program has shifted toward locating and managing native plant community remnants<sup>1,2</sup> as well as expanding the efforts to locate and manage naturally occurring wildflower populations<sup>2</sup>. Those aspirations are focused on remnants and populations that have a high likelihood of being economically and ecologically sustainable mainly through reduced mowing<sup>3</sup>.

For many years, *Coreopsis basalis* (Goldenmane Tickseed) and the naturalized species *Phlox drummondii* (Annual Phlox) have provided motorists in the northern half of Florida with spectacular displays thanks in large part to FDOT and its contractors utilizing practices that sustain these populations and help them spread. Locating and managing naturally occurring wildflowers has been adopted in

District 5 where that approach is now the core of their wildflower program (see *Gaillardia pulchella* [Blanketflower] below, lower



*Coreopsis basalis* (above; photo courtesy Jeff Caster, FDOT) along Interstate 10, and *Phlox drummondii* (left) on US 98 in Chiefland.

right). And District 2's wildflower program now extends beyond *Coreopsis basalis* and *Phlox drummondii*. For example, showy displays of naturally occurring *Coreopsis leavenworthii* (Leavenworth's Tickseed) adorn several miles of US 27 because of reduced mowing.

Wildflower Areas of *Coreopsis leavenworthii* (right; US 27, Levy Co.) and *Gaillardia pulchella* (far right; A1A, Flagler Co.) established by reduced mowing of naturally occurring wildflowers.



<sup>1</sup> In most cases these are just small patches of native plant communities, and mostly occur from the top edge of the back slope to the back edge of the ROW. In a few cases the remnant is an extension of the native herbaceous understory of the adjacent pine flatwoods.

<sup>2</sup> Location and management of Wildflower Areas must be in accordance with FDOT's [Wildflower Program Procedure](#).

<sup>3</sup> See [Reduced Mowing](#).

The classic example of preserving a native community remnant is a 30+ mile stretch of SR 65 (Liberty County, District 3) in the Apalachicola National Forest (ANF); in actuality, the remnants on both sides of the road are an extension of the native herbaceous understory of the adjacent pine forest. This section of SR 65 in the ANF is widely and deservedly acclaimed as the premier wildflower road in the state.



*Aletris lutea* (Yellow Colicroot) towers above *Sarracenia psittacina* (Parrot Pitcherplant) along SR 65 in the spring.

### Best roadside locations for preserving native plant community remnants and naturally occurring wildflowers

- Sparse to no weeds – See [“Common Weeds That Can Interfere with Establishment, Sustainability, and Aesthetics of Wildflower Plantings”](#)

*Scout potential sites in spring, summer and fall to be aware of weed issues that may hinder or limit sustainability (economical or ecological) or aesthetics. For example, dogfennel is a common native species along roadsides. Under reduced mowing, it could spread and outcompete other natives, and make the site appear weedy.*

- Managing weedy sites can become a restoration effort, which is costly
- Exception – site where a rare, threatened, or endangered species occurs
- Rural
- Wide ROW, where wooded edge is well beyond the top edge of the backslope
- Non-utility ROW (however, an agreement with the utility company might be able to be worked out)
- Non-commercial/non-residential
- Adjacent to pine forests under a prescribed fire regime
- Sandy soil
- The larger the site the better<sup>4</sup>
  - Easier to manage; less likely to be accidentally mowed
  - Showier; good example to promote this aspect of the program to the public



This remnant of a native wetland plant community along the Florida Turnpike is a prime example of a remnant that could be preserved by reduced mowing.

<sup>4</sup> Exception – sites where rare, threatened, or endangered species occur.

- Remnant or stand of wildflowers should be contiguous<sup>4</sup>
  - Easier to manage; less likely to be accidentally mowed
  - Showy; good example to promote this aspect of FDOT's wildflower program to the public

*Potential Wildflower Areas (WAs) comprised of discontinuous patches of remnants or naturally occurring wildflowers over several hundred feet or more can be difficult to manage. While reduced mowing will benefit the remnants or naturally occurring wildflowers, reduced mowing could easily have the same effect on the patches of weeds interspersed throughout the WA. And those weedy patches could be perceived as unsightly. Moreover, designating a long stretch of road as a WA by a basic wildflower sign<sup>5</sup> at each end is a double-edged sword – while it alerts mower operators, the signage can also raise expectations of the public for aesthetically pleasing vegetation, or at the very least, vegetation that is not perceived as weedy.*

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<sup>5</sup> Alternative – install educational signage analogous to “Pardon Our Dust...” to make motorists aware of the reduced mowing and the long-term goal of reduced mowing, especially for native plant community remnants that are not considered showy.