

FLORIDA FOREST SERVICE
LAKELAND DISTRICT
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LAKELAND, FLORIDA 33813

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE "NIKKI" FRIED

September 30, 2019

Ms. Karen Williams Seel, Chairperson
Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners
315 Court Street
Clearwater, FL. 33756

Board Records

Dear Commissioner Seel,

The Florida Forest Service's annual report is attached. This report is provided, in compliance with our agreement, for informational purposes only. It requires no formal action of the Board.

Sufficient copies are enclosed for distribution to each commissioner. If there are any questions concerning this report, feel free to contact me at (863) 940-6712.

Sincerely,

Patrick Keogh
District Manger
Lakeland District

Enclosure(s)

cc: Johnny Sabo, Chief, Field Operations
John Fish, Chief, Forest Protection
James Roberts, Chief, Forest Management
John Stys, Chief, Forest Logistics & Support
John Kern, Deputy Chief, Field Operations

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BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS
PINELLAS COUNTY FLORIDA

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Florida Forest Service

Lakeland District

ANNUAL REPORT TO

PINELLAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

JULY 1, 2018 - JUNE 30, 2019



INTRODUCTION

Florida's forests are as complex and diverse as any in the country and meeting the public's expectations for their management and protection is an enormous challenge. The social and economic needs of the nation's third most populous state have influenced forest land values, ownership patterns and exposure to wildfire in an unprecedented manner. The Florida Forest Service (FFS) must meet the challenges of changing landowner values, protecting lives and property, and managing the public land in a manner that serves the citizens of the state to the best of our ability.

MISSION

The mission of the Florida Forest Service is to protect Florida and its people from the dangers of wildland fire and manage the forest resources through a stewardship ethic to assure they are available for future generations.

AUTHORITY

The Florida Forest Service, through the Forest and Resource Protection Program, is charged with the primary duties and responsibilities mandated by Chapters 589 and 590 of the Florida Statutes. The Forest Service will:

- Promote and encourage forest fire protection, environmental education, land stewardship, tree planting and care, forest recreation, and the proper management of public lands;
- Serve as the lead management agency and provide direction for state-owned lands which are suited for forest resources and managed for multiple use;
- Continue an aggressive program to reforest lands for which the Forest Service has forest resource management responsibilities; and
- Prevent, detect, suppress, and extinguish wildfires wherever they may occur in Florida.

FIRE CONTROL OPERATIONS

***Providing Leadership to Protect Forests, Wildlands, and
the Public from the Destructive Effects of Wildfire***

A long-standing contractual agreement between Pinellas County and the Florida Forest Service is in place to provide fire protection in the forested undeveloped lands of the county. This report outlines accomplishments identified in the agreement.

Fire control operations in Pinellas County are conducted under the direction of District Manager Patrick Keogh and Forest Area Supervisor John DeWolfe. A total of four (4) Forest Rangers and Senior Forest Rangers, who are certified wildland firefighters, are strategically located in Pinellas County. Two (2) tractor plow units and three (3) brush units are used for wildfire suppression.

Pinellas County has contributed \$4,134.62 to help offset Florida Forest Service expenditures based upon \$.07 per acre for 59,066 acres of accessed wildlands.

During Fiscal Year 2018-2019, the Lakeland District responded to 2 fires totaling 62 acres in Pinellas County. This represents an increase of 1 fire and 61 acres over last year. The efforts of these specially trained and dedicated firefighters are often the only control point between the local fire departments and large destructive wildfires.



**F.F.S. Tractor-Plows on a Wildfire in the
Brooker Creek Preserve**

In a cooperative effort amongst state-wide Forest Service personnel, our agency promotes an aggressive wildfire prevention effort. Law enforcement investigations by the Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement and hard work by the District's Fire Prevention Team helped reduce fire occurrence throughout the county.

WILDFIRES - PINELLAS COUNTY July 1, 2018– June 30, 2019

Fire Causes	Fires	Percent	Acres	Percent
Campfire	0	0.0	0.0	0
Children	0	0.0	0.0	0
Debris Burns – All Types	0	0.0	0.0	0
Equipment use – All Types	0	0.0	0.0	0
Incendiary	1	0.0	60.0	96.77
Lightning	1	0.0	2.0	3.23
Miscellaneous – Other	0	0	0	0
Railroad	0	0.0	0.0	0
Smoking	0	0.0	0.0	0
Unknown	0	0.0	0.0	0
Total	2		62	



**FEDERAL EXCESS PERSONAL PROPERTY (FEPP) & FIREFIGHTER
PROPERTY (FFP)**

The FEPP/FFP program is authorized under terms of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, and the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978. FEPP/FFP is Federal equipment on loan to State Foresters from the Federal Government for use in rural and wildland fire protection programs.

Currently in Pinellas County, FEPP/FFP equipment is on loan to Caladesi Island State Park, Honeymoon Island State Park, Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management, Oldsmar Fire Rescue, Palm Harbor Fire Rescue, Seminole Fire Rescue, St. Petersburg Fire Rescue, and Treasure Island Fire Rescue



Equipment on loan to Oldsmar Fire Rescue

OPEN BURNING AUTHORIZATIONS

Through a cooperative agreement with other fire agencies, the Forest Service administers open burning rules and regulation and is responsible for issuing burn authorizations for agricultural and silvicultural. During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the Lakeland District authorized 33 fires in Pinellas County consisting of 638 acres and 20 piles. This represents an increase of 361 acres and 8 piles from the previous year.

**BURN AUTHORIZATIONS - PINELLAS COUNTY
July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019**

Burn Type	# Fires	Acres	Piles
Agricultural--Pasture	16	0	16
Silvicultural - Ecological	14	618	4
Silvicultural – Hazard Removal	2	9	0
Silvicultural - Wildlife	1	11	0
Total	33	638	20

COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Our Fire Dispatch Communications Center is operated by one (1) Duty Officer Supervisor and four (4) Duty Officers from 7 am until 9 pm daily. After 9 pm one of the Duty Officers are on-call for wildfires and all calls are forwarded to another district. The Communications Center is also responsible for issuing open burning authorizations for three (3) counties including Pinellas County.



PRESCRIBED BURNING AND PRE-SUPPRESSION PLOWING

The Florida Forest Service promotes the safe, effective use of prescribed fire as a means to reduce the threat of wildfires and manage environmentally sensitive lands. The Forest Service assists various agencies including Florida Department of Environmental Protection, City of Tarpon Springs and Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management in safely conducting their prescribed burns. The Forest Service maintains an aggressive wildfire mitigation program that has helped many landowners lessen the chances of devastating wildfires in high fire danger areas. Forest Service fire crews have completed wildfire mitigation burns and constructed firelines at no cost to property owners or the county.



Forest Service crews conducting a prescribed burn

BROOKER CREEK PRESERVE



Brooker Creek Preserve

Brooker Creek is approximately 8,700 acres owned by both Pinellas County and Southwest Florida Water Management District. This property is the largest natural area in Pinellas County, which consists of mostly pine flatwoods and forested wetlands. Pinellas is tasked with managing the entire property and was acquired in 1997.

The Forest Service preformed approximately \$9,890.00 of in-kind services this year for the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management, Brooker Creek Preserve. This work includes fire line prep, prescribed burning, mowing, and mop-up of prescribed burns.

The Forest Service also constructs and maintains fire lines for both public and private landowners. These pre-suppression fire lines are used to control prescribed burns but also as a means to assist suppression efforts in the event of a wildfire.



FIRE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Educating the Public About the Importance of Florida's Forests and Promoting the Renewal and Protection of these Resources

The Forest Service fire prevention committee is dedicated to reducing the number of devastating wildfires in Pinellas County through increased public awareness. Fire prevention and educational programs featuring "Smokey Bear" were used to reach thousands of school children and adults. These programs teach the public about the importance of fire safety, the benefits of prescribed fire, and general forestry practices.

Neighborhood wildfire mitigation and educational classes, and landowner contacts are part of the Forest Service's efforts to mitigate this fire danger. During dry windy periods, making local residents aware of fire danger is critical, and it is accomplished with the help of local media.



Fire Prevention Event

FIREWISE COMMUNITIES



**Before applying "FIREWISE" Principles -
Ridgemoore**

Over the past fifty years increasing numbers of Floridians have moved out of our cities to build homes and businesses in outlying fringe areas known as the wildland/urban interface. Almost 1/3 of our population now lives in interface areas where structures intermingle with forests and wildland. Residents in these areas are often unaware they may live too close to nature. They may in fact be living on the edge of a wildfire disaster.



During dry years, Florida experiences severe wildfires that destroy homes, impact people's lives, and affect the economy. The Forest Service is currently working with local leaders and neighborhoods throughout the state to create FIREWISE Communities. This program recognizes those groups that demonstrate the spirit, resolve, and willingness to take responsibility as partners in wildfire protection. The program helps to prevent and reduce losses due to wildfires and fosters awareness and public participation.



**After applying "FIREWISE" Principles -
Ridgemoore**

TRAINING GIVEN AND RECEIVED

Improving the Quality of Service through the Training and Development of our People, our Single Greatest Resource

This Leadership Encourages Innovation, Excellence and Freedom for Personal Growth

The Forest Service operates the Withlacoochee Training Center in Brooksville, where our forest rangers attend annual training. The Forest Service employs some of the most well-trained, and experienced firefighters in the wildland fire services in the United States. On assignments throughout the nation, Florida is recognized for their qualified personnel.

Forest Service employees not only regularly participate in training to maintain and develop their skills, they also provide valuable training to local cooperators. As many as 20 local participants attended Wildland Chainsaws, Wildland Firefighting in the Urban Interface, Wildland Firefighter Training, Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior, Human Factors on the Fireline, and Annual Refresher Training.

The State Fire Marshal has mandated that all fire department personnel complete basic wildland fire classes consisting of "Firefighter Training" (S-130) and "Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior" (S-190). In addition to offering these classes through a traditional classroom setting, the Forest Service developed and administers an online training program titled "Fire in the Field" to provide these courses to local fire departments.

ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Florida Forest Service also participates in various meetings and committees. Many of the Forest Service employees in Pinellas County are members of the local Forestry Safety Committee, Fire Prevention Committee, Central Florida Prescribed Fire Council, and State Interagency Incident Management Teams.



COOPERATIVE FORESTRY ASSISTANCE

Encouraging Family Forest Owners to Attain their Forestland Management Goals with Guidance and Technical Assistance Promoting Good Land Stewardship Principles

INTRODUCTION

The Cooperative Forest Management Act of 1950 authorized "The Secretary of Agriculture to cooperate with State Foresters or appropriate officials of the states to enable them to provide technical services to private landowners, forest operators, wood processors, and public agencies with respect to the multiple use management, environmental protection and improvement of forested lands: the harvesting, marketing, and processing of forest products; and the protection, improvement, and establishment of trees and shrubs in urban areas, communities, and open spaces." The program is implemented by the Florida Forest Service utilizing university trained professional foresters.



Lou Shepherd
CFA/Senior Forester

During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, Pinellas County was served by Lou Shepherd, the Cooperative Forestry Assistance (CFA) Forester. He is recognized as a Certified Arborist by the International Society of Arboriculture.

Lou is a senior forester for the Florida Forest Service who has over 35 years of multifaceted experience with both public and private sector clients. He promotes sustainability initiatives relative to urban forestry, outdoor recreation and sustainable growth. Lou provides support to local governments and cooperators on environmental and natural resources inventories and ordinances.

Formerly, Lou led the strategic development of programs and partnerships as the Urban and Community Forestry Programs Coordinator overseeing state urban activities from Forest Service headquarters in Tallahassee. One of his most important accomplishments in his career has been his ability to promote the scientifically-based practice of arboriculture through public awareness.

Lou's central Florida focus is to promote the importance of maintaining healthy communities, develop stewardship and comprehensive management plans and connect young people to the forest. He is highly motivated and passionate about improving tree health and increasing forest stewardship for future generations.

In this growing mega-region, the CFA Forester provides technical forestry advice to all citizens, organizations, and agencies in Pinellas County. The two main objectives of the program include assistance to planning groups, school boards, municipal and county governments and help to homeowners with shade tree challenges. Plus, assist private non-industrial forest landowners with sound technical advice in managing their forested lands. All with the goal of improving forest canopy, water quality, preventing erosion, conserving land while fostering wildlife habitat and other valuable resources.



Other duties include:

- The Forester coordinates local forestry and conservation activities with the County Cooperative Extension Service (UF/IFAS), Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Farm Service Agency
- Inform the public of new developments in forestry using news media, press releases, and workshops
- Florida is one of the top four tree-planting states in the nation, behind Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. The Forester helps facilitate tree seedling orders from Pinellas County landowners to the FFS nursery, reservations for the tree planters, gives technical advice, and assists with tree selection
- The Forester assists cities with the completion of grant projects they have received from the Florida Forest Service and provides any technical assistance needed until completion

Pinellas County Forest Facts:

- There is a total of 1,479 acres of agricultural land, which ranks 63rd in state for total value agricultural products sold (2012 – USDA Ag Census)
- Timberlands acreage is 0-10 percent of county (2011)
- Pinellas ranked 30th in state for cut Christmas trees and other short rotation woody crops in 2012
- Pinellas county had an estimated population of 975,280 people in 2018. The 6th most populated county in Florida (US Census Bureau)

COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS

LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE

Landowner assistance in reforestation, marketing, utilization of forest products, and the use of “Best Management Practices” as well as other related areas will continue to be emphasized in Pinellas County. The CFA Forester helps landowners evaluate neighborhood tree health.

Lou stresses the importance of using private enterprising professionals when needed. Providing referrals to consulting foresters, ISA certified arborists who adhere to a code of ethics, tree planters, and timber buyers. Use of consulting foresters is advantageous of woodland landowners and buyers and sellers of forest products by promoting the use of Best Management Practices during a timber harvest.

Landowner requests for pine seedlings are available through the Florida Forest Service’s Andrews Nursery located in Chiefland or via a list of private nurseries growing various tree species. Tree ordering information may be requested for planting pines for timber, urban forestry, green infrastructure and conservation activities.



When landowners want or need forest management plan for their property, the CFA Forester also can assist in writing a forest management plan. Forest management assistance or plans include information such as history, legal descriptions, forest types, maps, soils, recommendations for management, and current stand conditions. This past fiscal year, there were no forest management plan requests for private landowners in Pinellas County.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP



To practice sustainable forestry means to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the land to meet the needs of future generations. This is accomplished by practicing a stewardship ethic which integrates reforestation, managing, growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees with the conservation of soil, air and water quality, wildlife and fish habitat, and aesthetics. Forest stewards are landowners who manage their forestlands within the context of a long-term plan of objectives that are economically viable, conservative of natural resources while being socially, environmentally, and ecologically responsible. The objectives of the Forest Stewardship program are: encourage non-industrial landowners to manage their properties according to the multiple-use concept, increase public awareness to the important amenities that Florida's forestlands provide to all citizens of the state, and improve coordination among natural resource agencies and groups, both public and private, to better serve the state's landowners and achieve common goals.

There is currently one landowner in Pinellas County enrolled in the Forest Stewardship program. Some landowners may decide to not be part of the program or not follow management recommendations, which may also determine if they will continue in the Forest Stewardship Program in the future. If landowners follow management recommendations in a written Stewardship plan, they are eligible for Forest Stewardship certification or recertification.

In 2018, funding was reinstated by the US Forest Service to consultants for the writing of Stewardship Management Plans for long leaf pine plantations. The CFA Forester or consultant can produce new Stewardship Management Plans during the next fiscal year.

TREE FARM ASSISTANCE (ATFS)

The American Tree Farm System (ATFS) offers many valuable benefits to landowners who want to make their forest land a certified Tree Farm. Landowners with 10-10,000 acres of forest land are eligible for Tree Farm. The certified Tree Farm sign shows local communities that landowners are among the best forest stewards in the world. Participants in ATFS are committed to earning a sustainable forest and maintaining it over the years by following sustainable forest management practices.



By following the new 2015-2020 Standards of Sustainability, landowners may become a certified Tree Farm property. Currently, there is one certified Tree Farm landowner in



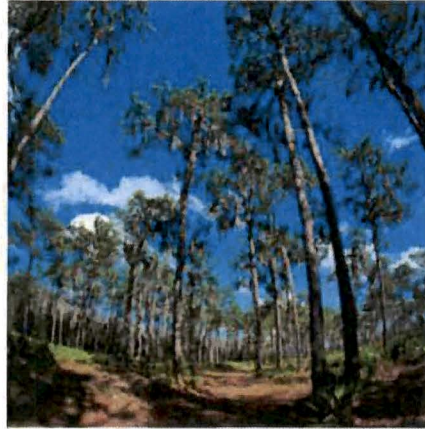
Pinellas County. Lou is a qualified Tree Farm Inspector and could assist landowners in becoming a certified Tree Farm. This past fiscal year, there were no landowners assisted for this program in Pinellas County.

COGONGRASS COST SHARE PROGRAM

Cogon grass is an invasive/exotic plant that is widespread on private and public lands in Florida. Cogon grass disrupts the natural fire regimes and disturbs habitat for native wildlife. This program had been funded by the USDA Forest Service to landowners through applications sent to the Forest Health Section for approvals each fiscal year. Unfortunately, as of October 1, 2017 funding was cut for the eradication of cogon grass.

OTHER PUBLIC LANDS

The Florida Forest Service also assists Pinellas County with the services of the Other Public Lands Forester. Not all municipalities have a forester on staff to help with their forest needs. The Florida Forest Service Other Public Lands (OPL) Forester is available to provide technical assistance to urban and county officials in the planning, establishment, and management of timber resources.



This fiscal year the Forest Service OPL forester did not receive requests for assistance in Pinellas County.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY GRANTS

The Florida Forest Service manages the Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Grant Program in which federal funds are made available to organizations to develop or enhance their urban and community forestry programs. During this past fiscal year, there were no U&CF grants in Pinellas County.

TREE CITY USA



This program recognizes communities that have committed adequate personnel and financial resources to develop comprehensive, long term urban forestry programs. This program began in 1976 as a Bicentennial project sponsored by the National Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the National Association of State Foresters and U.S. Forest Service. The benefits of this program include a framework for action, education in urban forestry, public image, citizen pride, financial assistance, and publicity.

Currently there are 180 Tree Cities in Florida. Congratulations to Pinellas County which was inducted as a New Tree City USA ® in this last fiscal year. This brings the total to twelve participants in Pinellas County. Belleair, Clearwater, Dunedin, Gulfport, Largo, Oldsmar, Pinellas Park, Safety Harbor, Seminole, St. Petersburg, and Tarpon Springs received recertification during in the 2018-2019 fiscal year. In addition, Pinellas has two



Tree Campus USA ® schools, Eckerd College and University of South Florida. Plus, Tampa Electric Company (TECO) recertified a Tree Line USA ® Company. The Forester believes strongly in this program and would like to engage more Pinellas County communities.

CHAMPION TREE PROGRAM

In 1940, the Champion Tree Program was created by the American Forests organization to recognize the largest known tree of each species in the United States. Every two years, American Forests publishes their National Register of Big Trees. The 2017 edition of the Register includes 127 Florida species, many of which are only found in the tropical region of the state. Currently, Florida has the most national champions of any state. Unfortunately, no designated Champion trees remain in Pinellas County.

ARBOR DAY PROJECT FUNDING

Each year, the Florida Forest Service offers Arbor Day grant project funding available for urban and community forestry activities. During the past fiscal year, Pinellas County was the recipient of two Arbor Day projects. The two projects were awarded to Gulfport and Sunken Gardens. One Arbor Day planting and tree adoption project was received by the City of Gulfport Recreation Division.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Youth forest education activities included Smokey Bear presentations, forestry displays and other forestry educational presentations, Arbor Day celebrations at various locations throughout the county, and participation at the State Fair. One of the best programs is the annual Ag-Venture located at the fairgrounds where many students are exposed to forestry and natural resources by employees of the Florida Forest Service.

The FFA Forestry Contest Field Day is a competitive activity that tests students' skills and knowledge in areas of forest management through five stations and a general knowledge exam. Event components include a general forest knowledge exam, tree and equipment identification, forest disorders, compass-pacing/map interpretation, and timber cruising. On October 15th, 2018 at Hillsborough River State Park, students from Pasco, Hillsborough and Pinellas County Schools participated in the District 9 FFA Forestry Field Day contest. The FFS County Forester and other FFS personnel from the Withlacoochee District participated in this event.

This year's FFA Field Day consisted of the following events:

1. General Knowledge Exam
2. Tree Identification
3. Equipment Identification
4. Timber Cruising
5. Compass and Pacing

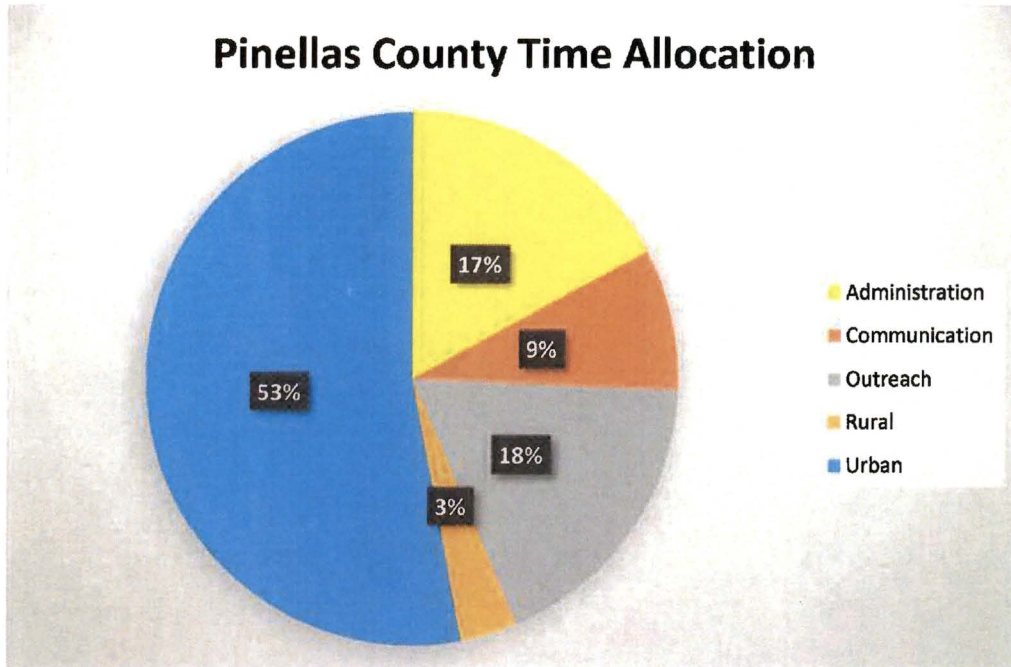


6. Forest Disorders

The students participating in FFA and the FFA Forestry District Contest are some of the brightest and most highly motivated youth in our school system. They are the future agricultural leaders of our community. This event, and the preparation that takes place prior to the event, introduces the students to forestry and allows them to attain a level of understanding of the subject that is highly desirable when this generation starts making career choices and decisions affecting forestry and all other aspects of agriculture.

In July of each year since 1933, the Florida Forest Service has run a Forestry Training Camp for FFA high school and middle school students. The Florida Forest Service's commitment to this camp is so strong that not even the labor shortages caused by the Second World War or the memorable 1998 wildfire season prevented the camp from operating.

This six-day resident camp is held at O'Leno State Park in High Springs, Florida. At Forestry Camp students learn about the many facets of forestry and FFA teachers learn different techniques for teaching subject matter.



During the past fiscal year, the CFA Forester spent majority of time with urban forestry assists to landowners in Pinellas County. Other assists within Pinellas included roughly 3 percent for rural forestry assists and 18 percent for outreach activities. Lou attended Tree Farm Inspector training and attended the annual statewide International Society of Arboriculture conference.

The CFA Forester periodically wrote articles for different local magazines, newspapers, and newsletters. This may include topics about programs for landowners, urban forestry, exotics removal, forest management practices, or fire management.



IN THE COMING YEAR

CISMA

Lou will be involved with local Suncoast Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA) committee. Being involved with the CISMA's exposes the CFA Forester to wider audiences for programs and other forestry related activities. This next fiscal year Lou plans on taking part in invasive/exotics workshops or providing help to this working group.

The CFA Forester periodically writes articles for different local magazines, news releases, newspapers, and newsletters. This may include topics about programs for landowners, urban forestry, invasive species removal, forest management practices, or fire management.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Lou will also assist in promoting forest management activities and Stewardship programs, exotics control on private and public lands, spread the message of fire prevention, help with Tree City USA and Arbor Day Celebrations, assist cities and the county when needed for tree ordinance technical advice. Lou will attend training to benefit homeowners and landowners by keeping them current on the latest information, trends and keep abreast of any new developments in industry and urban forestry that will affect the citizens of Pinellas County.

CONCLUSION

Lou will continue to look forward to another year serving the citizens and promoting the natural and forest resources of Pinellas County.

