

ORMOND SCENIC LOOP & TRAIL – SPRING WALK

Saturday, March 30, 2019

Michael Crotty Bicentennial Park – Ocean to river walk



The Ormond Scenic Loop & Trail had perfect weather on March 30th for its 20th semi-annual trail walk at Michael Crotty Bicentennial Park on Ormond-by-the-Sea. Dr. Don Spence, Assistant Professor of Biology at Bethune-Cookman University and a Certified Master Arborist, led 30 hikers along the park's nature trail.

Bicentennial Park is unique because it extends on the east side from the beach itself across the barrier island to the Halifax River on the west. This provides a great illustration of how plant and animal communities change from the harsh wind, salt spray, and topographically unstable dune environment at the beach to a more sheltered estuarine environment at the Halifax River.



Dr. Spence began his discussion with some historical background on the impact of human settlement in east central Florida. However pristine and wild some areas may appear to be, most have been disturbed or even cleared completely for agricultural or residential purposes over the last couple of centuries. Some areas we think are very old may have grown up in the last 50-100 years. Bicentennial Park provides a very recent illustration of this phenomenon. About a half-acre of what was probably old dune scrub habitat was cleared for a public-use project in October 2017 (see photographs). After intense public input the project was deemed by Volusia County to be inadvisable and canceled. While above-ground vegetation and trees were cleared, root structures and seeds below the surface were not removed and were permitted to regrow. On our trail walk we saw the once-cleared area after 17 months of natural fecundity. The area has extensively regrown with native Florida plants, such as dog fennel, coral bean, coontie, winged sumac, iron weed, bidens alba, and dune sunflower.





Inevitably some invasive species have also appeared, including Brazilian pepper. All of this looks lush, but it is relatively new regrowth. The absence of tree species like yaupon holly or sand live oak, in contrast to the older surrounding scrub areas along the trail where these trees are present, reveals the transitional status of the cleared area.

There were many questions from hikers on plants and trees in their own landscapes. There was a general interest in using appropriate native plant species where possible and practicable and to remove invasive species. In residential landscapes homeowners who wish or are required to maintain turf grass can move incrementally by reducing the area of their lawn, substituting water-wise native plants instead said Dr. Spence. Another step can be to reduce pesticide and fertilizer application. Everyone left Bicentennial Park knowing more than when they came.

Look forward to the Ormond Scenic Loop and Trail's fall trail walk later this year. Keep an eye on our Facebook page for current events along the byway corridor.

Article by Rob Bird
Photos by Nancy Galdo