



A brief history

(Last updated 9-29-18)

The Foundation was formed in February 2001 to receive the donations of the State Wildflower license plate. Prior to its founding, plate donations were being filtered to the Florida Wildflower Advisory Council under the 501(c)3 umbrella of Keep Florida Beautiful. Advisory council members saw a need to form a non-profit organization to receive tag funds directly when Keep Florida Beautiful failed to relinquish them in a timely and complete manner.

Since 2000, \$4.2 million has been generated in donations through sales of the State Wildflower license plate. According to the license plate statute, the donations must be used to fund wildflower education, research and planting programs. Fifteen percent may be used for administration and the marketing of the tag.

The Florida Wildflower Foundation appointed Gary Henry as its first executive director in 2001. Gary, a retired Florida Department of Transportation landscape architect, had overseen the department's wildflower program for more than two decades and had been instrumental in establishing the State Wildflower license plate. Under his direction, the Foundation began research, education and planting grant programs that funded university research projects, public plantings and roadside beautification.

When Gary Henry retired in 2008, the Foundation hired Lisa Roberts as its second executive director and moved its headquarters from Tallahassee to Maitland, north of Orlando. Grant funding paused in 2008 so the Florida Wildflower Foundation board of directors could review program results and establish a strategic plan that would yield desired results.

The board decided to generate most education projects internally. To help meet the immense need for education, the Florida Wildflower Symposium was launched in September 2008 at Harry P. Leu Botanical Gardens in Orlando. More than 100 people attended the half-day program. In 2012, the event grew to include two days of field trips, presentations and workshops. Each year, it is held in a different Central Florida venue. Past sites include Bok Tower Gardens, Wekiwa Springs State Park, Silver Springs State Park, and the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' headquarters in Winter Park.

In 2011, the Foundation received a grant to produce the first of several editions of the brochure "Native Wildflowers of Florida's Eastern Panhandle," which includes a map of wildflower routes as well as 40 photos of common regional wildflowers. The route was a result of a research project that logged spring, summer and fall wildflower species along Panhandle roads. Other three-season surveys were done in the Big Bend, Central Florida (St. Johns River to the Sea Loop) and Corkscrew Swamp vicinity (Southwest Florida).

In 2010, the Foundation received a Visit Florida grant to write a marketing plan for wildflower tourism in the Panhandle. As a result of the marketing plan, a contractor was hired in 2013 to serve as a liaison to the Florida Department of Transportation and to establish a group of roadside wildflower



enthusiasts to be known as the Panhandle Wildflower Alliance. The Foundation hopes to use the Panhandle program as a pilot for establishing alliances throughout the state.

Under the planting program, La Florida, Land of Flowers, Community Planting micro-grants were offered in 2010. The Seeds for Schools program, which provided seed grants for establishing campus gardens, launched in 2009. A third program, Viva Florida, began in 2011 to provide grants for landscape demonstrations at botanical gardens, city and county parks, extension centers and other public places. An educational component is required.

The La Florida program, which provided \$500 grants for small projects, was very popular at first. However, it was eliminated after the Foundation's 2015-16 fiscal year because of lack of qualified applications.

The Viva Florida program continues to be robust, although weeds and plant longevity continue to plague projects. In

2015, the Foundation began a hands-on project with Silver Springs State Park to establish a wildflower garden under the Viva Florida banner. A Foundation contractor regularly checked on the garden, replaced plants, and lead garden maintenance. Garden maintenance was turned over to the park in 2017. The garden is used in the park's programming, including in its summer children's programs.

In 2016, the Seeds for Schools program became Seedlings for Schools. Teachers, who were having marginal results with seeds, now receive \$50 worth of wildflower plants in September. If they are successful and file reports and photos, they become eligible to receive another \$50 in plants in spring.

The research program continues to support mostly university projects. In early 2008, the board also established the Gary Henry Endowment for the Study of Native Wildflowers at the University of Florida. In 2013, the endowment's earnings made it possible to begin to partially support at least one graduate student per year. For many years, the program has supported Dr. Richard Wunderlin's team working to add herbarium specimens to the Atlas of Florida Plants at the University of South Florida, Tampa.

In 2011, the Foundation funded a four-year study by Dr. Jaret Daniels (University of Florida) that delved into how insects use urban landscapes. The Foundation also supported Dr. Daniels' 2016 research into the effect of systemic insecticides applied to non-native milkweed on Monarch caterpillars, and a milkweed propagation project at a Central Florida prison. Results of all projects are pending as data is analyzed.

Determined to develop weed control methods, a major deterrent to the establishment of wildflowers on roadsides and in restoration projects, the Foundation in 2018 launched its own research project at Lake County's PEAR Park in Tavares. The project will test various seed rates and weed-containment methods for effectiveness. The Foundation also has provided funds to Dr. Steve Richardson at Florida Polytechnical University, who also is conducting weed seed bank research.