



Park Employee for a Day Geocache #3



Who You Are

As a park botanist, you work among the amazing diversity of plants that calls the Everglades home. You spend many days in the field cataloguing all the species present, and monitoring plant communities over the long-term looking for changes. But being a botanist in south Florida can be particularly challenging—the area is awash in nonnative invaders that can present big problems in the River of Grass. You are about to encounter one of the worst...

The Issue

A large agricultural community once thrived in the area you now stand. After the park was established, farming operations ceased and thousands of acres were left fallow. Over subsequent years, the disturbed lands were quickly invaded by Brazilian pepper, a nonnative species that now dominates the dense thickets you see growing on either side of the road.

Brazilian pepper is dispersed by various animals that feed upon its colorful red fruit. When introduced into the fertile, disturbed soils of these former farm lands, the plant forms impenetrable stands which deprive native species of the precious sunlight they require, and provide little habitat for native wildlife.



Brazilian Pepper is a nonnative invader that has taken over thousands of acres of former pine rockland.
NPS Photo

The Hard Decision

Getting rid of Brazilian pepper in this area is no easy task. Over the years, various control strategies have been tried with limited success. Cutting and hand-pulling are too costly and labor-intensive. Fire typically fails to kill the roots and seeds underground, from which the plants quickly re-sprout. And though useful elsewhere, herbicides are ineffective since the rate at which new seedlings appear can easily outpace work crews.

Roughly 6,300 acres are currently infested with Brazilian pepper and—if nothing is done—the situation will only get worse. It will likely take years to treat the entire area, and finding long-term funding for the work will be a constant battle. As the park botanist, you must decide whether or not the benefits of control are worth the cost of management. Are there any creative solutions for this overwhelming problem?



Manual removal of Brazilian pepper can be both labor intensive and time-consuming.
NPS Photo

When you log your find, be sure to tell us:

How would YOU address the growing spread of Brazilian pepper?



And then, if you're curious... here's how the park is winning the war on Brazilian pepper!