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of clean up also meant to vide education

Leonor/Contributing Writer

With shovels, hatches and wheelbarrows, students and staff members came out to the Nature Preserve and joined the ecological restoration project, clearing out trails and removing unwanted plants as part of the Nature Preserve Day.

“Daily downpours during the summer excite plant growth and when we come back to the fall semester, there is plenty of new plant growth that crowds over trails,” said Ryan Vogel, manager of the Nature Preserve and coordinator of the event. “We are doing this to clear trails so students, faculty and staff can utilize the trail and to facilitate transportation inside the preserve.”

The Nature Preserve Day provided a community service opportunity for many students, while also engaging them in a hands-on learning experience.

“Today and throughout the time that I’ve been volunteering, I haven’t just learned about native and invasive species, but also why we need to help clear out the preserve,” said volunteer Ana Gonzales, sophomore health science major at a neighboring university.

Located on the western side of Modesto Maidique Campus, during its 33 years the preserve has provided students, faculty and staff with many educational and recreational services, attempting to instill environmental awareness in its visitors.

“The preserve was established in 1978, therefore it’s older than most of the other structures here on campus,” Vogel said. “Most of the big trees you see were planted by FIU students many years ago. Most of what we see today is pretty young but has an important place in FIU history.”

Within its 11 acres, the preserve represents three Florida ecosystems and also houses its own organic garden. It is also home to many native plant and animal species that serve as the basis for student and faculty research.

With over a dozen active projects throughout, Vogel said the area serves as an important learning resource at the University. He also added that the preserve provides other benefits that lay outside of the educational.

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"It creates a refuge to get away from the stresses of school and work and life," Vogel said. "It creates a magical environment, something that cannot be created anywhere else here on campus. [It is] somewhere for students and faculty to get away to in order to get in touch with nature and to enjoy what was once all Florida Everglades."

In its future, Vogel said the preserve has the potential to expand and hopes to see it become more entangled in students' everyday lives.

"I think the preserve has the potential to set the standard for state and private universities throughout the country as how an urban wilderness area could be managed efficiently to provide for education space as well as recreation space," Vogel said. "If we were to have some sort of structure built immediately adjacent to the preserve I think that would allow a lot more students to enjoy the preserve."

As of today, the preserve plays an important part of University life, housing Florida ecosystems that are open to research and recreation in an urban campus. To keep the preserve functional, however, it requires student involvement.

"I learned that for nature to be preserved it needs dedication and hard work," said volunteer and freshman finance major Hector Nivia. He added that although he is majoring in finance, the community service opportunity gave him a chance to learn about the preserve while also restoring it.

The preserve management encourages students to become involved and keeps volunteer schedules posted by its site throughout the semester.

Vogel urges students to become a part of the work happening everyday at the preserve.

"In the past year alone I've noticed a lot of growth, a lot of new exiting energy here at the preserve, and I only foresee that that energy will continue to grow and expand," Vogel said. "Hopefully a lot more students and a lot more staff will come out here and start utilizing it. I can't wait to see how the preserve reaches its full potential."



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