



Habitat Restoration Project

Invasive Australian Pine Trees at Fort De Soto Park

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission funded a project in 2015 to remove the last remaining Australian pine trees from Fort De Soto Park. This invasive, non-native tree was removed from the park's North Beach area and other locations. This will enable native oak trees planted more than 20 years ago to receive more sunlight and offer greater shade for visitors.

About the project

- Removal of the pines is part of a statewide effort to eliminate exotic plant species from sensitive habitats.
- Removing invasive plant species is a requirement of the Fort De Soto Park Land Management Plan.
- Clearing out the Australian pines is vital for the park's long-term maintenance.

Australian pines can create several hazards for native Florida ecosystems:

- The pines do not stabilize the shoreline against erosion like native species.
- The trees are prone to topple over in high winds.
- They can create a toxin that inhibits native plants.
- The proximity to the beach can hinder sea turtle nesting.

For more information about Fort De Soto Park visit us online at www.pinellascounty.org/park/05_Ft_DeSoto.htm or call (727) 582-2267.



Australian Pines Removal at Fort De Soto's North Beach



Background

- The Australian pine removal at Fort De Soto Park is part of an “end of year” funding project from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC).
 - » The \$269,040.00 award also addressed other exotics at Fort De Soto, including Brazilian pepper, carrotwood, cogon grass and other species of concern.
 - » The FWC award allowed the county to address the problem at no cost to the taxpayers where previously it was addressed with county funds and labor.

The effect of the non-native Australian pines

- Extreme erosion occurring at North Beach has been exacerbated by the presence of Australian pines.
- The pines shade out dune vegetation, making the beach more susceptible to erosion.
- Eventually the trees die or topple because the shallow root system cannot support the weight of the tree.
- Portions of North Beach at Fort De Soto have been closed to the public in the past due to dangerous trees and/or exposed roots.
- Australian pines inhibit the growth of beneficial beach vegetation and provide little to no habitat for wildlife.
- The trees are fairly brittle, highly susceptible to freezes, and interfere with sea turtle nesting.

The ongoing program

- The removal of Australian pines at Fort De Soto Park has been an ongoing and necessary program for decades.
- The life expectancy of an Australian pine is 40 to 50 years old, which indicates that most of the large Australian pines at North Beach were at or near the end of their life expectancy. This makes them susceptible to failure and requires constant monitoring.

- The removal of exotic and nuisance vegetation at Fort De Soto Park is consistent with the park's management plan, the county's comprehensive plan, and sound environmental management.

From the Fort De Soto Park Management Plan

- “Australian Pines can shade out the sea oats and produce a bushel of pine needles a day. The accumulation of pine needles hinders the germination of the seeds of the sea oats. Australian pine trees are targeted in our exotic removal program and are being eliminated from the park. Complete elimination is not expected due to recruitment of new plants from wave and air borne seeds. This means that even when mature trees are eventually eliminated from the island we must remain vigilant in our efforts to eliminate the new plants as they inevitably arrive.”

From Pinellas County's Compendium

- 4.1.4. Policy: The County shall continue its program to require the eradication of ecologically undesirable vegetation from intertidal, riverine and nearby upland areas that is not indigenous to Florida and which has altered natural ecosystems by competitively excluding native plant species.

For more information on the Australian pine, please visit the FWC website at <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/invasive-plants/weed-alerts/australian-pine>

