

Program Name: Invasive Exotic Species Management
Project Name: **Develop and Implement a USFWS Invasive Species Strike Team**
Project ID: 2610
Lead Agency: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Funding Source: Federal
Goal(s) Addressed: 2.B.1

Measurable Output(s): Project acres treated including Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) projects, gross area surveyed, actual infested acres treated, cost per acre, herbicide amounts utilized, prioritized lists of invasive plants and animals, modify or enhanced control methods, funding totals, invasive exotic plant species targeted, inventory and monitoring methodologies for invasive plants and animals, treatment effectiveness, assessment and evaluation.

Project Synopsis: Secure and appropriate Congressional funding to develop and implement a highly mobile USFWS Invasive Species Strike Team (2-member) to rapidly respond to, and control incipient or newly established infestations (EDRR) of highly invasive exotic species (plants and animals) occurring on National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) in Florida (FL). Officially formed in 2004, the Region 4 Invasive Species Strike Team (R4 ISST) will provide administration, funding and oversight support for projects involving control and treatment of moderate and dense infestations of invasive exotic plants utilizing highly specialized and experienced exotic plant contractors on Southeast (SE) and FL NWRs. In addition, the R4 ISST will provide technical assistance to FL and SE NWR refuge managers and staff concerning invasive species identification, control and management, and lastly, will represent the interest of the USFWS on associated invasive species task forces or working groups, and Regional Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) established throughout peninsular Florida.

Current Status: As of June 2010, the R4 ISST was operating without the Assistant Strike Team Leader (ASTL) position leaving the Strike Team Leader as the sole individual comprising the team. The ASTL position was abolished in 2013 during regional workforce planning. During the first quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the R4 ISST Leader was relocated to a new duty station, A.R.M. Loxahatchee NWR, Boynton Beach, Florida, and the entire ISST budget was restored, but the ASTL position remains vacant. Approximately 60% of the R4 ISST Leader's job duties will be focused on refuges and on issues in South Florida. Twenty percent of duties will focus on central and north Florida NWRs and 20% on the remainder of refuges in the Southeast Region respectively.

For the FY15-16 reporting period, the R4 ISST Leader, using available refuge staff, completed 22+ EDRR non-native invasive plant projects on J.N. "Ding" Darling NWR, Sanibel, Florida as collateral work duties restricted travel. The gross acres covered were 135, and the infested acres treated were 23.5. In addition, the R4 ISST provided assistance to the Southwest Florida CISMA (SW FL-CISMA) serving on the steering committee, invasive plant and animal EDRR sub-committees, and managed several SW FL-CISMA grants intended for outreach and SW FL- CISMA field workdays.

For FY 2016, the entire R4 ISST budget was restored, and \$1.15M was made available to SE and FL NWRs through a competitive Request for Proposals for invasive plant and exotic wildlife control projects. Funding was dispersed as follows: Area I (\$200,000), Area II (\$750,000 including a direct allocation of \$500,000 to A.R.M. Loxahatchee NWR), and Area III (\$200,000). A total of 28 invasive-related projects were funded in the SE Region. Target species included FL and SE Exotic Pest Plant Council Category 1 and 2 non-native invasive plants and approximately eight feral hog projects including direct control via aerial shooting in collaboration with USDA-Wildlife Services, and developing and deploying new trap technologies. The R4 ISST budget increased 134% over FY 2015 levels.

Since its inception, the R4 ISST has provided over \$5M to SE and FL refuges for the control and management of non-native invasive plants and non-indigenous wildlife.

Estimated Cost: >\$10 million

Project Schedule:

Start Date: October 1, 2004
 Finish Date: N/A

Detailed Project Budget Information (\$1000s)

	Thru 2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Balance to complete	Total
Federal	4,362	494	494	494	494	494	1,150	N/A	7,982
State									
Tribal									
Local									
Other									
Total	4,362	494	494	494	494	494	1,150	N/A	7,982

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Figure 1. Example of biological control feeding damage on air potato vine from air potato leaf ('Lily') beetle larva on Sanibel conservation lands.