Management and habitat conservation and improvement for two plant species, the federally endangered Small's milkpea and candidate species sand flax at U.S. Special Operations Command South Headquarters, Homestead, Florida

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Introduction

The U.S. Army Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH) headquarters is located adjacent to the Homestead Air Reserve Base in Miami-Dade County. A portion of the site is important habitat for the federally endangered Small's milkpea (*Galactia smallii*) and the federal candidate sand flax (*Linum arenicola*). Two areas (Management Areas 1 and 2) have been identified as conservation areas for the protection of these species.

The primary habitat for Small's milkpea and sand flax is the pine rockland community, which historically occupied most of the uplands of southern Miami-Dade County. As a result of a variety of land clearing activities, less the 2% of the historical pine rockland habitat remains outside of Everglades National Park. Prior to restoration and management activities in the 1990s and 2000s, much of these remnant pine rocklands in Miami-Dade County had been degraded by fragmentation, fire suppression and exotic species invasions. However, significant work has occurred over the last 20 years that demonstrates that degraded pine rockland habitat can be restored.

The pine rockland community is dominated by a single canopy tree, South Florida slash pine (*Pinus elliottii* var. *densa*), with a diverse hardwood and palm shrub layer composed of a mixture of temperate and tropical species. It also has a rich herbaceous layer containing many endemic and tropical species. Pine trees are indicators of a pine rockland but it is the shrub and herbaceous layers that make the community unique. The habitat is naturally maintained by periodic fire, which controls vertical structure and species composition and prevents the accumulation of nutrients. Although fire is the preferred management tool in pine rocklands, many pine rockland species have shown persistence following disturbances including pine harvesting, mechanical scraping and repeated mowing. At SOCSOUTH, both Small's milkpea and sand flax have persisted despite significant disturbance, but would benefit from invasive species removal and other activities that would reduce threats and increase habitat viability for the species.

Project Objective

Habitat Restoration and Monitoring for Small's milkpea and sand flax.

Project Area

The U.S. Army Special Operations Command South headquarters is located adjacent to the Homestead Air Reserve Base in Miami-Dade County. Management Areas 1 and 2 (Figure 1) account for a total of 5.95 hectares (14.7 acres). Both Management Areas were fenced by a previous contractor. The Management Areas have previously been disturbance and mechanically scrapped.

Methods

Determining baseline species composition and distribution

To collect baseline species composition data from both Management Areas a 25 x 25 meter grid polygon was placed over each study area using GIS ArcMap 10 (ESRI). With the use of a Global Positioning System (GPS), the two Management Areas were surveyed using the overlaid 25x25 meter grid system. An initial survey was conducted by walking each individual 25×25 m polygon to determine the location of threatened and endangered species, to create a record of all observable species within the restoration site prior to the onset of restoration practices, and to determine habitat quality throughout the site. After the initial survey, three random points were created within each larger polygon using the software extension Hawthorns tools. At each random point, a 1x1 meter square plot was used to estimate species composition within each polygon.

To document the restoration thirteen photo points set in specific locations were established to monitor the restoration progress. Periodically, photographs were taken to show the changes to the vegetation during the restoration.

Treatment and removal of exotic species

All species listed as category I and II by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) were targeted for herbicidal treatment (Table 2). Exotic species which pose a threat to the pine rockland community on the SOCSOUTH Management Areas were also exterminated even though they were not listed as invasive species by the FLEPPC. Other non-native species considered naturalized to the state of Florida were not treated as they do not pose a threat to the health of the ecosystem (Table 3).

Several large stands of Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) and Australian pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) existed on the management sites. The majority of these exotic species were cut down and treated with herbicide using a cut/stump method and removed from the site. A subcontractor cut and removed the larger stands of exotic hardwood species. Invasive trees and shrubs that were not cut and removed were treated in place and left standing using a hack and squirt method. Other large tree species, found at lower densities scattered throughout the management areas, were also cut and removed. Large patches of tall graminoids such as Burma reed (*Neyraudia reynaudiana*) and Napier grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) were also cut using brush cutters and removed by hand. After re-growth of the Burma reed and Napier grass occurred, a foliar herbicide was applied in order to kill the plant while at a manageable height.

Turf grasses such as St. Augustine grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) and *Zoysia* grass (*Zoysia tenuifolia*) were encountered in high abundances in localized areas of both management sites. Typically, invasive turf grasses are eliminated by applying a foliar herbicide; however, areas invaded with the turf grass *Zoysia tenuifolia* often contain high densities of the endangered Small's milkpea and candidate species sand flax as well as other native plants. This relationship makes it difficult to eradicate the invasive species without harming the native vegetation. In order to limit damage to rare plants and other native species, a clipping technique was implemented. Rare and native plant stems were manually clipped below the *Zoysia* grass, approximately 2.5 cm above ground level,

which removes the above ground biomass and eliminates the ability of foliar herbicides to be absorb into the plant. The clipped plants were left for 24-72 hours, during the waiting period the plants naturally seal the clipped part of the stem forming a barrier. After the waiting period a foliar spray was used on the *Zoysia* grass allowing the clipped native vegetation to re-sprout as the *Zoysia* grass died.

Determining plant succession after exotic removal

Multiple areas were monitored to ensure proper native plant succession typical of a pine rockland after restoration methods were implemented. Locations were chosen depending on the scale of disturbance and location of exotic species. A line transect was established through an area once mechanically scraped and highly invaded with Australian pine and Burma reed, through areas dominated by *Zoysia* grass, and through monotypic stands of Brazilian pepper. Square meter plots were analyzed for species composition at different distances along the length of the transect after the exotic species were removed and all endangered or threatened species quantified along each transect.

Re-sampling

Using the initial grid system we will resurvey the management areas after exotic species have been removed as well as after the prescribed burn. Due to slow succession of native species in sprayed *Zoysia* we have not resurveyed to document changes in the restoration process. Due to unfavorable weather conditions, we have been unable to burn the management areas at this point

Results

Species composition and distribution

Several areas of high quality habitat defined by native species diversity and the absence of exotic species, were found in both management areas (Figure 2). Other areas of poor quality habitat, defined by an abundance of exotic species and/or the lack of native vegetation or altered habitat (e.g. asphalt), were also found in each Management Area.

A total of 179 plant species were found on the SOC south management areas, 41 of which are not considered native to south Florida with 16 species listed as a category I or II invasive (Table 1; Table 2; Table 3). During the surveys no other species considered as endangered, threatened, or candidates by the US Fish and Wildlife Service were found other than *Galactia smallii* and *Linum arenicola*. A total of 24 species listed by the State of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as endangered, threatened, or commercially exploited were found on the property (Table 4). Estimates prior to the removal of exotic species in Management Area 1 for Small's milkpea were 0.84 ± 0.15 (SE)/m², and total estimates for sand flax were 0.49 ± 0.23 (SE)/m². Estimates prior to the removal of exotic species in Management Area 2 for Small's milkpea were 0.47 ± 0.12 (SE)/m², and total estimates for sand flax were 0.40 ± 0.1 (SE)/m².

Treatment and removal of exotic species

High density areas of exotic invasive species, covering a total of 3.8 hectares (9.4 acres), are shown in Figure 3 and the areas which they occupied before herbicidal and mechanical treatments were applied are shown in Table 5. The species found in dense stands are: Australian pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) (Figure 4), St Augsutine (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) (Figure 5), lead tree (*Leucaena leucocephala*) (Figure 6), scarlet jungle flame (*Ixora coccinea*) (Figure 7), tall graminiods Burma reed (*Neyraudia reynaudiana*) and Napier grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) (Figure 8), *Zoysia* grass (*Zoysia tenuifolia*) (Figure 9) and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) (Figure 10).

Sparse presences of these and other species also occurred in other locations throughout the management areas and were eradicated when found. Other exotic invasive species also occurred throughout the area but were not found in dense stands such as ear-leaf acacia (*Acacia auriculiformis*), seaside mahoe (*Thespesia populnea*), umbrella tree (*Schefflera actinophylla*), woman's tongue (*Albizia lebbeck*), lead tree (*Leucaena leucocephala*), and scaevola (*Scaevola taccada*) (Table 6).

Monitoring plant succession after exotic removal

Jack-in-the-bush (*Chromolaena odorata*) and Mexican clover (*Richardia grandiflora*) began populating large areas that were treated for *Zoysia* grass. Both species can become problematic weeds if left unchecked, therefore herbicidal spot treatments are being applied to avoid allowing the plants to mature and reproduce. Pitted bluestem (*Bothriochloa pertusa*) began sprouting in high abundances in areas once dominated by Australian pine and tall invasive graminoids and is being treated with herbicides. Treatments of this type will continue until the seed source is depleted from the substrate as long as new plants are not allowed to mature, this includes the initial dominant invading species (e.g. Burma reed). Initial line transect data of disturbed areas once dominated by invasive species show a total of at least 36 early successional species (Figure 11; Table 7).

Acknowledgements

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Figure 1: Map showing Management Areas 1 and 2.



Figure 2: High quality habitat in the Management Areas.



Figure 3: Map showing coverage of densely populated areas.



Figure 4: High density areas of Australian pine (Casuarina equisetifolia).



Figure 5: High density areas of St. Augustine grass (Stenotaphrum secundatum).



Figure 6: High-density areas of lead tree (*Leucaena leucocephala*). This species was also found in low densities and scattered throughout both Management Areas.



Figure 7: High density areas of scarlet jungle flame (Ixora coccinea).



Figure 8: High density areas of tall invasive graminoids consisting of Burma reed (*Neyraudia reynaudiana*) and Napier grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*).



Figure 9: High density areas of Zoysia grass (Zoysia tenuifolia).



Figure 10: High density areas of Brazilian pepper (Schinus terebinthifolius)



Figure 11: Example of a line transect through an area that was once a monotypic stand of Burma reed and Napier grass.

Tables

Table 1: Common native species found on SOC south management areas

Scientific Name	Common Name
Abildgaardia ovate	Flatspike sedge
Ambrosia artemisiifolia	Common ragweed
Andropogon glomeratus var. pumilus	Common bushy bluestem
Andropogon ternarius	Splitbeard bluestem
Andropogon virginicus var. decipiens	Broomsedge bluestem
Aristida purpurascens	Arrowfeather threeawn
Aster adnatus	Clasping aster
Ayenia euphrasiifolia	Eyebright ayenia
Baccharis glomeruliflora	Silverling
Baccharis halimifolia	Saltbush
Bidens alba var. radiata	Spanish-needles
Buchnera americana	American bluehearts
Callicarpa americana	American beautyberry
Capraria biflora	Goatweed
Cassytha filiformis	Lovevine
Cenchrus spinifex	Coastal sandspur
Centrosema virginianum	Spurred butterfly-pea
Chamaecrista deeringiana	Deering partridge pea
Chamaecrista nictitans var. aspera	Hairy sensitive-pea
Chamaesyce blodgettii	Limestone sandmat
Chamaesyce conferta	Everglades key sandmat
Chamaesyce hypericifolia	Eyebane
Chiococca alba	Common snowberry
Chiococca parvifolia	Pineland snowberry
Chromolaena odorata	Jack-in-the-bush
Cirsium horridulum	Purple thistle
Cissus verticillata	Possum-grape
Cnidoscolus stimulosus	Tread-softly
Coccoloba uvifera	Seagrape
Conyza canadensis var. pusilla	Dwarf Canadian horseweed
Coreopsis leavenworthii	Leavenworth's tickseed
Crotalaria pumila	Low rattlebox
Croton linearis	Pineland croton
Cyperus polystachyos	Manyspike flatsedge
Desmodium incanum	Beggar's-ticks
Dichanthelium spp.*	

Scientific Name	Common Name
Dodonaea angustifolia	Narrow varnishleaf
Dyschoriste angusta	Rockland twinflower
Echites umbellatus	Devil's-potato, Rubbervine
Eragrostis elliottii	Eragrostis elliottii
Erigeron quercifolius	Southern-fleabane
Eupatorium capillifolium	Dog-fennel
Eupatorium serotinum	Lateflowering thoroughwort
Eustachys petraea	Common fingergrass
Ficus aurea	Strangler fig
Flaveria linearis	Narrowleaf yellowtops
Forestiera segregata	Florida privet
Galactia volubilis	Downy milkpea
Hamelia patens	Firebush
Hedyotis nigricans var. floridana	Florida diamond flowers
Heliotropium polyphyllum	Pineland heliotrope
Hypericum hypericoides	St. Andrew's-cross
Indigofera miniata var. florida	Florida coastal indigo
Lantana involucrata	Wild-sage
Liatris gracilis	Slender gayfeather
Licania michauxii	Gopher-apple
Ludwigia microcarpa	Smallfruit primrosewillow
Ludwigia octovalvis	Mexican primrosewillow
Ludwigia repens	Creeping primrosewillow
Lysiloma latisiliquum	Wild-tamarind
Melothria pendula	Creeping-cucumber
Metopium toxiferum	Poisonwood
Mikania scandens	Climbing hempweed
Morinda royoc	Mouse's pineapple
Muhlenbergia capillaris	Muhlygrass
Parthenocissus quinquefolia	Virginia-creeper
Paspalum caespitosum	Blue paspalum
Paspalum setaceum	Thin paspalum
Passiflora suberosa	Corkystem passionflower
Pectis glaucescens	Tea-blinkum
Phyla nodiflora	Frogfruit
Phyllanthus pentaphyllus var. floridanus	Florida five-petalled leafflower
Physalis walteri	Walter's groundcherry
Pilea microphylla	Artillery plant

Scientific Name	Common Name
Pinus elliottii var. densa	South Florida slash pine
Piriqueta caroliniana	Pitted stripeseed
Pityopsis graminifolia	Narrowleaf silkgrass
Pluchea odorata	Sweetscent
Pluchea rosea	Rosy Camphorweed
Poinsettia cyathophora	Paintedleaf
Poinsettia heterophylla	Fiddler's spurge
Polygala violacea	Candyweed
Randia aculeata	White indigoberry
Rhynchosia cinerea	Brownhair snoutbean
Rhynchosia minima	Least snoutbean
Rhynchospora colorata	Starrush whitetop
Rhynchospora floridensis	Florida whitetop
Ruellia succulenta	Thickleaf wild petunia
Sabal palmetto	Cabbage palm
Sabatia stellaris	Rose-of-Plymouth
Samolus ebracteatus	Water pimpernel
Schizachyrium gracile	Wire bluestem
Schizachyrium rhizomatum	Rhizomatous bluestem
Schizachyrium sanguineum	Crimson bluestem
Setaria parviflora	Knotroot foxtail
Sida acuta	Common fanpetals
Sida elliottii	Elliott's fanpetals
Sideroxylon salicifolium	Willow-bustic
Sisyrinchium angustifolium	Narroleaf blueeyed-grass
Solanum americanum	Common nightshade
Solidago gigantea	Giant goldenrod
Sorghastrum secundum	Lopsided Indian grass
Spermacoce assurgens	Woodland false buttonweed
Spigelia anthelmia	West Indian pinkroot
Stachytarpheta jamaicensis	Blue porterweed
Stylosanthes hamata	Cheesytoes
Teucrium canadense	Wood sage
Thelypteris kunthii	Southern shield fern
Tillandsia recurvata	Ball-moss
Trema micranthum	Florida trema
Tridax procumbens	Brittleweed
Verbena scabra	Harsh verbena

Scientific Name	Common Name
Waltheria indica	Sleepy morning

• * Sterile specimen, unable to identify to species level

Table 2: Non-native species found on SOC south management areas listed by the Flori	ida
Exotic Pest Plant Council as a category 1 or 2 invasive species.	

Scientific Name		FLEPPC
	Common Name	Listing
Acacia auriculiformis	Earleaf acacia	1
Albizia lebbeck	Woman's tongue	1
Ardisia elliptica	Shoe-button ardisia	1
Casuarina equisetifolia	Australian-pine	1
Dactyloctenium aegyptium	Crow's-foot grass	2
Ficus microcarpa	Laurel fig	1
Lantana camara	Shrubverbena	1
Leucaena leucocephala	Lead tree	2
Neyraudia reynaudiana	Burma reed	1
Pennisetum purpureum	Napier grass	1
Pteris vittata	China brake	2
Scaevola taccata	Scaevola	2
Schefflera actinophylla	Australian umbrellatree	1
Schinus terebinthifolius	Brazilian-pepper	1
Thespesia populnea	Seaside mahoe	1
Wedelia trilobata	Creeping wedelia	2

Table 3: Non-native species found on SOC south management areas but not listed by	1
FLEPPC.	

Scientific Name	Common Name
Alysicarpus vaginalis	White moneywort
Asclepias curassavica	Scarlet milkweed
*Bothriochloa pertusa	Pitted bluestem
Desmodium triflorum	Threeflower ticktrefoil
Eleusine indica	Indian goose grass
Emilia fosbergii	Florida tasselflower
Eulophia graminea	no common name available
Euphorbia graminea	Grassleaf spurge
Fimbristylis cymosa	Hurricane sedge
Indigofera spicata	Creeping indigo
*Ixora coccinea	Scarlet jungleflame
Kalanchoe daigremontiana	Devil's-backbone
Ligustrum japonicum	Japanese privet
*Macroptilium lathyroides	Wild-bean
*Melaleuca viminalis	Weeping bottlebrush
Momordica charantia	Wild balsam-apple
Paspalum urvillei	Vasey grass
Pluchea carolinensis	Cure-for-all
Pteris xdelchampsii	Delchamps' brake
*Richardia grandiflora	Mexican clover
Spermacoce verticillata	Shrubby false buttonweed
Sporobolus indicus	Smut grass
*Stenotaphrum secundatum	St. Augustine grass
*Tabebuia heterophylla	White-cedar
*Zoysia tenuifolia	Zoysia grass

• * Problematic weedy species targeted during restoration.

Table 4: Endangered, threatened, and commercially exploited plant species found or	1
SOC south management areas.	

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status
Angadenia berteroi	Pineland-allamanda	State threatened
Bletia purpurea	Pinepink	State threatened
Byrsonima lucida	Locustberry	State threatened
Chaptalia albicans	White sunbonnets	State threatened
Coccothrinax argentata	Florida silver palm	State threatened
Crossopetalum ilicifolium	Quailberry	State threatened
Cynanchum blodgettii	Blodgett's swallowwort	State threatened
Ernodea cokeri	Coker's creeper	State endangered
Galactia smallii	Small's milkpea	Federally endangered
Ipomoea microdactyla	Man-in-the-ground	State endangered
Jacquemontia curtisii	Pineland clustervine	State threatened
Lantana depressa	Pineland lantana	State endangered
Linum arenicola	Sand flax	State endangered, Federal candidate
Melanthera parvifolia	Pineland blackanthers	State threatened
Phyla stoechadifolia	Southern fogfruit	State endangered
Psidium longipes	Longstalked-stopper	State threatened
Pteris bahamensis	Bahama ladder brake	State threatened
Roystonea regia	Royal palm	State endangered
Scutellaria havanensis	Havana skullcap	State endangered
Senna mexicana var. chapmanii	Bahama senna	State threatened
Smilax havanensis	Havana greenbrier	State threatened
Spermacoce terminalis	Everglades Keys false buttonweed	State threatened
Swietenia mahagoni	West Indian mahogany	State threatened
Tetrazygia bicolor	West Indian-lilac	State threatened
Zamia integrifolia	Coontie	Commercially exploited

Invasive species	Acres	Hectares
Casuarina equisetifolia	0.573292274	0.232003152
Schinus terebinthifolius	4.382184531	1.773407161
Zoysia tenuifolia	3.367062368	1.362601797
Leucaena leucocephala	0.081043559	0.032797165
Ixora coccinea	0.015801159	0.006394502
Tall graminoids	0.90234024	0.36516414
Stenotaphrum secundatum	0.076838635	0.031095492

Table 5: Areas (acres and hectares) of treated high density invasive species

Invasive species	Total treated
Acacia auriculiformis	246
Albizia lebbeck	213
Ardisia elliptica	525
Lantana camara	702
Leucaena leucocephala	670
Melaleuca viminalis	20
Scaevola taccada	3
Schefflera actinophylla	15
Thespesia populnea	4

Table 6: Total individual counts of treated exotic species sporadically located throughout the SOC south management areas

Table 7: Early succession species from transect monitoring

Early succession species	Status
Abildgaardia ovata	Native
Alysicarpus vaginalis	Non-native
Andropogon ternarius	Native
Aster adnatus	Native
Baccharis halimifolia	Native
Chamaecrista nictitans var. aspera	Native
Chamaesyce blodgettii	Native
Chamaesyce hypericifolia	Native
Chromolaena odorata	Native
Conyza canadensis var. pusilla	Native
Desmodium triflorum	Non-native
Eragrostis elliottii	Native
Eupatorium capillifolium	Native
Eustachys petraea	Native
Galactia smallii	Native
Hedyotis nigricans var. floridana	Native
Indigofera spicata	Native
Lantana camara	Non-native
Lantana involucrata	Native
Linum arenicola	Native
Metopium toxiferum	Native
Neyraudia reynaudiana	Non-native
Paspalum setaceum	Native
Pectis hedyotis	Native
Pennisetum purpureum	Non-native
Phyla nodiflora	Native
Phyllanthus pentaphyllus var.	Native
floridanus	
Pluchea carolinensis	Native
Pluchea rosea	Native
Polygala violacea	Native
Pteris spp.	Native
Rhynchospora floridensis	Native
Schizachyrium sanguineum	Native
Spermacoce verticillata	Non-native

Early succession species	Status
Stachytarpheta jamaicensis	Native
Stylosanthes hamata	Native
Tridax procumbens	Native