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Rare Plants in Everglades Face Threats from Rising Sea Level

By [Marco Foronda](#) | Mar 04, 2015 08:35 AM EST

Palmetto Plants(Photo : National Geographic/Phil Schermeister)

A new study has revealed the rise in sea levels and invasive species is a growing threat to rare plants in the Everglades National Park in Florida.

The study was conducted over a 10-year period on 59 plant species by the Institute for Regional Conservation in Delray. Poaching is the biggest threat to the plants and the invasive plants such as Brazilian pepper, said researchers. In addition, rising sea waters also identified as a culprit.

In the study, researchers found that 16 of those species may have already vanished from the park whereas other species haven't fully recovered from past damage caused by orchid collectors and attempts to drain the Everglades.

During the study period, researchers also found hardwood hammocks containing more than half of the park's rarest plants. Disturbing patterns driving down populations of imperiled plants were repeated among more numerous species, indicating threats weren't limited to rare plants.

George Gann, chief conservation strategist for the Institute for Regional Conservation and the lead author of the study, was enlisted by the Park Services to list the park's 30 rarest plants over five years. Gann and his team didn't just focus on plants but also looked at overlooked and hard-to-reach areas of the vast park, including western mangrove fringes.

Gann hopes the research raises the profile of rare plants so that land managers and environmentalists pay the same attention to air plants, ferns and other disappearing species that they devote to water flows and wildlife.

"As human beings, we've done a lot damage to the native flora that we might not realize. Maybe we should do something about that and think about what that means for stewardship," he said.

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