



Institute for
Regional
Conservation

July 2024 Newsletter

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Conservation Note

Fruitful Collaborations

I'm excited to share some incredible highlights from the last month. On July 9th, the Florida Museum of Natural History (FMNH) issued a [media release](#) announcing the publication of a peer-reviewed paper on the first known vascular plant species to be extirpated in the wild from the United States due to sea level rise – the Key Largo Tree Cactus (*Pilosocereus millsbaughii*). Working with lead authors Jennifer Possley and Jimmy Lange from Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and Alan Franck from FMNH we fielded a storm of media interest. While the facts were sobering, we were excited to see the outpouring of interest, not just from the United States, but also Europe and beyond. I was interviewed on [National Public Radio](#), and some key findings from our rare plant work in South Florida were widely published.

The following week, I had the honor of attending the 6th Annual National Forum on Tropical Arboriculture in Mérida, Mexico in the Yucatan. This event brought together experts and enthusiasts in arboriculture and ecological restoration from across Mexico. During the Forum, I had the opportunity to give a talk in Spanish on the importance of integrating ecological restoration principles and standards into tree planting initiatives in urban spaces, not just within Mexico but globally. It



was encouraging to see how well this message was received, underscoring the growing recognition of the need to bridge the gap between planting trees and ecological restoration in major cities.

Photo captions: George Gann speaking at forum (top), Carlos Trejo speaking at forum (middle), dozens of volunteers planting after the forum (bottom)

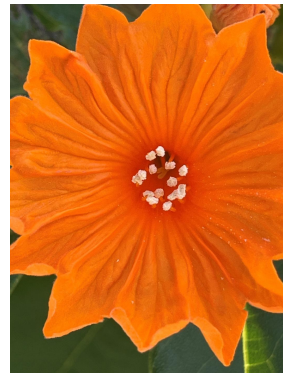


IRC Associate Carlos Trejo and George Gann

As we continue to grow our impact, it is inspiring to witness how our shared commitments resonate across borders with so many colleagues. Let's keep this momentum going as we move forward with our vision of uniting people and nature to restore our world.

George Gann
Founder and Executive Director

What was so special about this trip was that IRC associate Carlos Trejo played a pivotal role in organizing this event, and IRC was one of three major sponsors. Carlos ensured that our organization was well represented and that our mission of protecting and restoring biodiversity was at the forefront of discussions. It was a proud moment to see IRC's influence extending internationally, fostering collaborations that will undoubtedly benefit our work at home in South Florida and abroad.



Yucatan native *Cordia dodecandra*.

Upcoming Events

Coastal Conservation Education Workshop - Miami Beach Botanical Garden

Saturday, August 3rd 10am to 12pm

Join IRC and the Miami Beach Botanical Garden with support from Miami Beach Rising Above for a fun and educational talk about the importance of Coastal Conservation. Volunteers will learn how to identify coastal native plants, the importance of building a biodiverse dune system and how that helps protect from storms and so much more!

It is a great way to gain community service hours. To sign up check out our [IRC events page](#) and scroll to the Miami Beach Flyer for more details.

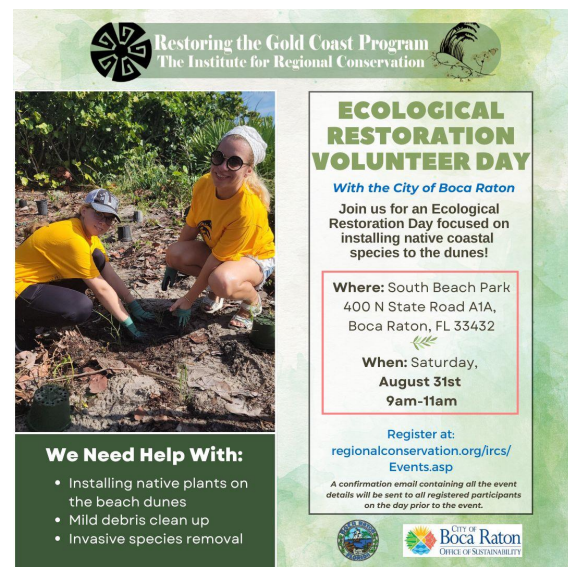


Ecological Restoration Volunteer Day at South Beach Park, Boca Raton

Saturday, August 31st 9am to 11am

Join IRC at South Beach Park in Boca Raton. We will be installing native coastal plants and discuss the importance of Coastal Conservation. Volunteers will learn how to identify coastal native plants, the importance of building a biodiverse dune system and how that helps protect from storms and so much more!

It is a great way to gain community service hours. To sign up check out our [IRC events page](#)



"Climate Change Claims First Plant Victim in Florida: The Extinction of the Keys Tree Cactus"

In a deeply concerning development, the Key Largo Tree Cactus (*Pilosocereus millspaughii*) has officially gone extinct in the wild in the Florida Keys as of July 2024. This unique cactus, once found only in the remote mangrove forests of the Keys, has succumbed to the relentless pressures of climate change, including rising sea levels, saltwater inundation, and habitat loss. Despite years of monitoring and conservation efforts by institutions like the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and the Institute for Regional Conservation (IRC), the last remnants of this species have been lost, marking it as the first plant species in Florida to go extinct due to climate change.

The Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden has been at the forefront of the efforts to save the Key Largo Tree Cactus. "Unfortunately, the Key Largo tree cactus may be a bellwether for how other low-lying coastal plants will respond to climate change," said Jennifer Possley,

Fairchild's Director of Regional Conservation. The cactus had faced repeated challenges, from herbivory by small mammals to soil depletion caused by rising sea levels and hurricanes, particularly after Hurricane Irma in 2017. Despite relocation attempts and growing cuttings in greenhouses, the natural population could not be saved ([Florida Museum](#)) ([EcoWatch](#)).



Photo credit: ([Florida Museum](#))

Our very own George Gann, Executive Director of the IRC, highlighted the broader implications of this loss. "We are on the front lines of biodiversity loss," he said, noting that more than one in four native plant species in South Florida are critically threatened with regional extinction. Gann emphasized that the loss of the Key Largo Tree Cactus underscores the urgent need for comprehensive conservation strategies to protect other species that are similarly vulnerable. This extinction is not just a loss for Florida but a warning signal for coastal ecosystems worldwide, illustrating the tangible impacts of climate change on biodiversity ([ScienceDaily](#)).

Spotlight on our Field Technician "Joel Otero"

We're thrilled to spotlight our field technician, Joel Otero, who recently passed his Florida Aquatic Pest Control Training with flying colors! This certification is a testament to his dedication and expertise in managing invasive species and protecting our valuable wetland ecosystems. His achievement not only enhances our team's capabilities but also strengthens our commitment to conservation excellence. Congratulations, Joel Otero, on this well-deserved accomplishment!





Thank you to all who have supported IRC's programs with a \$20 or larger donation in the last month: Lisa Peterfreund and David Teich

Thank you to our **Monthly Sustainers** who donate \$25 or more each month: Barbara McAdam, Lindsay Boehner and Valerie Seasholtz.

We would extend a special "Thank you" to our monthly donor on their anniversary: Maria Rowley

While we get funding for some great projects, those funds rarely cover all of our costs, so we really do need your support to continue our important work.

Consider supporting our efforts which allow us to provide important conservation services such as improving our free online resources, increasing protection of rare plants and animals, restoring native ecosystems, and advocating for better public policy. Click the button below.

If you're interested in being a sponsor of Natives For Your Neighborhood, please reach out to **Katherine Hardial**.

IRC has an E-Trade account. Please contact us about giving gifts of stock.



Pineland clustervine
(*Jacquemontia curtissi*)

PLEASE DONATE

Your donations empower us to enhance our free online resources, safeguard rare plants and animals, restore native ecosystems, and champion more effective public policies for conservation.

Recent Volunteer Day at

South Pointe Park, Miami Beach

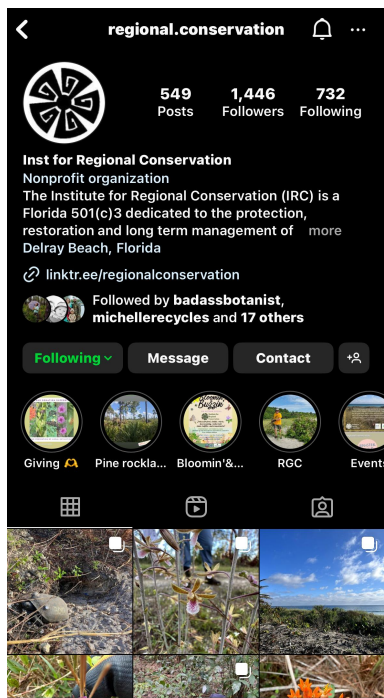
On Saturday, July 27th, we held our 2nd Volunteer Event at South Pointe Park in Miami Beach. With the help of 19 dedicated volunteers, we successfully installed 100 native coastal dune plants! A special thanks goes to IRC's Field Tech Alex Gascon and Riki Bonnema from Miami Beach Botanical Garden for their invaluable assistance during the event. We appreciate support for this work from the Miami Beach Rising Grant.

We also would like to extend our gratitude to our board member Donna Shore for her ongoing support on and off the field!

If you're looking to get involved, make sure to check out our [IRC events page](#) for upcoming volunteer events.



Follow us on Social Media



The best way to stay up to date on all things IRC is to follow us on social media! Every week we spotlight native plants for "Wildflower Wednesday" and give a glimpse into one of our many unique projects from our "From the Field Friday" posts. You can also follow our socials where we share our event photos and lots of relevant information about the environment and beyond.

So, if you haven't already, follow us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)!

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