

The Upper Captiva Community Panel has established a committee charged with considering the ramifications of and approach to creating a Lee County/Upper Captiva code for eradicating Brazilian pepper on North Captiva Island in the residential community north of the state land. A report will be presented to the UCCP Board at the September 20, 2011 meeting. The committee's first meeting was August 19, 4:00 pm at the Tompkins home.

The rationale for creating a code is clear and compelling. Brazilian pepper is a fast-growing invasive species that crowds out native vegetation and can provoke allergic reactions in some people (it's in the poison ivy family). Pepper trees encroach on pathways; hampering the passage of carts and emergency vehicles. Maintaining road clearance is an ongoing island expense. Local governments have a long history of requiring property owners to control nuisances on their property that impact the general health, safety and welfare. These existing regulations include zoning, building standards and code enforcement for trash and overgrown vacant lots. Brazilian pepper infestation continues to be an equally important nuisance that is not currently covered in existing codes. The majority of respondents to the UCCP survey of 2011 support establishing such a code.

Unimproved lots will be the focus of the code since developed parcels are almost 100% clear of pepper and existing Lee County codes specify a list of invasive exotics that must be removed before new construction begins. The challenge will not be in writing the "owners must" language, it will be to devise a tactical plan that reduces owner aggravation and offers some incentives to cooperate and comply.

Sanibel has a Brazilian Pepper Eradication Program adopted in 1996. It was designed based on this carrot and stick approach and has been very successful. Key aspects of the Sanibel plan:

- The island was divided into six zones and eradication was scheduled one zone at a time, each to be completely clear of pepper before moving to the next.
- The program started, by zone, with a "voluntary phase" with incentives for about a year, followed by a "mandatory phase" with no incentives, legal deadlines and fines for non compliance.
- Owners were offered a 20% cost rebate and free curbside waste pickup during the voluntary phase.
- Sanibel launched an extensive communication/education campaign to make sure that all owners understood the plan and its rationale, and the rules of the game.

Questions for UCCP board consideration:

1. To avoid having dead trees standing on lots (like the Australian pines on the state land) the peppers should be cut down close to the ground and the stumps immediately painted with a strong herbicide. How will all this horticultural waste be removed from the island? Could it be chipped or burned?
2. Are there any funding sources that could be used for program incentives: Civic Association? LeeCo tax rebates? Grants?
3. How can we determine the extent of our pepper problem, i.e. the number of trees: Lot by lot count? Aerial photos?
4. Might there be a completely DIY program, "Pepper Buster" volunteer teams who will clear lots (with the owners permission)?
5. What will the timing be for the program? When is end game? Will it happen by subdivisions?
6. BIG QUESTION: Removing all B. pepper from Upper Captiva will be the largest public works project

since post-Charley cleanup and could extend for years. Beyond LeeCo code enforcement (anticipated minimum involvement), who is going to administer this program: UCCP? A citizens committee? Contracted crews?

David Tompkins, Committee Chair
10 Sep 11

UPPER CAPTIVA COMMUNITY PANEL
BRAZILIAN PEPPER CODE COMMITTEE STATUS REPORT
Dave Tompkins, chair; Tom levin, Dick Lewis