Communities Come Together to Remove Invasive Trees: An Example of Cooperation, Volunteerism, and Multiplication

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The Shores of Long Bayou Condo HOA is responsible for maintaining a Nature Reserve on its 77-acre campus.
First, Let’s Scope Out the Job

• Problem: Particular area totally overgrown with Brazilian peppers
• Location: Beside Snowy Egret lake
• Density: Too thick to penetrate - Can’t even estimate the job!
• Problem: Manpower and Money
  • Manpower: Too big a job for volunteers - Need professionals
  • Money: Just try prying money from an HOA!
• Professional Help: Get three estimates
• Money: Look for conservation grants and HOA partners

At first it looked insurmountable. Only by chopping the elephant into bite-size pieces (networking), we could we eat the whole thing.
Removal of Invasive Species

- Our Goal: Build teams, increase conservation awareness, and reach out to other communities with solutions
- Difficult and expensive job: Needs tree-service professionals
  - 15 years of wild growth
  - Required chain saws / Poisoning of cut-stumps
  - Large truck-loads of debris and stumps
- Bring five communities (stake-holders) together
  - Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) ($3K): Seed money
  - The Shores HOA ($3K): Nature Reserve owner
  - Long Bayou HOA ($2.3K): Mutual benefits?
  - Unit Owner ($4.4K): Pepper removal in Nature Reserve
  - Volunteer labor: Equivalent of $8K (National rate of $24/hr)
- Winning the war for a “pepper-free” zone in Pinellas County

TBEP’s mini-Grant was multiplied over seven times, for Brazilian Pepper removal in an urban Nature Reserve.
The peppers were impenetrable!
We knew the estimates would be high!
Tree service estimators couldn’t even find their way through the maze!
We used Google-Earth for estimation.
Division of Responsibility?

How do you get our neighbors to pay for eradication, when they don’t even own the property?
Conundrum

- The “Shores of Long Bayou HOA” owns all shoreline property
- Brazilian Peppers are on the shoreline
- “Long Bayou HOA” (pool and tennis / shuffleboard courts) stand to gain the most (lake view)
- Still not enough incentive to spring money from our neighboring HOA

Long Bayou knew that we would find a way to remove the peppers if they held onto their money.
Coercion: The Story Behind the Story

- Manager of Long Bayou HOA’s wife (Heather) managed The Shores HOA at one time
- Crazy lady reported The Shores HOA for dumping dead trees
- FWC Code Enforcement Officers arrived at The Shores HOA
- Heather focused on the guns on FWC officers’ hips
- Volunteers took care of the dead trees
- Heather calmed down
- Long Bayou HOA had been cutting large peppers that obstructed their view and leaving the remains in place along the shoreline

Our only option left was to: “Pay your share or we’ll turn you in to the FWC.”
Estimates, Conservation Grants and HOA Partnerships

• Three Estimates: El Cheapo, Millennium and LauRose
  • Millennium Services of Pinellas got the bid at $13,000
• Won three Competitive Conservation Grants:
  • Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) mini-Grant: $3,000
  • CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area): $533
  • FLEPPC's Kathy Craddock Burks Education Grant: $300
• Three Home-Owner Association (HOA) Partnerships:
  • The Shores HOA: $3,000
  • Long Bayou HOA: $2,300
  • Individual Owner: $4,400
• Finishing Partnerships: Volunteers, Keep Pinellas Beautiful (KPB) Adopt-A-Shoreline program, Tree services (“free” mulch suppliers)

It was a tight squeeze to hire the professionals.
By keeping the chips on-site, to be used as mulch, we saved money on the overall job.
Brazilian peppers blocked our neighbor’s view of the lake.
Many of the Peppers Were Quite Large

After fifteen years of neglect, the peppers were out of control.
Invasive Brazilian pepper trees had displaced the mangroves on our watershed, later transformed into a picnic area.
Volunteers spent many hours removing pepper saplings and spreading “free” mulch from Keep Pinellas Beautiful (KPB) and other tree services.
I Want to Help!

Just as we see at City, County and State parks, we need a combo of volunteers and professionals to save money and maintain our environment.

**Smaller Jobs**
- Volunteers
- Trails
- Ponds
- Hand Tools
- Paper / Plastic Removal
- Invasive Vines & Saplings

**Larger Jobs**
- Professional Lawns
- Lakes
- Chain Saws and Machines
- Tree Debris Disposal
- Invasive Forest
Volunteers come with an attitude

... an attitude of service.
... and they multiplied.
Combat peppers which destroy our watershed

We strive to make our condo campus a “pepper-free” zone.
We successfully increased our volunteer team from only three to fifteen over the last year.
Results: Multiplication Beyond Budget

• Volunteer Time: We *nearly doubled* our budget estimates
  • Budget: **240** hours of volunteer labor
  • Actual: **350** hours

• Financial: Expenses *more than doubled* original budget estimates
  • Budget: **$9,649**
  • Actual: **$24,484**

• Community-Involvement: *Multiplied X5* thru networking of resources
  • Budget: TBEP + Shores of Long Bayou for pepper removal
  • Actual: Networking of other condos, grants and individuals

• Education: Publicized project in community and Bay Area
  • Budget: Local newspaper and in area newsletter
  • Actual: Four articles in Seminole Beacon and six publications

*Each of these items increase the general feeling that “Our community cares about the environment.”*
Now, it’s a tiny oasis in an urban setting.
All Pepper Trees Removed

Together, we removed all of the peppers, to yield a picnic area and a great view of the lake.
“Golden Mangrove Award” as TBEP’s most outstanding Bay Area mini-grant project for 2015

The Shores of Long Bayou Condos recently won an award from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. Several of the volunteers gathered at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council to receive a plaque for the best mini-grant project. The group restored several stormwater ponds, an area infested with Brazilian peppers and a Nature Trail on their 77-acre campus. The group's talents ranged from mulching, maintaining ponds, removing invasive species, and creating website.
Thank You

- Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP)
- FLEPPC CISMA Conservation Grant
- FLEPPC's Kathy Craddock Burks Education Grant

The End

...without whose help, we never would have started or finished.