

Cooperative Weed/Invasive Species Management Area (CWMA/CISMA)

A perspective from the Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP)

Published in Natural Area News, Fall 2008; www.naturalarea.org

Florida is becoming a leader in the national effort to build invasive species partnerships. In 2007, the Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP) began promoting the concept of Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas and Weed Management Areas in Florida. The goal of this effort is to encourage development of local partnerships among federal, state, and local governmental agencies, tribes, private individuals, and various interested groups to manage invasive species in a defined area. FISP Partners are committed to protecting Florida's biodiversity and natural lands through their respective programs. Through this commitment, FISP is striving to focus statewide efforts on prevention of invasive species as well as successful treatment methods. By working together, the partnership goal is to encourage development of innovative management approaches, provide new tools, reduce implementation costs, and ultimately increase effectiveness for control of invasive plant and animal species for land managers.

Currently, FISP is comprised of NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service), USFWS (US Fish and Wildlife Service) Partners program and Coastal program, USACE (US Army Corps of Engineers), FFWCC (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), FDOF (Florida Division of Forestry), FDOT (Florida Department of Transportation), SWFWMD (SW Florida Water Management District), Palm Beach County Florida, FLEPPC (Florida Exotic Plant Pest Council), The Nature Conservancy and UF-IFAS (University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences).

What is a CISMA?

“A partnership of federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, private individuals, and various interested groups that manage noxious weeds or invasive plants in defined area.”

While “Cooperative Weed Management Area” (CWMA) has become the generic term nationally for weed management areas, and this term is widely used in western states, Florida and other eastern states are expanding this approach to address animals as well as plants. In Florida, “CWMA” is more often replaced with “Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area” (CISMA) to capture this broader definition. “CISMA” is used as the generic name in this article.

What are its five basic characteristics?

(from: www.weedcenter.org/weed_mgmt_areas/wma_overview.html)

1. Definition of the geographical area distinguished by a common geography, invasive species problem, community, climate, political boundary, or land use;
2. Involvement or representation of the majority of landowners and natural resource managers in the defined area;
3. Establishment of a steering committee;
4. Commitment to cooperation;
5. Development of a comprehensive plan that addresses the management or prevention of one or more invasive species.

Do they need to be called “CISMA”?

Not necessarily. CWMA's have existed in the western U.S. for many years. Many of them use the name ‘Cooperative Weed Management Area’, or just ‘Weed Management Area’. The concept and name is now familiar to government agencies and private foundations, such as the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. However, whether or not a group is called “CWMA,” “CISMA,” or some other name, there is a difference between an informal invasives working group and a formal CISMA type of organization. A CISMA

provides a formal commitment to cooperate by participants (see step 9 in “Organizing a CWMA” in the CWMA Cookbook at www.mipn.org/cwma.html).

Who is involved in the development and formation of a CISMA?

Federal, state, and local government agencies, tribes, NGOs, private landowners, vendors and contractors, and various interested groups would be involved in the formation of a CISMA. The state and federal agency members would be local level staff, but empowered to participate.

How could they improve invasive species management on public and private land in Florida?

Landowners in the western states organized into CWMAs when they realized they needed a new approach to combat invasive plant problems. It has proven to be a successful approach.

Subsequently, there are now sources of federal funding tied to the CISMA concept (examples PL 108-412, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Pulling Together Initiative).

CISMAs can:

- Cross boundaries; invasive plant management can be carried out along ecological, rather than political boundaries;
- Allow partners (public and private) to share and leverage limited resources;
- Be highly visible, building community awareness;
- Present a united effort to state and federal legislators;
- Reduce risk of control efforts as all partners are using Best Management Practices (BMP);
- Provide an early detection and rapid response network;
- Secure and coordinate funding;
- Improve effectiveness of effort and ultimately reduce costs;
- The State of Florida’s Wildlife Legacy Initiative “Keeping Common Species Common” identifies Invasive Exotic plants and animals as a critical source of stress across most of Florida’s terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats. The focus of the Strategy is on conservation of wildlife through voluntary and cooperative efforts.

How could they be developed in Florida?

The boundaries of a CISMA are established to focus on a common problem and a defined geographic area. They could be organized along pre-existing boundaries such as county lines, water management district boundaries, or Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Invasive Plant Management Section Regional Working Groups (groups already established to address treatment of invasive exotics on public conservation lands). They could be formed through an organic grassroots movement and/or formally delineated by the State. Each CISMA would need a Leader and a Steering Committee to launch the effort. Landowners and partners within that geographic area would be contacted to see about their involvement.

Each CISMA would be responsible for developing its own plans and priorities which could include the following components: Education, Prevention, Early Detection, Control Efforts and monitoring. Priorities would include targeted species (plants & animals). Examples of plan and MOU templates are available at www.weedcenter.org and Florida specific examples will be posted at www.floridainvasives.org. Members of FISP are working with existing CISMAs in Florida to provide a consistency in approach for the formation of CISMAs and to provide resources so that newly forming CISMAs can learn from others and avoid re-inventing the wheel.

When could this happen in Florida?

Now! Twelve CISMA organizations have already sprung up in Florida, including the Everglades CISMA and the Marion County Invasive Species Council. The First Coast Invasive Working Group, Keys Invasive Exotic Task Force, and the Apalachicola River Watershed Invasive Working Group are just some examples of regional working groups that are working towards similar efforts. These groups are already realizing the success of partnership through joint training efforts, increased communication and successful grant awards. FISP is now hosting a monthly conference call/web meeting for Florida CISMAs. This is providing a forum for existing CISMAs to share ideas,

