

United Nations Recognizes Gulfstream Ecosystem Restoration

by Chris Stockton
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What you need to know:

- A Gulfstream mitigation project has been recognized in a United Nations report.
- The 400-acre forest restoration project is a global success story.
- The project was a condition of approval during the pipeline's original construction.

Gulfstream Natural Gas System's 400-acre Lake Wales Forest Restoration project is one of 30 successful environmental initiatives recently featured in a report released globally by the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#).

Titled *Dead Planet, Living Planet: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Restoration for Sustainable Development*, the report showcases successful environmental restoration projects across the globe.

"It's pretty amazing to see this project recognized at this level," said Brent Simmons, Gulfstream Environmental Scientist. "Hopefully it's a model that lead to successful restoration and mitigation success in other areas."



The Lake Wales Forest Restoration project is a successfully restored mosaic of upland and wetland forests, marshes and rare xeric scrub habitat on the Lake Wales Ridge in Polk County, Fla.

Back when the Gulfstream pipeline was being permitted in the late 1990s, regulatory agencies determined that as a condition of approval the company would need to conduct mitigation to offset unavoidable environmental impacts.

Veteran landscape ecologist Kevin Erwin designed, permitted and managed the restoration. He says the Lake Wales project was selected because it exemplifies how successful ecosystem restoration results in net ecosystem benefits by restoring landscape and wildlife functions and diversity to the region.

"The international significance of the Lake Wales Forest project is due to the fact that historically the site was a



mosaic of habitats, so biologically diverse that 35 of the plant and wildlife species now found again on the restored site are state and federally listed," he says.

The effort began with the removal of exotic and nuisance plant species, then followed with the restoration of historic ground and surface water conditions. Once that had been accomplished, direct seeding and planting of grasses herbaceous plants trees and shrubs began. More than 100,000 tree seedlings were planted to restore the swamp forest.

"The site was systematically cleared and drained five decades ago for agricultural production. Today the historic ground and surface water levels have been achieved and native habitats restored through ecological engineering," adds Kevin. "It was a very challenging project, but it was also very exciting."

Gulfstream is currently working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to permanently transfer the Lake Wales Forest site into the National Wildlife Refuge system as a gift possibly in late 2011 or early 2012. It is also working to have the entire site designated as a "Wetland of International Importance."

The UNEP report underlines that maintaining and managing intact ecosystems must be a key priority. Given that so many of them are already degraded, it says that restoration must now be an equal priority.

The report cites evidence that well-planned, science-based, community supported programs can recover 25 to 44 percent of the original services alongside the animals, plants and other biodiversity of the former intact system.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said at the launch of the report, "Well-planned investments and re-investments in the restoration of these vast, natural and nature-based utilities not only has a high rate of return, but will be central, if not fundamental, to sustainability in a world of rising aspirations, populations, incomes and demands on the Earth's natural resources."