

Florida Golden Aster

By Libby Hopkins



The Florida golden aster or *Chrysopsis floridana* as it's known by its scientific name, is one of the many imperiled species found at Lake Manatee State Park. This species of plant is most notable because not only is it recognized as a threatened plant in the state, but also on the federal level.

What led to the plant being endangered is that much of its natural habitat was transformed into land for agricultural use in the 1970s. It wasn't until 1988 that a plan was made to recover the population of the Florida golden aster and conduct research into its growth.

This plant thrives in areas of xeric hammock and Florida scrub, which is plentiful at Lake Manatee State Park. Because of this, the park has been a major site for studies conducted concerning the plant. Population studies are done every three years to monitor the growth of the Florida golden aster as well as studies assessing the best ways to increase growth. The research includes noting the effects of soil and light on the flowers and what conditions are ideal for maximum germination rates.

A partner in helping preserve the flower has been the Bok Tower Gardens. They have actually cryogenically preserved the seeds of this plant in the event that they continue to be threatened in the future.

Though this little yellow flower appears to be unassuming, it is an integral part of the environment at Lake Manatee. The hope is that with proper protection and continued research, the Florida golden aster will soon no longer be an endangered plant species.

The Florida golden aster is a perennial herb. This plant grows approximately one to one and a half feet tall and has yellow daisy-like blooms about one inch in diameter. This herb has a short life cycle and reproduces by seeds, which are dispersed by the wind.

When the species was listed as endangered in 1986, all nine known populations of the species occurred in five locations in southeastern Hillsborough County. Since the listing of the species, increased survey efforts have resulted in the discovery of additional populations, including occurrences further inland from the initial coastal populations. Many of the newly discovered locations have since been acquired as conserva-

tion lands with active conservation management activities implemented to improve habitat conditions.

Also benefiting the species, outplantings have occurred on conservation lands in Hardee, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Pinellas counties.

The proposal to delist the Florida golden aster is based primarily on the current number of populations on protected conservation lands and because the geographic distribution has exceeded the criteria in the recovery plan.

This species was listed as endangered on Sept. 26, 1986 under the ESA. On Feb. 8, 1989, the Service released a recovery plan. Five-year reviews were completed in 2009 and 2017. Both indicated that the species' status was improving.

