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County to begin removal of exotics on Rattlesnake Island

Sarasota County Parks and Recreation, Coastal Resources and the West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND) are set to begin an exotic removal project on Rattlesnake Island this week. The project will target invasive exotic plants such as Brazilian pepper and carrotwood trees, resulting in reduced fire risk, enhanced park accessibility and native habitats, as well as improved public safety. The project, being undertaken by RA Markuson, Inc. of Nokomis, is expected to take approximately one month and is being paid for by the WCIND.

Brazilian pepper, a non-native nuisance invasive plant, has spread over much of the island, crowding out native plants and making public access nearly impossible. Once removed, the exotics will be replaced with native plant life. According to the Brazilian Pepper Management Plan produced by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, Brazilian pepper now covers hundreds of thousands of acres in south and central Florida, as well as many of the islands on the east and west coasts of the state. Biannual exotics surveys conducted by the South Florida Water Management District indicate that Brazilian pepper is the most widespread exotic plant in the state - occupying more than 700,000 acres.

“Removal of the non-native plants is a priority because some areas of the island are virtually inaccessible. The increased population of Brazilian Pepper also results in increased risk of fire. Removing it will result in improved public safety for recreational opportunities including picnicking, fishing and trail access at this popular day-trip boating spot,” said Parks and Recreation’s Jerris Foote.

For more information on exotic plants and their effects on the Florida environment, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000.