# Florida SEE Grapevine

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## ANNUAL MEETING


**The Florida SEE Annual Meeting will be held May 31-June 1 at the Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve Interpretive Center in Fort Myers Florida. All members are invited to attend the board of directors meeting, informational presentations, off-site interpretive programs and more.**

The Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve consists of 3,500 acres of intermingled wetland and upland ecosystems. A mile long boardwalk makes the wetlands accessible year round offering great wildlife viewing opportunities.

Registration and meeting agenda will be posted by April 1.

## JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS!

*Pete Corradino*

## WEBINAR SERIES SCHEDULE SET

**ECO-TOUR Provider Webinar series**

Save the dates for these informative webinars that begin in June on the second Wednesday monthly at 7:00pm. FREE To Florida SEE members! Our board members from Florida Sea Grant have confirmed the following topics:

**June 12: Seagrass Ecology**
**July 10: Invasive Species**
**Aug. 14: Plastic Pollution**
**Sept. 11: Citizen Science Wildlife Monitoring**
**Oct. 9: Understanding Red Tide**
**Nov. 13: Corals of Florida**

**Webinar descriptions and registration links will be posted in mid-March.**

## THESE PLANTS NEED YOUR HELP!

*Brit Patterson-Weber*

### Seeking Florida SEE Board members!

Are you passionate about preserving Florida's natural beauty and promoting sustainable travel? Join us at the Florida Society of Ethical Ecotourism as a board member!
We're looking for dedicated individuals who share our commitment to ethical ecotourism practices and environmental conservation. If you have experience in ecotourism, environmental science, business development, marketing, or nonprofit management, we'd love to hear from you.
As a board member, you'll have the opportunity to shape our organization's mission, policies, and initiatives, while contributing to the growth of responsible tourism in Florida. Click here for more information.
If interested, please reach out to PeteCorradino@floridasee.org with a brief statement outlining your interest in serving on our board.
Let's work together to promote sustainable tourism and protect Florida's natural treasures for generations to come!

## GET SOCIAL!

Florida SEE is on **Instagram and Facebook**!
Members- share your posts with us for added promotion!
It will help us grow our image library AND promote your business!
Tag us @floridasee.org

## Beach vegetation traps sand and stabilizes coastal dunes

“Season” in Southwest Florida means a bevy of activities in our coastal communities. Chief among them: beach trips. The beach is one of our most celebrated natural resources, and rightly so. We know beaches as tourist magnets and economic drivers. But we less often consider the beach as habitat, a wildlife corridor spanning over 800 sandy miles along the state’s perimeter. Sea turtles, shorebirds, crabs and more depend on beaches for food and shelter. From our beach chairs, we may subconsciously note swooping shorebirds and scurrying crabs. Do we do the same with coastal plants? Doubtful. In fact, we turn our backs to them! Yet, the beach ecosystem wouldn’t be without plants. Sand-trapping vegetation literally anchors the beach, forming dunes up and down the coastline. These dunes provide food and shelter for wildlife, and they help shield the human environment against coastal flooding and high waves. These plants need your attention—And your help.

First, I challenge you to look carefully at what’s growing along the shoreline. At first glance, you may see merely a patch of green. Look again. How many species do you observe?

Each is doing a special job. Plants like railroad vine grow quickly and hold onto sand with their roots, stems and leaves. They are considered “dune-initiating” plants. Once the initiators have done their job, slower-growing species like bitter panicgrass can take root. This clumping grass traps sand and elevates dunes. These are just two examples of the many plants that have adapted over time to thrive in loose, nutrient-poor sand, tolerate salt spray, and survive periodic battering by storms. Together, they make a resilient ecosystem.

Shorelines exist in a state of dynamic equilibrium — that is, there are ever-changing adjustments made to ever-changing conditions. You’ve probably noticed this: one day, you may see rough and tumbling surf; the next, the Gulf may look like perfectly still glass. Sometimes, the tides give us only a narrow band of sand upon which to set our beach chairs; other days, you have enough room for a game of football. The one constant: plants.

Think of the beach ecosystem like it's a bank. The dune is a savings account, and the wind and waves make daily deposits and withdrawals of sand. Beach vegetation traps sand and stabilizes dunes, essentially keeping the elements from depleting the account.

When you imagine dunes, though, you might picture towering sand mounds. While "mound of sand" is the very definition of a dune, a dune's size is determined by tidal range, onshore winds, sand particle size and available sand. The dunes on our coast will never be imposing behemoths, but that doesn't mean they are unimportant. Even our smaller-scale structures offer protection against storm surge, as they dissipate wind and wave energy. There is a caveat. Nothing can prevent damage from storms on the scale of Hurricane Ian. However, a healthy, biodiverse coastline provides better sanctuary for our wildlife and more resilience to everyday stress from wind, waves and storms without names.

***Britt Patterson-Weber is board member of Florida SEE and Vice President of Education & Interpretation at Naples Botanical Garden.***