

**Program Name:** Invasive Exotic Species Management  
**Project Name:** **Develop and Implement a FWS Invasive Species Strike Team (ISST)**  
**Project ID:** 2504  
**Lead Agency:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
**Funding Source:** Federal  
**Goal(s) Addressed:** 2.B.1

**Measurable Output(s):** Project acres treated including EDRR projects, gross area surveyed, actual infested acres treated, cost per acre, herbicide amounts utilized, prioritized lists of invasive plants and animals, modify or enhanced control methods, funding totals, invasive exotic plant species targeted, inventory and monitoring methodologies for invasive plants and animals, treatment effectiveness, assessment and evaluation.

**Project Synopsis:** Secure and appropriate Congressional funding to develop and implement a highly mobile FWS Invasive Species Strike Team (2-member) to rapidly respond to, and control incipient or newly established infestations (EDRR) of highly invasive exotic species (plants and animals) occurring on National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) in Florida. The Region 4 Invasive Species Strike Team (R4 ISST) will provide administration, funding and oversight support for projects involving control and treatment of moderate and dense infestations of invasive exotic plants utilizing highly specialized and experienced exotic plant contractors on SE and Florida NWRs. In addition, the R4 ISST will provide technical assistance to Florida and SE NWR refuge managers and staff concerning invasive species identification, control and management, and lastly, will represent the interest of the FWS on associated invasive species task forces or working groups, i.e., NEWTT, FIATT and Regional Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA) established throughout peninsular Florida.

**Current Status:** The FWS Invasive Species Strike Team was implemented and became operational as of October 1, 2004 (FY05), and will continue operations for purposes for which established assuming recurring Congressional cyclical funding allocations are received. The FWS ISST works collaboratively with all other local, county, state and federal agencies, and NGOs concerning invasive species management in the Everglades and throughout Florida. Measurable output information identified above is updated regularly in both ECOSTEMS and WEEDAR exotic tracking databases.

**Estimated Cost:** ≥\$10 million

**Project Schedule:**

Start Date: October 1, 2004  
 Finish Date: N/A

**Detailed Project Budget Information (\$1000s)**

|              | Thru 2008    | 2009       | 2010         | 2011             | 2012             | 2013             | 2014             | Balance to complete | Total        |
|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Federal      | 2,890        | 978        | 1,200        | <sup>2</sup> 739 | <sup>1</sup> 494 | <sup>1</sup> 494 | <sup>1</sup> 494 | N/A                 | 7,289        |
| State        |              |            |              |                  |                  |                  |                  |                     |              |
| Tribal       |              |            |              |                  |                  |                  |                  |                     |              |
| Local        |              |            |              |                  |                  |                  |                  |                     |              |
| Other        |              |            |              |                  |                  |                  |                  |                     |              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>2,890</b> | <b>978</b> | <b>1,200</b> | <b>739</b>       | <b>494</b>       | <b>494</b>       | <b>494</b>       | <b>N/A</b>          | <b>7,289</b> |

<sup>1</sup>FWS ISST base allocation ; <sup>2</sup>Tentative base allocation

**Contact:** William G. Thomas, Jr, Region 4 Invasive Species Strike Team Leader, USFWS, (239) 472-1100 x 248, [William\\_G\\_Thomas@fws.gov](mailto:William_G_Thomas@fws.gov)

**Additional Information:** As of June 2011, the FWS R4 ISST was operating devoid of the Assistant Strike Team Leader position leaving the Strike Team Leader as the sole position comprising the team. Due to budget shortfalls and sequestration, no effort will be made to fill this critical position which will have impacts on the ability of the R4 ISST to participate in refuge EDRR projects, and regional multi-agency invasive-related CISMA events. Regardless of this short-coming, the R4 ISST Leader continues to secure available refuge staff to complete EDRR non-native invasive plant projects on Florida NWRs, and participates in CISMA invasive workdays when available.

The Fiscal Year 2013 budget for the R4 ISST was approximately \$494,000 – this includes salary for the leader and assistant positions. Only \$173,000 was available to field refuges for invasive plant and animal projects – a 78% decline from 2009 and 2010 funding levels, and a decline of 26% when compared to 2013- all the direct result of declining budgets and sequestration.

In 2013, five (5) projects were funded on Florida NWRs. The R4 ISST Leader, using available refuge staff, completed 22+ Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) non-native invasive plant projects on J.N. “Ding” Darling NWR as travel was restricted due to sequestration. The gross acres covered were 129, and the infested acres treated were 49.25. In addition, the R4 ISST provided assistance to the Southwest Florida Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (SW FL-CISMA) serving on the steering committee, invasive plant and animal EDRR sub-committees, and managed a SW FL-CISMA Challenge Cost Share grant. The team participated in five SW FL-CISMA events: the 1<sup>st</sup> annual SW FL-CISMA large constrictor survey, Pet Amnesty Days (2) and invasive plant workdays (2). Additionally, the R4 ISST assisted the USDA-ARS Invasive Plant Research Laboratory in releasing 250 air potato leaf beetles at three locations on Sanibel Island, and monitoring their impacts and effects.