



# Natural Areas TRAINING ACADEMY

*2021*

*Annual Report*

## Farewell and best wishes to Dr. Holly Ober!

This year was the 22nd year of operation for the Natural Areas Training Academy (NATA), marked by several significant changes for the program. First and foremost, Dr. Holly Ober, NATA's director from 2008-2021, left Florida to embark on a new journey out west as the Associate Dean for Science Outreach and Program Leader for Forestry and Natural Resources Extension at Oregon State University. We greatly appreciate her dedication to maintaining NATA as a remarkable resource for professional development in sustainable management of natural areas in Florida. Dr. Ober truly was a one-of-a-kind mentor and supervisor, and NATA will miss her contributions to the program greatly.



## Welcome back, Dr. Shelly Johnson!

When pondering who could preside as the director of NATA moving forward, Dr. Ober didn't have to contemplate long. The person most suited to fill her shoes, Dr. Shelly Johnson, was the former NATA workshop coordinator from 2015-2017 and the current State Specialized Agent in Natural Resources for UF/IFAS Extension. She also is involved in the development of several other programs focused on wildlife conservation in Florida. Dr. Johnson received her Ph.D. from UF in 2015, with research focused on the tradeoffs among biodiversity, social value, and ecosystem services of wildlife habitat in Florida forests. She stepped into this role in July and since then, NATA has offered several trainings this fall, with more scheduled for 2022!



## End of service and onward

Meghan Lauer, NATA's workshop coordinator since 2017, will be changing careers in the near future and thus will be retiring from the position at the end of 2021. She is thankful for the opportunities afforded to her in the role. She adds, "I will look back fondly at the times spent at workshops – roasting marshmallows and conversing with participants/instructors over the campfire at Gold Head and Wekiwa Springs State Parks, wading through the wetland at Longleaf Flatwoods Preserve, transporting participants to the live fire day at Ordway-Swisher Biological Station – and countless other occasions. I was so fortunate to be able to re-connect with co-workers from my previous occupation working for the Florida State Parks in this role, as well as meet so many wonderful people working for natural resources in the state of Florida."



## Year in Review

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact our operations during the 2021 calendar year. We were not able to offer as many trainings in-person as we would have liked to, but did manage to host **6 workshops** (3 in a 100% virtual format, 3 in a hybrid format). Our hybrid trainings require the participant to complete online coursework via the Canvas learning platform in advance of attending a live virtual (via Zoom) or in-person component. Both parts are required in order for the participant to obtain his or her certificate.

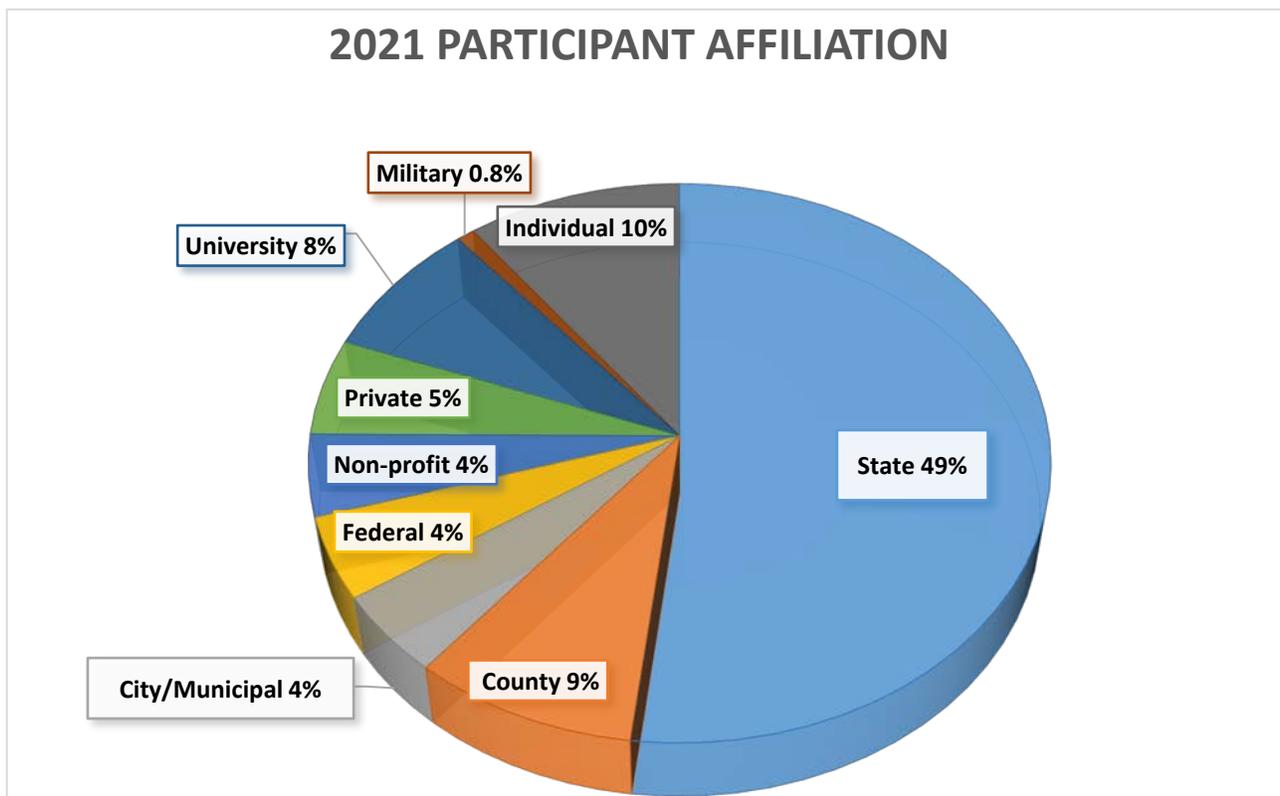
The demand for our 100% virtual trainings increased, due to the nationwide shortage of in-person training opportunities. The hybrid-style workshops were well-received by participants, as they reported they allowed for individuals to work at their own pace, yet also provided for in-person discussion and networking opportunities.

The 6 workshops were attended by **245 participants**, who represented **48 different organizations**. This effort represents **6,413 instructor-student contact hours**.

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### 2021 Workshop Participant Affiliation

Participants represented many levels of government agencies (federal, state, county, city, and military), universities, non-profits, and the private sector. This variety of backgrounds helps to enrich the learning experience provided at each workshop, even if in a virtual setting. 2021 participants represented 48 different organizations, with many “attending” from out of state.



## ***THANK YOU to our 2021 INSTRUCTORS***

NATA instructors are managers with many years of experience with public and private land management agencies. One of the virtues of our workshops is that seasoned managers teach folks at earlier stages in their careers to become even better at what they do. Knowledgeable, experienced instructors are the key to the success of the Natural Areas Training Academy. We are so appreciative of our instructors' willingness to teach during these trying times and acknowledge the contributions of this year's **41 instructors** who generously offered their time, knowledge, and expertise. NATA would not exist if it were not for the contributions of these experts. Instructors represented **12** agencies and organizations in 2021, including:

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Tall Timbers
- University of Florida
- Sarasota County
- University of Central Florida
- Pennsylvania Game Commission
- The Nature Conservancy
- Alachua County
- National Weather Service
- St. Johns River Water Management District
- USDA
- City of Gainesville

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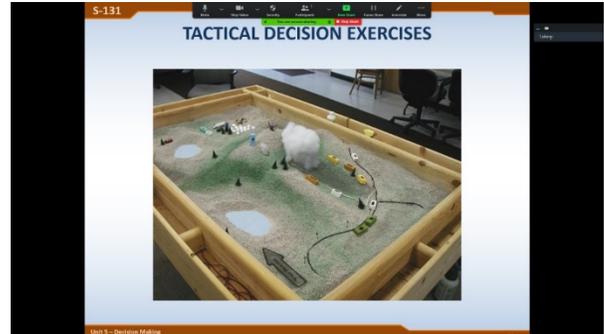
### ***Workshop Highlights***

We hosted six workshops during 2021, including one core workshop\*, as well as four fire trainings approved by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG), and one fire training created by the Florida Park Service.

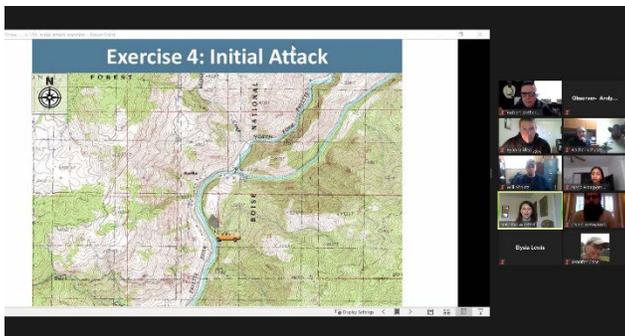
<b><i>Workshop Name</i></b>	<b><i>Date of Live Training Sessions</i></b>	<b><i>Hours online</i></b>	<b><i># of Participants</i></b>
Firefighter Type I (S-131) <i>virtual</i>	January 28	8	39
Florida Fuels and Weather <i>virtual</i>	April 7	8	31
Basic Wildland Firefighter (S-130/S-190/L-180) <i>hybrid</i>	May 5, 13, 20, & 21	33	46
Basic Wildland Firefighter (S-130/S-190/L-180) <i>hybrid</i>	November 2, 10, 17, & December 8	33	66
Managing for Diversity across Florida's Unique Landscapes* <i>hybrid</i>	November 8-9	12	23
Firefighter Type I (S-131) <i>virtual</i>	November 16	8	40

**Firefighter Type 1 Training (S-131)** was held in January and November via Canvas and Zoom. This training, approved by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG), is designed for individuals with wildland fire experience who are currently qualified as a Type 2 Wildland Firefighter and desire to be qualified as a Type 1 Wildland Firefighter or Incident Commander Type 5 (ICT5).

In order to earn their NWCG certificates, participants were required to complete two components: (1) approximately 8 hours of online coursework completed at their own pace through Canvas, and (2), attendance at a live, virtual Zoom session. Participants were split into breakout groups during the live session to engage in tactical exercises. An instructor assigned to each breakout group handed roles and responsibilities to specific individuals and guided them through decision-making as each scenario unfolded. Participants rotated among breakout rooms so that each gained experience making tactical decisions in a variety of situations.

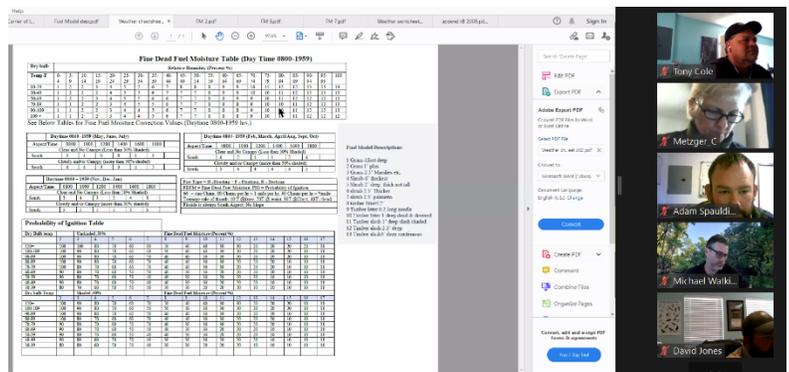


A huge thank you to lead instructor Zach Prusak (Tall Timbers) for coordinating instructors for these two trainings. Your role in these trainings cannot be understated! And thank you to all of our breakout group instructors: Andy Weaver (Pennsylvania Game Commission), Natasha Whetzel (TNC), Brent Saulsbury (University of Central Florida), Matt Snider (Tall Timbers), Matthew Brady (Sarasota County) and Ryan Kennelly (Alachua County) for sharing their extensive knowledge and fire experience in an engaging and informative manner.



**Florida Fuels and Weather (FFW)** was held in April in a 100% virtual format that involved asynchronous learning (via Canvas) and synchronous learning (via Zoom). This training was a joint effort between NATA and the Florida Park Service.

This course is designed for individuals with wildland fire experience who are interested in advancing in their fire careers to become a crew boss or burn boss within the Florida Park Service system. Participants completed approximately 5.5 hours of online coursework at their own pace through Canvas, and attended a live, virtual Zoom session.



During the virtual session, instructor Jeff DiMaggio led participants through several fuel model exercises so they became better equipped to predict fire behavior under a variety of environmental conditions. Following the virtual session, participants completed the final exam within Canvas.

***Managing for Diversity across Florida's Unique Landscapes\**** was held in November in a hybrid format. This was the first workshop to occur partly in-person since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

This workshop consisted of two components. In order to earn their certificates, participants were required to complete online coursework at their own pace through Canvas, and attend the in-person component of the training held at Morningside Nature Center and Longleaf Flatwoods Preserve in Gainesville. This was the fourth time NATA held the workshop at these locations.



This hybrid workshop attempted to build understanding of management and restoration approaches that conserve and promote biodiversity. Participants learned about the role of restoration in maintaining biodiversity over the long term; gained experience collecting data in the field to evaluate upland restoration success and assess wetland health; and learned how to prioritize which invasive species are most deserving of early treatment. The workshop featured a number of hands-on activities and group learning experiences.

New this year, we welcomed 3 new instructors to share their knowledge of land management history at Morningside Nature Center, management of invasive amphibians including the Cuban tree frog and cane toad, and to provide a unique perspective on invasive plants and upland restoration.

Thank you to all of the instructors that agreed to return another year and contribute, as well as to those instructing this workshop for the first time: Deb Stone (DEP), Nicole Barbieri (City of Gainesville), Jodi Slater (SJRWMD), Jeremy Olson (SJRWMD), Natalie Claunch (University of Florida), John Griffin (USDA/APHIS), and Elizabeth Ramirez (USDA Forest Service).

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***Basic Wildland Firefighter (S-130/S-190/L-180)*** was held in May and November/December in a hybrid format.



The intent of this course is to train new firefighters in basic firefighting skills. It is often required for participation in prescribed burning activities. Participants who complete all course requirements will receive federally-recognized NWCG certificates for S-130, S-190, and L-180.

This training consisted of two components. For participants to earn their certificates, they were required to complete approximately 40 hours of training total, with 33 hours of online coursework at their own pace through Canvas, and attendance at a field day (~8 hours) at a pre-selected location. The field day locations for both trainings included Apalachicola Bluffs & Ravines Preserve (TNC) in Bristol, FL, Ordway-Swisher Biological Station (University of Florida) in Melrose, FL, Disney Wilderness Preserve (TNC) in Poinciana, FL, UCF Arboretum (University of Central Florida) in



Orlando, FL, Wekiwa Springs State Park (Florida Park Service) in Apopka, FL, and St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park (Florida Park Service) in Fellsmere, FL.



We are so grateful for the many experienced and knowledgeable instructors from varied backgrounds that helped out- some even both times!-at the field day locations. Thank you first and foremost to Zachary Prusak (Tall Timbers) who served as lead instructor and coordinated the field day locations and auxiliary instructors. Thank you to each and every one of our field day instructors: Chaz Oliver (TNC) [Apalachicola Bluffs & Ravines Preserve]; Chelsea MacKenzie (TNC) and Dan Cole (TNC) [Disney Wilderness Preserve]; Andy Rappe (University of Florida) and Tracey Sleek (University of Florida) [Ordway-Swisher Biological Station]; Brent

Saulsbury (UCF) [UCF Arboretum and Wekiwa Springs State Park]; Paul Lammardo (Florida Park Service) and Ben Bandor (Florida Park Service) [Wekiwa Springs State Park]; and Dylan Gavagni (Florida Park Service) and Evan Hall (Florida Park Service) [St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park].

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## 2022 workshops

We are still in the process of planning our calendar for 2022. In the meantime, the best way to stay informed regarding upcoming NATA training opportunities is by joining the [NATA listserv](#). Once dates have been finalized, they will be posted on the [NATA website](#). Workshops in preparation for 2022 include:

- *Conservation Site Assessment & Planning\**
  - *Managing Visitors and Volunteers in Natural Areas\**
  - *Managing for Diversity across Florida's Unique Landscapes\**
  - *Collaborating to Manage Ecosystems\**
  - *Firefighter Type I (S-131)*
  - *Basic Wildland Firefighter (S-130/S-190/L-180)*
- \*denotes a core workshop*

Please contact the workshop coordinator with any questions or suggestions you may have about the NATA program, at [nata@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:nata@ifas.ufl.edu).



Natural Areas  
TRAINING ACADEMY

Website: <https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/nata/>

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