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MARCH HAPPENINGS



National Women's Month

March 8th

KW Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden: Gardenfest
10AM-4PM College Rd.



March 8th-9th

Marathon Seafood Festival
Marathon Community Park



March 9th-15th

Termite Awareness Week



March 17th

Happy St. Patrick's Day!



March 22nd

World Water Day!



Patience Saves Lives: Driving Safe During the Busy Season

By Brynn Morey,
Extension Coordinator &
Program Specialist II

Driving along the Overseas Highway (US1) in the Florida Keys is one of the most iconic road trips in the United States. The route, which spans over 120 miles from the mainland to Key West, offers breathtaking views of turquoise waters, charming islands, and picturesque bridges. However, this unique road comes with its own set of challenges, and it's important to drive cautiously and responsibly to ensure a safe journey. With the busy season upon us, the traffic on US1 is becoming increasingly heavy. There are more cars on the road, and the risk of accidents increases, so it is important to take extra precautions to stay safe.

Although US1 is a major highway, much of it is narrow, with just two lanes and limited shoulder space. The speed limits can vary, ranging from 45 mph to 55 mph, and can drastically change quickly to speeds of 35 mph or less due to school zones, bridges, wildlife restrictions, and construction. It is imperative to pay attention to posted speed limit signs. Staying vigilant of the speed limits and slowing down is essential to everyone's safety.

US1 is a scenic drive, and it's easy to get distracted by the stunning views. There are plenty of places to pull over, including scenic viewpoints, beaches, and historical sites. While it's tempting to speed up to reach your destination, it's also important to take your time and be patient; slow down and appreciate the beauty around you. Being in a hurry and passing vehicles can be extremely dangerous and oftentimes causes fatalities. According to the Florida Highway

Plant Clinics

Saturday, March 1st

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Key Deer Refuge Nature Cntr.

30587 o/s Hwy.
Big Pine Key

Wednesday, March 5th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Key Largo Library

101485 O/S Hwy.
Key Largo

Saturday, March 15th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

Marathon Home Depot
4555 O/S Hwy,
Marathon

Saturday, March 15th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to Noon

KW Botanical Garden Nursery

5210 College Rd.
Stock Island

Tuesday, March 18th

Plant Clinic

9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Garden Club of Upper Keys
94040 O/S Hwy.
Tavernier

Thursday, March 27th

Plant Clinic

9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Island Home Nursery
88720 O/S Hwy,
Islamorada

Sea Grant News



Shelly Krueger
UF/IFAS Florida Sea Grant Agent

Shelly recently accomplished the following activities:

- Shelly was invited to the Lower Keys Guides Association annual meeting to present on shallow-water sponge restoration that supports Backcountry recreational fishing species like bonefish. Shelly provided vouchers to 3 captains to take the Florida Friendly Fishing Guides course, a \$130 savings per captain.



- Shelly was invited by the FWC to be on the scientific programming committee to plan the [Florida Keys Marine Science Conference and Workshop](#) October 27 – 30th, 2025 in Coral Springs, FL. FWC is reviving the Florida Keys Marine Science Conference and Workshop that first convened under the leadership of former program director, John Hunt. We have finalized the 12 agenda topic areas and expect to launch the request for abstracts March 13.

- Shelly was invited to the Duck Key Property Owners Association and presented information on Lake Watch water quality testing results from the residents that Shelly trained last year.



- Shelly invited two scientists from [NOAA National Coral Reef Monitoring Program](#) to speak to Florida's Coral Reef Resilience Program communications team about their research cruises this summer and fall in Florida's Coral Reef. We will share their products once they are finalized and look forward to collaborating with them on their findings.

The Environmental Horticulture Program and Master Gardener Volunteers remain dedicated to helping you with your plant related questions.



CALL OUR OFFICE:
(305)292-4501

We have many different ways we can assist!

VISIT OUR OFFICE:

Email Monroe@ifas.ufl.edu or
Call (305)292-4501 to schedule an appointment

EMAIL YOUR QUESTIONS TO:
mastergardener@monroecounty-fl.gov

Please include a detailed description of the problem and photos if available

FACEBOOK PAGE:

Visit our Facebook page for updates, requests, information and so much more!

<https://www.facebook.com/MonroeCountyExtension>



Horticulture News



UF/IFAS Environmental Horticulture Program

- Extension's Horticulture and Master Gardener Volunteer Program welcomed new Environmental Horticulture Agent and Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator, Liah Continentino. Liah is local to the Keys and has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Studies. Liah comes to the University of Florida, Monroe County Extension, with a wide variety of experience and is eager to help our community with all types of plant and landscape needs.



Liah Continentino
Environmental Horticulture Agent &
Master Gardener Coordinator

- The Monroe County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers held a for the "Love Birds" project at the Key Largo Public Library Branch - where participants enjoyed some creative time together making heart-shaped bread, peanut butter, and seed feeders! Participants were taught how to connect with local feathered friends by attracting them to gardens and balconies. They also shared tips on bird watching and about various bird-friendly plants.



welcome 

Be sure to "Like" us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)!

Extension Director's News

Alicia Betancourt

UF/IFAS Family and Community Development Agent and
Monroe County Extension Director

Alicia recently accomplished the following activities:

- Alicia is working with the Community Voices, Informed Choices (CIVIC) program to develop a community resilience discussion guide to be completed in the summer. She co-leads this Florida leadership team in planning meetings and evaluation efforts.



- Alicia drafted a news article and Blog about bird flu concerns in the Keys.

- Alicia worked with several Southeast Florida communities in designated Community Disaster Resilience Zones (CDRZ). She connected one community with the technical assistance provider Alloy Fundraising for assistance in grant research and proposal development. Another community is assisted by Climate Access with the tools and strategies they need to effectively communicate about climate change and mobilize public support for climate solutions. Finally a third community will be assisted by Project IN-CORE to model “what if” scenarios for natural hazards, including future flooding due to climate change, and resilience planning specific to a community.

- Alicia led a national meeting of Extension professionals working on advancing climate resilience assistance under the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy. She is the co-chair of the Fostering Climate Resilient Communities working group and drafted the group's effort in a logic model. To learn more about this effort or to read the Extension Climate Action Plan <https://pats.extension.org/program-action-teams/climate/>



- Alicia spoke on the radio about tax return scams. She discussed how to protect your identity and how to report an issue.

Continued from page 1

Safety and Motor Vehicles there were 1,722 vehicle crashes, 6 fatalities, and 1,246 vehicle crashes with injuries in year 2024 alone. So, there is no need to race to your destination and endanger your life and possibly someone else's life.

Watching for pedestrians and cyclists is also an important safety measure while driving on US1. Cycling is popular in the Keys, and many cyclists use US1 to travel between islands. Be mindful of cyclists, especially in areas without bike lanes or shoulders. Keep a safe distance and pass them cautiously. Pedestrians also enjoy a nice stroll or jog along US1 and are often out and about in high-traffic areas, particularly near shops, restaurants, and attractions. Pedestrian safety is crucial, so always slow down when you see them and stop for crossing pedestrians when required.



Finally, remember to stay alert for wildlife. The Florida Keys are home to a variety of wildlife, and many animals cross the road, particularly at dawn and dusk. Keep an eye out for animals such as birds, iguanas, and even small mammals, especially in less developed areas. Key Deer are also a potential hazard, particularly in the Lower Keys. Avoid distractions and stay focused on the road to spot any animals crossing unexpectedly.



Driving US1 in the Florida Keys is a unique and beautiful experience, that can also be dangerous if you do not drive safely. By staying alert, following road signs and traffic rules, taking your time, and being patient, you can ensure a safe and enjoyable journey through this tropical paradise. With the right mentality and cautious approach, your drive along US1 will be a safe ride whose stunning beauty reminds us why we love the Florida Keys.



UF/IFAS/MONROE COUNTY EXTENSION

1100 Simonton Street, Suite 2-260, Key West, FL 33040
 88800 Overseas Hwy., Suite 6, Plantation Key, FL 33070

KW Phone: 305-292-4501 PKS Phone: 305-797-1086
 KW Fax: 305-292-4415

General e-mail: monroe@ifas.ufl.edu
 County Extension Director: Alicia Betancourt
 Newsletter Editor: Brynn Morey, Extension Coordinator

This newsletter can be accessed online at:
<http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu/newsletter.shtml>

We're on the Web at: <http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu>



University of Florida (UF)
<http://SolutionsForYourLife.ufl.edu>
<http://ufl.edu>
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<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>



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UF/IFAS/MCES QUARTERLY CONTACTS

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Totals
Phone calls	52	30	27	109
Office visitors	5	11	9	25
Email Consultations	54	72	78	204
Learning events	23	22	11	56
Participants	1,249	467	493	2,209
Media submissions	6	7	5	18
Publications distributed	125	125	225	475
TOTAL contacts	1,514	734	848	3,096



Shallow-water sponge restoration aquaculture in the Florida Keys

Shelly Krueger, Florida Sea Grant Agent III, Extension Faculty, UF/IFAS, Monroe County

Jan 29, 2025
 101 Phelps Lab, 11:45 am

Join us for the livestream or view later:
<https://youtube.com/live/ukoMafKGYyc?feature=share>



Sponges are dying off in large numbers in Florida Bay and beyond. Sponge restoration aquaculture, which rebuilds these declining populations, can help us restore water quality, increase biodiversity, and support essential fish habitat. Shelly Krueger, shared her research on sponge restoration aquaculture with the UF Howard T. Odum Center for Wetlands. Shelly's doctoral research investigates how three sponge species regulate water quality and identifies when restored sponges become reproductive, which is crucial for population growth. Watch her presentation by clicking the link below.

<https://youtube.com/live/ukoMafKGYyc?feature=share>



Photo Above: Sea Grant Agent, Shelly Krueger at the Lower Keys Guides Association