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**Lee County residents asked to keep an eye out for illegal saw palmetto berry harvests**

Fort Myers, FL, Aug. 17, 2018 — Neighbors of Lee County Conservation 20/20 preserves and others are being asked to be on the lookout for people illegally harvesting saw palmetto berries from the preserves. If you see what you believe are illegal berry harvests, call the Lee County Sheriff's Office at 239-477-1000.

Pickers frequently arrive in trucks that park on the edge of preserve or cut fences to drive in. Then they disperse with bags or buckets to take as many berries as they can carry.

In recent weeks, Lee County Park Rangers, deputies from the Lee County Sheriff's Office and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission law enforcement officers have intercepted and cited groups illegally harvesting the berries, which are processed into a supplement used in herbal remedies.

The berries are a critical food source of several native Florida species, including black bear and deer, and are essential to the ecosystem.

Berries that are seized are redistributed throughout the preserve. Berries have been confiscated from illegal harvest from Prairie Pines Preserve, in North Fort Myers, St. James Creek Preserve in St. James City and Alva Scrub in east county. Florida closed state lands to berry picking in 2015 and now require permits and property permission slip to harvest the berries. County preserves have always been closed to berry harvesting.

Log on to [www.leegov.com/conservation2020](http://www.leegov.com/conservation2020) for more information about Conservation 20/20 preserves.