

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Betsy Clayton APR/CPRC
Communications Director
Lee County Government
239-826-4606
bclayton@leegov.com

Lee County residents asked to report illegal saw palmetto berry harvests

Fort Myers, FL, Aug. 14, 2019 — With saw palmetto berry season coming into full swing, neighbors of Lee County Conservation 20/20 preserves and members of the public are asked to be on the lookout for individuals illegally harvesting berries from preserves. If you observe what you believe may be an illegal berry harvest, call the Lee County Sheriff's Office non-emergency line at 239-477-1000 or the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission information and tip hotline at 1-888-404-FWCC.

Berry pickers typically arrive in trucks that park along the edges of these conservation areas or cut fences to drive in, dispersing with buckets and bags to quickly harvest as many berries as possible.

Florida law requires individuals to obtain a permit to harvest the berries of this native plant from public lands, although Lee County parks and Conservation 20/20 preserves are always closed to berry harvesting.

Saw palmetto berries are a critical food source for a variety of wildlife species, including black bear, white-tailed deer and the state-threatened gopher tortoise. Berries that are harvested legally with a permit are primarily used as an ingredient in herbal-medicinal products.

Harvesting saw palmetto berries without a permit is a crime. Rangers with Lee County Parks & Recreation and deputies from the Lee County Sheriff's Office will issue citations or arrest individuals caught illegally picking berries. In past years, citations have been issued to individuals illegally picking berries at preserves in east Lee County, as well as in North Fort Myers, Cape Coral and on Pine Island. Berries that are seized are redistributed onto the lands from which they are harvested.

When calling to report an illegal berry harvest, be prepared to report the location and provide a description of the individuals and their vehicles, if possible. Do not confront or directly engage with any berry pickers.

For more information about Conservation 20/20, visit www.Conservation2020.org.



Close-up image of saw palmetto berries



Saw palmetto with berries