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WHITE PAPER

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Exploring the Possibility of Gainesville Becoming a “Butterfly City”

The purpose of this white paper is to outline the benefits and issues related to naming the City of Gainesville “Florida’s Butterfly City,” or the “Butterfly Capital of the South.” Declaring the City of Gainesville a “Butterfly City” may increase the prestige of the City and promote tourism to various Lepidoptera-related events in and near the Greater Gainesville area. Following is a brief summary of criteria used to justify various U.S. and international cities and regions designated as “butterfly destinations” and a summary of the reasons why Gainesville may wish to consider self-designation as a “Butterfly City or as the “Butterfly Capital of the South.”

Designated Butterfly Destinations

London, England

It is expected that London will become the world’s butterfly capital with the opening of The Butterfly World of Europe. Butterfly World is planned to open in stages between June 2009 and March 2011. It will house 10,000 types of tropical butterflies of 250 species on free-flying view under its dome at any one time, in the world's largest display, in addition to extensive gardens and meadows to attract native British species, as well as education and research facilities.

State of West Virginia

West Virginia is identified as the butterfly capital of the northeast. Approximately 129 species of butterflies have been found in West Virginia. Some species found are very rare and difficult to locate in other parts of the world. Virginia also has a great diversity of habitat and flora, from mountain tops at nearly 4,000 feet in elevation to river valleys along the Ohio and Potomac rivers.

South Texas

South Texas is recognized as America's Butterfly Capital (Capital de Las Mariposas). The Texas Butterfly Festival is held in the fall. The strategic location between tropical and temperate zones makes this area the most biologically diverse region in the United States. As many butterfly species can be seen in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) four county areas as in the entire Eastern region of North America. Located between the Chihuahuah Desert on the west and the Gulf of Mexico on the east, the Valley is an area of contrasting climatic and biotic influences. Temperate and tropic climates meet here and so do the major Mississippi and Central bird flyways. Eleven different biotic communities serve as habitat to well over 300 species of butterflies. The North American Butterfly Association (NABA) International Butterfly Park is located there and dedicated to education, conservation and scientific research on wild butterflies. This is the only region of the United States where an abundance of butterflies flies throughout the year.

Selma, Alabama

The Eastern Tiger Swallowtail became the state mascot and butterfly in 1989 by Act no. 89-676. The legislation was requested by the Selma City Council. Selma is designated as the Butterfly Capital of Alabama and the Eastern Swallowtail is its mascot.

City of Coconut Creek, Florida

Coconut Creek refers to itself as the Butterfly Capital of the World™, and is home to the three – acre Butterfly World, the world's largest butterfly aviary with over 80 species and 5,000 individual butterflies. A rapidly growing suburb of Ft. Lauderdale, 16 percent of the city's land is set aside for parks and other natural areas. It is currently the only city in Florida with a butterfly related designation. Butterfly gardens have been planted at the town hall, in town parks and at several schools in the City. Annual events include the 5K Butterfly Run, the Arbor Day Tree and the Butterfly Plant Give Away. There are butterfly gardens throughout their neighborhoods. Some of the characteristics that led to Coconut Creek's designation as "Butterfly City" include:

- **Environment:** South Florida's sub-tropical climate, Coconut Creek's close proximity to the Everglades and to the coastline, and its well-maintained woodlands, wetlands, fields and glades, help make the City an ideal home for an astonishing variety of butterflies, including rare species not found anywhere else in the world.
- **Community Spirit:** Coconut Creek celebrates its "butterfly pride" with an annual Butterfly Festival. The festivities include a, the Butterfly Parade, butterfly educational activities in the schools, and a new high school named Monarch High.
- **Official Recognition:** In April 2002 the City Commission passed Resolution No. 2002-60 proclaiming the City to be the Butterfly Capital of the World. The Florida House of Representatives similarly passed House Resolution No. 9001-E recognizing Coconut Creek as home of the world's largest butterfly habitat.
- **Citizen Involvement:** In order to promote the butterfly development, the city of Coconut Creek has created a plan for residents to create butterfly gardens in their backyard.

Why Should Gainesville consider self-designation as a Butterfly City or the Butterfly Capital of the South?

The state of Florida has more chapters of the North American Butterfly Association (NABA) than any other state. Since 1995, [12 chapters](#) of NABA have been formed in Florida! In 1996, the Florida Legislature designated the Zebra Heliconian as the official state butterfly. The first North American Butterfly Association regional meeting in Florida was held in Gainesville in March 2007. We have many native butterfly species in the Gainesville area. Director Tom Emmel and Assistant Director for Research Jaret Daniels at the Florida Museum of Natural History's McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity will be consulted to obtain their recommendation of possible butterfly species that could be considered for designation as the official City of Gainesville Butterfly. The City of Gainesville is qualified to be named a "Butterfly City," because its natural habitat is ideally suited for butterfly propagation and preservation initiatives, and other reasons as outlined below:

- ***The Florida Museum of Natural History's McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity:*** The Florida Museum of Natural History's McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity is the world's largest research facility dedicated to the study of butterflies and moths, and holds one of the world's largest collections of Lepidoptera specimens. The 39,000 square feet of research space includes laboratories focusing on molecular genetics, scanning electron microscopy, image analysis, conservation and captive propagation of endangered species, optical microscopy and specimen preparation, as well as classrooms and offices for 12 faculty curators, collection managers and other staff. The McGuire Center serves both research and public education functions. The center includes the 6,400-square-foot living Butterfly Rainforest attraction and other exhibit space featuring information about Lepidoptera and rainforests worldwide.

- **Butterfly Rainforest:** This permanent exhibit at the Florida Museum of Natural History has become one of Alachua County's most popular destinations since it opened in 2004, hosting more than 575,000 visitors. Museum ZIP code data shows that 69 percent of these visitors come from outside Alachua County. The screened vivarium houses subtropical and tropical plants and trees to support up to 2,000 free-flying butterflies representing 55 to 65 different species at any given time. Guests can stroll through the Butterfly Rainforest on a winding path and relax to the sounds of cascading waterfalls year-round and experience live butterfly releases and interpretations on Saturdays and Sundays. **Indoor Butterfly Exhibits:** Inside the McGuire Center, a public exhibits gallery showcases the "Wall of Wings," which features more than 13,000 preserved and photographed butterfly and moth specimens. The wall includes a wealth of information on butterfly and moth biology and behavior, and is a stunning tribute to the research and collections mission of the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity. **Butterfly Conservation Initiative:** The Butterfly Conservation Initiative is a self-sustaining national coalition member and partner organization dedicated to the conservation of threatened, endangered and vulnerable North American butterflies and their habitats. The group completed its move from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums in Baltimore to the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity at the Florida Museum of Natural History in May 2007.
- **Suitable Environment for Butterflies:** A sample of 500 species of moths of 30 families has been collected at the Paynes Prairie Preserve. "Gainesville has hundreds of butterfly gardens and special plantings through the City that attract more than 100 species of native Florida butterflies. In our ideal subtropical climate, butterflies can be found in Gainesville throughout all 12 months of the year. Each fall and again in the spring, millions of migrating butterflies of numerous species fly south (fall) or north (spring) through Gainesville and surrounding areas in massive movements that last up to several months." (Emmel)
- **Butterfly Fest:** ButterflyFest is held every year and is dedicated to increasing awareness of Florida's butterflies as fun, fascinating ambassadors to the natural world. Activities promote inquiry and provide a call to action for the conservation and preservation of backyard wildlife and habitats. Throughout the weekend, all ages participate in fun and educational activities, including take-away crafts for children, informative workshops and demonstrations on conservation and attracting butterflies and other pollinators. Nearly 5,000 visitors attended the third annual ButterflyFest in 2008. The 2009 event is scheduled for Oct. 24-25.
- **Butterfly Week:** Mayor Hanrahan read a proclamation that declared October 9-16, Florida Butterfly Festival Week in 2006. During the week, there were art festivals, Butterfly Illustration Workshops, and ballets centered on butterfly themes. In 2007 the name was officially changed to ButterflyFest. Organizers of this annual event are interested in exploring a formal arrangement to have the Mayor of Gainesville designate the official week of ButterflyFest each year.
- **Kanapaha Botanical Gardens:** A Butterfly Garden is located within the Kanapaha Botanical Gardens and is operated by the North Florida Botanical Society. Many plants in this collection produce flowers that are attractive to butterflies or foliage that serves as a food source for their caterpillars. These are the two categories of plants essential to a butterfly garden. Signage identifies both plant species and the more common butterflies that attend them.
- **Ronald McDonald House Butterfly Garden:** More than 1,000 flowers and trees handpicked by McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity Director Thomas Emmel to attract 50 different species of butterflies were planted in this garden. The 40-foot-by-60-foot plot, once cluttered by wooded brush, now features a private walking trail and garden at the Ronald McDonald House of Gainesville.

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- Gainesville Sun:
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- E-mail interview conducted with Dr. Thomas C. Emmel, director of the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity, at the Florida Museum of Natural History)