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A rare beauty

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The Pygmy Fringe Tree, a shrub native to Florida's Lake Wales Ridge, has inspired three organizations in Highlands and Polk counties to celebrate it through the Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Festival March 12-14. South Florida State College, Bok Tower Gardens, and Archbold Biological Station will offer guided walks and a student art show honoring the Pygmy Fringe Tree in its natural environment.

In Avon Park, SFSC will host wildflower walks on the Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail and a student art show at the Museum of Florida Art and Culture on Thursday, March 12, from 1-4 p.m.

Trail walks to see spring wildflowers on the Lake Wales Ridge will be available Friday, March 13, 10 a.m.-noon at Bok Tower Gardens in Lake Wales; and Saturday, March 14, 10 a.m.-noon at Archbold Biological Station in Venus.

"The Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Festival is a way to bring attention to the unique habitat of the Lake Wales Ridge," said Mollie Doctrow, curator, SFSC MOFAC. "Visit one of the festival sites, take a guided walk, and learn about the flowering spring plants on the ridge. It's a close-up environment with a special kind of beauty."

The Pygmy Fringe Tree is an endangered species, growing primarily in the scrub and Turkey Oak Sandhills on the Lake Wales Ridge. It grows to 6 feet. Its small white flowers are sweet smelling and bloom late February through March.

The Lake Wales Ridge is part of a distinct natural region in Central Florida and is an ancient beach and sand dune system formed 1-3 million years ago. The Lake Wales Ridge has one of the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered plants and animals in the United States.

For more information, visit fringetreewildflowerfestival.com or contact these organizations:

- SFSC MOFAC, 863-784-7240 or www.mofac.org
- Bok Tower Gardens, 863-676-1408 or boktowergardens.org
- Archbold Biological Station, 863-465-2571 or www.archbold-station.org

Photos:

Courtesy photo

The Pygmy Fringe Tree is native to the Lake Wales Ridge and is an endangered species.