FLORIDA WAXWEED
Cuphea aspera Chapman
Synonyms: *Parsonia lythroides* Small
Family: Lythraceae (loosestrife)
FNAI Ranks: G2/S2
Legal Status: US-none FL-Endangered
Wetland Status: US-OBL+ FL-FACW


Amy Jenkins


Jenna Annis

Field Description: Small perennial **herb** with erect **stems** up to 16 inches tall. **Leaves** are entire, opposite on the upper stem and whorled on the lower stem, ovate, rough with erect hairs, and lacking leaf stalks. **Flowers** opposite or whorled at upper nodes, slightly zygomorphic and light pink/purple with 6 narrow, clawed petals. **Sepals** form a purple, ribbed floral tube with a pouched base. The common name is derived from the waxy or sticky feel of the upper stems, flower stalks, and floral tubes, which are covered with purple glandular hairs scattered among white glandless hairs.

Similar Species: Cuphea carthegenensis is a related non-native weedy species with glandular hairs and similar flowers. It is, however, a much coarser plant with smaller flowers that are alternate, rather than opposite in the rare species. Young stems of Hypericum are easily mistaken with Cuphea aspera. However, these stems lack the glandular hairs present on Cuphea.

Florida waxweed ***Cuphea aspera***

Related Rare Species: Curtiss' loosestrife (*Lythrum curtissii*), also a member of the loosestrife family, is also rare in Florida.

Habitat: Open, wet pine flatwoods and prairies; clearings and rights-of-way in flatwoods.

Best Survey Season: Flowers May-July. Plants may be recognizable vegetatively.

Range-wide Distribution: Endemic. Occurs in only three counties in Florida – Calhoun, Gulf, and Franklin.

Conservation Status: About 25 populations are known, most on private timber company lands.

Protection and Management: Avoid ditching, draining, bedding, or other disturbance to soil and hydrology. Although this species may take advantage of the more open habitat that plowing creates, continued disruption of roadsides and trails is not recommended, as these activities eventually favor weedy and invasive species. Ecotones between mesic flatwoods and marsh/swamp communities should be burned every 2-3 years to promote the open habitat favored by this species.

References: Coile 2000, Graham 1964, Graham 1975, Kral 1983, Small 1933, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a.