

For Immediate Release

## Naples Botanical Garden's Chad Washburn Receives American Public Gardens Association Award

**NAPLES, FL – June 8, 2021** – The American Public Gardens Association recognized Chad Washburn, Vice President of Conservation at Naples Botanical Garden, with its Professional Citation on June 7. The citation, one of the organization's highest honors, recognizes significant achievements in the disciplines of public horticulture, including conservation.

Washburn began his career at Naples Botanical Garden more than 15 years ago when the organization was a dream on paper and a wilderness of invasive species covering 170 acres. In the years that followed, Washburn took a direct role in caring for the land working to reconstruct the ecosystems within the Garden's Preserve (even when this meant wielding a chainsaw to remove endless melaleuca). He's also shared the organization's expertise with colleagues in the local community and throughout the Caribbean, creating partnerships vital to the protection of countless threatened and endangered plant species.

"Naples Botanical Garden is extremely proud—and extremely fortunate—to have Chad Washburn on our team," President & CEO Donna McGinnis says. "Botanical gardens are on the front lines of climate change and related environmental issues. Thanks to Chad's leadership, the Garden is playing an important role in plant conservation, ecosystem restoration, water quality improvements, and storm resilience through the strategic use of plants."

Washburn's tenure at the Garden began while it was still under construction, and during that time he has filled many roles. Washburn served as the inaugural Director of Education at the Garden's opening in 2009, later moving into his conservation post and setting the course for the Garden's mission to extend beyond its grounds. Existing relationships with colleagues in Puerto Rico were strengthened during on-site recovery efforts with Doña Ines Arboretum following Hurricane Maria in 2017. This work came mere weeks following the Garden's own recovery from Hurricane Irma, which set the stage for continuing work with local community leaders to address storm resiliency and the importance of plants in mitigating sea level rise.

"Chad is a resource in our local community as well as the greater Caribbean region," says Dr. Brian Bovard, Assistant Professor of Wetland Ecology and Program Coordinator of Environmental Studies for Florida Gulf Coast University. "As an ecologist, I take advantage of Chad's botany skills on a frequent basis and have observed him teaching my students, his colleagues at work, and visitors to Naples Botanical Garden," adds Bovard, who collaborates with Washburn on a variety of projects. "He is always sharing his passion for plants with anyone expressing an interest, and I've seen his passion spark a greater love of plants in others."

Conservation work momentum builds as Washburn has established Memoranda of Understanding with gardens in Haiti, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, and with the USDA Forest Service and National Wildlife refuges, which provide collaboration opportunities in South Florida and the

Caribbean. Of prime importance is identifying at-risk species and prioritizing efforts to protect them.

On a global scale, Washburn collaborates with Botanic Gardens Conservation International to bring people and gardens together to address the greatest environmental needs in the Caribbean region. This work includes assessing the threat of extinction of plant species on behalf of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

“Working in a public garden has given me so many opportunities to work with people from around the world who share the same passion for conserving plants and ecosystems,” Washburn says. “I cannot imagine doing anything else and am so grateful for this recognition.”

[Learn About the Garden's Conservation Initiatives](#)

For questions, contact Jenny Fuentes, Content Manager, at [jfuentes@naplesgarden.org](mailto:jfuentes@naplesgarden.org).

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## About Naples Botanical Garden

Naples Botanical Garden is a 170-acre, world-class garden paradise that features plants from around the world. It is the youngest garden in history to receive the American Public Gardens Association’s prestigious Award for Garden Excellence. The Garden provides arts, culture, youth and adult education, conservation, wellness, and volunteer programs that contribute to the quality of life in Southwest Florida onsite and online at [naplesgarden.org](http://naplesgarden.org). The Garden’s living collections are always growing and evolving, leaving our audiences with a deeper engagement with our curated gardens and Preserve.

Summer hours of operation are 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily. Regular admission is \$20 for adults, \$10 for children (4 – 14); Members and children 3 and under get in free. Residents of Collier, Lee, and Charlotte Counties enjoy discounted admission June 1 – September 30, 2021. Visit [naplesgarden.org](http://naplesgarden.org) for details.

[Visit our Media Page](#)

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