Chapter 2 - Florida's Outdoor Recreation Setting

This chapter provides an overview of the social and physical setting for outdoor recreation in Florida. As Florida moves through the 21st century, it's astonishing rate of population growth continues.

Florida's People and Economy

Florida's population was 16 million in 2000 according to the U.S. Census. By April 2007, it had grown to 18.6 million, an increase of nearly 17 percent. Today, Florida is the fourth most-populated state in the nation and its population is projected to reach nearly 22.5 million by 2020 (see Figure 2.1).

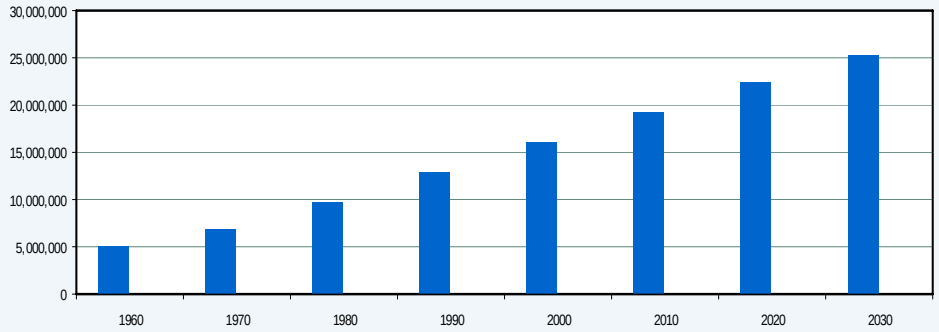
Lovers Key State Park, Lee County

Florida has gained an average of 900 residents each day since 2000, roughly one-third of whom were migrating from other countries, particularly those in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to becoming more culturally diverse, Florida's population is getting older. In 2000, 18 percent of Floridians were aged 65 or older, compared to the national average of 12.4 percent. Florida's median age of 38.7 was second highest only to West Virginia's of 38.9. At the other end of the age spectrum, however, Florida's population had the largest increase in the number of school-age children (ages 5 - 17) in the nation between 2000 and 2002. This rapid population growth and the increasing diversity of the population will create complex challenges and opportunities that affect many aspects of the state's social and economic framework.

According to the report *Florida Population Growth: Past, Present and Future,* written by state demographer Stanley K. Smith in 2005, population aging, shifts in the racial and ethnic composition of the population, changes in household and family structures, and the overall impacts of population growth are four demographic trends that will have an impact on government and businesses in the years ahead. If current trends continue, most of the new population will concentrate in relatively unpopulated counties adjacent to the heavily developed metropolitan areas, particularly along the coast. As these areas become more crowded, problems such as loss of open space and natural areas, crowded infrastructure, and a higher cost of living will provide an impetus for further expansion into more rural areas. This sprawling pattern of growth, which characterizes many communities in Florida, increasingly limits the availability of outdoor recreation lands. A major challenge facing outdoor recreation planning and programming efforts in Florida is to anticipate and meet the recreation demands of a growing and changing population, and to ensure that an adequate natural resource and funding base is maintained to accommodate future needs while preserving a quality environment.

To ensure a continued high quality of life in Florida, the amenities provided by the state outdoor recreation program must be coupled with a healthy social and economic climate.

Figure 2.1
Florida's Population, 1960 to 2030



Source: University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, 2008

Among socio-economic variables, income is a major factor in determining the ability of people to participate in many kinds of recreational activity. During the past five years, most non-agricultural segments of Florida's economy experienced substantial growth. The per capita income of Florida residents climbed from $28,508 in 2000 to an estimated $36,720 in 2006.

Tourism-based activities support a major share of Florida's economy. Taxable spending in the tourism and recreation category during 2007 totaled a record $65.5 billion, according to data from VISIT FLORIDA, the official tourism marketing organization of the State of Florida. Many tourism leaders are cautiously optimistic that Florida will remain a preferred destination for both domestic and international travelers. However, increased competition from other vacation destinations, record gasoline costs and increases in other travel prices are major concerns.

Physical Situation

Florida is an elongated peninsula with a total land area of 65,755 square miles, including 4,672 square miles of interior water. The state stretches 450 miles from north to south and 470 miles from east to west. This size makes Florida the second largest state east of the Mississippi River (Georgia being slightly larger). Despite its size, no point in Florida is more than 70 miles from either the Atlantic or Gulf coast. Florida's highly diverse coastline stretches 1,350 miles around the peninsula. To the north, Florida shares common boundaries with Alabama and Georgia.

Climate

Florida's climate is one of its primary assets and perhaps the single, most important factor contributing to the love of outdoor recreation by residents and visitors. Florida lies completely within the temperate zone, yet its climate, particularly in the lower peninsula, is subtropical, with wet, humid summers and

Table 2.1
Visitor Estimates for Florida
2000-2007

Year	Annual Visitors (millions)	Percent Change
2000	72.8	n/a
2001	69.5	-4.6
2002	73.9	6.4
2003	74.6	1.0
2004	79.7	6.9
2005	83.6	4.8
2006	83.9	0.3
2007	82.4	-1.7

Source: VISIT FLORIDA, February, 2008

relatively dry, cool winters. The influence of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east tends to moderate seasonal temperature extremes. Most of the state enjoys a long, warm summer, relatively minor seasonal transitions, and a short, mild winter. The mean annual temperature ranges from the upper 60s in the northern portions of the state to the upper 70s in the south. Florida's abundant rainfall is seasonal. Most of the state's average annual rainfall of 53 inches consists of short summer showers. In the winter months, when sunshine is so conducive to outdoor activity, Florida enjoys the greatest average percentage of seasonal sunshine in the eastern United States.

Florida's geography makes it extremely vulnerable to tropical storms. These cyclonic weather systems have always been a part of Florida's natural climatic patterns, but in 2004, one tropical storm and four major hurricanes made landfall along Florida's coastline, impacting nearly 85 percent of the state's beaches. As the science surrounding global warming and climate change makes it clearer that carbon emissions are affecting global climate, the state's outdoor recreation resources may be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than many other states. Changes in climate can affect water temperatures and salinity, disrupting natural conditions in sensitive areas such as coastal wetlands and coral reefs. Rising sea levels and coastal erosion have also compromised many of the state's important saltwater beaches, necessitating costly restoration and stabilization efforts to protect this vital component of Florida's economy and culture.

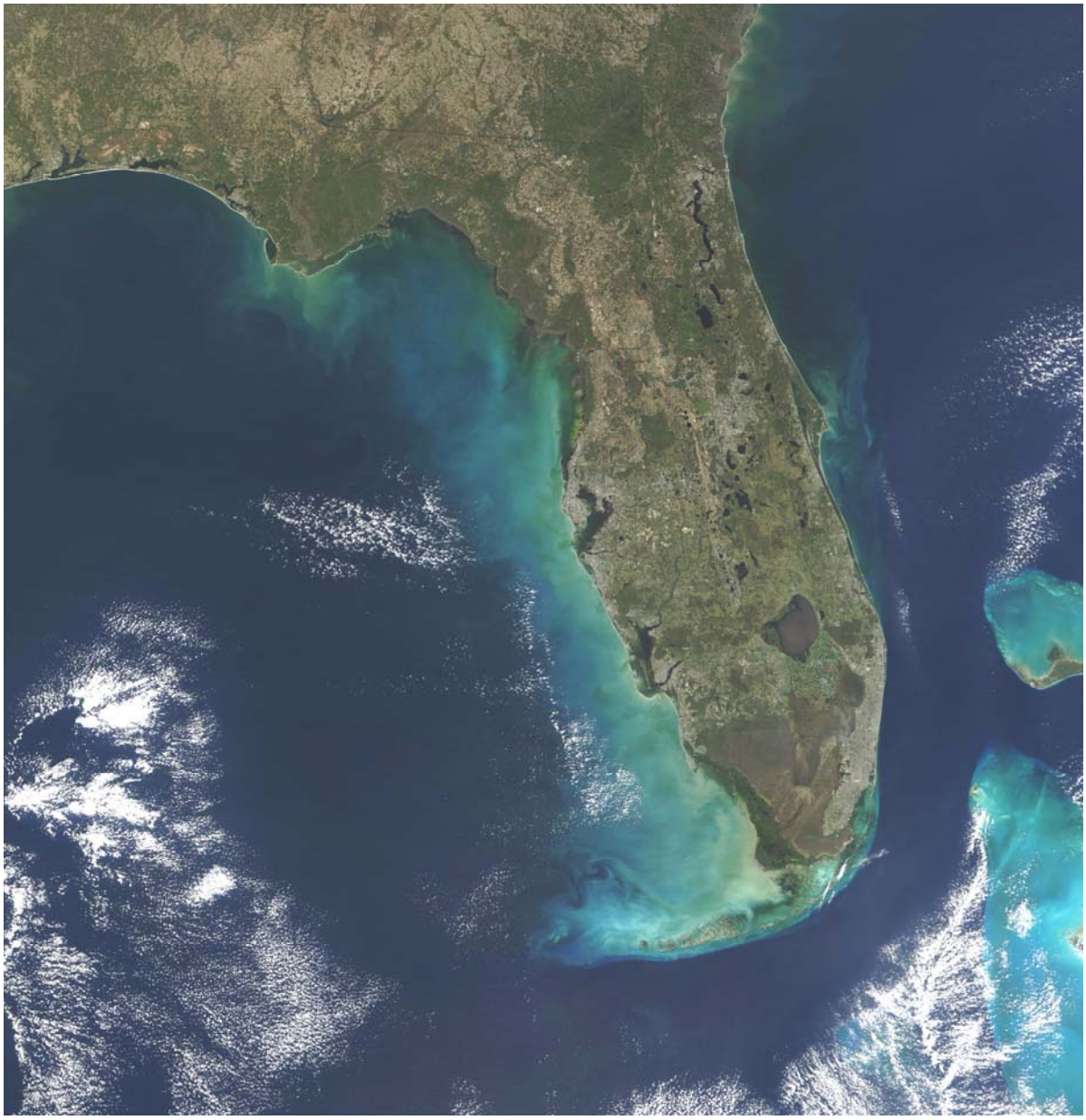
Geology

Florida occupies only about half of a larger geological unit, the Floridian Plateau. This plateau is a partly submerged platform nearly 500 miles long and 250 to 400 miles wide. It separates the deep waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The submerged portions of the plateau are called the continental shelf, extending out to an ocean depth of about 300 feet. The plateau has been in existence for millions of years, during which time it has been alternately dry land or shallow sea. It consists of a core of metamorphic rocks buried under layers of sedimentary rocks (chiefly limestone) which vary in thickness from a little less than a mile to upwards of four miles.

Physiography

Five physical or natural regions are commonly identified in the state. They are the *Western Highlands*, the *Marianna Lowlands*, the *Tallahassee Hills*, the *Central Highlands*, and the *Coastal Lowlands* (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.2
Satellite View of Florida



The *Western Highlands* includes most of the Florida Panhandle between the Perdido and Apalachicola Rivers, north of the *Coastal Lowlands*. It is a southward-sloping plateau, hilly in the northern part and trenched by narrow steep-walled stream valleys. The higher hills in the northern part of the plateau are over 300 feet in elevation and include the highest measured elevation in the state-345 feet.

The *Marianna Lowlands*, west of the Apalachicola River, is a low, rolling hill and sinkhole region, with numerous small lakes. This region occupies a roughly quadrilateral area, with its southern and western limits

marked by a rise to the *Western Highlands*. The elevation is due to the increasing thickness of sand covering the limestone base that lies near the land surface.

The *Tallahassee Hills* region, north of the *Coastal Lowlands*, stretches from the Apalachicola River to the northern Withlacoochee River. It is approximately 25 miles wide by 100 miles in length and is characterized by long, gentle slopes with rounded summits.

The *Central Highlands* region extends from the *Tallahassee Hills* and the Okefenokee Swamp in the north almost to Lake Okeechobee in the south. Its length is about 250 miles. The width tapers from 60 miles in its northern portions down to a blunt point at the southern boundary. Much of the northern part is a nearly level plain approximately 150 feet above sea level. The western part consists of hills and hollows interspersed with broad, low plains. This sub-region ranges in altitude from 200 feet to less than 40 feet above sea level. Adjoining this sub-region to the east and extending southward to the end of the *Central Highlands* is a sub-region known as the Lake Region. It is characterized by numerous lakes and high hills of up to 325 feet above sea level.

The *Coastal Lowlands* forms the entire Florida coastline, including the Florida Keys, and reaches inland as much as 60 miles at some points. The inner edge generally lies along the 100-foot contour line. In recent geologic times, these lowlands were marine terraces and experienced three or more successive inundations by higher sea levels. This is a flat region, except where ancient shorelines or dune ridges occur or where the surface has been modified by stream erosion or underground solution. The Gulf coast has the appearance of a drowned coastline, one that is sinking into the sea. The east coast has the appearance of an emergent coast, one that is rising from the sea. In fact, sea levels on both coasts are rising very gradually as the result of changes in global climatic patterns.

Figure 2.3
Physiographic Map

Source:
Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Hydrology

More than 2.8 million acres of Florida are covered by water. This includes some 7,000 natural and man-made lakes larger than ten acres, as well as marshes, swamps and seasonal floodplains.

Most of the defined river systems in Florida are in the northern half of the state. South Florida's lack of these systems is due to its differing geological history and flatter terrain. Drainage in south Florida occurs through broad, shallow channels, most of which

have been altered extensively by man for purposes of reclamation and water management.

In addition to the thousands of lakes and the thousands of miles of streams, wetlands comprise a major component of the state's surface waters. It has been estimated that in 1973, wetlands and their associated open-water areas accounted for approximately one-third of Florida's total area. An overview of wetlands in Florida, including a description of wetland protection efforts is contained in Appendix H.

A considerable amount of drainage in Florida goes into and through the underlying limestone rock, forming a groundwater reservoir. This underground reservoir, or aquifer, discharges tremendous quantities of fresh water to wells and to some of the world's largest springs. Florida has 33 first magnitude springs, discharging more than six billion gallons of water per day. The combined flow of all the state's springs is estimated to be eight billion gallons per day.

Between Florida's offshore waters and its inland fresh waters are sheltered coastal waters generally referred to as estuaries. Estuaries form where the flow of fresh water from inland rivers and streams meets coastal waters. Estuaries are among Florida's most biologically productive waters, and are vital to the state's commercial and sports fisheries.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Vegetation dominates the Florida landscape. More than 65 percent of the state is covered by a seemingly endless variety of plant associations and natural communities. All of

America's Everglades

Florida's natural vegetation is significant from the standpoint of outdoor recreation. In addition to its obvious aesthetic qualities, it utilizes carbon dioxide and produces oxygen, absorbs wastes and maintains water quality, provides food and habitat for game and other forms of wildlife, and performs a host of other environmental functions that themselves contribute to outdoor recreation. Providing effective management of Florida's diverse native plant communities through prescribed burning, exotic plant control, hydrological restoration and other methods is critical for maintaining their biological and recreational values.

Rookery Bay Aquatic Preserve, Collier County

Florida's wildlife is as varied as the habitats that support it. Species range from those common throughout the southeastern United States to some that are virtually unknown elsewhere in the country such as the Florida panther, the Florida manatee and the Florida scrub jay. Florida is inhabited by more than 490 bird species, 135 native, non-marine reptiles and amphibians, 250 native freshwater fish and nearly 80 mammals that spend all or part of their lives on land. These diverse wildlife resources provide a major attraction for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Fish, both freshwater and saltwater, are exceptionally important to the economy and to outdoor recreation in Florida. Numerous game species play an important role as well. Non-game species, particularly birdlife, support nature observation and appreciation and a range of environmental education activities.

History and Culture

There is evidence that man has inhabited Florida for approximately the last 12,000 years. Prehistoric cultures thrived in this hospitable area and left behind much evidence of their way of life. This evidence has become a source of wonder and curiosity for modern man. The story is still unfolding from professional exploration and analysis of the data from the many Native American mounds, other prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, and historic structures found throughout the state.

In 1513, barely 20 years after the first voyage of Columbus, Florida was opened up to the western world by Spanish discovery. Thus began 450 years of exploration, colonization, settlement and development by Spanish, French, British, and American people, which constitute Florida's long and unique modern history.

Both of these eras, the Prehistoric and the Modern, combine to leave rich historical and cultural resources. These resources provide abundant opportunity for a highly popular form of outdoor recreation, visiting historical and archaeological sites.

Dudley Farm Historic State Park, Alachua County