

ITEM 9:

Consider the 10-year update to the Lake George State Forest management plan (Lease No. 4009).

LOCATION:

Volusia County

APPLICANT:

Florida Forest Service

DIVISION OF STATE LANDS STAFF REMARKS:

Background

Lake George State Forest (LGSF) is comprised of 21,473.18 acres located in the northwestern portion of Volusia County, between Barberville and Astor. The LGSF was acquired under the Preservation 2000, Conservation and Recreation Lands, and Florida Forever programs. The Lake George State Forest is comprised of four tracts. These are referred to as the Astor Tract, Volusia Tract, Dexter Tract, and Mary Farms Tract. The Dexter Tract and Mary Farms Tract are comprised of all parcels south of State Road 40.

The forest's diverse ecological communities include mesic flatwoods, floodplain wetlands, and interspersed cypress and bay depressions. The LGSF is one of several publicly owned lands that encompass Lake George, Florida's second largest lake. The state forest has approximately 6.55 miles of water frontage on the westernmost boundary, comprised of 3.10 miles of St. Johns River frontage, and 3.45 miles of lake and creek frontage. The area along the river has a rich archeological history that contains many artifacts of past land use.

A variety of recreation opportunities are available on the LGSF including birdwatching, bicycling, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, paddling, picnicking, and primitive camping. Overnight camping is presently available at the River Road Campground. The LGSF is part of the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail and the Florida Forest Service (FFS) Trailwalker Program. The forest is open during daylight hours for visitors.

Multiple-use management is the harmonious and coordinated management of timber, recreation, conservation of fish and wildlife, forage, archaeological and historic sites, habitat and other biological resources, and water resources so they are utilized in the combination that will best serve the people of the state. Local demands, acquisition objectives, and other factors influence the array of uses that are compatible with and allowed on any specific area of the forest. This management approach is believed to provide for the greatest public benefit by allowing compatible uses while protecting overall forest health, native ecosystems, and the functions and values associated with them.

Management Plan Overview

In 2024, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory completed an inventory and natural community mapping project on the LGSF and created current and historic natural community type maps. Fifteen natural community types are found on the LGSF. The predominant natural community types are mesic flatwoods and hydric hammock. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory also

identified 11 altered landcover types. There are 29 rare, threatened, or endangered species documented on the LGSF.

A review of information contained in the Division of Historical Resources Florida Master Site File has determined there are eleven recorded archaeological sites within the designated area for the LGSF. The FFS will follow the “Management Procedures for Archaeological and Historical Sites and Properties on State Owned or Controlled Lands” and will comply with all appropriate provisions of section 267.061(2)(a) and (b), Florida Statutes (F.S.).

The LGSF participates in a Firewise community program. Communities in wildfire prone areas must work together to be fully prepared for wildfire. A “Fire Adapted Community” incorporates people, buildings, businesses, infrastructure, cultural resources, and natural areas to prepare for the effects of wildfire. The Fire Adapted Community concept serves as an umbrella to the various programs that help communities become more fire adapted. The FFS has implemented the Fire Adapted Community concept for prevention statewide. Specifically, in the area adjacent to or nearby the LGSF, efforts will continue to identify communities at risk and to contact their representatives.

The Florida Legislature requires that all land management plans include long and short-term goals. These goals must be measurable objectives, and short-term goals must be achievable within a two-year planning period. Pursuant to section 253.034, F.S., the Division of State Lands began compiling the short-term goals from each land management plan approved since July 1, 2016. The management plan identified objectives under the following short-term goals: Hydrological Preservation and Restoration.

Public Involvement

This plan has been prepared by the FFS and will be carried out primarily by the FFS. The FFS responds to public involvement through liaison committees, management plan advisory groups, public hearings, and through ongoing direct contact with user groups.

The plan was developed with input from the LGSF Management Plan Advisory Group and was reviewed at a public hearing on June 4, 2026. The Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) public hearing and meeting serve as an additional forum for public input and review of the plan.

Surplus Lands

The evaluation of the LGSF by the FFS has determined that all portions of the area are being managed and operated for the original purposes of acquisition, as well as center on the multiple-use concept, as defined in sections 589.04(3) and 253.034(2)(a), F.S. Implementation of this concept will utilize and conserve state forest resources in a harmonious and coordinated combination that will best serve the people of the State of Florida. Therefore, no portion of the LGSF is recommended for potential surplus.

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review was conducted in October 2023. The review team found that the property is managed in accordance with the purposes for which it was acquired, and the management practices, including public access, comply with the management plan. There was one consensus recommendation offered.

- The review team recommended the FFS include additional growing season prescribed fires.

The 2023 Land Management Review notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made within this management plan update.

DIVISION OF STATE LANDS STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:

- ☐ APPROVE
- ☐ APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS: _____
- ☐ DEFER
- ☐ WITHDRAW
- ☐ NOT APPROVE
- ☐ OTHER: _____

LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LEAD AGENCY: Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Forest Service
 COMMON NAME: Lake George State Forest (LGSF)
 LOCATION: Volusia County
 ACREAGE TOTAL: 21,473.18 acres

Historic Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage
Basin marsh	199
Basin swamp	1,442
Baygall	1,327
Blackwater stream	4
Bottomland forest	13
Depression marsh	405
Dome swamp	357
Floodplain marsh	793

Historic Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage
Floodplain swamp	2,262
Hydric Hammock*	3,146
Mesic flatwoods	8,757
Sandhill	192
Scrubby flatwoods	265
Wet flatwoods	2,692
Wet Prairie	9

*According to FNAI 2024 Assessment, Mesic hammock historic acres are included in Hydric hammock historic acres

TIITF LEASE AGREEMENT NUMBER: 4009

USE: Single ☐ Multiple ☒

MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Florida DACS, Florida Forest Service
 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 St. Johns River Water Management District
 Department of State, Division of Historical Resources

RESPONSIBILITY

General Forest Resource Management
 Wildlife Resources and Laws
 Water Resource Protection and Restoration
 Historical and Archaeological Resource Management

DESIGNATED LAND USE:

Multiple-Use State Forest

SUBLEASES:

None

ENCUMBRANCES:

Multiple power lines, water main.

TYPE OF ACQUISITION:

Conservation and Recreation (CARL) Lands, Preservation 2000, and Florida Forever.

UNIQUE FEATURES:

Lake George, St. Johns, River, Lake Dexter and associated creeks account for 6.55 miles of water frontage.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL / HISTORICAL:

Eleven (11) known sites

MANAGEMENT NEEDS:

Invasive species control; perimeter firelines; flora and fauna inventory; road repair and maintenance; fuel and fire management; thinning; recreation plan implementation, maintenance of recreational trails and facilities; forest inventory maintenance and boundary encroachment resolution.

ACQUISITION NEEDS:

967.8 Acres of Optimal Management Boundary

SURPLUS ACREAGE:

None

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:

Liaison Committee, Volusia County Council, Management Plan Advisory Group and Public Hearing, Acquisition and Restoration Council

















