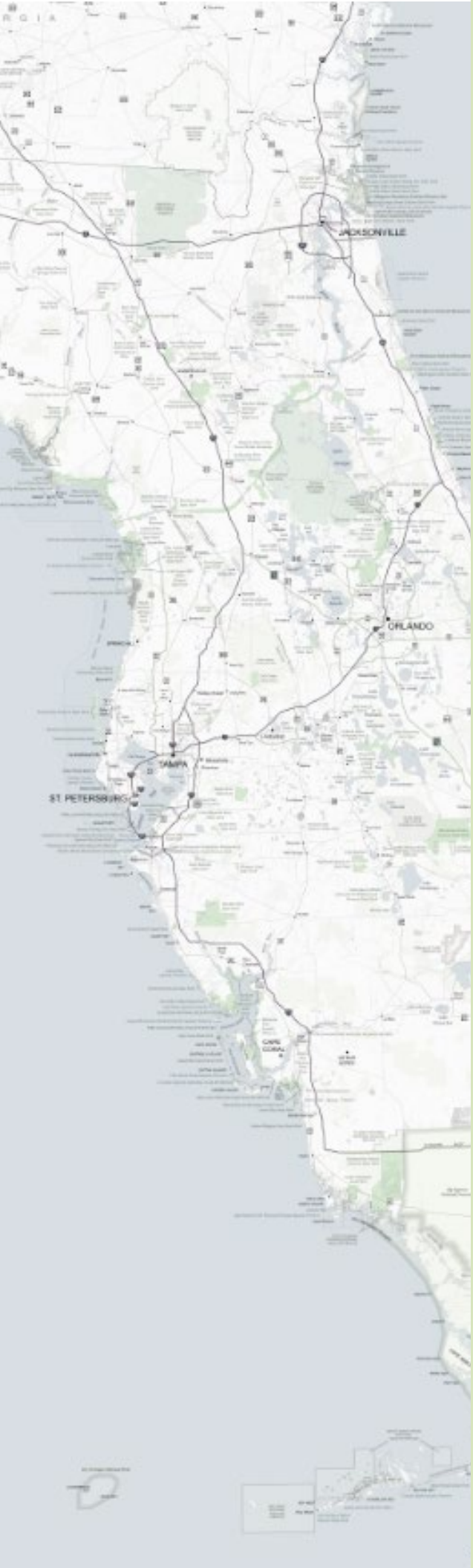
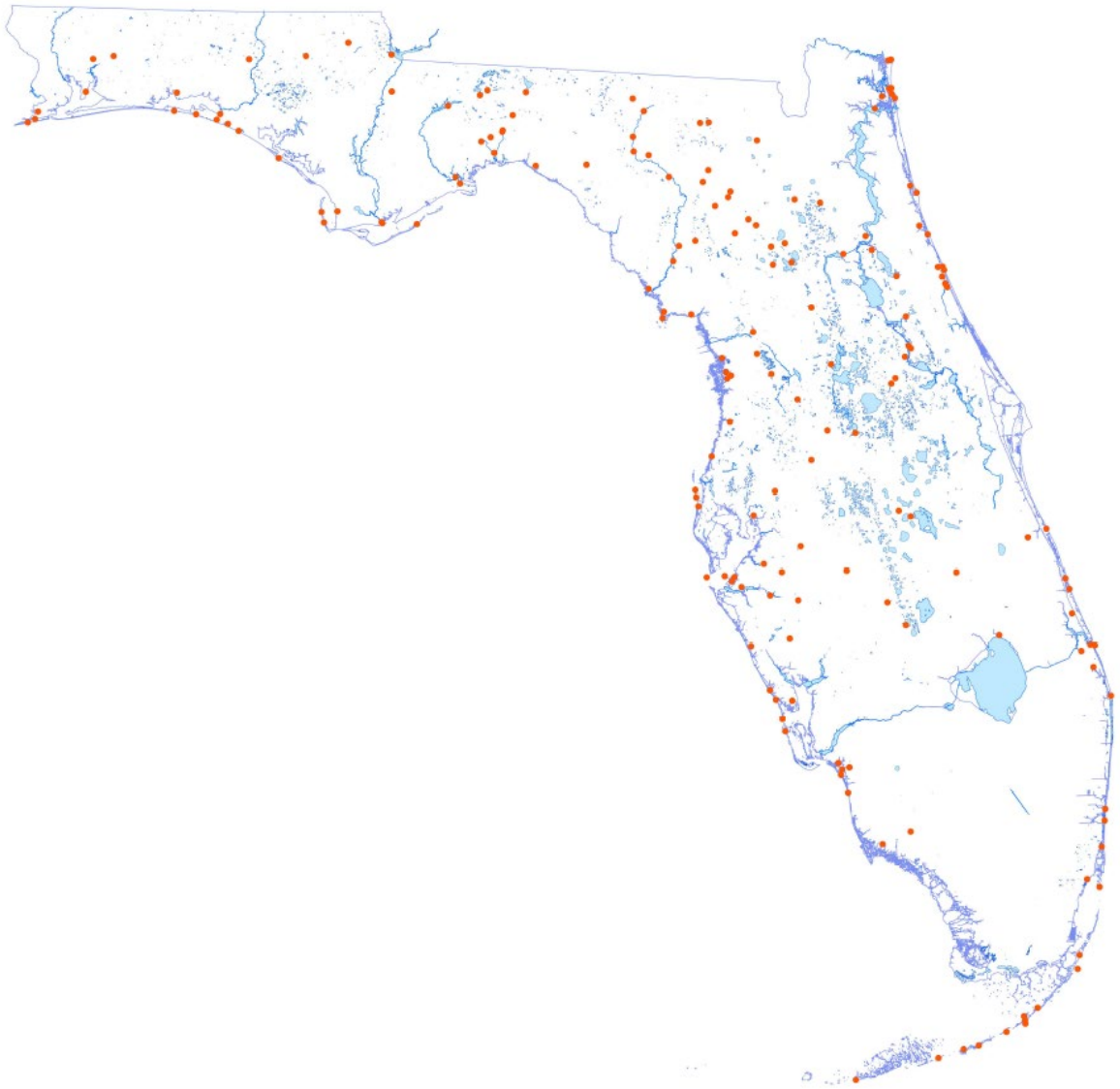


FLORIDA PARK SERVICE UNIT PLANNING PROCESS

STATEWIDE PHILOSOPHY & FRAMEWORK

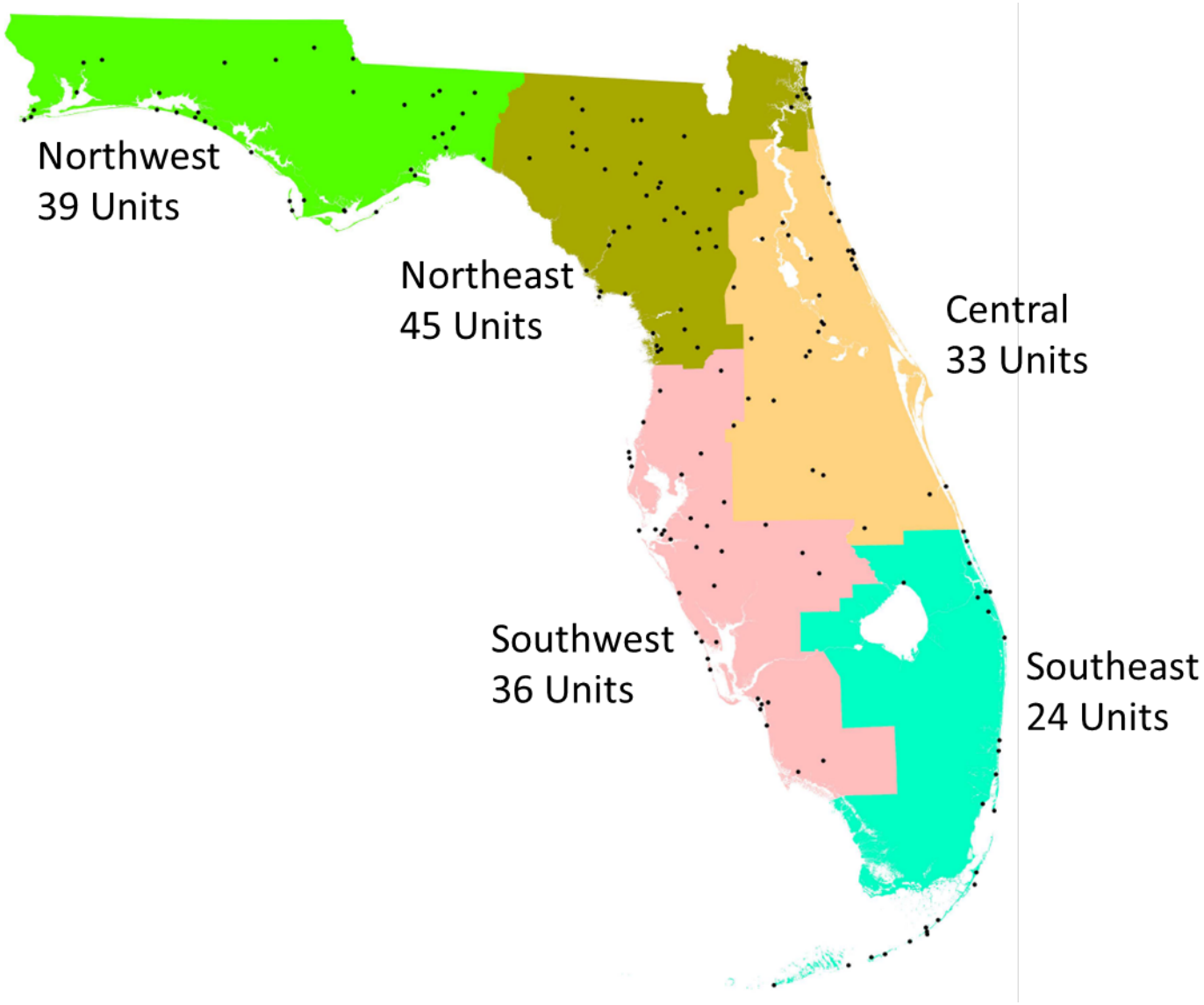
MISSION AND GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) is among the largest managers of public conservation lands in the state of Florida, managing 175 units totaling nearly 900,000 acres. DRP is an innovative leader in balancing preservation of natural domain with demand for resource-based recreation. This successful duality is marked by the continued resilience of Florida state parks in the face of often robust public use, and it is at the core of the DRP mission, "to provide resource-based recreation while preserving, restoring, interpreting natural and cultural resources." This mission is essential to preserving the environmental and cultural legacy of Florida – for providing places where citizenry can connect with green space and heritage.



ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

DRP is administratively divided into five districts, each with characteristics partial to their respective regions of the state. The defining natural elements such as geomorphology, geology, hydrology, natural communities, and biota, as well as land and recreation program areas, are aggregated and interpreted in each of five DRP District Plans. DRP District 1 corresponds to the northwest, District 2 to the northeast, District 3 to the central, District 4 to the southwest, and District 5 to the southeast, including the Florida Keys.



PURPOSE OF PARK PLANNING

Park plans, both individually and collectively, serve as the basic statement of policy and direction for management of Florida State Parks. They identify the goals, objectives, and actions that guide management in two broad categories – resource management and land use. Arranged into two respective components, plans set forth specific measures that will be implemented to preserve and restore natural and cultural resources and provide public access for resource-based recreation and interpretation among these resources. The plans are intended to meet the requirements of sections 253.034 and 259.032 of the Florida Statutes and Chapter 18-2 of the Florida Administrative Code, which provide the legal foundation for strategically and proactively, rather than reactively, identifying the needs and opportunities within each unit of the Florida State Park System.

All developments and resource alterations proposed in the plans are subject to the granting of appropriate permits, easements, licenses, and other required legal instruments. Approval of a management plan does not constitute an exemption from complying with the appropriate local, state, or federal agencies. The plans are also intended to meet the requirements for beach and shore preservation, as defined in Chapter 161, Florida Statutes, and Chapters 62B-33, 62B-36, and 62R-49 of the Florida Administrative Code.

Florida's state parks play a significant role in preserving natural domain, biodiversity, and recreational green space, yet their efficacy is being tested throughout the state by sprawling development that threatens to isolate many units from other biologically productive lands. At no other time in the history of the state has a greater need existed to plan for and create ecological and recreational linkages between regional state parks and other local, state, and federal conservation lands. Linear eco-recreation connections can serve as both wildlife corridors and multiuse trails that provide a green, non-motor vehicle transportation link between state parks. Such "greenway" connections have the potential to elevate local state park units to regional destinations by extending the sense of preservation and recreational opportunities well beyond their boundaries. To this common goal, the Florida State Park System is integral to the vision and successful implementation of the Florida Wildlife Corridor – the creation of a contiguous network of public and private conservation lands for safe passage and dispersal, essential to preserving healthy populations of plants and animals.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FOR DISTRICTWIDE PLANNING

DRP provides an opportunity for public input by conducting various formats of community engagement, including public hearings, workshops, open houses, and advisory group meetings to openly review and discuss the proposals of draft unit management plans. Meeting notices are published in the Florida Administrative Register, included on DEP or DRP website calendars, physically posted in clear view at the parks, and promoted locally.

Florida Statutes Chapter 259.032 Paragraph 10(b) establishes a requirement that all state land management plans for properties greater than 160 acres will be reviewed by an advisory group:

> *"Individual management plans required by s. 253.034(5), for parcels over 160 acres, shall be developed with input from an advisory group. Members of this advisory group shall include, at a minimum, representatives of the lead land managing agency, co-managing entities, local private property owners, the appropriate soil and water conservation district, a local conservation organization, and a local elected official."*

The purpose of such advisory groups is to receive stakeholder input regarding the needs, opportunities, and management objective and concepts of the plans.

Stakeholder engagement for the units within a given district is offered in a manner that is recognizable from the DRP's past traditional method of planning for individual parks or trails (one unit at a time).

In the new methodology, in-person forums are still conducted county-by-county, in the counties where each of the parks are located. By planning for many units at once, within a consolidated process, however, the DRP is able to showcase the plans for not only one unit within each county but for all units within a given county – thereby maximizing the message, understanding, and perspective that the parks and trails are integral to a system, i.e., the units are not planned or managed in isolation. Each of the countywide meetings expands on this regional approach by including planning materials for units within a multi-county radius. While individual units were acquired and are planned and operated according to their unique attributes, they contribute to a complex of other conservation and recreation lands, collectively forming an intentionally balanced program.

For example, for the Northeast District, in Suwannee County (where the DRP only has one park) plans were displayed for several parks that share in the same conservation and ecotourism space. And, for each meeting of a given region (e.g., North Florida Highlands), materials of respective regionwide scope were repeatedly displayed so that plans could always be discussed in geographic context. By the same logic of contextualization, materials of districtwide or statewide scope were displayed at all meetings.

This expanded way of sharing draft plans in each county amounts to additional opportunities for stakeholder involvement. For example, Peacock Springs State Park was not only discussed at the meeting in Live Oak – the seat of Suwannee County, where the park is located, but also in Mayo (Lafayette County) and Lake City (Columbia County). Conducting meetings across multiple counties:

- contextualizes the parks and trails within the region and park system,
- broadens the scope of community conversations,
- educates participants about other parks apart from those on which they are initially focused,
- facilitates understanding of the ways that some units are favorably suited for certain types of projects, and
- aids in expressing that the parks are not only locally significant but also globally significant – while continuing to engage local stakeholders (e.g., nearby residents, adjacent landowners, county commissioners, mayors, tourism development councils, etc.).

As a result, participants are convening at these meetings who were otherwise unlikely to attend the same meeting (e.g., volunteers of different parks or local government and conservation stakeholders). Additionally, as a matter of practical convenience, the series of meetings (showcasing many of the same units on multiple occasions over a multi-month timespan) provides alternative dates/opportunities for participations, such that interested persons with scheduling conflicts are enabled to consider attending other related meetings.

Utilizing the Northeast District as the example, over the course of an intensive two-month period, the Office of Park Planning, in close coordination with district and park staff, conducted 14 public meetings that were widely noticed (consistent with and exceeding statutory requirements) across the Northeast District. These meetings were conducted in county seats or other relevant population centers where accommodating, accessible civic venues were available.

MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

In accordance with Chapter 258, Florida Statutes and Chapter 62D-2, Florida Administrative Code, DRP is charged with the responsibility of developing and operating Florida's recreation and parks system. These are administered in accordance with the following policy:

> *It shall be the policy of the Division of Recreation and Parks to promote the state park system for the use, enjoyment, and benefit of the people of Florida and visitors; to acquire typical portions of the original domain of the state which will be accessible to all of the people, and of such character as to emblemize the state's natural values; conserve these natural values for all time; administer the development, use and maintenance of these lands and render such public service in so doing, in such a manner as to enable the people of Florida and visitors to enjoy these values without depleting them; to contribute materially to the development of a strong mental, moral, and physical fiber in the people; to provide for perpetual preservation of historic sites and memorials of statewide significance and interpretation of their history to the people; to contribute to the tourist appeal of Florida.*

Thorough inventory and assessment of the natural and cultural resources of DRP-managed lands is conducted upon initial acquisition and updated cyclically through the unit management plan revision process. This information is largely contained within the Resource Management Component of the individual park chapters.

Sovereign Submerged Lands

The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees) has granted management authority of certain sovereign submerged lands to DRP under Management Agreement MA 68-086 (as amended Jan. 19, 1988). The management area includes a 400-foot zone from the edge of mean high water where a park boundary borders sovereign submerged lands fronting beaches, bays, estuarine areas, rivers, or streams. Where emergent wetland vegetation exists, the zone extends waterward 400 feet beyond the vegetation. The agreement is intended to provide additional protection to resources of the park and nearshore areas and to provide authority to manage activities that could adversely affect public recreational uses.

Many operating procedures are standardized system-wide and are set by internal direction. These procedures are outlined in the DRP Operations Manual (OM), which covers areas such as personnel management, uniforms and personal appearance, training, signage, communications, fiscal procedures, interpretation, concessions, public-use regulations, resource management and protection, law enforcement, visitor and staff safety, and facilities and equipment maintenance.

Coastal Management

DRP manages over 100 miles of sandy beach, which represents one-eighth of Florida’s total sandy beach shoreline. Approximately one-quarter of Florida’s state parks are beach-oriented and account for more than 60% of statewide park visitation. The management and maintenance of beaches and their associated systems and processes is complicated by the presence of inlets and various structures (jetties, groins, breakwaters) all along the coast. As a result, beach restoration and nourishment have become increasingly necessary and costly procedures for protecting valuable infrastructure. Beach and inlet management practices affect beaches for long distances on either side of a particular project.

Unless otherwise posted, all state park beaches are accessible to the public. During shorebird nesting season, certain areas may be closed to prevent visitors from impacting nesting shorebirds. Although this may suffice to protect nests, once chicks are mobile and leave the nest it is more difficult to protect them from visitor impacts. This is particularly problematic with solitary nesters, whose isolated nests and mobile chicks are cryptic and often difficult to protect. Pedestrians and cyclists using the beach may also flush resting and feeding birds either intentionally or inadvertently. Interpretive signs are used at beach access points to educate park visitors about avoiding impacts to shorebirds. Although dogs are not permitted on park beaches, this policy is occasionally violated by park visitors, often those accessing the park from adjacent beaches. Dogs may pose a greater threat to shorebirds than humans, particularly if the dogs are allowed to run off leash. DRP uses signage at all park beach access points to inform visitors of rules and regulations pertaining to dogs and other potential impacts.

DRP has management authority over a zone extending 400 feet from the edge of mean high water in areas where state parks interface with estuarine or coastal waters. Among various potential management actions, this authority provides for establishment of no-wake or non-motorized zones for the purposes of protecting aquatic habitats and/or visitor safety. There is also provision to restrict boat landings where necessary to protect imperiled species.

In 1986, Florida legislatively designated (Chapter 161 F. S.) numerous areas in the state, including many state parks as “critically eroded” and began to develop regional remediation strategies and long-term restoration plans (DEP 2012a). Soon after, the State of Florida and the U.S. federal government executed memoranda of understanding clarifying their partnership to dredge inlets and transport beach-quality sediments to downdrift beaches and nearshore sites. Federal, state, and local stakeholders agreed to participate in management actions that included inlet sand bypassing, beach nourishment, and shoreline hardening where severe erosion cases were warranted.

The DEP Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection (RCP) is responsible for the protection and management of coastal systems in the state of Florida. As a key stakeholder in the management of nearly 400 miles of shoreline and eight miles of inlets, RCP has developed a statewide Strategic Beach Management Plan to help prioritize its responsibilities and effectively implement necessary management action.

This statewide RCP program also supports comprehensive shoreline surveys and monitoring, development of regulatory systems and detailed documentation of weather-related impacts along all sandy beach ecosystems in Florida. Each year, DRP obtains routine aerial photography that covers over one quarter of the state, thereby gathering, every four years, a complete photographic collection of Florida’s shorelines. DRP also documents and has extensive records of topography and nearshore bathymetry for all critical erosion regions of the state. Along with RCP’s existing record of aerial photography (i.e., 1977-present), DRP may collect additional GPS details of eroded regions of specific state park beaches.

The RCP also administers the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) program, an essential element of Florida’s coastal management program, protecting the state’s beaches and dunes. The CCCL passes through all state parks directly bordering the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Development seaward of the line is limited; however, public infrastructure providing shoreline access, natural resource conservation or protection, as well as some types of park facility development are permitted subjectively in strict coordination with the RCP administered CCCL program. Any proposed development at or seaward of the CCCL also involves coordination with local county and municipal planning officials.

Sea Level Rise

Sea level rise associated with global climate change has increased the severity and impacts of spring tides and storm surge events along the entire Florida coastline. Coastal state parks are experiencing a range of impacts including shoreline recession, loss of maritime habitats, erosion of archaeological sites, and damage to facilities and infrastructure. Anticipation of science supported successional changes to physical coastlines and coastal areas must be a part of future planning efforts. Planning in coastal parks where sea level rise impacts are particularly immanent should include:

- Risk assessment
- Identifying catalysts/trigger points that will initiate contingency actions
- Developing options, in response to trigger points, ranging from in-situ mitigation to strategic inland retreat of facilities and operations

Surplus Lands

How constituent parcels support and contribute to the holistic natural landscape and natural processes of a given state park is ultimately evaluated during the unit planning process. If any lands are determined to be surplus to the purposes or needs of the park, such determination must definitively conclude that the subject land is no longer contiguous with or supporting any identifiable natural or cultural resources or aspects of the visitor experience. Similarly, such determination must also definitively conclude that the subject land is no longer, in any way, germane to the park or broader ecological or cultural attributes of the surrounding area that complement, buffer, or provide benefit to the park. This evaluation and determination must be made through coordinated evaluation with appropriate DRP program areas. Such evaluation must include careful consideration of any conservation or preservation values, aesthetics, operational opportunities and constraints, and long-term public benefits. Identification of any surplus lands, if applicable, will be specifically described in the optimum boundary section of the respective park chapter.

MANAGEMENT COORDINATION

State parks are managed in accordance with all applicable laws and administrative rules. Recognizing that the lands that support and impact natural processes extend beyond unit boundaries, partner agencies have a major role in the management of state parks – both in terms of creating greater ecosystem conservation and supporting and assisting key program areas. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Forest Service (FFS), assists DRP staff in the development of wildfire emergency plans and provides the authorization required for prescribed fires. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) assists staff in the enforcement of state laws pertaining to wildlife, freshwater fish and other aquatic life existing within the park. In addition, FWC aids DRP with wildlife management programs, including imperiled species management. The Florida Department of State (FDOS), Division of Historical Resources (DHR) assists staff to ensure protection of archaeological and historical sites. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection (RCP) aids staff in aquatic preserves management programs, as well as is planning and construction activities seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL). In addition, RCP aids the staff in the development of erosion control projects.

Contract Services

DRP may provide the services and facilities outlined in this plan either with its own funds and staff or through an outsourcing contract. Private contractors may provide assistance with natural resource management and restoration activities, or a concessionaire may provide services to park visitors in order to enhance the visitor experience. For example, a concessionaire could be authorized to sell merchandise and food and to rent recreational equipment for use in parks. A concessionaire may also be authorized to provide specialized services, such as interpretive tours, or overnight accommodations when the required capital investment exceeds that which DRP can incur. Decisions regarding outsourcing, contracting with the private sector, the use of concessionaires and similar topics are made on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the policies set forth in the DRP OM.

PARK MANAGEMENT GOALS

The following goals express the long-term intentions of the DRP in managing state parks:

- Provide Administrative Support for All Park Functions
- Protect, Restore, and Maintain Hydrology to the Extent Feasible
- Protect Water Quality and Quantity
- Restore and Maintain Natural Communities
- Maintain, Improve, or Restore Imperiled Species Populations
- Remove Invasive and Nuisance Species and Conduct Maintenance Control
- Protect, Preserve, and Maintain Cultural Resources
- Provide Public Access for Recreational and Interpretive Opportunities

Goal
Provide Administrative Support for All Park Functions

Administration of DRP program areas is provided at three levels – Park, District, and Division – dependent on scope and complexity. Park level administration includes local financial management, project management, implementation of facilities maintenance, visitor programs, routine resource management measures, and supervision of local staff. District level administration provides guidance and support in broad program areas, ensuring consistency and compliance with the implementation of DRP policies and procedures in the day-to-day operations of subject parks. At the highest level, the Division provides statewide policy direction as well as supervision and support for all program areas. Aspects of this goal are addressed through the resource management and land use components of management plans as well as through constant efforts outside of the context of management planning.

Goal
Protect, Restore, and Maintain Hydrology to the Extent Feasible

The natural hydrology of most state parks was impaired to varying degrees before state acquisition. Florida's native habitats are precisely adapted to natural drainage patterns and seasonal water level fluctuations, and variations in these factors frequently determine the types of natural communities that occur on a particular site. Even minor changes to natural hydrology can result in the loss of plant and animal species from a landscape. Restoring state park lands to original natural conditions often depends on returning natural hydrological processes and conditions. This is done primarily by filling or plugging ditches, removing obstructions to surface water sheetflow, installing culverts or low water crossings and installing water control structures to manage water levels.

Conservation of Soil Resources

The DRP ensures that all resource management activities, facility construction or enhancements, and visitor uses avoid significant erosive impacts that may lead to a net loss of soil resources. Management measures support the restoration, enhancement, and maintenance of intact native plant communities as the primary strategy for conserving soil resources and avoiding soil erosion. Specifically, access trails, fire lines, and resource management roads are designed, placed, and maintained to avoid acceleration and channelization of surface waters that could lead to gully erosion. Low-water stream crossings and/or culverts are installed and maintained to avoid significant streambed disturbance and subsequent loss of suspended sediments.

Goal
Protect Water Quality and Quantity

The Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) requires states to submit to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) a list of surface waters that do not meet applicable water quality standards. Waterbodies are assessed using the Impaired Waters Rule (IWR, Chapter 62-303, F.A.C). For each of these impaired waterbodies, a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) must be set for each pollutant causing the impairment.

In 1996, DEP initiated a formal statewide monitoring program for surface and groundwater (Maddox et al. 1992; DEP 2009). This monitoring program took a comprehensive watershed approach based on 52 natural hydrologic basins. In addition, the DEP assigned a water body identification number (WBID) to each water body; (e.g., Fanning Spring is 3422S). DEP evaluates these hydrologic basins on a five-year cycle to identify impairments and implement TMDLs in accordance with federal and state regulations (Livingston 2003). This watershed approach provides a framework for implementing TMDL requirements that will attempt to restore and protect water bodies that have been declared impaired (Clark and DeBusk 2008).

Once TMDLs are set, a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) is the primary tool to identify strategies to address specific water quality issues in impaired water bodies. BMAPs are developed by DEP in coordination with multiple stakeholders, including local, regional, and state government agencies, non-governmental organizations, elected officials, citizens, and private interests. The success of strategies identified in each BMAP is evaluated according to a fixed schedule on an ongoing basis.

Minimum Flows and Levels (MFL) or Minimum Lake Levels (MLL) are established for water bodies by the state's water management districts to identify the water levels below which the important values of the water body would be negatively impacted. The factors that can be considered in defining MFLs for a river or spring include recreation, fish and wildlife habitats, estuarine resources, transport of detritus and sediments, maintenance of freshwater storage and supply, aesthetic values, filtration and adsorption of nutrients and pollutants, water quality, and navigation. Because different water bodies vary in their uses and attributes, not all these factors may be relevant in setting MFLs for a particular river or spring.

The Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act (FSAPA) was passed in 2016 to assist with protection and recovery of 30 Outstanding Florida Springs (OFS) (Chapter 373.801-813 F.A.C.). The official legislative list of designated OFS includes all first magnitude and several additional ecologically significant springs. A spring priority focus area (PFA) is a specific protection area within an OFS springshed where certain land use activities could most adversely impact a target spring. These springshed protection zones are also priority areas for BMAP projects. The FSAPA sets forth several requirements for protecting OFS, including:

- MFL must be established; springs below MFL or projected to be below it within 20 years are required have a prevention/recovery strategy plan.
- Priority focus areas must be identified for each OFS.
- Local governments within priority focus areas are required to implement fertilizer regulations.
- Agricultural operations within priority focus areas must follow best management practices.
- In priority focus areas where nutrients from wastewater make up over a threshold percentage of nutrient inputs, strategies to address these nutrient sources are implemented.

The Clean Water Act requires all states to classify their surface water bodies according to designated uses (Alexander 1998). Florida's water quality classifications are arranged in order of the degree of protection required, with Class I waters having generally the most stringent water quality criteria and Class V the least stringent (i.e., per rule 62-302.400, F.A.C). Nonetheless, Class I, II, and III surface waters equally share water quality criteria meant to protect fish consumption, recreation and the propagation and maintenance of a healthy, well-balanced population of fish and wildlife. All surface waters within Florida State Parks are designated as either Class I, II, or III waters.

Beginning in 1996, with expanded efforts in 2000, DEP initiated a formal, statewide monitoring program for surface waters and groundwater. This Integrated Water Resource Monitoring Program (IWRMP) evolved from a mandate to implement the requirements of the 1999 Florida Watershed Restoration Act and to satisfy Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. The IWRMP takes a comprehensive watershed approach to monitoring Florida's water resources based on natural hydrologic units. Accordingly, the 52 hydrologic basins in Florida are on a five-year rotating schedule that allows water resource issues to be addressed at different geographic scales. In addition, the IWRMP assigns a water body identification number (WBID) to each water body. This watershed approach provides a framework for implementing TMDL requirements to restore and protect specific water bodies. All priorities for TMDL development in Florida follow strict adherence to verified priority water body lists reviewed by the EPA. Specifically, DEP's primary plan to address water quality issues is to implement Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) (DEP 2008c; Grubbs 2001). Much of the important hydrological information collected and managed by various agencies can be accessed through a variety of web-based databases.

Florida's water management districts are mandated by the Florida Statutes to ensure adequate water supply for all citizens, provide protection of natural systems including water quality, minimize harm to water resources, and promote the reuse of reclaimed water. Additionally, they are required to understand and plan for future water supply demand. When existing water sources are potentially insufficient or fall below specific criteria within a projected 20-year period, managers must then develop a regional water supply plan, as well as designate affected areas as Water Resource Caution Areas. The state's five water management districts include the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NWFWMD), the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD), the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

Goal
Restore and Maintain Natural Communities

DRP practices natural systems management. In most cases, this includes returning fire to its natural role in fire-dependent natural communities. Other methods include large-scale restoration projects and smaller-scale natural community improvements intended to re-establish hydrological regimes and the natural relative abundance of native plants to provide high quality wildlife habitats. Natural resource management efforts strive towards habitat conditions that match natural domain – conditions that existed prior to European contact. This leads to a land management approach that focuses on restoring or mimicking the natural processes that shaped natural communities and systems over time.

The system of classifying natural communities employed in this plan was developed by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI). The premise of this system is that physical factors such as climate, geology, soil, hydrology, and fire frequency generally determine the species composition of an area, and that areas that are similar with respect to those factors will tend to have natural communities with similar species compositions. Obvious differences in species composition can occur, however, despite similar physical conditions. In other instances, physical factors are substantially different, yet the species compositions are quite similar. Some physical influences, such as fire frequency, may vary from FNAI descriptions for certain natural communities in this plan.

The desired future conditions for FNAI natural communities found within DRP-managed lands are described in each of the five district introductions. Natural communities specific to each unit, along with general management measures required to bring these natural communities to their desired future conditions are discussed in greater detail at the park chapter level.

When a natural community reaches its desired future condition, it is considered to be in a maintenance condition. Required actions for sustaining maintenance condition may include:

- Maintaining optimal fire return intervals for fire-dependent communities.
- Ongoing control of invasive plant and animal species.
- Maintaining natural hydrological functions.
- Preserving a community's biodiversity and vegetative structure.
- Protection of all site-appropriate native plants and animals.
- Preserving ecotones between natural communities across the greater landscape.

<u>Restoration</u>
In some cases, the reintroduction and maintenance of natural processes is not enough to reach the desired future condition for natural communities and active restoration programs are required. Restoration of altered natural communities to fully functioning natural landscapes often requires substantial efforts that may include mechanical treatment and reintroduction or augmentation of native plants and animals.

Restoration is defined as the process of assisting the recovery and natural function of degraded natural communities to desired future condition, including the re-establishment of biodiversity, ecological processes, vegetation structure and physical characteristics. Examples that would qualify as natural community restoration include:

- Large projects intended to restore natural landscapes in terms of hydrologic function and other natural processes, species diversity and species proportions. This may include removal of off-site species and the reintroduction of both native groundcover and overstory trees.

- Large-scale hardwood removal in fire-suppressed pinelands.
- Timber removal activities that support restoration of native pine forests, or more natural and sustainable basal areas.
- Mechanical manipulation to mitigate hazardous fuel loads prior to reintroducing fire.

The key concept is that restoration projects will go beyond routine management activities such as the application of fire as a natural process, spot treatments of invasive plants, and small-scale vegetation management.

Improvement

Improvements are similar to restoration but on a less intensive scale. This typically includes small-scale vegetative management activities or minor habitat manipulation. Examples that would qualify as natural community improvement include:

- Reducing off-site hardwoods in pineland systems via select mowing, girdling, or herbiciding to improve the effectiveness of prescribed fire and improve understory species proportions.
- Underplanting of pine seedlings to achieve target overstory density and species proportions.
- Minor hydrological improvements such as culvert upgrades or enhancement of low water crossings.

Prescribed Fire

Prescribed fire is used to mimic natural, lightning-set fires, which are among the primary natural forces that shaped Florida's ecosystem. Prescribed fire increases the abundance and health of many wildlife species. Many of Florida's imperiled species, including both plants and animals, are dependent on periodic fire for their continued existence.

Fire-type natural communities consist of two general types: fire-dependent and fire-influenced. Fire-dependent natural communities gradually accumulate flammable vegetation, and periodic fire reduces wildfire hazards by reducing these fuels. Fire-dependent natural communities also rely on natural fire return intervals to maintain plant species proportions, distribution, and relative abundance. Inadequate fire frequency or fire exclusion results in one suite of species (such as woody shrubs) dominating the understory at the expense of greater diversity.

Fire-influenced natural communities are generally shaped by natural factors other than fire, such as local hydrology or maritime influence. However, these areas often occur adjacent to fire-dependent communities where natural or prescribed fires burn across ecotones to varying extents and can have a profound influence on natural processes. One such example is fire moving from mesic flatwoods or sandhill into imbedded forested wetlands such as dome and basin swamp, thus maintaining an upland-wetland ecotone free of woody shrubs. Maintaining ecotones between these types of communities are important for plant and animal species that are adapted to these transitional areas. The use of hard firebreaks such as roads and disked lines along ecotones is discouraged for this reason, and some sections of road along ecotones may require rerouting or abandonment and restoration to restore seamless connections and natural conditions.

DRP applies fire to all fire-type natural communities according to their respective natural ecological relationship to fire and associated recommended fire return intervals as determined by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI). All prescribed fires in the state park system are conducted with authorization from the Florida Forest Service (FFS). Wildfire suppression activities are coordinated with the FFS.

To track fire management activities, DRP maintains a statewide burn database. The database facilitates tracking of the fire management programs for each park, including individual fire zone histories and fire return intervals, staff training and experience, backlogged zones, and other information. The database is also used for annual prescribed fire planning which allows DRP to document fire management goals and objectives on an annual basis. The database is updated each quarter, and reports are produced that track progress toward meeting annual fire objectives.

Prescribed fire is planned for each burn zone at appropriate intervals. For each park, the prescribed fire plan is updated annually because fire management is a dynamic process. To provide adaptive responses to changing conditions, fire management requires careful planning based on annual and very specific burn objectives. Each annual burn plan is developed to support and implement the broader objectives and actions outlined in this 10-year management plan.

Goal
Maintain, Improve, or Restore Imperiled Species

Imperiled species are those that are tracked by FNAI as critically imperiled or listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), FWC, and/or FDACS as endangered, threatened, or of special concern.

DRP strives to maintain and restore viable populations of imperiled plant and animal species primarily by implementing effective management of natural systems. Single species management is appropriate in state parks when the maintenance, recovery or restoration of a species or population is complicated due to constraints associated with long-term restoration efforts, unnaturally high mortality, or insufficient habitat. Single species management should be compatible with the maintenance of natural processes and should not imperil other native species or seriously compromise park values.

In the preparation of this management plan, DRP staff consulted with staff of FWC Imperiled Species Management, FWC regional biologists and other appropriate federal, state, and local agencies for assistance in developing imperiled animal species management objectives and actions. Likewise, for imperiled plant species, DRP staff consulted with FDACS. Data collected by the USFWS, FWC, FDACS, and FNAI as part of ongoing research and monitoring programs will be reviewed by park staff to inform management decisions that may have an impact on imperiled species in state parks.

Ongoing inventory and monitoring of imperiled species in the state park system is necessary to accomplish DRP mission. Long-term monitoring is also essential to ensure the effectiveness of resource management programs. Monitoring efforts must be prioritized so that the data collected provides information that can be used to improve or confirm the effectiveness of management actions on conservation priorities. Monitoring intensity must at least be at a level that provides the minimum data needed to make informed decisions to meet conservation goals. Not all imperiled species require intensive monitoring efforts on a regular interval. Priority must be given to those species that can provide valuable data to guide adaptive management practices.

In accordance with Section 259.105 of the Florida Statutes as established by Senate Bill 494, all state parks in Florida are assessed for eligibility as gopher tortoise recipient sites. In accordance with Senate Bill 494 and FWC recipient site permit requirements, any state park having more than 40 contiguous acres of suitable gopher tortoise habitat will be considered and further evaluated by FWC as a possible

recipient site. Whether an eligible park would receive a recipient site permit from FWC would depend on the results of transect surveys in the suspected suitable habitat natural communities.

Each state park chapter within a given DRP district plan contains a table of all known and potential imperiled species within the park and identifies their status as defined by various entities. It also identifies the types of management actions that are currently being taken by DRP staff or others and identifies the current level of monitoring effort. The codes used under the column headings for management actions and monitoring level are defined following the table. Explanations for federal and state status as well as FNAI global and state rank are provided in the district-wide plant and animal addendum.

Goal
Remove Invasive and Nuisance Species and Conduct Maintenance Control

Invasive species are species that (1) are non-native to a specified geographic area, (2) were introduced by humans intentionally or unintentionally, and (3) cause or can cause environmental or economic harm or harm to humans. Invasive species can out-compete, displace, or destroy native species and their habitats, often because they have been released from the natural controls of their native ranges. If left unchecked, invasive plants and animals alter the character, productivity, and conservation values of the natural areas they invade.

Invasive animal species include non-native wildlife species, free-ranging domesticated pets or livestock and feral animals. Because of the negative impacts to natural systems attributed to invasive animals, DRP actively removes invasive animals from state parks, with priority being given to those species causing the greatest ecological damage.

Native wildlife may also pose management problems or nuisances within state parks. Nuisance species are defined as individuals or groups of individuals of a species that cause management issues, property damage, or present a threat to public safety or imperiled species. This can apply to both native and non-native species whose individual behavior creates specific management problems or concerns. These species are dealt with on a case-by-case basis in accordance with DRP Nuisance and Exotic Animal Removal Standard.

Quantitative data descriptions of park lands regarding inventory of invasive plants and associated acreages and levels of infestation, as well as a record of control efforts for both invasive plants and animals, is tracked in the DRP Natural Recourse Tracking System (NRTS) database.

DRP actively removes invasive plant species from state parks, with priority being given to those causing the greatest ecological damage. Species of concern are categorized by the Florida Invasive Species Council (FISC) as Category I and II (FISC, 2021). Removal techniques may include mechanical treatment, herbicides, or biocontrol agents. All treatments are to be documented in NRTS.

<u>Arthropod Control Plan</u>
All DRP-managed lands are designated as “environmentally sensitive and biologically highly productive” in accordance with Chapter 388 and Chapter 388.4111, Florida Statutes. If a local mosquito control district proposes a treatment plan, DRP works with the local mosquito control district to achieve consensus. By policy of DEP since 1987, aerial application is not allowed, but larviciding and ground adulticiding (truck spraying in public use areas) is typically allowed as needed to ensure public health.

DRP does not authorize new physical alterations of marshes or other wetlands through ditching or the installation of water control structures. Mosquito control plans may be temporarily set aside under declared threats to public or animal health, or during a governor's emergency declaration.

Arthropod control plans are included as appendix items in the districtwide plan, however, are subject to periodic review and revision (i.e., versions captured in the appendix may become superseded by updates). Not all state park units have an established arthropod control plan, although they may still have similar procedures in place with the local mosquito control district. In general, park lands should be sampled prior to any requested mosquito control efforts. Surveillance at a park is completed by a variety of techniques including landing rate counts, citizen complaints, light traps, and by dip-netting for larval mosquitoes. Once mosquitoes are detected, monitoring and surveillance efforts continue to determine mosquito prevalence, abundance, and the anticipated effects of control activities on target and non-target species. Depending on the severity of the mosquito problem, mosquitoes will be controlled with ground or aerial spraying of wetland areas. In addition, predacious fish may be stocked to use as a biological control. Normal range mosquitoes may be controlled via ground-based fogging around high use areas such as campgrounds, or around the park staff residences based on request. Fogging should not take place during high winds to prevent unintended effects in adjacent conservation areas.

Goal
Protect, Preserve, and Maintain Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include archaeological sites, historic buildings and structures, cultural landscapes and associated artifacts/materials, and collections. The Florida Department of State maintains the master inventory through the Florida Master Site File (FMSF). All state agencies are required to locate, inventory, and evaluate cultural resources that appear to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

For the purposes of this plan, "significant cultural resource" means those listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The terms "archaeological site," "historic structure," and "historic landscape" refer to all resources that will become 50 years old during the term of this plan.

DRP practices preservation of cultural resources according to the classifications, unique needs, and functions of each feature within a given unit. Objectives and actions associated with each listed cultural resource will consider the types and extent of preservation that are appropriate. For archaeological sites, appropriate actions are typically within the framework of protection from external impacts that are not inherent to the nature of the site. Such protection may serve to stabilize a site from reasonably avoidable degradation. For historic structures, in many cases, repairs and renovations are coordinated with respective partner agencies such that the structure may continue to be utilized for its interpretive or operational purpose.

Condition Assessment

Evaluating the condition of cultural resources is accomplished using a three-part evaluation scale expressed as "good," "fair," and "poor." These terms describe the present condition, rather than comparing what exists to the ideal condition.

"Good" describes a condition of structural stability and physical wholeness where no obvious deterioration other than normal occurs.

"Fair" describes a condition in which there is a discernible decline in condition between inspections and the wholeness or physical integrity is and continues to be threatened by factors other than normal wear. A fair assessment is usually a cause for concern.

"Poor" describes an unstable condition where there is palpable, accelerating decline and physical integrity is being compromised quickly. A resource in poor condition suffers obvious declines in physical integrity from year to year. A poor condition suggests immediate action is needed to re-establish physical stability.

Level of Significance

Applying the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places involves the use of contexts, as well as an evaluation of integrity of the site. A cultural resource's significance derives from its historical, architectural, ethnographic, or archaeological context. Evaluation of cultural sites will result in one of the followings designations:

- NRL (National Register Listed)
- NRE (National Register Eligible)
- NE (Not Evaluated)
- NS (Not Significant)

There are no criteria for determining the significance of collections or archival material. The significance of a collection is based on what or whom it may represent. For instance, a collection of furniture from a single family and particular era in connection with a significant historic site would be considered highly significant. In the same way, a high-quality collection of artifacts from a significant archaeological site would be of important significance. A large herbarium collected from a specific park over many decades could be valuable to resource management efforts. Archival records are most significant as a research source. Any records depicting critical events in the history of a given park, including construction and resource management efforts, would all be significant.

DHR Compliance and Review

All activities related to land clearing, ground-disturbing activities, major repairs, or additions to historic structures listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places must be submitted to DHR for review and comment prior to undertaking the proposed project.

Recommendations may include concurrence with the project as submitted, pre-testing of the project site by a certified archaeological monitor, cultural resource assessment survey by a qualified professional archaeologist, or modifications to the proposed project to avoid or mitigate potential adverse effect. In addition, any demolition or substantial alteration to any historic structure or resource must be submitted to the DHR for consultation, and DRP must demonstrate that there is no feasible alternative to removal and must provide a strategy for documentation or salvage of the resource.

Florida law further requires that DRP consider the reuse of historic buildings in the park in lieu of new construction and must undertake a cost comparison of new development versus rehabilitation of a building before electing to construct a new or replacement building. This comparison must be accomplished with the assistance of the DHR.

Goal
Provide Balanced Public Access for Recreational and Interpretive Opportunities

Recreation Access

A key component of the DRP mission is to provide access for resource-based recreation. DRP, therefore, strives to provide universal access to hallmark natural and cultural features and representative examples of distinctive natural communities and landscapes. The growth of both resident and tourist populations in Florida brings increasing pressure for more widespread access, and for denser levels of public use in the natural areas available to the public. Consequently, one of the greatest challenges for public land managers is the balancing of reasonable levels of public access with the need to preserve and enhance the natural and cultural resources of state parks. Analysis of impacts to natural and cultural resources guides public access and use level decision making to ensure the protection and sustainability of Florida State Parks for future generations.

Interpretation

Interpretation is a DRP priority for the inherent value of visitor engagement and as a tool for promoting stewardship and conservation. Interpretation also plays an important role in achieving many other park management objectives. As a mission-based communication process, Interpretation forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource. Interpretive themes are the key concepts for communicating the meanings inherent in a given park. A central park theme is a short, dynamic interpretive statement that reflects the significance of a park by highlighting distinctive features and essential visitor experiences. In addition to a central park theme, each park has primary interpretive themes. These themes serve as a starting point for park staff to plan interpretive and educational content by outlining the main stories of the park's natural and cultural resources. Further interpretive planning can branch off from these themes but should ultimately help reinforce the main interpretive messages of the park. Interpretation is conveyed by the following means:

- *Non-Personal Interpretation*
  Interpretive elements which do not require a person to deliver a message (signs, exhibits, brochures, kiosks, etc.).
- *Personal Interpretation*
  One person or persons providing interpretation to another person or persons. Delivery of personal interpretation can be planned or ad hoc.

Facilities and Infrastructure

Inherent to its mission, DRP provides public access to the natural and cultural resources that it protects and restores. Access is for the purposes of recreation, interpretation, and education - three modes of active and passive experiences within or around the diverse range of features and points of interest that draw visitors. Whether for forests, water bodies, gardens, historic buildings, or collections, public access is facilitated by site-specific and situationally appropriate means that may be the subject of park planning processes. Whereas in certain settings access is by basic means, in others access may be supported by complex infrastructure. Evaluations of existing and proposed access include site suitability, accessibility, resource impacts, visitor demand, fiscal/operational investment, and degree of public benefit. Classification of DRP units provides fundamental guidance on the types and levels of visitor use that are appropriate for each park or trail.

Visitor Use Management

The mission of DRP seeks to maintain a balance between recreational use and resource protection, recognizing that the natural and cultural resources for which the parks were acquired are not only significant but also rare, if not altogether unique, and sensitive.

The DRP manages visitor use to sustain both the quality of park resources and the visitor experience, consistent with the purposes of the park. The dynamic nature of visitor use requires a deliberate and adaptive approach to managing resource impacts resulting from recreational activity. To manage visitor use, the DRP relies on a variety of management tools and strategies, in addition to estimating carrying capacities for limiting the number of people within certain portions of parks to ensure quality of experience and minimize resource impacts.

Applications of visitor use management strategies vary widely in scope and complexity. Although any actions taken to mitigate the impacts of recreation on natural or cultural resources may constitute visitor use management, a formal visitor use management strategy entails five sequential elements:

- *Assessment of Baseline Conditions*
  Measured qualitatively and quantitatively / existing conditions assessment against which to measure future conditions.
- *Determination of Desired Future Conditions*
  Measured qualitatively and quantitatively / condition to maintain or achieve by way of management strategies and actions.
- *Selection of Indicators and Establishment of Thresholds*
  Measured qualitatively and quantitatively / metrics of conditions to be collected by monitoring.
- *Identification and Implementation of Management Strategies*
  Adaptable and innovative / calling for site-specific actions to achieve desired conditions, with outcomes to be measured according to established indicators and thresholds.
- *Engagement with Stakeholders*
  Occurs both internally (i.e., DRP and other DEP staff) and externally (e.g., partnering public agencies and other entities), consistent with the internal and external review phases of the statutorily framed unit management planning process.

A level of uncertainty and risk will always be associated with the issues concerning visitor use management. In the development of visitor use management strategies, DRP may need to rely on professional judgement and the best available research. Regardless of the selected approach, decisions regarding visitor use and resource conditions are documented with analysis in the resource management and land use components of management plans to support decision-making.