

ITEM 5:

Annual Land Management Review Team findings and the Land Management Uniform Accounting Council 2021 Annual Report.

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

Section 259.036, Florida Statutes (F.S.), requires the Board of Trustees (BOT), acting through the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), to conduct land management reviews of selected conservation, preservation and recreation lands titled to the BOT to determine whether those lands are being managed in accordance with their adopted management plans. The legislation requires DEP to submit a report of its findings to the BOT no later than the second board meeting in October of each year. The 2003 Florida Legislature amended section 259.036, F.S., to require that all lands subject to being reviewed over 1,000 acres, be reviewed at least every five years.

ANNUAL LAND MANAGEMENT REVIEW TEAM FINDINGS

Properties were selected from a database of BOT lands based on property size, management plan due dates, managing agency, previous land management reviews, and geographic location. Regional review team members were selected in accordance with the requirements of the legislation to include representatives of the following: (1) the county or local community in which the parcel is located, (2) the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP), (3) the Florida Forest Service (FFS), (4) the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), (5) the DEP district office, (6) a private land manager, (7) the local Soil and Water Conservation District board of supervisors or Water Management District (WMD), and (8) a conservation organization. Participating state agencies, soil and water conservation districts, and conservation groups have had continual input into the development and ongoing evolution of the review process. Additionally, DEP coordinates with representatives of the WMD to integrate management reviews where WMD lands are adjacent to BOT lands and when the BOT has joint ownership of parcels with a WMD.

Thirty-five reviews were originally scheduled, but consistent with precautionary guidance provided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Governor DeSantis and the Florida Department of Health regarding COVID-19, DEP postponed 16 land management reviews scheduled from July through October 2020. Nineteen reviews were conducted during Fiscal Year 2020-21, involving more than 245,000 acres of managed lands. Reports of the review team findings were provided to the managing agency and ARC. The reports are also available on the DSL website. The management activities are scored on a range of one to five. Applying the criteria that a score of 3.5 and up is considered excellent, a score of 2.5 to 3.49 is considered adequate, and a score of less than 2.5 is considered inadequate, the management review team provides the following:

- Public access: Public access was excellent on 18 (94.7 percent) of the sites the teams visited, and adequate on one (5.3 percent) of the sites.
- Prescribed fire scope: Prescribed burning is considered an appropriate management tool on 14 of the 19 sites reviewed. On one site (5.3 percent of sites), over 30 percent of the fire dependent lands had been treated according to prescription. On 12 sites (63.2 percent) over 60 percent of the fire dependent lands had been treated according to

prescription. On one site (5.3 percent) less than 30 percent of the fire dependent lands had been treated according to prescription. Five sites (26.3 percent) have no fire dependent lands.

- Prescribed fire frequency: On 13 of the 14 sites requiring prescribed fire (68.4 percent), the teams found the burn frequency adequate or excellent. On one site (5.3 percent) the teams found the burn frequency to be inadequate.
- Fire quality: On 13 of the 14 sites where prescribed fire has been implemented (68.4 percent) the teams found fire quality to be excellent. On one site (5.3 percent) the teams found fire quality to be inadequate.
- Invasive species control: Control of non-native invasive plants was a management issue on all the lands reviewed. Control and maintenance measures were excellent on 14 (73.7 percent) of the sites reviewed.
- Surface water quality: Lands that have significant hydrological resources should be monitored to ensure protection. Thirteen sites (68.4 percent) had plans that adequately covered testing for degradation of surface waters. Six sites had no surface water testing needs.
- Groundwater quality: Seven sites (36.8 percent) had adequate monitoring for groundwater quality and quantity. Twelve sites had no groundwater monitoring needs.
- Species protection: Nineteen sites (100 percent) were found to be excellent in actual management practices to protect listed plants and animals on site. The plans were deemed adequate or excellent to ensure protection on 19 sites (100 percent).
- Law enforcement: On 18 sites (94.7 percent), law enforcement was adequate or excellent to protect the resources, and one site (5.3 percent) demonstrated a need for improvements in law enforcement.
- Public education and outreach: Nineteen sites (100 percent) demonstrated adequate or excellent public education and outreach programs.

Even in instances where overall management was deemed adequate or excellent, specific areas meriting improvement were noted by the teams and can be found in the individual reports. The review teams observed many examples of management meriting special mention:

- At Point Washington State Forest in Walton County, the review team commended FFS for their site preparation tactics used to preserve and maintain native groundcover species.
- At Lignumvitae Key Botanical State Park in Monroe County, the review team commended the Florida Park Service (FPS) for maintaining excellent condition of all natural and cultural resources and restoring submerged resources with extremely limited staff and funding.
- At Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area in Franklin and Gulf counties, the review team commended FWC for their comprehensive approach to habitat management and restoration for wildlife, imperiled plants and the natural communities environment.
- At Weedon Island Preserve in Pinellas County, the review team commended Pinellas County staff for their outstanding control of invasive species at the preserve.

Overall, the review teams found that the managers of these areas are dedicated professionals who are doing an excellent job with the resources available.

Many of the management issues noted in the findings may be directly related to the following:

- **Staffing Levels:** On four sites (21.1 percent) the teams found that staffing levels were less than adequate to protect the resources, while on 15 sites (78.9 percent) the staffing levels were adequate or excellent.
- **Funding Levels:** On 18 sites (94.7 percent) the teams found funding levels were adequate or excellent for proper management of resources, while on one site (5.3 percent) funding levels were less than what the review team thought was needed for proper management.
- **Equipment:** On 19 sites (100 percent) the team found adequate or excellent equipment to properly manage the property.

Pursuant to section 259.036, F.S., if the land management review team determines that reviewed lands are not being managed for purposes compatible with conservation, preservation, or recreation or in compliance with the adopted land management plan, DEP shall provide the review findings to the BOT, and the managing agency must report to the BOT its reasons for managing the lands as it has.

All properties were found to be managed for purposes compatible with conservation, preservation, or recreation; and actual management practices, including public access, were found to be in compliance with the adopted management plans. The report of the annual review team findings is consistent with section 259.036, F.S., and with the Natural Systems and Recreation Lands section of the State Comprehensive Plan.

ANNUAL LAND MANAGEMENT UNIFORM ACCOUNTING COUNCIL REPORT

The Land Management Uniform Accounting Council (LMUAC) was created by the 2000 Florida Legislature with the enactment of section 259.037, F.S. As mandated by the legislation, the council developed a uniform method for compiling and reporting accurate costs of land management activities. This includes an agreed-upon list of standardized land management categories and subcategories for grouping management activities, which is attached as an addendum to this report. Although the individual management activities vary between agencies, they can usually be grouped within this structure. The report contains a summary of FY 2020-21 expenditures per agency, grouped according to the established categories and subcategories. It also includes an introduction for each agency outlining their mission and primary goals for state land management.

Section 259.037(4), F.S., requires that the LMUAC submit their annual report to the ARC and DSL for inclusion with the Annual Land Management Review Team findings.

Both reports are available on the DSL website at: <https://floridadep.gov/lands/environmental-services/content/land-stewardship>

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Accept (1) the Annual Land Management Review Team Findings, and (2) the LMUAC 2021 Annual Report for submittal to the BOT.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

None required