

ITEM 9:

Consider a 10-year update to the Myakka State Forest Management Plan (Lease Nos. 4102 and 4327).

LOCATION:

Sarasota County

APPLICANT:

Florida Forest Service (FFS)

STAFF REMARKS:*Background*

The Myakka State Forest (MSF) is comprised of 8,593 acres located in the southwestern portion of Sarasota County and is almost entirely within the North Port city limits. MSF is made up primarily of mesic flatwoods with a mixture of longleaf pine and south Florida slash pine overstory with a palmetto understory. Numerous depression marshes are scattered throughout the flatwoods, providing many opportunities for viewing wading birds and other wildlife. MSF includes approximately 2.5 miles of frontage on the Myakka River, which is designated as an Outstanding Florida Water and a Wild and Scenic River and flows through the northeastern portion of MSF. The Myakkahatchee Creek flows through MSF for 1.5 miles and provides an additional water resource.

The Board of Trustees and the Southwest Florida Water Management District purchased this property on October 13, 1995, from Atlantic Gulf Communities Corporation (AGCC) as part of the Myakka Estuary Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) project. It was acquired using Preservation 2000 bond funds from the CARL program and from the Save Our Rivers conservation program. The western portions of the AGCC property, Tracts 21-708-101A, 21-708-101B and 21-708-106, are managed by the FFS as the MSF. These are the only portions of the purchase covered under this management plan. The remainder of the AGCC property was assigned to the FDEP, Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection for management as part of the Charlotte Harbor State Buffer Preserve.

The primary mission of the FFS is to “protect Florida and its people from the dangers of wildland fire and manage the forest resources through a stewardship ethic to assure they are available for future generations.” Management strategies for WISF center on the multiple-use concept, as defined in sections 589.04(3) and 253.034(2)(a), Florida Statutes (F.S.).

Multiple-use management for MSF will be accomplished with the following strategies:

- Practice sustainable forest management for improved forest health and efficient generation of revenue in support of state forest management objectives;
- Provide for resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities for multiple interests;
- Restore and manage healthy forests and native ecosystems ensuring the long-term viability of populations and species listed as endangered, threatened or rare, and other components of biological diversity including game and nongame wildlife and plants;
- Protect known archaeological, historical, and cultural resources;
- Restore, maintain, and protect hydrological functions related to water resources and the health of associated wetland and aquatic communities; and
- Provide research and educational opportunities related to natural resource management.

Management Plan Overview

In 2019, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) completed an inventory and natural community mapping project on MSF and created current and historic natural community type maps. Eleven natural community types are found on MSF. The predominant natural community types are mesic and wet flatwoods. FNAI also identified six altered landcover types. There are 15 rare, endangered, or threatened plant and animal species documented on MSF.

A review of information contained in the Division of Historical Resources Florida Master Site File has determined there are four recorded archaeological resource groups within the designated area for MSF. Currently, none of the known sites on MSF are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The primary recreation objective is to provide the public with dispersed outdoor recreation activities that are dependent on the natural environment and to provide outdoor recreation opportunities to wounded veterans through Operation Outdoor Freedom. FFS will continue to promote and encourage public access and recreation use by the public while protecting resources and practicing multiple-use management. Recreation opportunities on MSF include camping, hiking, off-road bicycling, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, and small-game hunting. MSF contains a primitive campground and hike-in or paddle-in primitive campsites dispersed around the waterways. MSF contains more than 30 miles of marked trails that are open to hiking, trail biking, and equestrian activities. MSF trails are included in the Florida Forest Service's Trailwalker Program for hikers, as well as horse trails in the Trailtrotter Program for equestrians.

The MSF 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 MSF, 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: Public Access and Recreational Opportunities, and Hydrological Preservation and Restoration.

Public Involvement

FFS responds to public involvement through liaison panels, management plan advisory groups, public hearings, and through ongoing direct contact with user groups. The plan was developed with input from the MSF Management Plan Advisory Group and was reviewed at a public hearing on February 2, 2023. No comments from the public were received.

Surplus Lands

On conservation lands where FFS is the lead manager, FFS assesses and identifies areas for potential surplus land. This consists of an examination of resource and operational management needs, public access and recreational use, and GIS modeling and analysis. The evaluation of

MSF by FFS has determined that all portions of the area are being managed and operated for the original purposes of acquisition, therefore, no portion of the MSF is recommended for potential surplus.

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in January 2018. 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, are in compliance with the management plan. Three consensus recommendations were offered:

- The team recommends the FFS coordinate with FWC to identify the role of Myakka State Forest for imperiled wildlife species and identify actions needed to ensure the state forest fulfills its role in supporting imperiled wildlife.
- The team recommends the FFS incorporate more growing season prescribed fire into the burn program at Myakka State Forest.
- The team recommends the FFS coordinate with FWC to assess treatment protocol and potential funding for control of para grass and torpedo grass.

The 2018 LMR notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made to this management plan. A LMR was scheduled in November 2022 but was postponed due to Hurricane Ian.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ARC 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: Myakka State Forest
 LOCATION: Sarasota County
 ACREAGE TOTAL: 8,593 acres

Historic Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage
Mesic flatwoods	5,385
Wet flatwoods	1,176
Depression marsh	1,122
Dry prairie	259
Wet prairie	127
Hydric hammock	54

Historic Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage
Scrubby flatwoods	29
Salt marsh	24
Mesic hammock	22
Mangrove swamp	18
Tidal creek	7

*Note – roughly 370 acres of MSF are not mapped in the northern portion of the property, generally east of the Myakka River

TIITF LEASE AGREEMENT NUMBERS: 4102, 4327
 USE: Single Multiple

MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Florida DACS, Florida Forest Service
 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 Southwest Florida 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: None
 TYPE ACQUISITION: Conservation and Recreation Lands, Save Our Rivers, and Preservation 2000
 UNIQUE FEATURES: Four waterways flow through Myakka State Forest. These waterways form a diverse network of aquatic and wetland habitats.
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL / HISTORICAL: Four (4) recorded.
 MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Non-native species control, public access to parcel east of Myakka River, upgraded recreation facilities
 ACQUISITION NEEDS: Approximately 736 acres located in the Optimal Management Boundary
 SURPLUS ACREAGE: None
 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: 2013 and 2018 Land Management Reviews, Management Plan Advisory Group and Public Hearing, Liaison Committee Meetings, and FDEP Acquisition and Restoration Council Public Hearing -----

**DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE
(FOR DIVISION OF STATE LANDS USE ONLY)**

ARC Approval Date: _____ TIITF Approval Date: _____

Comments:























