

ITEM 15:

Consider a 10-year update to the Four Creeks State Forest Management Plan (Lease Nos. 4507 and 4844).

LOCATION:

Nassau County

APPLICANT:

Florida Forest Service (FFS)

STAFF REMARKS:*Background*

Four Creeks State Forest (FCSF) is located between Callahan and Yulee, on approximately 13,658 acres in Nassau County. Four Creeks was named after the four water systems that traverse it, Alligator/Mills, Thomas, Boggy, and Plummer creeks. The four creeks join to form the headwaters of the Nassau River, which borders the southeastern portion of the forest. The property was jointly acquired by the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (BOT) each holding fifty percent title of the original 10,221.10 acres of FCSF under Lease Agreement 4507. In November 2007, Lease 4507 was amended to add the SJRWMD to the lease as a co-lessor and to include all sovereign lands which are located within the boundary and contiguous with the boundaries of FCSF which amounted to approximately 2,582 acres. BOT holds full title to the Smurfit-Stone Corp, Murphy Act lands, and the Studdard Tract (459.95 acres) managed under Lease 4844.

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 FCSF 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 FCSF 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 2016, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) completed an inventory and natural community mapping project on FCSF and created a current and historic natural community type maps. Thirteen natural community types are found on FCSF. The predominant natural

community is floodplain swamp. FNAI also identified five altered landcover types. There are nine endangered or threatened plant and animal species documented on FCSF.

A review of information contained in the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Master Site File has determined there is one archaeological resource group found within FCSF.

A variety of recreational opportunities are available on the forest. Recreation activities include hunting, wildlife viewing, picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, fishing, boating, paddling, and primitive camping, all of which can be enjoyed using existing service roads and established trails.

The FCSF is a participant 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 FCSF, 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 Division has included short-term goals from this management plan as part of this item.

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 FCSF Management Plan Advisory Group and was reviewed at a public hearing on October 21, 2021. 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 FCSF 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 FCSF is recommended for potential surplus.

State Land Management Review Team

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in September 2019. 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. Two consensus recommendations were offered:

- 1) The team recommended the FFS seek to convert OPS biologist to FTE.
- 2) The team recommended the FFS increase effort to document flora and fauna on this forest, particularly listed species.

The 2019 LMR notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made to this management plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the management plan.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

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

Four Creeks State Forest

Land Management Plan Short-term Goals

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Measures
2	Public Access and Recreational Opportunities	2	Evaluate the potential for additional public access and recreational areas on FCSF that are compatible with multiple-use management	List of viable access points and visitor opportunities for consideration
7	Hydrological Preservation and Restoration	3	Conduct or obtain a site assessment / study to identify potential hydrological restoration needs.	Assessment conducted

Source: Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised 2019.

LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LEAD AGENCY: Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Forest Service
 COMMON NAME: Four Creeks State Forest (FCSF)
 LOCATION: Nassau County
 ACREAGE TOTAL: 13,658 acres

Historic Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage*
Mesic Flatwoods	3,861
Floodplain Swamp	2,638
Wet Flatwoods	2,574
Salt Marsh	1,319
Bottomland Forest	1,171
Floodplain Marsh	649
Dome Swamp	383

Historic Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage*
Mesic Hammock	314
Blackwater Stream	275
Wet Prairie	107
Hydric Hammock	84
Basin Swamp	76
Baygall	38

* A 170-acre Parcel Acquisition has not been mapped

TIITF LEASE AGREEMENT NUMBERS: 4507 and 4844
 USE: Single Multiple

MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FDACS, 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: None
 TYPE ACQUISITION: Florida Forever’s Northeast Florida Timberlands and Watershed Reserve Project
 UNIQUE FEATURES: Four waterways flow through FCSF to make up the prominent feature of this forest. These waterways form a diverse network of aquatic and wetland habitats.
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL / HISTORICAL: One known site
 MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Adequate funding to implement Hydrological Restoration Plan, Ground Cover Restoration and Reforestation
 ACQUISITION NEEDS: Approximately 7,222 acres located in the Optimal Management Boundary
 SURPLUS ACREAGE: None
 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: 2010, 2014 and 2019 Land Management Reviews, Management Plan Advisory Group and Public Hearing, SFI Liaison Committee Meetings, and FDEP Acquisition and Restoration Council Public Hearing -----



















