



**PUBLIC AND INTER-AGENCY
PARTICIPATION**
Northeast District

General Public Open House Meetings

Public Meeting Date	Public Meeting County	Public Meeting Venue	Region	Park Unit Within County (as required by statute)	Included Parks - Adjacent Counties (for regional context)	FAR Publication Date	FAR Publication Reference
10/4/2023	Baker	UF/IFAS Extension Baker County - Agricultural Center, 1025 West Macclenny Avenue, Macclenny, FL 32063	North FL Highlands	Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park	Big Shoals State Park Stephen Foster Culture Center State Park Suwannee River Wilderness Trail	9/21/2023	Issue 49/184
10/5/2023	Alachua	The Harn Museum of Art at the University of Florida, 3259 Hull Road, Gainesville, FL 32608	North FL Highlands	Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park Dudley Farm Historic State Park Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park	Price's Scrub State Park	9/22/2023	Issue 49/185
			Trail System	Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail			
10/6/2023	Duval	Fort George Island Cultural State Park, Ribault Club, 11241 Fort George Road, Jacksonville, FL 32226	Atlantic Coast	Big Talbot Island State Park Little Talbot Island State Park Fort George Island Cultural State Park Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park Yellow Bluff Fort Historic State Park	Amelia Island State Park George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier State Park Fernandina Plaza Historic State Park Fort Clinch State Park	9/21/2023	Issue 49/184
10/9/2023	Citrus	City of Inverness, City Hall Council Chambers, 212 West Main Street, Inverness, FL 34450	Gulf Coast	Crystal River Archaeological State Park Crystal River Preserve State Park Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park Fort Cooper State Park Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins Historic State Park	Rainbow Springs State Park Price's Scrub State Park	9/25/2023	Issue 49/186
			Trail System	Withlacoochee State Trail			
10/10/2023	Nassau	Amelia Island Museum of History - Baker Hall, 233 South Third Street, Fernandina Beach, FL 32034	Atlantic Coast	Amelia Island State Park George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier State Park Fernandina Plaza Historic State Park Fort Clinch State Park	Big Talbot Island State Park Little Talbot Island State Park Fort George Island Cultural State Park Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park Yellow Bluff Fort Historic State Park	10/2/2023	Issue 49/191
10/11/2023	Marion	College of Central Florida, Klein Conference Center, 3001 SW College Road, Ocala, FL 34474	North FL Highlands	Price's Scrub State Park	Crystal River Archaeological State Park Crystal River Preserve State Park Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park Fort Cooper State Park Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins Historic State Park Withlacoochee State Trail	10/2/2023	Issue 49/191
			Gulf Coast	Rainbow Springs State Park			
10/16/2023	Suwannee	Suwannee County Judicial Annex Building, 218 Parshley Street SW, Live Oak, FL 32064	Suwannee River	Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Ichetucknee Trace Suwannee River State Park Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park	Lafayette Blue Springs State Park Troy Spring State Park Suwannee River Wilderness Trail Madison Blue Spring State Park Forest Capital Museum State Park	10/6/2023	Issue 49/195
10/17/2023	Bradford	Bradford County Courthouse, 954 N. Temple Avenue, Starke, FL 32091	Trail System	Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail	Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park Dudley Farm Historic State Park Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park	10/6/2023	Issue 49/195
10/18/2023	Clay	City of Keystone Heights, Historic Beach Pavilion, 565 South Lawrence Boulevard, Keystone Heights, FL 32656	North FL Highlands	Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park	Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park Dudley Farm Historic State Park Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park	10/9/2023	Issue 49/196
10/19/2023	Gilchrist	Gilchrist County Board of County Commissioners, Board Room, 210 South Main Street, Trenton, FL 32693	Suwannee River	Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs	River Rise Preserve State Park O'Leno State Park	10/9/2023	Issue 49/196
			Trail System	Nature Coast State Trail	Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Ichetucknee Trace		

General Public Open House Meetings

Public Meeting Date	Public Meeting County	Public Meeting Venue	Region	Park Unit Within County (as required by statute)	Included Parks - Adjacent Counties (for regional context)	FAR Publication Date	FAR Publication Reference
10/20/2023	Columbia	Columbia County Schools Auditorium, 372 West Duval Street, Lake City, FL 32055	North FL Highlands	River Rise Preserve State Park O'Leno State Park	Big Shoals State Park Stephen Foster Culture Center State Park Suwannee River Wilderness Trail	10/10/2023	Issue 49/197
			Suwannee River	Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Ichetucknee Trace			
10/23/2023	Levy	Levy Government Center Auditorium, 310 School Street, Bronson, FL 32621	Gulf Coast	Cedar Key Museum State Park Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park	Nature Coast State Trail Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park	10/13/2023	Issue 49/200
			Suwannee River	Fanning Springs State Park Manatee Springs State Park			
10/25/2023	Hamilton	Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center, White Springs Tourism Building, 10499 Spring Street, White Springs, FL 32096	Suwannee River	Big Shoals Public Lands Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park	River Rise Preserve State Park O'Leno State Park Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Ichetucknee Trace	10/13/2023	Issue 49/200
10/26/2023	Lafayette	Lafayette County Courthouse Board Room, 120 West Main Street, Mayo, FL 32066	Suwannee River	Lafayette Blue Springs State Park Troy Spring State Park	Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Ichetucknee Trace Suwannee River State Park Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park Big Shoals State Park Stephen Foster Culture Center State Park Suwannee River Wilderness Trail Forest Capital Museum State Park	10/13/2023	Issue 49/200
			Trail System	Suwannee River Wilderness Trail			

Virtual Regional Advisory Group Meetings

Advisory Group Meeting Date	Region	Park Unit	FAR Publication Date	FAR Publication Reference
11/6/2023	Atlantic Coast	Amelia Island State Park	10/31/2023	Issue 49/212
		George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier State Park		
		Big Talbot Island State Park		
		Little Talbot Island State Park		
		Fernandina Plaza Historic State Park		
		Fort Clinch State Park		
		Fort George Island Cultural State Park		
		Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park		
		Yellow Bluff Fort Historic State Park		
11/16/2023	North FL Highlands	Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park	11/7/2023	Issue 49/217
		Dudley Farm Historic State Park		
		Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park		
		Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park		
		O'Leno State Park		
		River Rise Preserve State Park		
		Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park		
		Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park		
		Price's Scrub State Park		
		San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park		
		11/20/2023		
Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve				
Crystal River Archaeological State Park				
Crystal River Preserve State Park				
Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park				
Fort Cooper State Park				
Rainbow Springs State Park				
Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park				
Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins Historic State Park				
11/28/2023	Suwannee River	Big Shoals Public Lands	11/21/2023	Issue 49/226
		Fanning Springs State Park		
		Forest Capital Museum State Park		
		Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Ichetucknee Trace		
		Ichetucknee Springs State Park and Ichetucknee Trace		
		Lafayette Blue Springs State Park		
		Madison Blue Spring State Park		
		Manatee Springs State Park		
		Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs		
		Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park		
		Suwannee River State Park		
		Troy Spring State Park		
		Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park		
11/30/2023	Trail System	Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail	11/22/2023	Issue 49/227
		Nature Coast State Trail		
		Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail		
		Suwannee River Wilderness Trail		
		Withlacoochee State Trail		



NORTHEAST DISTRICT
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REPORT
PUBLIC MEETINGS

BAKER COUNTY

Wednesday, October 4, 2023, 3 pm – 7 pm

UF/IFAS Baker Co. Agric. Center

Macclenny, FL

Members of the public, local government officials, a local state legislator, a lobbyist representing Florida business interests, and local press were in attendance regarding the scheduled revision of the Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park. There was considerable interest in the plan to construct a new interpretive building, particularly as to the status of project funding. It was determined that onus of the current fundraising effort has largely rested with the park's Citizen Support Organization (CSO) since approval of the current UMP and associated consensus regarding how to proceed. There was discussion initiated by the local state representative that introduced the possibility of pursuing a legislative appropriation for the project.

Attendees also expressed interest in acquiring an optimum boundary parcel south of US Hwy 90 that would incorporate a significant portion of the historic battlefield into the park boundary and possibly provide space for additional event parking. There was considerable interest and opinion regarding the possibility of a monument/memorial to commemorate the loss of US Army/Union soldiers. General consensus was not opposed to the concept, but attendees were keenly interested in the design and placement of such a monument.

One attendee expressed opposition to abandoning any resource management roads on the DRP/USFS co-managed property since visitors utilize the roads for recreational access.

ALACHUA COUNTY

Thursday, October 5, 2023, 3 pm – 7 pm

Harn Museum of Art

Gainesville, FL

Several adjacent landowners came to the meeting. Specific details relating to Devil's Millhopper and the adjacent wetlands were discussed, as neighboring homes face flooding in their backyards. Solutions were discussed, and the District was aware of the situation and agrees that some solutions should be implemented to lessen any hydrological impact in the area. A local nonprofit member also attended to discuss further collaboration and conservation efforts in the area. The City of Gainesville's Environmental Protection Department inquired about the overall format of the districtwide planning process. The city representative requested copies of the Alachua County Park Chapters to ensure that the plan for Paynes Prairie addresses parcels such as Sweetwater Wetlands Park that are co-managed by the city and DRP. County staff expressed interest in serving on the Advisory Group for the North Florida Highlands planning region of District 2.

Adjacent landowner, Grant Gatson, also provided written comments after the public meeting addressing hydrological issues surrounding Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park. Mr. Gatson suggests that the park's hydrological objectives include a study of the connection between the western depression marsh and adjacent residential properties. He explained that the Devil's Millhopper wetland is connected to residential backyards of the Deer Run neighborhood and is causing property damage, including falling trees from overly saturated soil, rotting fences, landscape damage, and potential structure flooding. He suggests that a small berm between the wetland and adjacent residential properties be constructed to benefit both Deer Run residents and Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park.

The Friends of Paynes Prairie also provided written comments following the public meeting, expressing support for the Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park Conceptual Land Use Plan objective to extend the La Chua Trail boardwalk. They provided numerous benefits for extending the boardwalk (e.g., enhanced visitor safety, visitor experience, and wildlife and vegetation protection) and intend to partner with DEP to implement this proposal.

DUVAL COUNTY

Friday, October 6, 2023, 3 pm – 7 pm

Ribault Club, Fort George Island Cultural State Park

Jacksonville, FL

Attending members of the public expressed concerns regarding recent, high density residential developments and imminent development adjacent to Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park. Sentiment was that this level/density of development is incompatible with the 7 Creeks cohort of conservation lands, of which Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve is the largest contingent. Attendees wanted to know if the DRP had made any effort to oppose such development on the grounds that it would impact the park's water resources and DRP's ability to effectively manage the park. Biological staff responded that DRP provided input during the regulatory review period, detailing the expected impacts to area watersheds that are contiguous with and support the park. Attendees requested and received information about the wetland permitting process administered by the state's water management districts Environmental Resource Permit program (ERP), in coordination with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Attendees were provided St. Johns River Water Management District and DEP regulatory contact information.

A representative from the City of Jacksonville (COJ), inquired about enhancing trail connections within the 7 Creeks Recreation Area in light of the recent Black Hammock Island acquisition to Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park. Recommended that this subject be discussed in the updated UMP. COJ also inquired about the status of the proposed Batten Island entrance to Fort George Island Cultural State Park. This concept is currently approved and is being carried over into the updated UMP. COJ also requested that the updated Pumpkin Hill Creek UMP include language to support a proposed paved multiuse trail along the Cedar Point Road corridor to provide non-motorized access to the 7 Creeks Recreation Area.

Public attendees inquired about the status of the south beach use area on Little Talbot Island. This area has been closed since 2018 due to severe erosion that has compromised park infrastructure and visitor safety. Attendees were interested in the proposed addition of beach access north of the defunct South Beach Use Area.

CITRUS COUNTY

Monday, October 9, 2023, 2 pm – 6 pm

City Hall Council Chambers

Inverness, FL

Many focused questions from meeting attendees pertained to the Withlacoochee State Trail. Officials from the City of Inverness were very interested in working with the Division of Recreation and Parks to make improvements to the trail's signature trailhead in Wallace Brooks Park, which is situated in downtown Inverness on the shore of Lake Tsala Apopka. The Inverness City Manager exchanged contact information with Office of Park Planning staff to further discuss development. Local landowners and trail

users also voiced their opinions on trail maintenance, especially the maintenance of vegetation along trail shoulders. A member from the Withlacoochee State Trail CSO group inquired about how the trail could receive additional staff for routine maintenance operations.

A written public comment for the Withlacoochee State Trail was also emailed to DRP staff. They expressed that the trail needs enhanced maintenance and that this is an integral part of resurfacing the trail. They also mentioned that additional restrooms should be provided, that all restrooms should be retained and improved, and that every trailhead should have appropriate facilities to support Withlacoochee State Trail users and other trails being developed in the region. They mentioned that DRP should consult with trail users, the trail's CSO group, and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to improve trail safety. They opposed the proposal for a CSO Visitor Center and Gift Shop and the removal of the Trilby Trailhead. Lastly, they expressed that the plan needs to address volunteer recruitment, plan for work crews, and dedicate a designated trail manager to enhance and promote the trail.

Several attendees were interested in Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park infrastructure updates, leading to several conversations relating to flooding and animal safety.

NASSAU COUNTY

Tuesday, October 10, 2023, 3 pm – 7 pm

Amelia Island Museum of History

Fernandina Beach, FL

Nassau County commissioners from two districts were in attendance. There was inquiry about plans to replace the damaged fishing pier at Ft. Clinch State Park, particularly regarding feasibility and projected cost. There was also discussion of plans to provide some form of replacement for the George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier once the structure is no longer deemed safe by the Florida Department of Transportation.

County officials commented on the Optimum Boundary parcel immediately north of Amelia Island State Park regarding the feasibility of state acquisition as well as the potential to reroute beach driving access to a county managed stretch of beach if the parcel is either acquired by the state or by a development interest. Officials were in favor of such an alternative for beach driving access as it would avoid the need to access the county managed beaches through Amelia Island State Park, thus alleviating pressures/impacts to the park.

City of Fernandina Beach, City Manager, and members of the general public expressed support for Ft. Clinch State Park and the improvements proposed in the draft plan. Attendees were in favor of proposed entrance area enhancements to reduce traffic congestion entering the park, however several parties wanted assurance that this would not involve widening the park road at any points inside of the park – once past the entrance station.

The Mayor of Fernandina Beach also attended the meeting and expressed support for the Nassau County state parks' proposals.

MARION COUNTY

Wednesday, October 11, 2023, 3 pm – 7 pm

*College of Central Florida Ewers Century Conference Center, Klein Conference Center Room
Ocala, FL*

Members of the public were primarily interested in proposals related to Rainbow Springs State Park. Concern was expressed over the proposal to provide a pull-off and direct walking path from the park drive (a short way past the new entrance station) to the designated launch site for paddlers wishing to use their own paddlecraft. There is concern that this will cause significant congestion/back up along the park entrance road.

Attendees expressed interest in the placement of two proposed group camps at the north end of the park's northern parcel. Some in attendance wanted assurance that the facilities would be placed an appropriate distance away from park residence and shop facilities.

There was request for more information regarding the installation of up to two RV sites at the park's southern tract. It was explained that these are full utility sites that will serve the park's concessionaire staff. Attendees were supportive.

SUWANNEE COUNTY

Monday, October 16, 2023, 2 pm – 6 pm

*Suwannee County Judicial Annex
Live Oak, FL*

One county commission member attended the meeting and provided a very in-depth discussion relating to waterflow from the Okefenokee to the Suwannee and beyond. Conversation ensued about possible solutions relating to dam issues within Georgia. Additionally, the county commissioner inquired on the intended proposals for Wes Skiles Peacock Springs and Madison Blue Springs State Park.

BRADFORD COUNTY

Tuesday, October 17, 2023, 2 pm – 6 pm

*Bradford County Courthouse
Starke, FL*

Two Bradford County Commissioners and the Bradford County Manager were early attendees at the public meeting; they were later accompanied by a member of the local media. Questions for park and central office staff revolved primarily around construction progress of key trail elements. Progress of paving efforts, construction of an overpass spanning US Highway 301 north of the City of Starke, and implementation of a signalized crossing of State Highway 100 west of Keystone Heights garnered significant interest from the public and local government officials. The park manager offered to reach out to the Florida Department of Transportation for an update on overpass construction. He also explained that infrastructure to facilitate the State Highway 100 crossing was already in place and activation of traffic signals was imminent.

The meeting also presented an opportunity for the park manager and trail park services specialist to discuss trail safety issues with the Bradford County Sheriff's Office. A robust discussion ensued, centering on the enforcement of trail rules with respect to unauthorized motor vehicles, unauthorized access points, and suspicious activity.

The Director of Tourism and Film Development in Clay County also attended the meeting to discuss an extension of the Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail. They mentioned that there is currently a project to connect the Jacksonville Baldwin Rail Trail to Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park via State Road 21. The Clay County-managed spur trail outside of the park boundary would then lead visitors to the Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail to the south.

CLAY COUNTY

Wednesday, October 18, 2023, 3 pm – 7 pm

Historic Beach Pavilion

Keystone Heights, FL

Residents of Christian Camp Road (located just south of Gold Head Branch State Park) had concern over the re-alignment of the segment of the Florida National Scenic Trail that enters the park at the south end. This segment is currently being re-routed through a more scenic area of sandhill east of its current route. Attendees requested continued pedestrian and cycling access into the park where the Florida National Scenic Trail has traditionally entered. DRP communicated concerns with this access which is directly through the shop support area.

Attendees questioned DRP staff about the status of the park's lakes, particularly water quantity/lake levels. There is widespread concern in the local community for the trend of declining lake levels in the greater Keystone Heights area. Staff communicated that while larger sandhill lakes such as Lake Johnson have experienced considerable water level declines, others such as Sheeler Lake and Devil's Washbasin have remained constant, perhaps due to more pronounced artesian connections.

There was interest in the park's resource management activities, particularly prescribed burning of sandhill and the positive effect on promoting diversity. DRP staff responded to questions about the seasonality of prescribed burning and the challenges posed by increasing development in the greater region. There was also interest in the status of Red Cockaded woodpecker in the park.

GILCHRIST COUNTY

Thursday, October 19, 2023, 2 pm – 6 pm

Gilchrist County Commissioners' Board Room

Trenton, FL

Local press expressed interest in the DRP's general planning process, particularly the current regional approach. A specific inquiry was made regarding Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park (parkwide) visitor services redevelopment and natural areas restoration – including the spring basin. Elements such as facilities construction, erosion control, shoreline restoration and road realignment were discussed.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Friday, October 20, 2023, 2 pm – 6 pm

Columbia County Schools Auditorium

Lake City, FL

Adjacent property owners to River Rise State Park expressed dismay over not being allowed direct access to the park from their backyards. Elements such as security, natural resource protection, safety,

and visitor accounting were offered as rationale for enforcing park rules regarding the regulation of visitor access.

Attendees expressed interest in what specific efforts DRP is taking to protect the Ichetucknee River and associated springs. DRP staff discussed natural areas management and visitor management strategies, as well as recent efforts to acquire important aquifer recharge areas such as Ichetucknee Trace.

An attendee expressed concern over regional reduction in groundwater recharge due to the retention of stormwater in developed areas of north Florida. The attendee communicated support for statewide appropriations to move treated stormwater to historic “down-drainage” wetland recharge areas.

Two attendees were interested in horseback riding trails and were happy to have maps and conversation with DRP Staff to identify several possible trails to ride through in their area.

LEVY COUNTY

Monday, October 23, 2023, 2 pm - 6 pm

Levy County Government Center Auditorium

Bronson, FL

Attendees provided quad maps identifying significant areas of the Waccasassa River watershed that would benefit from state acquisition. The attendees discussed the economic importance of protecting the water quality of the greater Waccasassa Bay.

Attendees expressed interest in surveying for monarch butterflies that utilize the hydric hammocks within the Waccasassa Bay watershed. Also communicated opposition for a recent proposed land use in Levy County that considered the raising of primates for laboratory purposes.

Local government personnel also voiced interest in the Optimum Boundary parcels for Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park, as they mentioned that adjacent parcels were always flooding and causing severe issues to landowners. Possible DRP acquisition for neighboring parcels seemed of interest. There was also interest relating to paddling trails through Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park.

Lynetta Griner, an adjacent landowner to Fanning Springs State Park, expressed concern over park visitors trespassing on her property. She also advised staff that a reverter clause tied to the Wayside Picnic Area at Fanning Springs would prevent closing a separate entrance to this area from the highway. Upon further inspection of the deed, no reverter clause was found.

Trip Lancaster, Mayor of Fanning Springs, thought that the proposed floating dock on the Suwannee River at Fanning Springs State Park would allow for boats to be exposed to wake action from passing motorboats. It is believed that the addition of boat slips on the dock would prevent this from happening.

HAMILTON COUNTY

Wednesday, October 25, 2023, 3 pm - 7 pm

White Springs Tourism Building

White Springs, FL

This meeting saw a variety of different members of the public, user groups, CSO members, and local government personnel. There was a broad consensus on supporting cycling throughout the area, especially to connect Stephen Foster and Big Shoals. The Big Shoals Portage was also discussed, with specific comments relating to safety, erosion control, flooding events, and the primitive campsite. Clear consensus between DRP staff and participating members noted that safety was a priority, and portage improvements were necessary. Several members voiced that signage seemed outdated. Meeting participants were happy to hear that there would be signage and wayfinding improvements, especially relating to Big Shoals.

Several participants voiced their support for collaborating on another property of interest and expanding Stephen Foster's Optimum Boundary.

LAFAYETTE COUNTY

Thursday, October 26, 2023, 1 pm – 5 pm

Lafayette County Courthouse Boardroom

Mayo, FL

A representative from Suwannee Riverkeeper attended to discuss the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail and its River Camps. DRP staff briefly explained the proposals for the river camps. Regarding other parks in the vicinity, they mentioned that some park users recognized that there was unclear water near springheads, specifically Troy Spring, and asked if DRP staff still conducts water quality samples. He later noted where the Suwannee River has been contaminated in the past and actions the Riverkeepers have taken to reduce these incidents.

A member of the public requested to know when Suwannee River State Park would reopen since she lived nearby and usually frequents the park. She was told that clean up from Hurricane Idalia was still ongoing and it was unclear exactly when the park would be reopened.

A representative from Suwannee River Water Management District discussed a variety of topics including the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. He mentioned that oftentimes there is not a camping option for paddlers between the Holton Creek and Woods Ferry river camps due to the abundance of events at the Spirit of Suwannee River Music Park. He recommended that DRP staff consider coordinating with the music park to designate a river camp for paddlers.



NORTHEAST DISTRICT

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REPORT

REGIONAL ADVISORY GROUP SUMMARIES

**Atlantic Coast Region
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Local Government

Brian Burket, Waterfront Project Manager
City of Jacksonville

Christopher Kinslow, Land Resource Specialist
St. John's River Water Management District

Partnering State Agencies

Ralph Clark, Professional Engineer
Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection

William "Guy" Weeks, Planning Manager
Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection

Jason O'Donoghue, PhD
Division of Historical Resources

Hailey Dedmon, Regional Shorebird Biologist
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Rebecca (Blaire) Hayman, Wildlife Biologist
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Jonathan Johnson, GIS Forester
Florida Forest Service

Alan Davis, Land Planning Coordinator
Florida Forest Service

Partnering Federal Agencies

Katie Conrad, Northeast FL Coastal Biologist
US Fish and Wildlife Service

Joshua Salestrom
National Park Service

Jason Harrah, Duval County Project Manager
US Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District

Beau Corbett, Nassau County Project Manager
US Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District

Environmental Organizations

Chris Farrell, Northeast FL Policy Associate
Florida Audubon Society

Logan Cross, Chair
Sierra Club Northeast Florida Chapter

Grant Gelhardt, Chair of Conservation Committee
Sierra Club Florida Chapter

Rianna Elliott, Director of Land Stewardship
North Florida Land Trust

Sine Murray, Florida Project Manager
Trust for Public Land

Haley Busch, Outreach Director
1000 Friends of Florida

Mark Rizzo, Land Steward
Conservation Florida

Lily Anderson-Messec, Director of North FL Programs
Florida Native Plant Society

Recreational User Groups

Janice Hindson, Executive Director
Paddle Florida

Todd Addicott, President
Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association

Nancy Stephens, President
North Florida Back Country Horsemen

Florida Park Service

Michelle Waterman, Park Manager
Talbot Islands State Parks

Allison Conboy, Environmental Specialist
Talbot Islands State Parks

Heath Alboher, Park Manager
Fort Clinch State Park and Fernandina Plaza Historic State Park

Atlantic Coast Region Advisory Group Members and Report

The Advisory Group Meeting to review the proposed unit management plans (UMP) for Amelia Island State Park, George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier State Park, Big Talbot Island State Park, Little Talbot Island State Park, Fernandina Plaza Historic State Park, Fort Clinch State Park, Fort George Island Cultural State Park, Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park, and Yellow Bluff Fort Historic State Park was held virtually on November 6th, 2023 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Appointed members unable to attend include Jason O'Donoghue, Hailey Dedmon, Lily Anderson-Messec, Nancy Stephens, and Alan Davis. Nancy Stephens from the North Florida Back Country Horsemen and Brian Burket from the City of Jacksonville provided written comments prior to the meeting, which are summarized below.

Attending Division of Recreation and Parks staff members from the state parks, District Office, and the Office of Park Planning include Michelle Waterman, Heath Alboher, Daniel Pearson, Richard Owen, Anne Barkdoll, Keith Morin, Gabrielle Trace, Daniel Alsentzer, John McKenzie, James Gaddis, Yasmine Armaghani, Savannah Atwell, Tess Flemma, and Scott Groves.

Daniel Alsentzer began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the districtwide planning process, explaining the goals for this innovative process, and describing why each member was appointed to attend this meeting. John McKenzie thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and explained the agenda. Gabrielle Trace introduced the topics of discussion and asked advisory group members to express their comments on the draft districtwide plan.

Summary of Advisory Group Comments

Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection (RCP) Ralph Clark commented on the plans for pier reconstruction at Fort Clinch State Park and George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier State Park. He mentioned that DEP provides ocean fishing pier design guidance on the Bureau of Beaches and Coastal Systems website. He inquired about the statewide beach erosion plan and developing solutions to mitigate critical erosion areas. He recognized that there are many critically eroded areas statewide. Although this is not as much of an issue in Northeast Florida, state parks that are on interior tidal waters and have erosion problem areas should be identified and addressed with a type of plan similar to the Strategic Beach Management Plan.

Daniel Alsentzer mentioned that it is very relevant, particularly at the southern end of Little Talbot Island where the channel of the Fort George River has been eating away at the southwest end of the island. Mr. Clark continued to say that these erosion conditions fall under the RCP Critical Erosion Report and that their Strategic Beach Management Plan also addresses barrier inlets such as the Fort George Inlet and the erosion affecting the Talbot Island state parks.

Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection William "Guy" Weeks from RCP echoed the USACE discussion (see discussion below), saying that there was a Section 111/Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) feasibility study for the Fort George Inlet and Little Talbot Island. The US Army Corps of Engineers submitted an engineering modeling study to the Coastal Engineering and Geology Group with RCP but there have been financial hurdles. He continued to say that DEP's Chief Resilience Officer is lobbying for this project to be able to receive federal funding. The projects for Little Talbot Island State Park and the

Atlantic Coast Region Advisory Group Members and Report

Fort George Inlet are listed in the Strategic Beach Management Plan and explain official strategies that DEP recommends from a critical erosion coastal engineering perspective.

Mr. Weeks commented on what Beau Corbett (USACE) was discussing about the Nassau County Shore Protection Project. He mentioned that the inlet bypassing for the St. Marys River has supported the initial restoration conducted in 2008 and is very beneficial to the coastal system, as it has been over ten years since the USACE has renourished the shoreline. The inlet bypassing is listed in DEP's Annual Inlet Report and the Strategic Beach Management Plan.

Mr. Weeks highlighted that the Fort Clinch State Park UMP lists several RCP documents including the Strategic Beach Management Plan and DEP strategies for managing beaches and coastal erosion. He did not see the Critical Erosion Report or the Annual Inlet Report in the Atlantic Coast planning region UMPs and advised that these documents be included. John McKenzie replied that there was discussion regarding coastal projects in the Regional Introduction for the Atlantic Coast planning region and that DRP will consistently provide cross references to these sections.

Mr. Weeks later inquired about the anticipated footprint of the proposed Fort Clinch Pier. Gabrielle Trace replied that we don't have an exact design for the pier rebuild yet, but we are preparing for it in the plan and will collaborate with appropriate stakeholders to decide on a design. Daniel Alsentzer also mentioned that planning at a districtwide level allows us to better compare the needs and opportunities at different units (e.g., pier reconstruction at Fort Clinch State Park and/or George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier State Park).

US Army Corps of Engineers Jason Harrah presented information on current beach renourishment projects that are related to the state parks or near the state parks in Northeast Florida. Concerning the state parks and USACE, he noted the ongoing erosion at Little Talbot Island State Park and efforts to restore the shoreline and federal navigation channels.

Mr. Harrah mentioned that after the Florida Park Service requested a CAP study to address the ongoing erosion of the Fort George Inlet. After deliberation, the USACE ultimately planned for a rock groin structure for the southern end of Little Talbot Island to help stabilize it from future erosion. He stated that after Congress authorizes the funding for this project, the USACE will have extensive public outreach.

US Army Corps of Engineers Beau Corbett began his comments by stating that he works within Nassau County and is currently working on a shoreline restoration project near Amelia Island (Federal Nassau County Shore Protection Project), along with the Fernandina Harbor Inlet dredging. Mr. Corbett also emphasized that DRP inform the USACE if/when DRP decides to rebuild the Fort Clinch Pier since Army Corps regularly dredges the Kings Bay Entrance Channel north of Fort Clinch State Park.

US Fish and Wildlife Service Katie Conrad mentioned that some species are currently being federally evaluated and proposed as endangered including the monarch butterfly, Florida pine snake, the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, and the tricolored bat. She also stated that the gopher tortoise is no longer a candidate for the federal listing of endangered species.

Ms. Conrad later inquired about how much longer the George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier would remain open, if there was going to be a public process to determine what would happen with the existing

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structure, and what will be in its place. John McKenzie replied that since sections of the bridge have already been closed based on past FDOT inspections, full closure of the bridge is imminent.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Blaire Hayman echoed Chris Farrell's comments, emphasizing how incredible the partnership is between FWC and DRP park staff. For Amelia Island, Big Talbot Island, and Little Talbot Island state parks, she stated that human disturbance and human-subsidized predation are major threats to nesting seabirds. Since FWC works closely with park staff on predation management, this partnership should be included in the parks' UMPs.

Ms. Hayman also noted that the imperiled species sections for Amelia Island, Big Talbot Island, Little Talbot Island, and Fort Clinch state parks listed Worthington's marsh wren as an FWC Species of Concern. She mentioned that it is now designated as a state threatened species and the plan should be updated to reflect that. Ms. Hayman also stated that although the Wilson's plover isn't state-listed, Northeast Florida is a stronghold for the species. Because the Wilson's plover endures the same threats as state-listed species, she suggested that we manage them the same way.

Towards the end of the meeting, Ms. Hayman inquired about public beach driving at Amelia Island State Park and encouraged reducing vehicle traffic along the shoreline. Gabrielle Trace explained that there is a proposal to reevaluate and refine beach driving regulations. John McKenzie further explained that the parcel directly north of the park may serve as an alternative route to access the public beach to the north, greatly diminishing public beach driving within the state park.

St. Johns River Water Management District Christopher Kinslow prompted a discussion about Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park's land management practices. He mentioned that the wood chip market in the Jacksonville Port Authority is expanding and that this should be mentioned in other components of the plan. He mentioned that restoration efforts have improved as far as longleaf replanting densities, but staff should consider planting 450-500 trees per acre for the application of prescribed fire. He emphasized that the longleaf pine underplanting was a great idea, but the light gaps need to be at least 50% to ensure longleaf pine survival. Furthermore, Mr. Kinslow thoroughly appreciated the mechanical treatment objective for Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park.

Mr. Kinslow asked if DRP had utilized state resiliency funds, particularly for the Amelia Island State Park optimum boundary parcel. He also expressed support for limiting beach driving within the state park.

Lastly, Mr. Kinslow supported the proposal for a living shoreline restoration project at Point Isabel on Fort George Island Cultural State Park since it is such a high-energy area.

Florida Forest Service Jonathan Johnson spoke about timber assessments, specifically at Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park. He agreed with the tree planting density mentioned by Chris Kinslow and recommended that the densities be reassessed to enhance tree survival.

John McKenzie explained the prescribed fire program utilized at Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park. Mr. Johnson noted that the approach that DRP has taken seems to be going well, even with the adjustments from COVID-19. He stated that the objectives look well-placed and appropriate.

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Sierra Club Grant Gelhardt noted that there was no reference to other conservation lands adjacent to or in the vicinity of these state parks. He inquired if there was a section of the UMPs that discusses the synergistic benefits and needs to coordinate management between these various agencies' conservation lands. John McKenzie mentioned that we do identify adjacent conservation lands in our optimum boundary section of the UMPs and that this discussion could be suitable in the Regional Introduction or Districtwide Introduction of the overall Districtwide plan.

Mr. Gelhardt stated that he noticed the Regional Introduction discussed water quality issues within and surrounding the Atlantic Coast region parks but emphasized that it did not recognize solutions and coordination with surrounding entities. He also identified the ongoing coastal erosion issues from the dredging projects surrounding Amelia Island, Big Talbot Island, and Little Talbot Island. Daniel Alsentzer mentioned that there is more detail in the park-specific chapters discussing the impacts of intensive coastal management projects and that DRP is a major stakeholder in the planning and implementation phases of these projects.

Mr. Gelhardt also noted that there was recent legislation to provide funds to the Division of Historical Resources for research endeavors and identifying the locations of African American historic grave sites. He recommended that we address this important work in our park-specific chapters or the Regional Introduction. Daniel Pearson informed Mr. Gelhardt that one of the objectives in all UMPs is to register every cultural site in the Florida Master Site File and contact the Division of Historical Resources if staff suspects they have found a graveyard. Anne Barkdoll explained that we do list where unmarked gravesites may be in the UMPs but that this information could be included in the Statewide Introduction.

Sierra Club Logan Cross noted the beach renourishment project at Vilano Beach and that live invertebrates were found in dumpsters after being dredged offshore. Jason Harrah (USACE) mentioned that he is meeting with a First Coast News anchor to provide additional information on this topic. The focus of the conversation was brought back to the parks within the Atlantic Planning Region.

Conservation Florida Mark Rizzo noted that the phrasing for invasive species control in the park-specific chapters could be improved. He advised if staff plans to use percentages to describe these accomplishments, additional detail may need to be provided. Daniel Pearson explained how invasive species treatment accomplishments are determined and why it's difficult to explain but will try to improve the phrasing within the park-specific chapters.

Mr. Rizzo mentioned that the hydrology sections are well laid out and inquired about what DRP is doing to restore hydrologic impoundments (e.g., mosquito ditches) within these parks. Mr. Pearson mentioned that DRP doesn't normally get funding for large studies and that much of the parks' hydrological work has been linked to DRP's prescribed fire program. He further explained that there is not a straightforward solution since the ditches provide drainage for nearby residences.

Audubon Society Chris Farrell initially began by praising park staff for their work and increased efforts on shorebird protection at the Talbot Island state parks. He emphasized how important Northeast Florida is for several imperiled species. He noted that Little Talbot Island has the highest concentration of nesting

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Wilson's plover within the state. Mr. Rizzo emphasized that the land use proposals for additional recreational access on Little Talbot Island should consider the highly sensitive shorebird nesting, foraging, and roosting areas and avoid increasing public access in areas critical for shorebirds.

Trust for Public Land Sine Murray commented on several formatting details and suggested several improvements for the Districtwide Introduction, Regional Introduction, and park-specific chapters:

Ms. Murray suggested improving the flow from the overarching districtwide section to the park-specific chapters. She also mentioned that some information within the plans is repetitive, including visitor use management information and strategies to manage park visitation. She recommended including this information in the Regional Introduction to educate visitors about their impacts.

Ms. Murray further noted that staff should provide additional discussion of DRP monitoring protocols for visitor use impacts and discuss thresholds that might cause certain resource management procedures. This will help explain to the public why a park is managed in a certain way (e.g., boardwalk closures). Additionally, park-specific chapters need to address why certain recreational opportunities are or aren't provided to convey the balance of natural resources and recreation (e.g., why some parks offer a campground and why this development is unsustainable for other units).

Ms. Murray noted that the Regional Introduction could improve the discussion regarding surrounding land use changes or impacts on the parks from surrounding land use. She recommended that in the Amelia Island State Park Land Use Component, discussion of land uses in surrounding communities could be enhanced.

Ms. Murray observed that there was not much discussion regarding who the state parks serve and how they can improve by providing equitable access. This discussion could be enhanced by providing additional demographic information in the plan. She recommended providing a more comprehensive view in the Regional Introduction about who visits these parks and what services they may be seeking since recreational patterns and uses change. She suggested further discussion of climate change and its impacts on existing visitor facilities and activities.

Ms. Murray supported the proposal for the Nassau House at Fort Clinch State Park. She mentioned that restoration of this unutilized area is probably the most suitable use. She also mentioned that the Fort Clinch State Park optimum boundary map needs to be updated since the Tiger Island Florida Forever Board of Trustees Project has already been acquired.

Regarding the optimum boundary map layout, Ms. Murray found it confusing that DRP identifies existing conservation land for acquisition. Gabrielle Trace explained that some entities acquire land for DRP and in case parcels aren't protected for conservation purposes, DRP identifies them in the park's optimum boundary. Ms. Murray noted the caveats of the land identified in the optimum boundary and how this section doesn't imply any zoning overlay or any additional restrictions, such that this can be a concern for adjacent landowners if their property is identified on the optimum boundary map. Daniel Alsentzer responded, concurring that this could be discussed in the Statewide Introduction and that park-specific chapters could cross-reference this in their respective Optimum Boundary narratives. Ms. Murray also

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stressed getting the Amelia Island State Park optimum boundary parcel on the Florida Forever Strategic Managed Area Lands List because this will facilitate land trusts to acquire the parcel.

Additionally, Ms. Murray expressed support for the Fort George Island Cultural State Park proposed Batten Island entrance.

North Florida Land Trust Rianna Elliott noted a current land ownership transfer from the North Florida Land Trust to the Florida Park Service, specifically to the boundary of Big Talbot Island State Park.

Paddle Florida Janice Hindson began her comments by stating how members within Paddle Florida would like to see a continuous paddling trail connecting the creeks that surround the Talbot Islands including Myrtle Creek, Simpson Creek, Sawpit Creek, Sisters Creek, and Pumpkin Hill Creek, similar to the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. Gabrielle Trace briefly explained the route of the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail and how some of the creeks surrounding these islands regularly have impassably low tides.

Ms. Hindson supported the proposals for continued paddle launch sites and additional parking space but emphasized that members would also like to see additional green spaces near these launch sites to serve as primitive camping locations. Ms. Trace mentioned that the Kayak Amelia rental service on Long Island may not be renewing their contract and that a primitive group camp has been discussed for this location.

National Park Service Joshua Salestrom did not provide any comments.

Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association Todd Addicott did not provide any comments.

Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) In addition to verbal comments during the meeting, Katie Conrad also provided written comments regarding funding available for coastal acquisition projects through the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants Program. Additionally, she provided information regarding funding and restoration for the George Crady Bridge and Sawpit Island. Ms. Conrad also stated that the USFWS Coastal Program is funding Tall Timbers to conduct mechanical treatment within Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park and plans to fund additional work to restore habitat for federally listed and at-risk species.

Sierra Club Grant Gelhardt emphasized several topics that need improved discussion:

- Discuss the challenges with deepening the St. Mary's and St. John's River channels, including the impact on the littoral flow of sand and impacts to nearby beaches.
- The plan mentions the water quality issues within the region but needs to suggest solutions and mention that DRP will continue to track and monitor these issues.
- The plan should consider stating the need to continue tracking water quality and erosion and consider appropriate actions to mitigate or reverse these trends.

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- The plan should describe how conservation lands and aquatic preserves surrounding these parks work together.

Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection Following the advisory group meeting, William “Guy” Weeks provided several documents that were referenced in the meeting, including two DEP Fishing Pier Design Guidance documents and the DEP Strategic Beach Management Plan.

City of Jacksonville Brian Burket attended the Duval County public meeting and the Atlantic Coast region advisory group meeting. Mr. Burket identified that the Big Talbot Island State Park base map should include labels for both Timucuan Trail parking lots. For Big Talbot Island, he recommended that the conceptual land use plan include the expansion of the second Timucuan Trail parking area to the south. He also identified that the Big Talbot Island optimum boundary includes land already owned by the North Florida Land Trust as existing conservation land.

Mr. Burket inquired about the status of the Batten Island Access realignment and island traffic flow project for Fort George Island Cultural State Park.

Mr. Burket noted that the Little Talbot Island State Park base map is missing labels for the Timucuan Trail, Fort George Inlet parking lot, campground, and paddling concessionaire. He also noticed that City-owned Bird Island was included in the park’s optimum boundary, mentioned that in the past the State requested a donation, and inquired if the State would like to restart this donation process.

Mr. Burket noted that the Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park base map should label the main trailhead parking area off Pumpkin Hill Road. He inquired if there was any recreational use proposed for Black Hammock Island. He emphasized that the Pumpkin Hill chapter should discuss the park’s inclusion in the “7 Creeks Recreation Area”. The Conceptual Land Use Plan should include support for a proposed paved, shared-use path along the right-of-way of Cedar Point Road and Pumpkin Hill Road. This route should connect to the existing trailhead parking lots at Pumpkin Hill and adjacent conservation lands. Mr. Burket inquired if the 2006 Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park land use proposals were being removed, including the development of a(n):

- information kiosk on Cedar Point Road at Nungezer Road
- trailhead off Nungezer Road
- trailhead off Boney Road
- group camp and observation platform on Pumpkin Hill Creek
- equestrian trailhead and camp at Jim Wingate Park

Mr. Burket noted that if DRP doesn’t propose a trailhead off Boney Road, there should still be coordination with the City of Jacksonville to improve the existing trail crossing on Boney Road.

Regarding Pumpkin Hill’s optimum boundary section, Mr. Burket recommended the removal of the City-owned Betz-Tiger Point Preserve and Jim Wingate Park and to designate these properties as existing conservation lands. The map should also be updated to remove properties recently developed and lands recently acquired on Black Hammock Island by the National Park Service.

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North Florida Back Country Horsemen Nancy Stephens stated that the North Florida Back Country Horsemen members appreciate the equestrian trails at Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park and ask that DRP continue to accommodate this use.

Ms. Stephens mentioned that the members also support allowing both rental horses and privately owned horses inside Amelia Island State Park and on the beach. She recommends that the area for parking private vehicles and horse trailers be delineated.

Staff Analysis

DRP Staff recommends approval of the proposed unit management plans for the Atlantic Coast region state parks as presented, with the following significant changes:

Statewide Introduction

- The Statewide Introduction will explain the caveats of land identified in the parks' optimum boundary and cross reference this information in the park chapters' Optimum Boundary narratives as needed.

Districtwide Introduction

- The Districtwide Introduction will discuss the benefits of landscape connectivity and introduce the Florida Wildlife Corridor, the Florida Ecological Greenways Network, and partnerships DEP has to advance these large-scale projects.

Regional Introduction

- The Regional Introduction will briefly introduce and discuss the DEP Critical Erosion Report and Annual Inlet Report.
- An explanation of the partnership between FWC and DEP concerning shorebird protection and predation management will be provided in the Regional Introduction.
- Visitor use management, visitor services, demographic information, surrounding land use changes, impacts from surrounding land use, climate change and its impacts on existing visitor facilities will be provided in the Regional Introduction.
- In the Regional Introduction, the balance between natural resources and recreation will be conveyed and explain DRP monitoring protocols for visitor use impacts.

Park Chapters

- The imperiled species sections of the Atlantic Coast region park chapters will include additions and updates recommended by the USFWS and FWC. The Florida pine snake and eastern diamondback rattlesnake will be designated as under review, the monarch butterfly will be listed as a candidate species, the tricolored bat will be updated as proposed endangered, and the gopher tortoise will no longer be listed as a candidate for the federal listing of endangered species.

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- Regarding the natural community restoration actions for Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park, a variety of land management tools that are available to DRP staff will be utilized and staff will adaptively work to ensure longleaf pine survival.
- Staff included funding opportunities like DEP Resilient Florida Grants into the Amelia Island State Park Optimum Boundary section.
- Staff will update the proposal for additional recreation access at Little Talbot Island State Park to highlight that the placement of additional access will consider highly sensitive shorebird nesting, foraging, and roosting areas.
- Staff will update the Fort Clinch State Park Optimum Boundary Map.
- Staff will include consideration for a primitive group camp for the Long Island-Simpson Creek Use Area on Big Talbot Island State Park.
- The Big Talbot Island State Park, Little Talbot Island State Park, and Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park base maps will be updated to identify the Timucuan Trail, the two Timucuan Trail parking areas, the Fort George Inlet Parking Area, the Little Talbot Island Campground, and the main trailhead parking area off Pumpkin Hill Road.
- The Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve State Park Land Use Component will discuss the park's inclusion in the "7 Creeks Recreation Area". Staff will provide text to support this interagency collaboration including the provision for a trailhead, natural surface trails, and a paddling launch.
- The Pumpkin Hill optimum boundary map will be updated to reflect recently acquired adjacent conservation lands.

Additional revisions were made throughout the document to address editorial corrections, consistency of spellings and notations, additional cross-references, and other minor corrections.

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Local Government

William McKinstry, Land Manager

Suwannee River Water Management District

Maxine Connor

Sierra Club

Partnering State Agencies

Paulette McFadden, Public Lands Archaeology

Division of Historical Resources

Haley Busch, Outreach Director

1000 Friends of Florida

Hailey Dedmon, Regional Shorebird Biologist

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Julie Burford, Biologist

Conservation Florida

Rebecca Doane, Conservation Biologist

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Lily Anderson-Messec, Director of North FL

Programs

Florida Native Plant Society

Partnering Federal Agencies

Tiffany Lane, Coastal Restoration

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Florida Park Service

Larry Steed, Park Manager

Homosassa Springs State Park

Environmental Organizations

Ken Spilios

Florida Audubon Society

Kate Spratt, Park Service Specialist

Homosassa Springs State Park

Brad Rimbey

Florida Springs Council

Zach Phifer, Park Manager

Crystal River State Parks/Yulee Sugar Mill

DeeVon Quirolo

Sierra Club

Jeff Pettis, Park Manager

Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park

Robin Orlandi

Sierra Club

Chris Raby, Park Manager

Fort Cooper State Park

Grant Gelhardt

Sierra Club

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The Advisory Group Meeting to review the proposed unit management plans (UMP) for Cedar Key Museum State Park, Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve, Crystal River Archaeological State Park, Crystal River Preserve State Park, Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, Fort Cooper State Park, Rainbow Springs State Park, Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park, and Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins Historic State Park was held virtually on November 20th, 2023 from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm.

Appointed members unable to attend include Ralph Clark, Sine Murray, Dr. Bob Knight, Nancy Stephens, and Alan Davis.

Attending Division of Recreation and Parks staff members from the state parks, District Office, and the Office of Park Planning include Chris Raby, Jeff Pettis, Zach Phifer, Larry Steed, Kate Spratt, Daniel Pearson, Richard Owen, Anne Barkdoll, Keith Morin, Gabrielle Trace, Daniel Alsentzer, John McKenzie, James Gaddis, Yasmine Armaghani, Savannah Atwell, and Scott Groves.

Daniel Alsentzer began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the districtwide planning process, explaining the goals for this innovative process, and describing why each member was appointed to attend this meeting. John McKenzie thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and explained the agenda for the meeting. Savannah Atwell introduced the topics of discussion and asked advisory group members to express their comments on the draft districtwide plan.

Summary of Advisory Group Comments

Sierra Club Grant Gelhardt commented on the regional aspect of the plan and that the regional maps should include other adjacent public lands such as wildlife refuges and aquatic preserves. James Gaddis responded to Mr. Gelhardt, saying he appreciated all the map feedback and will work to incorporate it into his maps.

Mr. Gelhardt also suggested there be a discussion on how state parks and public lands work together in a synergistic manner to protect the ecosystems. He wanted to emphasize the need to have the Big Bend Seagrass Aquatic Preserve represented on the maps because it provides habitat for many animals that are in and around the state parks. Mr. Gelhardt also urged staff to add more hydrology information to the regional section because issues affecting the flow of springs are not just happening locally. There are a number of freshwater springs in the Gulf of Mexico that may not be flowing. These springs need to be monitored if they fall within the jurisdiction of the state parks. The discussion should also include the Big Bend Saltwater paddling trail as a recreational opportunity since it goes through the Aquatic Preserve and is adjacent to a number of the state parks in the area.

Mr. Gelhardt suggested that a short description be added to the regional section about the regional fire team as well.

US Fish and Wildlife Service Tiffany Lane appreciated the monitoring plan for the Salt Marsh Vole especially after Hurricane Idalia. She suggested that the Eastern Black Rail be monitored as well. Dan Pearson responded by saying the monitoring of the Salt Marsh Vole is done in cooperation with US Fish and Wildlife Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and we will continue to work with those agencies. Dan also mentioned that Craig Faulhaber has invited him to meet and discuss monitoring Eastern Black Rails in the Gulf Coast Region. Ms. Lane also wanted to inform us that the Coastal Program is currently accepting FY24 projects. The projects tend to focus on land management

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and restoration in both aquatic and upland habitats and are funded through cooperative agreements, typically between \$10,000 and \$90,000. They prioritize projects that would significantly contribute to not listing, downlisting, or delisting federally listed or at-risk species.

Sierra Club Maxine Connor commented that the studies cited in the Water Quality section of the Homosassa Springs plan are outdated, the most recent one being from 2011. She wanted to know if there were more recent studies that could be referenced. She also wondered when the most recent dye trace studies were and if there was still monitoring being done for ammonium in the main spring. Rick Owen responded to Ms. Connor by saying as far as he knows, the 2011 study was the most recent study, but if a new one was to occur, they would certainly cite it. He then went on to say that Homosassa Springs is assessed often by Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and others, and he tries to summarize those assessments in the plan. Mr. Owen then explained that there have not been many dye trace studies done in north Florida and the Park Service is not the one performing them. However, when they do occur, he makes sure to summarize them in the plan.

Ms. Connor then asked Mr. Owen if he had any comment on the recent gas station being built near Homosassa Springs. Mr. Owen said that the Florida Geological Survey took the lead, but DEP was involved as well because there was concern as to whether there was a breach of a conduit.

Ms. Connor asked how sewage would be dealt with if a campground were added at Crystal River Preserve. John McKenzie stated that it would certainly have to be done in a fashion where it did not become an impact to the local watershed and the water quality.

Maxine encouraged us to consider energy efficient alternatives when it comes time to replace systems such as AC units.

Sierra Club Robin Orlandi commented that the St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve should be considered during our planning process because things that happen there impact the state parks. Ms. Orlandi added that a 10,000-gallon commercial septic tank was recently installed in an area where the Marsh Preserve is surrounding it on three sides. Since the aquatic preserves are such important habitats for manatees and other sea life, if they were included in the plans, it may enable us to monitor those resources more comprehensively. Rick Owen commented that he will take a second look at a couple of plans and make mention of some aquatic preserves.

Robin explained that there are a lot of individuals who wish to volunteer at the State Parks but there doesn't seem to be many volunteer opportunities. Savannah Atwell responded by saying every State Park has a Citizens Support Organization made up of volunteers and every CSO should be linked on the Florida Park Service website.

Robin Orlandi approves of the proposal to merge the entrances of Crystal River Archaeological State Park and Crystal River Preserve. She also encouraged increased interpretive signage along the river for kayakers to enjoy. Zachary Phifer advised that interpretation not disclose locations of cultural sites to avoid looting.

Ms. Orlandi commented on the possibility of adding a campsite to Crystal River, saying she thought making it a primitive walk-in, walk-out scenario like Cumberland Island National Seashore would be her hope.

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Florida Springs Council Brad Rimbey was able to talk about the new gas station near Homosassa Springs. Mr. Rimbey made several trips to the construction site and spoke to the supervisor of the petroleum tank installation. He was told that when trenches were being dug for the petroleum tanks, they hit groundwater about three feet down and their construction site was flooded. They had to stop construction and seemed surprised that they hit groundwater that quickly. Mr. Rimbey was then told by the construction supervisor that in order to get the petroleum tanks into the ground and keep them from floating, they had to be filled with water and pushed down with a large shovel. The tanks were then covered in concrete to keep them submerged. Mr. Rimbey went on to say that FDEP only got involved after the fuel tanks had already been installed. He was told that FDEP was taking water quality readings at the Homosassa main spring daily.

Mr. Rimbey stated that Homosassa River Alliance is planning to establish a “Springs Protection Zone” at least through the Blue Waters area which is the area closest to the main spring. This is due to people dropping anchors and dredging up grass from the bottom of the river. He suggests an anchoring buoy similar to what is done in the Keys to protect coral reefs.

Sierra Club DeeVon Quirolo stated that the Sierra Club supports assessing, evaluating and restoring natural hydrological conditions and preserving and stabilizing mounds and other cultural sites and submitting them to the National Historic Registry. They also endorse and support the restoration of previously logged areas, prescribed burns, invasive plants and feral hog removal. Ms. Quirolo noted that sea level rise is an urgent crisis that is already affecting many of the park properties and is glad to see that we are addressing the need to potentially move park structures further inland. She also noted that due to growth in the Citrus County area especially, the Sierra Club fully supports our endeavor to acquire new parcels for our optimum boundary.

Ms. Quirolo expressed concerns over the possibility of a septic system being installed at Ozello RV Park which is surrounded by St. Martins Aquatic Preserve. This area frequently floods and would not be a good location for a septic tank. She said that she would be grateful for any help FDEP could provide to prevent this from happening.

Ms. Quirolo stated that the Sierra Club thinks combining the entrances of Crystal River Preserve and Archaeological Site is a great idea but does not approve of the idea of the full-service campground at the existing Eco Walk and urged us to limit it to low impact, primitive campsites, and related facilities.

Ms. Quirolo thinks it is important to expand the interpretation at Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins State Park to tell more of the history and about the lives of the people who were forced to work on the plantation.

She also recommended the addition of electric vehicle charging stations at all State Park parking lots to encourage the use of clean energy. Also, the replacement of recycling bins at all State Parks and the adoption of a parks-wide recycling program supported by educational signage to encourage visitors to recycle.

Ms. Quirolo informed us that Dave Cullen at the state can assist with land acquisition and interactions with the legislature during the funding and budgeting process. Sierra Club is always in support of land acquisitions, especially within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and Florida Forever funding.

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Ms. Quirolo asked if Rainbow Springs State Park was in the process of becoming a registered National Historic Place. Larry Steed said he was at Rainbow Springs for almost 9 years, and he believes that the site will be registered as a National Historic Place.

Florida Native Plant Society Lilly Anderson-Messec stated that while participating in recent Land Management Reviews, she was told by park managers that contractors have been hired to manage feral hogs which has led to criticism from local hunters who now don't have enough hogs to hunt. She said that the park managers feel like they must listen to these criticisms and decrease their management of feral hogs. John McKenzie responded by saying if this scenario occurred at a State Park, then that would definitely be concerning. He went on to say that it is a huge priority to manage feral hogs and then encouraged anyone from the District to comment on the topic. Keith Moran was introduced by Dan Pearson as having extensive experience with feral hog control. Mr. Moran explained that the parks are not influenced by the needs or opinions of hunters using the property. Even on properties where hunting is allowed, the management goal is to eliminate the damage from feral hogs. He explained that he would never make it a goal in a plan to eliminate feral hogs because it is impossible due to shared borders with unmanaged land. Also, putting up a fence would not be wise because it would impede the movement of all wildlife. He said he would review sections of the plan that reference feral hog management and make sure the language is strong.

Ms. Messec also noted the increased use of personal drones within state park boundaries for photography and how they can be harmful to birds and other wildlife in general. Jeff Pettis responded by stating that drones are prohibited inside of state parks without permits. Dan Pearson added that we don't completely control the airspace above the park, so if someone does take off and land outside of the State Park boundary, we don't have the authority to stop them. Ms. Messac urged us to educate the public about the impacts drones can have on wildlife.

District 2 Keith Moran described the cultural resources at Crystal River Archaeological State Park and Crystal River Preserve. Most resources are prehistoric and there is a National Landmark mound complex at Crystal River Preserve. Zachary Phifer added that there has been an increase in boat activity along the Crystal River causing more wake action which causes erosion along the shoreline. He would like to see an extension of the "No Wake" zone further down the river towards Three Sisters Spring in order to preserve the cultural sites.

Florida Audubon Society Ken Spilios expressed concern over noise pollution caused by air boats around nesting areas for birds. He also expressed concern about waste disposal in our environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Spilios suggested the construction of a bird observation platform on Lake Holathlikaha at Fort Cooper State Park to accommodate the Citrus County Audubon group who often go bird watching in the area. John McKenzie responded by stating that there currently is a proposal for a fishing dock to be built on Lake Holathlikaha.

Suwannee River Water Management District William McKinstry suggested the possibility of reevaluating the need for some of the many campsites at Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park due to current and future sea level rise. Jeff Pettis informed us that there are work days scheduled for December 11th and 12th with the Circumnavigational Paddling Trail club members to clean up the camp sites.

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Division of Historic Resources (Public Lands Archaeology) Paulette McFadden asked if parks had any issues with fossil hunters. John McKenzie explained that part of our protocol includes routinely visiting known cultural sites to look for impacts from erosion and looting.

1000 Friends of Florida Haley Busch did not provide any comments.

Conservation Florida Julie Burford did not provide any comments.

Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

Sierra Club, Adventure Coast Group - Overall, the plans are well-thought out and build on proven management strategies to conserve natural areas and cultural resources such as assessing, evaluating and restoring natural park hydrological conditions, preserving and stabilizing mounds and other cultural sites and submitting them for listing on the National Historic Register, restoring previously logged areas, plantings, prescribed burns, invasive plant removal and feral hog eradication, and other efforts to maintain current lands while minimizing overspray of herbicides and preventing runoff pollution. All of these strategies support and protect imperiled native bird, plant and animal species within the parks. We support low to no impact activities as a critical element of sustainable, carbon-neutral ecotourism, i.e., non-motorized water activities, hiking trail access, and primitive camping. We recommend that you consider the siting of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations at all parking lots, the placement of recycling bins for public use at all Florida parks, as well as signage to encourage visitors to recycle their waste and avoid single use plastics and we encourage bans on plastic bottles in waterways to reduce plastic waste in coastal waters. The most pressing challenge may be the urgent need to plan for climate change and specifically sea level rise that is already affecting coastal areas including Citrus state parks. Please encourage and support water quality monitoring by partnering agencies for nitrates, nutrient loading, algae, pathogenic bacteria and flow volume at all sites to ensure quality of habitat for wild populations and to protect onsite cultural resources as well as human recreational opportunities.

Sierra Club, Grant Gelhardt - There needs to be a discussion and maps provided showing other conservation lands in the area. Also, a discussion on how these various state parks and public lands work together in a synergistic manner to protect the ecosystems. There needs to be a discussion and a map provided showing the Big Bend Seagrass Aquatic Preserve which is a critical element in this Gulf Coast region ecosystem – the wetland marsh and vast seagrass beds. The discussion should also mention the hydrology in the area and the need to track the hydrology and aquifer since these areas include karst systems and sinkholes and springs. And how the freshwater springs in this area have been impacted. There may be some freshwater springs in the area that are no longer flowing at their historic levels and in some cases some of these freshwater springs are no longer flowing at all. There are several freshwater springs off into the Gulf of Mexico that may not be flowing. These springs need to be monitored if they fall within the jurisdiction of the state parks. The discussion should also include the Big Bend Saltwater paddling trail as a recreational opportunity since it goes through the Aquatic Preserve and is adjacent to several of the state parks in the area.

Regional issues that need to be discussed:

- Cross Florida Greenway should be discussed
- Florida Trail should be discussed

Gulf Coast Region Advisory Group Members and Report

Trust for Public Land Sine Murray did not attend but provided written comments that included general plan comments. Ms. Murray commented that it would be helpful for the reader to have additional information within the optimum boundary section to further elaborate on the approach for identifying lands for the proposed optimum boundary. An example she provided included elaborating on the difference between DRP vs. Non-DRP acquisition. Ms. Murray noted that parks within the region could see increased pressure to provide greater public access over the next ten years and that the plans for additional recreational opportunities are quite modest considering the size of Florida's population and the current demand for outdoor recreation. Ms. Murray suggested the plan could address this discrepancy by identifying a need for additional park lands to meet future demands for recreation.

Ms. Murray also noted that there is no climate change adaptation section, which she believed should be considered. Ms. Murray also suggested that visitor use management could be a topic that is discussed at the district level overview, and which could improve public understanding of visitor management strategies.

North Florida Back Country Horsemen Nancy Stephens was unable to attend but provided written comments pertaining to two parks in the Gulf Coast Region. At Rainbow Springs State Park she noted the proposal for the removal of an old horse stable and suggested that there be some recognition of the historic use of horses at the park. Ms. Stephens also commented that she was thankful for the 6 new miles of equestrian trail being proposed at Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve but wondered if the area could accommodate more than 6 miles of trail. She explained that if someone was riding that parcel, 8 miles would be the minimum to justify the trip. She also explained that parking at CR 347 is difficult for horse trailers and requested a redesign of the parking area. She added that many equestrians have expressed the need for improved horse trailer parking at this park.

Staff Analysis

DRP Staff analyzed suggestions made by Gulf Coast Advisory Group members and have made the following updates to the UMPs:

- The Office of Park Planning Staff revisited the language in the regional section based off Grant Gelhardt's comments in hopes of bolstering the regional intent of the plan. A regional map will also be added to the regional introduction.
- Neighboring Aquatic Preserves will be symbolized in the regional map due to their ecological significance and effect on nearby State Parks.
- Advisory group members noted that essential components of Florida statute were difficult to find. The table of contents and other features of the document will be revised to make such elements readily findable.

**North Florida Highlands Region
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Local Government

Besty Waite, Director

City of Gainesville

Andi Christman, Land Conservation Manager

Alachua County Environmental Protection

Partnering State Agencies

Rebecca Doane

Florida Fish and Wildlife

Edwin McCook, Senior Land Manager

Suwannee River Management District

Brent Bachelder, Land Resource Specialist

St. Johns Water Management District

Alan Davis, Land Planning Coordinator

Florida Forest Service

Jason O'Donoghue, PhD

Division of Historical Resources

Partnering Federal Agencies

Chad Allison, Land Assistance Coordinator

US Fish and Wildlife

Environmental Organizations

Anne Casella, Florida Audubon Society

Florida Audubon Society

Grant Gelhardt, Chair

Sierra Club

Rianna Elliott, Director of Land Stewardship

North Florida Land Trust

Sine Murray, Florida Project Manager

Trust for Public Land

Haley Busch

1000 Friends of Florida

Susan Carr

Florida Native Plant Society

Kimberly Tillman, Partnership Coordinator

Alachua Conservation Trust

Recreational User Groups

Jeff Glenn, North Region Trail Manager

Florida National Scenic Trail

Todd Addicott, President

Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association

Nancy Stephens, President

North Florida Back Country Horsemen

Florida Park Service

Dennis Parsons, Park Manager

O'Leno State Park, River Rise State Park, & Dudley Farm State Park

Charlie Brown, Park Manager

Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park

Adam Dunham, Assistant Park Manager

Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park

Kevin Patton, Park Manager

Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

North Florida Highlands Region Advisory Group Members and Report

The advisory group meeting to review the proposed unit management plans (UMP) for Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park, Dudley Farm Historic State Park, Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, O'Leno State Park, River Rise Preserve State Park, Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park, Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, Price's Scrub State Park, and San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park was held virtually on November 16, 2023 from 9 am to 12 pm.

Appointed members unable to attend include Jason O'Donoughue, Betsy Waite, Rianna Elliot, Todd Addicott, Jeff Glenn, and Alan Davis. Nancy Stephens from the North Florida Back Country Horsemen, and Sine Murray from the Trust for Public Lands which are summarized below.

Attending Division of Recreation and Parks staff members from the state parks, district office, and Office of Park Planning included Charlie Brown, Adam Dunham, Dennis Parsons, Kevin Patton, Daniel Pearson, Richard Owen, Anne Barkdoll, Keith Morin, Gabrielle Trace, Daniel Alsentzer, John McKenzie, James Gaddis, Yasmine Armaghani, Savannah Atwell, Tess Flemma, and Scott Groves.

Daniel Alsentzer began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the districtwide planning process, explaining the goals for this innovative process, and describing why each member was appointed to attend this meeting. John McKenzie thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and explained the agenda for the meeting. Yasmine Armaghani and Gabrielle Trace introduced the topics of discussion and asked advisory group members to express their comments on the draft districtwide plan.

Summary of Advisory Group Comments

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Chad Allison

Noted the potential for differences in "state listed" vs. "federal listed" when classifying imperiled species. Mr. Allison also suggested and noted adequate mechanisms for sharing imperiled species survey data with FNAI, FWC, and USFWS. Additionally, echoed Mr. Gelhardt's comments saying that more text in the plans and maps need to discuss how the state parks work and connect to other lands in their region, specifically using landowner assistance programs such as USFWS' Partners for Fish and Wildlife and the Coastal Program.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Rebecca Doane

Inquired whether a central database is maintained for records of all imperiled species monitoring within the park service, along with the respective tiers of monitoring. She additionally inquired whether there is a process for interagency sharing of monitoring protocols.

In response, Mr. McKenzie explained that the Florida Park Service actively maintains an in-house data system called the "Natural Resources Tracking System", which tracks the progress of prescribed fire efforts and exotic removal efforts.

Bureau of Archaeological Research (DHR), Shawan Joy

Works primarily focuses on fossil hunting and the impacts on natural/cultural resources within state parks and surrounding lands. Mr. Joy noted that fossil hunting by private citizens has become an issue in recent years, and how DHR is working with FWC to identify "bad behavior" regarding looting, and how additional training might be needed for staff to deal with the issue. Mr. Joy also discussed a meeting with Alachua County and Gainesville to stop destruction of waterways due to fossil hunting.

**North Florida Highlands Region
Advisory Group Members and Report**

St. Johns River Water Management District, Brent Bachelder

Mr. Bachelder began the comments by stating he appreciated the discussion on the decreasing water levels in the unit management plans, as this is an important issue to the water management district, and to Gold Head Branch State Park in particular. Mr. Bachelder added that a significant project is being done by the WMD to address this issue that would pump water from Black Creek into Keystone Heights to hopefully increase groundwater discharge.

Alachua County Land Conservation, Andi Christman

Ms. Christman began by providing support for the prescribed fire program and believes it is a critical land management tool and supports all activities of implementation of all prescribed fire within state parks.

For the maps provided in the advisory group drafts, Ms. Christman noted several mislabeling of adjacent conservation lands and easements lands within Alachua County. Praised overall map design for the draft unit management plans.

Commented and posed several questions regarding Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park regarding the availability of an updated livestock management plan for Paynes Prairie Preserve, specifically for the cracker horses and bison herd.

Regarding land use proposals, Ms. Christman provided support for the extension of the La Chua boardwalk at Paynes Preserve State Park, and removal of the dike and observation platform. Ms. Christman also added comments about the interaction of humans and the natural resources/environment along Highway 441 and Eco-passage. Several examples expressed included: ongoing feeding of alligators, fishing during the day, and engagement of illegal activity. Also inquired about any specific considerations of universal accessibility to develop full ADA accessible trails.

Regarding fossil hunting, Ms. Christman noted looting activities at the Hogtown Creek Greenway (City of Gainesville) and other Alachua County-owned lands, causing erosion, trampling, and other damages.

Florida Alachua Audubon Society, Anne Casella

Ms. Casella commented on the proposed Hammock Trail with the Sweetwater area of Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Noting that she was pleased to see this proposal within the current draft plan, as it was not included in the current approved plan and could not move forward. Additional support was stated for the extension of the boardwalk of the La Chua Trail and the removal of the dike and observation platform. Noted note visitor issues at sections of the La Chua Trail due to the conflict of visitors and wildlife.

North Florida Highlands Region Advisory Group Members and Report

Sierra Club, Grant Gelhardt

Mr. Gelhardt's recommendations for the new district wide plan included the addition of a district and region map, and a map showing the connections of state parks to adjacent conservation lands and wildlife corridors. As they work to provide a "symbiotic relationship to protect Florida wildlife and provide recreational opportunities".

He also recommended the discussion of regional water issues be added to the management plan whether at the regional or park level. Including decreased water levels at Gold Head Branch State Park. Mr. Gelhardt also added that water issues should be tracked and identified, even if occurring outside of a park boundary and beyond direct jurisdiction of DEP, and that DEP/DRP should offer possible solutions. Additionally, broad issues such as global warming and climate change should be included in the new plan. He recommended that effects should be referenced or monitored.

Florida Native Plant Society, Susan Carr

Inquired on the optimum boundaries asking why some of the proposed parcels are larger than those apart of the Florida Forever boundaries, and if that would cause an issue with later acquisition. John McKenzie responded by adding in general to the optimum boundary the first process that identification of parcels is critical, and next to see if it is within a Florida Forever project.

Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

North Florida Back Country Horsemen Nancy Stephens provided written comments for individual state parks prior to the meeting. Regarding Gold Head Branch State Park, Ms. Stephens expressed the organization's strong interest in increased trail mileage for equestrian use, especially as demand increases. Regarding River Rise Reserve State Park, a question was posed regarding operations for checking in horse trailers at River Rise, that would not require one having to drive to O'Leno State Park with the horse trailers. For Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, support was also shown by the North Florida Back Country Horsemen for the extension of the Chacala equestrian trail at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Additional comments regarding Paynes Prairie include the possible addition of equestrian camping, that would allow camping with horses safely by trailers, in either a semi-primitive or standard facility setting.

Trust for Public Land Sine Murray provided written comments that included general recommendations. Ms. Murray commented that it would be helpful for the reader to have additional information within the optimum boundary section to further elaborate on the approach for identifying lands for the proposed optimum boundary. An example she provided included elaborating on the difference between DRP versus Non-DRP acquisition. Ms. Murray also noted that there is no climate change adaptation section, which she believed should be considered. Ms. Murray also suggested that visitor use management could be a topic of discussion at the districtwide level, which could improve public understanding of visitor management philosophies and strategies.

**North Florida Highlands Region
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Staff Analysis

DRP Staff recommends approval of the proposed unit management plans for the North Florida Highlands region state parks as presented, with the following significant changes:

- The Office of Park Planning will coordinate with the district biological sciences team to include an updated version of the Livestock Management Plan within the district plan.
- General editorial corrections will be made as needed and where appropriate.
- Edits and corrections as needed to the maps.
- The Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park and San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park chapters will be updated to include Alachua County and St. Johns River Water Management District management leases.
- The Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park chapter will be updated to recognize the advantages and disadvantages of expanding the Chacala Trail.

**Suwannee River Region
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Partnering State Agencies

Edwin McCook, Senior Land Manager

Suwannee River Water Management District

Cade Chaney, District Biologist

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Paulette McFadden, Supervisor of Public Land - Archeology

Division of Historic Resources

Amy Roberson, District 2 Planning Supervisor

Florida Department of Transportation

Ian Pawn, District 2 Cultural Resources Coordinator

Florida Department of Transportation

Lacey Boatright

Florida Department of Transportation

Terri Newman

Florida Department of Transportation

Sam Avery

Florida Forest Service

Environmental Organizations

John Middleton

Four Rivers Audubon Society

Grant Gelhardt

Sierra Club

Joanne Tremblay, President

Our Santa Fe River

Joanna Reilly-Brown, Springs Project Coordinator

Alachua Conservation Trust

Haley Busch

1000 Friends of Florida

Sine Murray

Trust for Public Land

Mark Rizzo, Land Steward

Conservation Florida

Lily Anderson-Messec, Director of North Florida Programs

Florida Native Plant Society

Brenda Wells

Florida Springs Council

Bob Knight

Florida Springs Institute

Recreational User Groups

Janice Hindson, Executive Director

Paddle Florida

Nancy Stephens, President

North Florida Back Country Horsemen

Florida Park Service

Dennis Parson, Park Manager

Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs

Mebane Cory-Ogden, Park Manager

Fanning Springs and Manatee Springs State Park

Debra Walker, Assistant Park Manager

Big Shoals Public Lands and Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park

Suwannee River Region Advisory Group Members and Report

The advisory group meeting to review the proposed unit management plans (UMP) for Big Shoals State Park, Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, Fanning Springs State Park, Forest Capital Museum State Park, Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park, Ichetucknee Springs State Park, Lafayette Blue Springs State Park, Madison Blue Spring State Park, Manatee Springs State Park, Peacock Springs State Park, Suwannee River State Park, and Troy Spring State Park was held virtually on November 28th, 2023, from 9 am to 12:00 pm.

Appointed members unable to attend include Sine Murray from Trust for Public Land, Haley Busch from 1000 Friends of Florida, and Bob Knight from Florida Springs Institute. Bob Knight, Sine Murray, Mark Rizzo, and Nancy Stephens provided written comments pre/post meeting, which are summarized below. Attending Division of Recreation and Parks staff members from the state parks, district 2 office, and the Office of Park Planning include Danielle Terell, Clifton Maxwell, Daniel Pearson, Richard Owen, Anne Barkdoll, Keith Morin, Gabrielle Trace, Daniel Alsentzer, John McKenzie, James Gaddis, Yasmine Armaghani, Savannah Atwell, Tess Flemma, and Scott Groves.

Daniel Alsentzer began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the districtwide planning process, explaining the goals for this innovative process, and describing why each member was appointed to attend this meeting. John McKenzie thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and explained the agenda for the meeting. Tess Flemma introduced the topics of discussion and asked advisory group members to express their comments on the draft districtwide plan.

Summary of Advisory Group Comments

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Cade Chaney initially commented on the data and observations within the plans, which she noted did not appear to have been updated. She provided examples that she found in the plan, specifically in the Peacock Springs Park Chapter. Ms. Chaney also echoed Mr. Gelhardt's comments about monitoring water quality. Ms. Chaney also noted that the Lafayette Blue Springs Park Chapter featured high quality map graphics and a well-written hydrological section. She suggested that the type of information, graphics, and detail in Lafayette Blue Springs should be replicated in other chapters as well. Ms. Chaney also noted the repetition of some objectives within the resource management components of some of the plans and offered a potential solution for narrowing some of the objectives.

Similar to Mr. Gelhardt, Ms. Chaney also noted that manatees are a focal point in several of the parks in this region but was not a highlight in several park chapters. For example, Ms. Chaney stated that in Fanning Springs there seemed to be only a brief mention of habitat protection for manatees, and that the sturgeon is mentioned just briefly throughout the plan. Ms. Chaney asked for clarification about some of the restoration acreage numbers in the Fanning Springs State Park Chapter. Richard Owen and Dan Pearson explained that the restoration acreage in the previous plan was focused on erosion mitigation, and the language carried over to the current plan is because erosion control has been completed as the first phase. The two acres in the current draft plan noting restoration acreage is talking about SAV planting. While the planting has not begun, the framework has been set the previous shoreline erosion abatement and by current SAV planting and restoration efforts at Rainbow Springs State Park.

Ms. Chaney also inquired about the log cabin at Fanning Springs and if there were any updates about its historical significance and eligibility. District Biologist Dan Pearson responded that the log cabin is

Suwannee River Region Advisory Group Members and Report

currently in a preservation state and is not actively used. There has been no determination yet for its future use / historic significance. John McKenzie also noted that there is a cultural resource section at the statewide level that discusses the process for review with the Division of Historic Resources, and the team would go back and review to ensure that the policy is adequately outlined. Ms. Chaney inquired about ARM training, and if the park service knew how many people are certified. Ms. McFadden provided a response which is highlighted under Division of Historic Resources.

Ms. Chaney also inquired about some of the boiler plate information and offered to provide formatting and grammatical comments. Daniel Alsentzer responded with appreciation for the comments, identifying that some of what Ms. Chaney inquired about was within the text. Mr. Alsentzer agreed with Ms. Chaney, noting that the organization and flow of the plan needed to be reviewed to ensure that any confusion is eliminated, and provided context / background information for the plan structure. An additional suggestion was made to include text regarding “desired future conditions”. Daniel Alsentzer noted that some of the information Ms. Chaney was asking about was in the statewide/district section and agreed that the information was important and needed to be reflected, so cross referencing, table of contents, and subtext below the headings would be implemented to identify the content within different sections of the plan.

Ms. Chaney inquired about prescribed fire based off of Mr. Rizzo’s comment and asked about the annual targeted burn acreage. Ms. Chaney also asked for clarification about the restored natural community section. Dan Pearson provided the calculations for the annual targeted burn acreage and explained that the restored natural community is an area undergoing restoration. Ms. Chaney suggested that once the restoration work is completed, DRP could work with FNAI to verify the land type. Dan Pearson explained that DRP does its own natural community mapping and evaluation.

Ms. Chaney asked about the process employed within the park system for accessibility. Tess Flemma responded that with any infrastructure improvements, accessibility is at the forefront of conversations with the design and construction team. Dan Pearson also noted that there is also designated funding every year for ADA accessibility. Ms. Chaney also suggested that there is training available through FSU to make documents/websites ADA accessible. FWC uses a specific company to convert maps and text to be ADA compliant and offered to provide that information.

Ms. Chaney inquired about land acquisition, and where it was within the plan. Daniel Alsentzer noted that there is no specific budget, the park service operates under Florida Forever Initiatives, but that optimum boundary maps are included at the end of the park chapters.

Division of Historical Resources Paulette McFadden provided more information concerning the ARM training Ms. Chaney brought up. Ms. McFadden explained that the ARM Training is now a webinar which has allowed for a greater number of park staff to receive the training. Ms. McFadden also provided more information regarding eligibility of sites – noting that DHR is starting to go through Master Site Files to determine if sites are eligible.

Ms. McFadden also noted that several objectives throughout park chapters mentioned updating the scope of collections. If something is collected, it is necessary to make sure that DHR is aware of the collections and that they are being logged correctly. Ms. McFadden highlighted Big Shoals State Park, as a few sites are being looted. As the Law Enforcement Coordinator for DHR, she let the group know that any looting can be reported to her.

Suwannee River Region Advisory Group Members and Report

Ms. McFadden also commented on the current struggles associated with fossil hunting permits. She wanted to put it on everyone's radar that even though it may not be in State Parks, there are people going into rivers and digging up fossils, and inadvertently artifacts. Some state parks have had issues with this (i.e., Ichetucknee). Ultimately, the looting/digging issue can impact sea grasses (SAV), and the sedimentation from digging in the river could harm parks downstream. Tess Flemma noted that this had been a topic of conversation in other advisory group meetings, and that dialogue has been occurring between multiple entities to try to tackle this issue.

Florida Department of Transportation Amy Roberson noted that there is a lot going on relating to trails throughout the state. Senate Bill 106 for SUNTrail was given \$200 million, and District 2 was given \$60 million specifically for trails. She noted several FDOT projects and studies are beginning and affirmed that when the consultant is identified, correspondence will include the park service. FDOT is also in the process of doing a Trail inventory, which includes inventorying all the trails in District 2 that have been funded with state or federal funds. The outcome would provide a inventory for all state agencies to utilize, and could also potentially provide the necessary documentation to receive FEMA reimbursement for damages when the time comes.

Ms. Roberson is also the transportation alternative grant program coordinator, working closely with local agencies. Ms. Roberson is looking for applications for the program within the next couple of months, which could be beneficial for park trails.

Florida Forest Service Sam Avery did not provide any comments.

Suwannee River Water Management District Edwin McCook did not provide any comments.

Florida Native Plant Society Lily Anderson-Messec added to the discussion about exotic plants Ms. Stephenson brought up, noting that park users know about invasive species, but don't necessarily know how to report the findings. She suggested that it would be beneficial for all public lands to have a clear strategy and education initiative for the public to know how to identify non-native/invasive plants. An example Ms. Anderson-Messec provided was the usage of an app to report invasive species within the parks and let staff know. It could also be a great way to report feral hog damage. Dan Pearson mentioned that iNaturalist can be used for that, and the "I've Got 1" and Ed Maps app also works for that purpose as well. Dan Pearson and Daniel Alsentzer agreed that the usage of apps and educational content is a great idea and staff would investigate implementation efforts.

Sierra Club Grant Gelhardt repeated comments from other advisory group meetings, which included that maps should be included in regional section showing state parks and other nearby conservation lands. Mr. Gelhardt also commented on the regional language and special qualities that should be highlighted in the area. First, he mentioned that there should be descriptions and/or images that display all conservations lands working together, as well as how the state is working with other agencies to protect resources as the parks don't work in isolation. Second, Mr. Gelhardt cited that additional identification about the Suwannee River region as a biking center of the southeast and an ecotourism hotspot is important as well. These parks provide unique destinations, camping areas, and experiences throughout a variety of ecosystems. Mr. Gelhardt noted that the paddling is one of the best in the Southeastern United States. Third, Mr. Gelhardt noted that the Suwannee sturgeon & manatees should also be

Suwannee River Region Advisory Group Members and Report

highlighted at the regional level since they are listed species, and manatees use a vast majority of these parks as a winter refuge / sanctuary.

Specific comments relating to park chapters that Mr. Gelhardt mentioned included that the Florida Park Service notes that it will continue to monitor the springs, which he believes is just noting the ecological demise of the springs. While monitoring is important, he remarked that the park(s) needs to be proactive in encouraging and facilitating the protection of springs discharge & the aquifer. Specifically, staff should have a proactive voice. He recommended we add some positive remarks while also outlining a solution for some of the issues affecting springs in this region. Daniel Alsentzer thanked Mr. Gelhardt for his comments, even if they have been repeated, are important and may be useful for those who have not been in an advisory group meeting yet.

Four River Audubon Society John Middleton inquired on hurricane recovery efforts from Hurricane Idalia and its respective budgetary impacts and constraints. He also inquired about the impact of the hurricane on current unit management planning efforts. Daniel Alsentzer responded to Mr. Middleton noting that the proposed projects have not received funding yet, as they are still proposed. Also, hurricane recovery costs do not impact funding for proposed projects.

Mr. Middleton also inquired about regional accessibility plans. Tess Flemma noted that specific parks such as Troy Springs State Park focus on ADA accessibility. Daniel Alsentzer noted that as Dan Pearson mentioned it is budgetary, and while there is no ADA accessibility plan per se, that is something the DRP is continually trying to add-on and improve, so that parks are able to support all users.

Conservation Florida Mark Rizzo went over some of the resource management sections for individual plans and congratulated the team on a job well done concerning land management issues. Mr. Rizzo did note that there was room to highlight partnerships, volunteers, nonprofits, or other agencies that could be used for supporting land management work. Specific comments related to Madison Blue Spring noted that there was mention of prescribed fire within the plan, but it wasn't reflected within the management units. Mr. Rizzo also noted that there were a few minor grammatical errors and offered to provide written comment.

Save Our Santa Fe River Joanne Tremblay commented that in the Ruth B. K Gilchrist Blue Springs Park chapter, there was no mention of the New River as a major tributary of the Santa Fe River. Rick Owen said it was an oversight and that it will be added to the Hydrology section. Ms. Tremblay noted that she loved the proposed changes at Gilchrist Blue Springs. Ms. Tremblay also commented that there are objectives in the Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs plan that have already been accomplished such as closing naked springs. Daniel Alsentzer said some of the language will be reconfigured so that the objectives are listed as future action items.

Specifically, Ms. Tremblay said that she liked the paddle launch at the north entrance at Ichetucknee Springs State Park because of the notches that make it easier to launch for individuals with mobility issues. Ms. Tremblay noted that she would like to see similar designs at other state parks.

Ms. Tremblay also inquired about the 57 million dollars that were recently allocated for springs protection to see if they were being used for any special projects within the parks. Richard Owen responded by noting that Fanning Springs was given some funds to increase water levels, but that there are a multitude of projects that are not within the parks that the monies are allocated for. Mr. Owen

Suwannee River Region Advisory Group Members and Report

noted that he sits on the committee for one of the funding areas, and that most of the funds are being dedicated to septic tank conversion or stormwater protection projects. While the money is funding projects outside the park, these projects indirectly benefit the springs within park boundaries. Another example provided was at Crystal River Archeological State Park, the funding was used to connect the park directly to city sewer. Since most projects are funded and implemented through the Water Management District, Mr. Owen noted that to see the specific projects, Ms. Tremblay could go to the Water Management District web pages.

Paddle Florida Janice Hindson supported Mr. Gelhardt's comments. Ms. Hindson commented that she supported a variety of infrastructure improvements, particularly the relocation of the park entrance and paddling launch at Madison Blue Springs. Ms. Hindson noted that Paddle Florida uses Ruth B. Kirby Gilchrist Blue Springs frequently, and that she is very excited for the kayak launch to be separated as well as the campground being moved. Overall, she is excited for the infrastructure improvements that support paddle use throughout the region.

North Florida Back Country Horseman Nancy Stephens mentioned that the feral hog issue is clear to her throughout her visits in the parks. Ms. Stephens suggested that there should be additional discussion within the plan about eliminating / controlling the feral hog population through interagency efforts or within the park service. Ms. Stephens also stated that Florida is one of the top states facing this issue. Ms. Stephens also inquired about how severe an exotic plant infestation is before it is treated. Dan Pearson commented that the park staff treats every infestation. Staff maps them and tracks all invasive plants, and then prioritizes certain infestations based on funds available. Typically focus on the outliers and then work backwards towards the worst spot to prevent the continuing spread. Mr. Pearson also noted that staff are appreciative when park users note where exotic invasives were seen.

Ms. Stephens also mentioned the longstanding issues at Road 1 within Big Shoals State Park. There is a dip in the road, which can cause damage to horse trailers and waste tanks on trailers. Ms. Stephens is aware that Big Shoals State Park is part of a larger multi-agency conservation area, and flooding is apparent (i.e., low water crossing is present). Ms. Stephens noted that there may need to be a long-term solution, but she wanted to see whether or not it needed to be addressed in the 10-year plan cycle. Tess Flemma mentioned there will likely have to be an interagency solution and that the park staff is aware of the issue.

Florida Springs Council Brenda Wells did not provide any comments.

Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Cade Chaney noted in the meeting chat that "I've Got 1" is still an app but is unsure how updated it is. Ms. Chaney submitted detailed written comments for several park chapters, as well as overall comments throughout the entire district plan.

Ms. Chaney's written comments echoed comments mentioned during the meeting itself. Specific written comments included noting that table of contents, page numbers, figures and tables should be labeled appropriately to facilitate the reading experience. Additional comments that also echoed meeting discussion included other formatting, misspelling, and standardizing map/table location to ease the flow of the text for the reader. Ms. Chaney also noted that all tables should be accounted for, as some parks

Suwannee River Region Advisory Group Members and Report

were missing management zone tables. Ms. Chaney also suggested adding text saying that the blank pages were intentionally left blank. Ms. Chaney provided specific comments to three parks: Lafayette Blue Springs State Park, Peacock Springs State Park, and Fanning Springs State Park. Grammatical and formatting comments were resolved, and any park specific text that was updated is highlighted below.

Florida Department of Transportation FDOT Lacey Boatright commented in the chat the following counties were within District 2 for FDOT “Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Dixie, Duval, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Nassau, Putnam, St. Johns, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union”. Lacey also noted that District 2 Transportation Alternative Application Cycle is open through 01/16/2024, and SUNTrail is open through 12/20/2023.

Conservation Florida Mark Rizzo provided written comments after the meeting that included some grammatical and formatting suggestions.

Sierra Club Grant Gelhardt emphasized several topics within the meeting chat. First, Mr. Gelhardt noted that Ms. Chaney had provided “Great insight - setting goals - where they meet - not just repeating the goals” so that they can be tracked. Mr. Gelhardt also noted that “Recommendations derived from monitoring and research activities will be essential to the decision-making process during management planning. A primary focus should be the documentation of ecological responses to decreased spring discharge due to overconsumption of groundwater, river flooding due to increasingly severe rain events, and increasing tidal influence (along the river’s lower stretch) due to sea level rise and associated tropical cyclones.” Mr. Gelhardt also noted that he was happy to hear that habitat restoration has been successful at Ichetucknee Springs State Park. Specific comments included:

- This area is considered a “Mecca” in the southeastern US as major cycling and paddling hub.
- Maps should identify parks and other conservation lands.
- Important to highlight imperiled species: Sturgeon Suwanee and Manatee (critical wintering areas).

Florida Springs Institute Bob Knight was unable to attend virtually but submitted written comments after the meeting. Mr. Knight highlighted that the Suwannee River region is generally themed around their first magnitude springs and spring runs. “All of these waters are Outstanding Florida Waters, and many are also Outstanding Florida Springs. Some of them also have MFLs to protect adequate flows to avoid significant harm. All are subject to a nitrate nitrogen water quality criterion of 0.35 mg/L.” Mr. Knight commented that many springs are impaired by excessive nitrogen pollution (largely from agricultural sources), and that all have diminished flows. Mr. Knight also wrote that the remnant ecosystems and recreational values are severely reduced or totally eliminated.

Mr. Knight suggested that the park service does not ignore the issues he highlighted above. Mr. Knight also provided scientific reports that the Florida Springs Institute has conducted.

Trust for Public Land Sine Murray did not attend but provided written comments that included general plan comments. Ms. Murray commented that it would be helpful for the reader to have additional information within the optimum boundary section to further elaborate on the approach for identifying lands for the proposed optimum boundary. An example she provided included elaborating on the

Suwannee River Region Advisory Group Members and Report

difference between DRP versus Non-DRP acquisition. Ms. Murray noted that parks within the region could see increased pressure to provide greater public access over the next ten years and that the plans for additional recreational opportunities are quite modest considering the size of Florida's population and the current demand for outdoor recreation. Ms. Murray suggested that the plan could address this discrepancy by identifying a need for additional park lands to meet future demands for outdoor recreation.

Ms. Murray also noted that there is no climate change adaptation section, which she believed should be considered. Ms. Murray also suggested that visitor use management could be a topic that is discussed at the district level overview, and which could improve public understanding of visitor use management strategies.

North Florida Back Country Horsemen Nancy Stephens provided written comment for individual state parks prior to the advisory group meetings. Specifically, to Big Shoals State Park, Ms. Stephens highlighted that the DEP website is a bit confusing as it relates to horseback riding trails available at Big Shoals. Ms. Stephens also inquired about the possibility of adding some equestrian trail miles in a loop configuration at Big Shoals State Park. Ms. Stephens also inquired about the possibility of having an equestrian trail that would provide an opportunity (whether riding or walking a distance) to an overlook of the Big and/or Little Shoals. Ms. Stephens also noted that hunters sometimes use Road 1 and asked if it be possible to move the trail off of Road 1 by mowing a path.

Ms. Stephens also noted that the signage throughout Big Shoals State Park seemed water-damaged and could use some updating. She also applauded staff for posting hunting dates at the trailhead and their work with the limited resources available.

Lastly, Ms. Stephens inquired about the possibility of including primitive overnight equestrian camping and offered her organization as a potential partner for volunteer opportunities.

Alachua Conservation Trust Joanna Reilly-Brown commented in the chat that the list of most recent springs projects funded through SRWMD can be found online.

Four Rivers Audubon John Middleton asked in the meeting chat "When you discuss infrastructure, if not already planned could someone give a brief update on effects of and recovery from Idalia, please?" Daniel Alsentzer provided updates regarding overall resiliency efforts throughout the region and what elements within parks had faced the most damage.

**Suwannee River Region
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Staff Analysis

DRP Staff reviewed and analyzed advisory group comments. Based off the final review and analysis, DRP Staff recommends the approval of the proposed unit management plans for the Suwannee River region state parks as presented, with the following changes:

Formatting

- Staff will outline the components in geographic sequence and create a table of contents to improve reader orientation.
- Blank pages intentionally being left blank will be labeled or watermarked accordingly.

Statewide

- The Statewide Introduction will address boiler plate language regarding the different components of the unit management plan.
- Staff will research the need to incorporate more ADA compliant maps and alt-text for the park website and at kiosks within parks.
- Staff will coordinate with FDOT and local entities to identify potential projects that could apply for available funding opportunities.
- Staff will look into providing more educational opportunities as well as identification opportunities for park users concerning native and invasive species.

Districtwide

- The Districtwide text will discuss the benefits of landscape connectivity, DEP partnerships, and maps to depict the area and its unique features.

Regional Introduction

- For the Suwannee River Region, more detail will be added to address the unique opportunities (paddling and biking), the health of springs, potential solutions, and unique imperiled species found in the area.

Park Chapters

- The consistency of elements within the park chapters will be reviewed, edited, and updated as needed (i.e., numbers, graphs).
- Partnerships, volunteers, nonprofits, and other agencies that support land management work will be expanded upon.

Gilchrist Blue Springs State Park:

- Language relating to objectives that have been accomplished will be edited.
- The New River as a major tributary to the Santa Fe River will be added to the hydrology section.

**Suwannee River Region
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Big Shoals State Park:

- Road 1 issues will be resolved by moving the equestrian trailhead to the Little Shoals Day Use Area.
- Metrics and data will be updated to reflect the most recent data.

Additional revisions were made throughout the document to address editorial corrections, consistency of spelling and notations, additional cross-references, and other minor corrections.

Peacock Springs State Park:

- Fire return interval tables will be updated to reflect accurate information.

Lafayette Blue Springs State Park:

- The resource management component of the plan will be updated with current soil and hydrology information.
- The management zones map will be updated.

**Northeast District Trail System
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Local Government

Scott Wright, City Senior Planner
City of Gainesville

Deborah Leistner, Planning Manager
City of Gainesville

Seth Wood, Transportation Planner
City of Gainesville

Scott Kornegay, County Manager
Bradford County

**Amanda Brown, Executive Assistant to County
Manager**
Bradford County

Eric Williams, City Manager
City of Inverness

**Collette Schwomeyer, Executive Assistant to City
Manager**
City of Inverness

Partnering State Agencies

Paulette McFadden
Division of Historical Resources

Tom Matthews, Public Access Planner
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Jonathan Johnson, GIS Forester
Florida Forest Service

Alan Davis, Land Planning Coordinator
Florida Forest Service

Lacey Boatright, SUN Trail Coordinator
Florida Department of Transportation

Amy Roberson, Planning Supervisor
Florida Department of Transportation

Ian Pawn, Cultural Resources Coordinator
Florida Department of Transportation

Jensen Hackett, SUN Trail Coordinator
Florida Department of Transportation

Suzanne Monk, SUN Trail Coordinator
Florida Department of Transportation

Environmental Organizations

Sine Murray, Florida Project Manager
Trust For Public Land

Grant Gelhardt, Chair of Conservation Committee
Sierra Club Florida Chapter

Robin Orlandi
Sierra Club Florida Chapter, Adventure Coast Group

Haley Busch, Outreach Director
1000 Friends of Florida

Laura Berkelman, President
Santa Fe Audubon Society

**Lily Anderson-Messec, Director of North FL
Programs**
Florida Native Plant Society

**Chelsey Stevens, Secretary for the Florida National
Scenic Trail**
Florida Native Plant Society

Chris Stevens
Florida Native Plant Society

Recreational User Groups

Janice Hindson, Executive Director
Paddle Florida

Nancy Stephens, President
North Florida Back Country Horsemen

Kathryn Thompson
Back Country Horsemen of Florida

Florida Park Service

Kevin Patton, Park Manager
Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

Charles Brown, Park Manager
Gold Head Branch State Park

Adam Dunham, Assistant Park Manager
Gold Head Branch State Park

Nicholas Brown, Park Manager
Lafayette Blue Springs State Park

April Davis, Park Services Specialist
Suwannee River Wilderness Trail

Mebane Cory-Ogden, Park Manager
Manatee Springs State Park

Northeast District Trail System Advisory Group Members and Report

The advisory group meeting to review the proposed unit management plans (UMP) for the system of trails located throughout the Northeast District – Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail, Nature Coast State Trail, Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail, Suwannee River Wilderness Trail, and Withlacoochee State Trail was held virtually on November 30 from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm.

Appointed members unable to attend include Scott Wright, Seth Wood, Scott Kornegay, Jonathan Johnson, Alan Davis, Amy Roberson, Suzanne Monk, Sine Murray, Grant Gelhardt, and Nancy Stephens. Maxine Conner and Robin Orlandi from the Sierra Club Florida Chapter provided written comments, which are summarized below.

Attending Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) staff members from the state trails, District Office, and the Office of Park Planning include Kevin Patton, Charles Brown, Adam Dunham, Nicholas Brown, April Davis, Mebane Cory-Ogden, Danielle Terrell, Clifton Maxwell, Daniel Pearson, Richard Owen, Anne Barkdoll, Keith Morin, Gabrielle Trace, Daniel Alsentzer, James Gaddis, Yasmine Armaghani, Savannah Atwell, Tess Flemma, and Scott Groves.

Daniel Alsentzer began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the districtwide planning process, explaining the goals for planning at a districtwide scale and describing the extent of the trail system. James Gaddis introduced the Northeast District and districtwide trail network maps, explained how the district is divided by common geographical themes, and explained the parks within each region and the state trail system. Mr. Gaddis introduced the topics of discussion and asked advisory group members to express their comments on the draft districtwide plan.

Summary of Advisory Group Comments

City of Gainesville Deborah Leistner mentioned that the City of Gainesville has a plan to connect segments of local trails in Gainesville with a proposed trail that would travel through Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. She inquired about how this proposal could be considered in the next unit management plan update for Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park or the Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail.

Bradford County Amanda Brown attended the advisory group meeting on behalf of Scott Kornegay. Ms. Brown inquired about the estimated timeline for the completion of the U.S. Highway 301 overpass for the Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail. She expressed the support given by the Bradford County Commissioners for this proposal and noted that this project is a “really excellent thing to add to the trails and to Bradford County.”

City of Inverness Eric Williams noted the extent, benefits, and potential expansion of the trail network within Citrus County and the City of Inverness. Mr. Williams noted that the City would like to partner with the state to improve the overflow parking area at the Inverness Trailhead along the Withlacoochee State Trail and expressed support for all future trail improvements.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Tom Matthews noted that signage along the trail that highlights adjacent public lands and trails would help link visitors between DRP and FWC properties. James Gaddis noted that some trails provide direct connections with several state parks and that ideally, DRP would like to have a universal wayfinding system for the trail network.

Northeast District Trail System Advisory Group Members and Report

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Lacey Boatright noted that FDOT designed the trail bridge over New River, but they have not acquired funding yet. Ms. Boatright also suggested sending her more information about the Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail's proposal for deceleration lanes at the Palatka Trailhead. She also mentioned that FDOT is in the process of doing an inventory of all state trails to discover locations that need additional support and repaving. FDOT does not currently have one unit of mapping for all the trails and their upkeep. She noted that FDOT has design funding for the Hampton to County Road 227 segment of the Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail and that the agency is paving sections of the trail as they're being prioritized.

Ms. Boatright noted that all signage installation directing visitors to state parks and trails should be requested through the county once the trail is complete.

Ian Pawn noted that the rail corridors are also considered a historic resource and that they may have already been inventoried. James Gaddis replied that the rail corridors are listed in the respective trail chapters' cultural resource table.

Sierra Club Florida Chapter Robin Orlandi noted the proximity between the Withlacoochee State Trail and U.S. Highway 41 and recommended installing barriers to abate gopher tortoises from accessing the highway. Ms. Orlandi mentioned that the Sierra Club leads and encourages outings with other groups like Citrus Audubon to engage and educate the public about the trails' resources.

Ms. Orlandi and the Sierra Club expressed support for the proposals to formalize the trailhead parking lots, specifically along the Withlacoochee State Trail. She recommends that in the design of the parking areas, DRP considers the potential for asphalt heat islands, stormwater runoff control, recycling cans, permeable surfaces, and the siting for electric vehicle charging stations.

Ms. Orlandi mentioned that when she visits the Withlacoochee State Trail, she often observes many invasive species along it and encourages the control and removal of these species. She supports the goals for invasive species control referenced in the trail chapters but that staff follow best practices for herbicides and other chemicals.

Ms. Orlandi encourages additional benches along the trails, placed approximately every half mile. She also noted the proposal to replace some wooden fencing in the Withlacoochee State Trail chapter and recommends utilizing wildlife friendly fencing and wildlife tunnels to facilitate migration. When replacing the wooden fencing, trail staff should consider adjacent wildlife habitats and avoid habitat fragmentation or any restrictions on wildlife movement.

1000 Friends of Florida Haley Busch noted that 1000 Friends of Florida used to be more involved with the Office of Greenways and Trails and hopes to rekindle a similar form of engagement for the trail system.

Santa Fe Audubon Society Laura Berkelman initially inquired about plans for mapping and interpretation and if new maps would be designed and developed to include connections to other public lands, such as lands managed by the St. John's River Water Management District. James Gaddis responded noting that this idea is something that would be ideal to have at a trailhead kiosk to highlight adjacent connected public lands and that the Office of Interpretive Services with DRP oversees facilitating kiosk designs. Ms. Berkelman also expressed support for the Gainesville-to-Hawthorne State Trail proposal to install a small

Northeast District Trail System Advisory Group Members and Report

restroom at the Hawthorne Trailhead. Ms. Berkelman also suggested using concrete hog slabs when replacing the staircases and docks for the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail river camps to improve drainage and increase longevity.

Florida Native Plant Society Lily Anderson-Messec, Chelsey Stevens, and Chris Stevens did not provide any comments.

Paddle Florida Janice Hindson inquired about the addition of “Paddling” in the name of the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. Nicholas Brown noted that many visitors who come to the park want to hike or bike the trail and are unaware that the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is designated for paddlers. Ms. Hindson supports the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail proposals for bathhouse replacements, staircase replacements, and the addition of a river camp partnership at Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park.

Back Country Horsemen of Florida Kathryn Thompson inquired about equestrian access on the Nature Coast State Trail and Palatka-to-Lake Butler State Trail. Ms. Thompson mentioned that in 2008 the park manager for the Withlacoochee State Trail allowed members of the equestrian organization to maintain the trail with their equipment. Since then, the organization has not been authorized to maintain the equestrian trail and DRP staff has not maintained the trail. Ms. Thompson would like DRP staff to prioritize and adequately maintain equestrian trails alongside the paved state trails where applicable.

Summary of Written Advisory Group Comments

Sierra Club Florida Chapter Maxine Conner and Robin Orlandi submitted written comments following the advisory group meeting. The Sierra Club supports the hydrological goals within the trail chapters, encourages continued active partnership and communication with state agencies, and appreciates DEP’s continued support of water quality monitoring with partnering agencies. Ms. Conner and Ms. Orlandi support the Resource Management Component objectives for the Withlacoochee State Trail since gopher tortoises are often observed along the trail but they offer the following recommendations:

- “We recommend consideration of additional protective measures to decrease mortality car strikes in areas where the WST is directly adjacent to heavy use access roadways (Highway 41 between Hernando and Dunnellon for example)
- Public education signage and handouts to educate users about Gopher Tortoise protected status and their natural history and ecological importance.”

Regarding Land Use Component objectives for the Withlacoochee State Trail, the Sierra Club supports DRP’s outreach to Florida Audubon to provide regular birdwatching tours and encourages more extensive outreach to other Florida Conservation organizations. They also appreciate the proposals to provide municipal sewer connections to the trailhead restrooms and emphasize where sewer connections are not available, DRP should consider alternative waste management measures (e.g. onsite composting toilets). Potable water fountains or spigots should also be provided at trailheads and in areas farthest from an established trailhead. Ms. Conner and Ms. Orlandi support the optimum boundary goals identified in the Withlacoochee State Trail UMP and encourage DRP to acquire additional lands adjacent to the current trails to ensure protection from encroaching development.

**Northeast District Trail System
Advisory Group Members and Report**

Staff Analysis

DRP Staff recommends approval of the proposed unit management plans for the Atlantic Coast region state parks as presented, with the following significant changes:

- Clifton Maxwell noted that though interpretive programming is encouraged for the state parks and trails, many programs can be developed by park staff. The proposal for the interpretive birdwatching tour along the Withlacoochee State Trail has been removed and is encouraged to be implemented through appropriate park staff.
- Park chapters have been updated to include coordination with counties and local government to install directional signage to trailhead access points.