

Chapter Two - Florida's Outdoor Recreation Setting

This chapter provides an overview of the social and physical setting for outdoor recreation in Florida. As Florida moves through the 21st Century, its astonishing rate of population growth continues.

FLORIDA'S PEOPLE AND ECONOMY

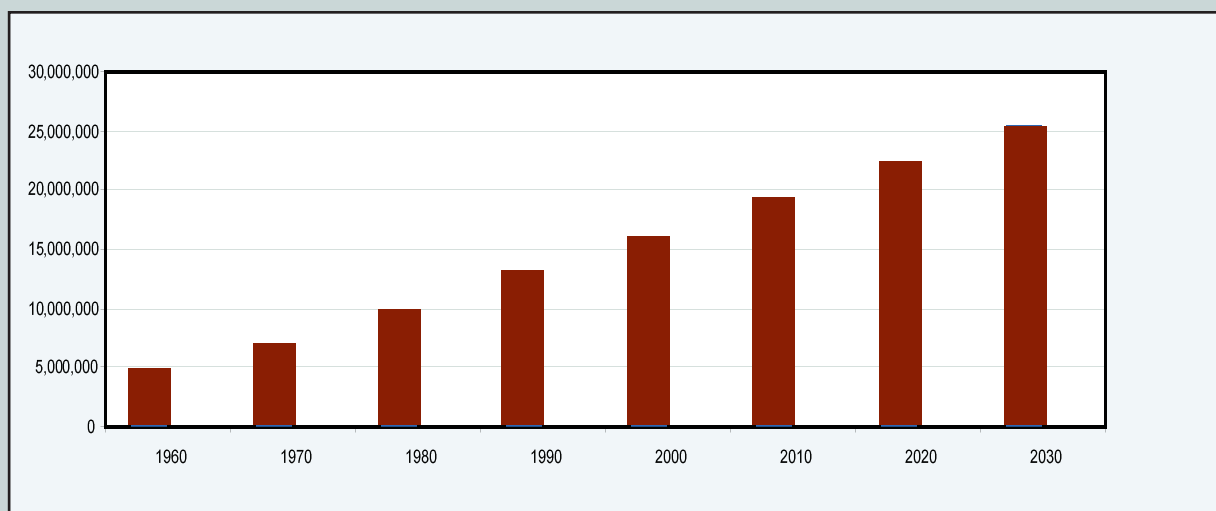
Florida's population was 18.8 million in 2010 according to the 2010 U.S. Census, a 17.6 percent increase from 2000. Today, Florida is the fourth most-populated state in the nation and its population is projected to reach nearly 24.5 million by 2025.

The 2010 Census in Florida reported a rise in the Hispanic/Latino population from roughly 17 percent (2000 Census) to 22.5 percent – making Hispanics the fastest growing segment of the population in the state. In addition to becoming more culturally diverse, Florida's population is also getting older. In 2010, 17.3 percent of Floridians were aged 65 or older, compared to the national average of 13 percent. Florida's median age of 40.7 was fifth highest in the nation (the

national average is 37.2 years), an upward shift compared to 38.7 in 2000. The state's rapid population growth, increasing ethnic diversity and the shift in age of its population will create complex challenges affecting many aspects of the state's social and economic framework. The planning and coordination of Florida's system of outdoor recreation programs will be affected by these changes.

If current trends continue, most of the new population will concentrate in relatively unpopulated counties adjacent to the highly developed metropolitan areas, particularly along the coast. As these areas become more crowded, problems such as loss of open space and natural areas, crowding and a higher cost of living will provide an impetus for further expansion into more rural areas. This sprawling pattern of growth reduces the availability of outdoor recreation land and facilities unless more land is acquired and more facilities developed in pace with the expansion. Ensuring that an adequate base of land for both user-oriented and resource-based recreation is acquired and sufficient

Florida's Population, 1960 to 2030



Source: University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, 2008

Figure 2.1



Crowds enjoy Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park in Dade County

funding resources are available for facilities development and operations continues to be a major challenge for recreation planning and programming in Florida.

To ensure a continued high quality of life in Florida, the amenities provided by the statewide outdoor recreation program must be coupled with a healthy social and economic climate. Among socioeconomic variables, income is a major factor in determining the ability of people to participate in many kinds of recreational activity. Unfortunately, during the past five years the nation has faced substantial economic challenges, and Florida is no exception. Between 2008 and 2009, per capita annual income in Florida dropped by roughly \$2,600 to \$37,382. This appears to have been the worst of the economic downturn as, in response to a slowly-improving national and state economic performance, incomes rose to an estimated \$39,636 per capita in 2011, returning to near the 2008 level (Bureau of Economic Analysis). Significantly, Florida's unemployment rate has surpassed the national average every year since 2008, and currently stands at 8.1

percent (November 2012), compared to a 7.7 percent national average. There is no certainty that pre-2008 economic growth rates and unemployment figures will return in the near future. The health of the state and local economies will always directly affect the public resources available to support outdoor recreation. Therefore, current economic conditions and subsequent financial support for recreation will continue as priority issues for recreation system planning in Florida.

Tourism-based activities support a major share of Florida's economy. An estimated 87.3 million tourists visited Florida in 2011, a 6 percent increase from 2010. Taxable spending in the tourism and recreation category during 2011 totaled \$67.2 billion, according to data from VISIT FLORIDA, the official tourism marketing organization of the state. Many tourism leaders are cautiously optimistic that Florida will remain a preferred destination for both domestic and international travelers, although increased competition from other vacation destinations, potential high gasoline costs and increases in other travel costs are major concerns.

Visitor Estimates for Florida 2005-2011

YEAR	Annual Visitors (millions)	Percent Change
2005	83.6	NA
2006	83.9	.03%
2007	84.5	.07%
2008	84.2	-0.4%
2009	80.9	NA*
2010	82.3	1.7%
2011	87.3	6%

*A new estimation methodology was introduced in 2009

Table 2.1

source: VISIT FLORIDA

PHYSICAL SITUATION

Florida is an elongated peninsula with a total land area of 65,755 square miles, including 4,672 square miles of interior water. The state stretches 450 miles from north to south and 470 miles from east to west. This size makes Florida the second largest state east of the Mississippi River (Georgia being slightly larger). Despite its size, no point in Florida is more than 70 miles from either the Atlantic or Gulf coast. Florida's highly diverse coastline stretches 1,350 miles around the peninsula. To the north, Florida shares common boundaries with Alabama and Georgia.

CLIMATE

Florida's climate is one of its primary assets and perhaps the single, most important factor contributing to the love of outdoor recreation by residents and visitors. Florida lies completely within the temperate zone, yet its climate, particularly in the lower peninsula, is subtropical, with wet, humid summers and relatively dry, cool winters. The influence of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east tends to moderate seasonal temperature extremes. Most of the state enjoys a long, warm summer, relatively minor seasonal transitions, and a short, mild winter. The mean annual

temperature ranges from the upper 60s in the northern portions of the state to the upper 70s in the south. Florida's abundant rainfall is seasonal. Most of the state's average annual rainfall of 54 inches consists of short summer showers. In the winter months, when sunshine is so conducive to outdoor activity, Florida enjoys the greatest average percentage of seasonal sunshine in the eastern United States.

Florida's geography makes it extremely vulnerable to tropical storms. These cyclonic weather systems have always been a part of Florida's natural climatic patterns, but in 2004, one tropical storm and four major hurricanes made landfall along Florida's coastline, impacting nearly 85 percent of the state's beaches. As the science surrounding climate change makes it clearer that carbon emissions are affecting global climate, the state's outdoor recreation resources may be more vulnerable to the effects of climate

Florida's Recreation and Leisure-Based Tourism

There are many reasons why Florida is a popular place to visit and vacation. Beautiful beaches, theme parks, access to water and climate are all well-known draws for people to come to the state. Arguably, many of Florida's most unique traits are rooted in its landscape, leading millions of people each year to participate in outdoor recreation and leisure activities while in Florida.

According to VISIT FLORIDA research, the percentages of tourists who choose to visit the state because of outdoor opportunities is significant.

Percentage of visitors who came to Florida primarily for recreation and leisure



change than many other states. Changes in climate can affect water temperatures and salinity, disrupting natural conditions in sensitive areas such as coastal wetlands and coral reefs. Coastal erosion has also compromised many of the state's important saltwater beaches, necessitating costly restoration and stabilization efforts to protect this vital component of Florida's economy and culture.

GEOLOGY

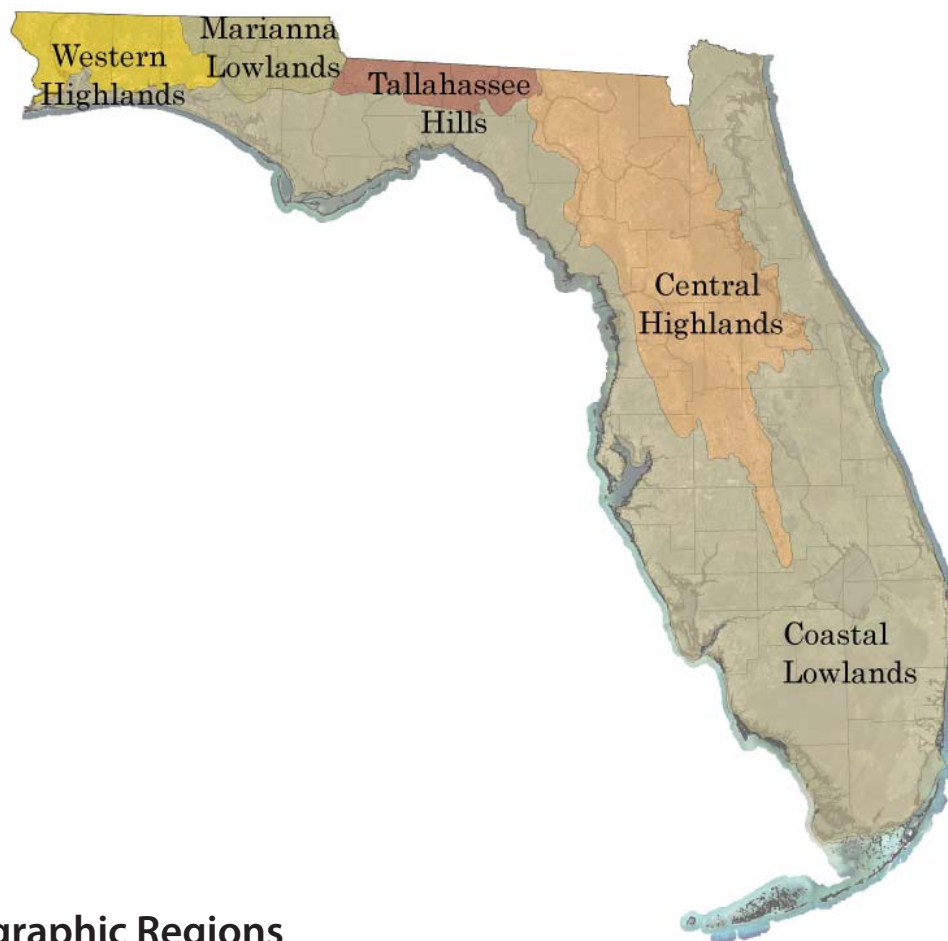
Florida occupies only about half of a larger geological unit, the Floridian Plateau. This plateau is a partly submerged platform nearly 500 miles long and 250 to 400 miles wide. It separates the deep waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The submerged portions of the plateau are called the continental shelf, extending out to an

ocean depth of about 300 feet. The plateau has been in existence for millions of years, during which time it has been alternately dry land or shallow sea. It consists of a core of metamorphic rocks buried under layers of sedimentary rocks (chiefly limestone) which vary in thickness from a little less than a mile to upwards of four miles.

PHYSIOGRAPHY

Five physical or natural regions are commonly identified in the state. They are the **Western Highlands**, the **Marianna Lowlands**, the **Tallahassee Hills**, the **Central Highlands**, and the **Coastal Lowlands** (see Figure 2.3).

The **Western Highlands** includes most of the Florida Panhandle between the Perdido and Apalachicola Rivers, north of the Coastal Lowlands. It is a southward-sloping plateau,



Physiographic Regions

Figure 2.2

hilly in the northern part and trenched by narrow steep-walled stream valleys. The higher hills in the northern part of the plateau are over 300 feet in elevation and include the highest measured elevation in the state - 345 feet.

The **Marianna Lowlands**, west of the Apalachicola River, is a low, rolling hill and sinkhole region, with numerous small lakes. This region occupies a roughly quadrilateral area, with its southern and western limits marked by a rise to the Western Highlands. The elevation is due to the increasing thickness of sand covering the limestone base that lies near the land surface.

The **Tallahassee Hills** region, north of the Coastal Lowlands, stretches from the Apalachicola River to the northern Withlacoochee River. It is approximately 100 miles wide by 25 miles in length and is characterized by long, gentle slopes with rounded summits.

The **Central Highlands** region extends from the Tallahassee Hills and the Okefenokee Swamp in the north almost to Lake Okeechobee in the south. Its length is about 250 miles. The width tapers from 60 miles in its northern portions down to a blunt point at the southern boundary. Much of the northern part is a nearly level plain approximately 150 feet above sea level. The western part consists of hills and hollows interspersed with broad, low plains. This sub-region ranges in altitude from 200 feet to less than 40 feet above sea level. Adjoining this sub-region to the east and extending southward to the end of the Central Highlands is a sub-region known as the Lake Region. It is characterized by numerous lakes and high hills of up to 325 feet above sea level.

The **Coastal Lowlands** forms the entire Florida coastline, including the Florida Keys, and reaches inland as much as 60 miles at some points. The inner edge generally lies along the 100' contour line. In recent geologic times, these lowlands were marine terraces

and experienced three or more successive inundations by higher sea levels. This is a flat region, except where ancient shorelines or dune ridges occur or where the surface has been modified by stream erosion or underground solution. The Gulf coast has the appearance of a drowned coastline, one that is sinking into the sea. The east coast has the appearance of an emergent coast, one that is rising from the sea. In fact, sea levels on both coasts are rising very gradually as the result of changes in global climatic patterns.

HYDROLOGY

More than 2.8 million acres of Florida are covered by water. This includes some 7,000 natural and man-made lakes larger than ten acres, as well as marshes, swamps and seasonal floodplains.

Most of the defined river systems in Florida are in the northern half of the state. South Florida's lack of these systems is due to its differing geological history and flatter terrain. Drainage in south Florida occurs through broad, shallow channels, most of which have been altered extensively by man for purposes of reclamation and water management. In addition to the thousands of lakes and the thousands of miles of streams, wetlands comprise a major component of the state's surface waters. It has been estimated that in 1973, wetlands and their associated open-water areas accounted for approximately one-third of Florida's total area. An overview of wetlands in Florida, including a description of wetland protection efforts is contained in Appendix I.

A considerable amount of drainage in Florida goes into and through the underlying limestone rock, forming a groundwater reservoir. This underground reservoir, or aquifer, discharges tremendous quantities of fresh water to wells and to some of the world's largest springs. Florida has 33 first magnitude springs, discharging more than six billion gallons of water per day. The combined flow of all the state's springs is estimated to be eight billion gallons per day.



Manatee calf and mother, Blue Spring State Park

Between Florida's offshore waters and its inland fresh waters are sheltered coastal waters generally referred to as estuaries. Estuaries form where the flow of fresh water from inland rivers and streams meets coastal waters. Estuaries are among Florida's most biologically productive waters, and are vital to the state's commercial and sports fisheries.

VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

Vegetation dominates the Florida landscape. More than 65 percent of the state is covered by a seemingly endless variety of plant associations and natural communities. All of Florida's natural vegetation is significant from the standpoint of outdoor recreation. In addition to its obvious aesthetic qualities, it utilizes carbon dioxide and produces oxygen, absorbs wastes and maintains water quality, provides food and habitat for game and other forms of wildlife, and performs a host of other environmental functions that themselves contribute to outdoor recreation. Providing effective management of Florida's

diverse native plant communities through prescribed burning, exotic plant control, hydrological restoration and other methods is critical for maintaining their biological and recreational values.

Florida's wildlife is as varied as the habitats that support it. Species range from those common throughout the southeastern United States to some that are virtually unknown elsewhere in the country such as the Florida panther, the Florida manatee and the



Indian Blanket Flower at Honeymoon Island State Park, credit: Sherry S. Werner

Florida scrub jay. Florida is inhabited by more than 490 bird species, 135 native, non-marine reptiles and amphibians, 250 native freshwater fish and nearly 80 mammals that spend all or part of their lives on land. These diverse wildlife resources provide a major attraction for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Fish, both freshwater and saltwater, are exceptionally important to the economy and to outdoor recreation in Florida. Numerous game species play an important role as well. Non-game species, particularly bird life, support nature observation and appreciation and a range of environmental education activities.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

There is evidence that man has inhabited Florida for approximately the last 12,000 years. Prehistoric cultures thrived in this hospitable area and left behind much evidence of their way of life. This evidence has become a source of wonder and curiosity for modern man. The story is still unfolding from professional exploration and analysis of the data from the many Native American mounds, other prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, and historic structures found throughout the state.



A typical 1940s crowd at American Beach, credit: Amelia Island Museum of History



Seminole at Ocali Country Days, Silver River State Park

In 1513, barely 20 years after the first voyage of Columbus, Florida was opened up to the western world by Spanish discovery. Thus began 450 years of exploration, colonization, settlement and development by Spanish, French, British, and American people, which constitute Florida's long and unique modern history.

Both of these eras, the Prehistoric and the Modern, combine to leave rich historical and cultural resources. These resources provide abundant opportunity for a highly popular form of outdoor recreation, visiting historical and archaeological sites.

