

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Division of Recreation and Parks

Recommendations for Improving Florida's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Since the enactment of the Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Act in 1963, Florida has developed and maintained a statewide outdoor recreation plan to guide the state's outdoor recreation efforts. Section 375.021, Florida Statutes, authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection to prepare and maintain the plan with assistance from other state agencies and the water management districts. Since 1965, the plan has also served as a basis for maintaining Florida's eligibility to receive grants through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program administered by the National Park Service.

Since the plan's inception, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has lost some of its effectiveness as a tool for coordinating Florida's outdoor recreation efforts, particularly among state land management agencies. In 2009, the Department of Environmental Protection established an informal working group of staff from each primary state land managing agency to recommend ways for improving the plan's usefulness and meaning. The work group was composed of the following members:

- David Alden, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Samantha Browne, Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails
- Penny Isom, Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas
- Jerrie Lindsey, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- John Waldron, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Forestry
- Mike Wisenbaker, Department of State, Division of Historical Resources
- Jim Wood, Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails

The work group focused its attention on three specific aspects of the SCORP: the planning process; the plan's data methodology; and the plan document itself. The work group discussed each topic in detail and made recommendations for improvements in each area. The group also reviewed the state's current SCORP, Outdoor Recreation in Florida- 2008, which was approved by the National Park Service in 2009. The following report presents the work group's findings and recommendations for improving the SCORP.

Planning Process

The basic direction for the SCORP is found in state law. Section 375.021, Florida Statutes, directs that the plan's purpose is "to document recreation supply and demand, describe current recreational opportunities, estimate the need for additional recreational opportunities, and propose means for meeting identified needs." (A copy of the statute is attached.) In addition to state law, the plan is also governed by the planning requirements of the LWCF program.

Chapter 2 of the LWCF Grants-in-Aid Manual (also attached) requires that each state's SCORP be updated every five years. Among other requirements, plans must evaluate the supply of and demand for outdoor recreation, identify statewide recreation issues, and be developed through a process that includes ample opportunity for public participation. These requirements must be met as a condition for approval of the plan by the National Park Service.

Today, the SCORP planning process is essentially a data gathering and analysis process. A statewide inventory of public and private recreation areas and facilities is maintained to identify the supply of existing recreation opportunities. Random sample surveys are conducted periodically to measure outdoor recreation demand (participation) by residents and tourists. Statewide recreation issues are identified through public workshops and other forms public input. However, little in the way of substantive interaction or coordination takes place in the process among the recreation providers or between the recreation providers and the public they serve.

The work group agreed that interagency communication and coordination in the SCORP process is inadequate and should be substantially increased, particularly at the state level. The group also felt that the SCORP process presents a ready tool for strengthening coordination among the state agencies that have responsibilities related to outdoor recreation. The work group concluded that a group of representatives from these agencies should be created as the core advisory group for developing the SCORP and to serve the broader purpose of improving coordination among the agencies. The work group did not make a specific recommendation on how the group should be constituted, but felt that it should have formal sanction of some type from the participants.

Since the SCORP is intended to be comprehensive, the work group recognized that involvement by a broader range of interests is also important to improving the planning process. The work group felt that, as a second phase, a more broadly constituted group of local and federal agencies, private organizations and others concerned with outdoor recreation should be established, with input from the inter-agency advisory group. This expanded group would also assist in developing the SCORP, identifying outdoor recreation needs and issues, and promoting interagency cooperation and partnerships.

Recommendations

- Inter-agency communications and coordination in developing the SCORP should be substantially strengthened.
- The SCORP process should be adapted to provide a means for coordinating the outdoor recreation-related activities of state agencies.
- An inter-agency group should be established to advise and assist DEP in the development of the SCORP. The group should be composed of state land managers, water management districts, the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Transportation and Visit Florida. The group should promote coordination between the agencies by exchanging information about the recreation opportunities they provide and could provide, identifying outdoor recreation needs and issues, and developing action programs to resolve them.

- A group representing a broad cross-section of Florida's public and private outdoor recreation providers and the public should be established. The composition of the group should be determined with input from the inter-agency group. The group should advise and assist in developing SCORP, identify recreation needs and issues, and promote interagency coordination and partnerships. Establishment of the group should follow the creation of the state interagency group.

Data Methodology

The usefulness of the SCORP, like other planning documents, is largely determined by the quality of data used in its development. The SCORP process is based on several sources of planning data and relies on the cooperation of many agencies for obtaining accurate and reliable information. The information DEP collects in developing the SCORP has value beyond the immediate needs of the SCORP process. It is used in a wide variety of recreation planning activities and public information programs across the state.

The SCORP has employed a quantitative approach to identifying recreation supply, demand and need. Resource and facility inventories, recreation participation surveys, and other analyses are conducted to obtain the data used to support the development of the plan and identify recreation needs. Some states no longer use this approach, and instead use non-quantitative methods, such as trend and issue analysis, key-person interviews and focus groups, to identify recreation demand and need. The work group was asked which approach would be the best to use for the SCORP. The group felt strongly that a quantitative approach applied at a regional level is the most useful and meaningful data methodology for statewide recreation planning in a diverse, complex state like Florida.

The work group discussed how the plan's data gathering methods could be improved. The group believed that an accurate and up-to-date inventory of resources and facilities is the most fundamental element of the plan. Of all the SCORP's data components, the inventory requires the greatest amount of cooperative effort among the agencies and is the least funding-intensive. The group felt that the inventory process could be improved by the agencies working more closely together to share and exchange information, and several suggestions were made for how this could occur. The group also recommended expanding the facilities that are included in the inventory to make the results more useful to other agencies. The work group felt strongly that the inventory data base should be adapted to include GIS capability to make the information more useful to a wider range of users.

The work group gave considerable attention to the SCORP's assessment of recreation demand. The last survey of resident and tourist recreation participation was conducted in 2001 and was used as the basis for the 2008 SCORP. The work group felt that the survey data have become outdated and that future plans should be based on an updated participation survey. The group felt that the usefulness and meaning of the SCORP would be diminished if the 2001 survey data are used in future plans. The group recognized the difficulty of providing funds to conduct a new survey during the current budget climate. The group briefly discussed the possibility of the agencies sharing the cost of a future participation survey, but no conclusions were reached.

Recommendations

- The SCORP should continue to use a quantitative approach to identify and analyze outdoor recreation supply, demand and need in the state. The analysis should continue to focus on the regional level.
- The SCORP's recreation supply inventory should be improved by expanding the specific resources and facilities included in the inventory and incorporating GIS capability.
- A staff working group should be established to create a process for routinely sharing outdoor recreation resource and facility data and to guide other enhancements to the SCORP planning data base.
- An update of the 2001 statewide recreation participation survey of residents and tourists should be conducted as a high priority.

Plan Document

The work group felt that the current SCORP is an attractive, easy-to-understand document and that its format and appearance are an improvement over earlier plans, which lacked visual interest. The group felt that the document's large size disengages the casual reader, however, and that an executive summary would highlight the plan's key findings and recommendations more succinctly. The group suggested several minor changes to the plan's design, photograph selection and similar matters.

The work group was unanimous in believing that the usefulness of the SCORP could be vastly improved by increasing its visibility and accessibility to the public. The group felt that the most effective way to accomplish this would be to develop a dedicated web site to allow the widest possible distribution of the document and its associated data. If properly designed, the web site could become a central resource for information on outdoor recreation in Florida, incorporating links to web sites maintained by a wide range of recreation interests and providers. The site could feature a map application linked to the SCORP supply inventory to display the locations of recreation areas and list the resources and facilities they provide. It could also provide data entry access for recreation providers to facilitate maintaining the inventory's data on their areas and facilities. The web site could also provide an outlet for reporting agency accomplishments to the public. The group felt that over time a web site of this type could become a clearinghouse for providing information on outdoor recreation in Florida and a forum for coordinating recreation planning.

Recommendations

- Future SCORP documents should include an executive summary to highlight the plan's data, findings and recommendations.
- DEP should create and maintain a web site that features the SCORP and provides electronic access to the plan and its information. The design of the web site should allow

it to be used in updating the plan's recreation supply inventory. The web site should also incorporate an interactive map application, links to sites maintained by other recreation providers, and other features of interest.

- The state inter-agency advisory group should assist DEP in designing the web site and in enhancing the design of future plans to further the goal of making the document a more useful planning tool.

Summary

The SCORP planning process is the only setting where all of Florida's diverse public and private outdoor recreation lands, facilities, programs and users are considered and addressed. Rejuvenating the SCORP process is needed for the plan to serve as an effective guide for implementing an optimal outdoor recreation system for Florida. The recommendations in this report provide a framework for improving the plan's usefulness and meaning. Implementing the recommendations will require the support and dedication of all the agencies in elevating the importance of the plan and expanding the role it plays in their efforts to provide outdoor recreation opportunities to the public.

ATTACHMENTS

FLORIDA STATUTES

CHAPTER 375

OUTDOOR RECREATION AND CONSERVATION LANDS

375.021 Comprehensive multipurpose outdoor recreation plan.--

(1) The department is given the responsibility, authority, and power to develop and execute a comprehensive multipurpose outdoor recreation plan for this state with the cooperation of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Department of Transportation, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Commission on Tourism, and the water management districts.

(2) The purpose of the plan is to document recreational supply and demand, describe current recreational opportunities, estimate the need for additional recreational opportunities, and propose means for meeting identified needs. The plan shall describe statewide recreational needs, opportunities, and potential opportunities.

(3) The outdoor recreation plan shall be kept current through continual reevaluation and revision. Each agency named in subsection (1) must submit data to the Department of Environmental Protection periodically, upon request, relative to recreational opportunities supplied by that agency, potential recreational opportunities which could be provided by the agency, and any other relevant recreational statistics that the agency may possess. The agencies shall meet periodically at the request of the Department of Environmental Protection to discuss recreational issues.

(4) The Department of Environmental Protection may contract with the Government of the United States, or any agency or instrumentality thereof; or with the state or any county, municipality, district authority, or political subdivision; or with any private corporation, partnership, association, or person providing for or relating to the development of outdoor recreation or conservation in accomplishing the purposes of this act. The department may receive and accept from any federal agency, state agency, or other public body grants or loans for or in aid of the purposes of this act; and the department may receive and accept aid, contributions, or loans from any other source of money, property, labor, or other things of value to be held, used, and applied only for the purpose for which such aid, grants, or loans were made. Without limiting or modifying any of the powers and authority of the department, but specifically as an addition thereto, the department is expressly authorized to participate in the land and water conservation fund program, established by and pursuant to Pub. L. No. 88-578, as it may be amended from time to time.

**LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND
STATE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE MANUAL
Volume 69**

**CHAPTER 2 - STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN
AND OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS**

A. State Plan Preparation, Procedures, and Eligibility

1. Purpose. This section explains the objectives, eligibility requirements, and guidelines for the preparation of Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP) and the NPS review and approval process. The SCORP is required by Section 6(d) of the LWCF Act of 1965, as amended. The guidelines are based on provisions of the LWCF Act, related federal statutes, and determinations of the NPS regarding planning considerations essential for effective administration of the LWCF program. The Governor and/or the officially designated State Liaison Officer (SLO) are the officials authorized to act for the State, as specified under the various provisions of this Part.

2. Requirements of the LWCF Act of 1965, as amended. The LWCF Act of 1965, as amended, requires a SCORP from each State prior to consideration by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior for financial assistance for acquisition and development projects. The LWCF Act explicitly requires the SCORP to include the following:

- a. The name of the state agency that will have the authority to represent and act for the State in dealing with the Secretary for purposes of the LWCF Act of 1965, as amended;
- b. An evaluation of the demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities in the State;
- c. A program for the implementation of the plan;
- d. Certification by the Governor that ample opportunity for public participation has taken place in plan development; and
- e. Other necessary information, as may be determined by the Secretary.

The SCORP shall take into account relevant federal resources and programs and shall be correlated so far as practicable with other state, regional and local plans.

3. Goals and objectives of the SCORP. The goals of the SCORP and its associated planning process are to direct each State's use of its LWCF apportionment. The objectives of the SCORP and its associated planning process are to:

- a. Fulfill the purposes of the LWCF Act;
- b. Provide each State the maximum opportunity and flexibility to develop and implement its plan;
- c. Describe the role of the LWCF in the State's provision of outdoor recreation resources and the State's policies for use of its LWCF apportionment;
- d. Provide a basis for determining each State's LWCF eligibility; and
- e. Ensure relevant, influential and timely planning for the State's use of its LWCF apportionment.

Each State is encouraged to conduct outdoor recreation planning beyond the minimum required to maintain LWCF eligibility. Under Section 8(a) of Public Law 90-543, as amended, and Section 11(a) of Public Law 90-542, as amended, respectively, the Secretary is directed to encourage States to consider in their plans the needs and opportunities for establishing recreation and historic trails, and wild, scenic and recreational river areas. In addition, the plan must contain a wetlands component pursuant to Section 303 of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 (see item 4.e below).

4. Plan requirements. The minimum requirements of the plan are:

- a. The plan must describe the process and methodology(s) chosen by the State to meet the guidelines as set forth in this section.
- b. The planning process must include ample opportunity for public participation involving all segments of the state's population.
- c. The plan must be comprehensive. The plan will be considered comprehensive if it:
 - (1) Identifies outdoor recreation issues of statewide importance based upon, but not limited to, input from the public participation program. The plan must also identify those issues the State will address through the LWCF and those issues which may be addressed by other means;
 - (2) Evaluates demand, i.e., public outdoor recreation preferences, but not necessarily through quantitative statewide surveys or analyses; and
 - (3) Evaluates the supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities, but not necessarily through quantitative statewide inventories.
- d. The plan must have an implementation program that identifies the State's strategies, priorities, and actions for the obligation of its LWCF apportionment. The implementation program must be of sufficient detail for use in developing project selection criteria for the State's Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) so projects submitted to NPS for LWCF funding will implement the SCORP.
- e. The plan must contain or reference a wetlands priority component consistent with Section 303 of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986. At a minimum, the wetlands priority component must:
 - (1) Be consistent with the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan, prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service;
 - (2) Provide evidence of consultation with the state agency responsible for fish and wildlife resources;
 - (3) Contain a listing of those wetland types which should receive priority for acquisition; and
 - (4) Consider outdoor recreation opportunities associated with its wetlands resources for meeting the State's public outdoor recreation needs.
- f. The plan may consist of a single document or may be comprised of multiple documents as long as the guidelines as set forth in this section are met.

5. Plan cooperation. An effective working partnership between each State and the NPS is necessary to consult and coordinate on such elements as scheduling, planning methodology(s), public participation, and the NPS assistance needed by the State. Each State is strongly encouraged to consult and coordinate with the NPS on a regular basis, especially at the start of its planning cycle, to ensure that the planning process and its products are mutually acceptable.

6. Submission of plan documentation. The minimum documentation required to be submitted by each State to NPS as evidence of conformance with this section is a new or revised plan at least once every five years. The Plan must be approved by the State Governor and contain a certification by the Governor that ample opportunity for public participation has taken place in development of the Plan. A total of three (3) copies of the Plan must be submitted to the NPS. States are encouraged to post the Plan on the agency's Website and use other means as appropriate to make it available to the public. Amendments to the Plan may be submitted at any time. Amendments will follow the same review and approval procedures as the original Plan.

7. State LWCF eligibility related to planning. Each State will be deemed eligible to participate in the LWCF State Assistance Program when its SCORP meets the requirements of the LWCF Act. The Act requires an adequate and approved SCORP prior to the consideration by the Secretary of financial assistance for acquisition or development projects. The State must produce a SCORP at least once every five (5) years and implement its recommendations through the OPSP in order to maintain the State's eligibility to participate in the LWCF Program. The State must develop the SCORP in accordance with this Chapter and submit a draft for NPS review. NPS Regional Director approval of a formal SCORP submission must occur prior to the expiration of the State's current SCORP to maintain LWCF eligibility. Should the State fail to meet this deadline or if NPS finds that the pending SCORP currently under review is inadequate, NPS will provide written notification to the State's designated State Liaison Officer that it must correct the identified deficiencies within ninety (90) days following the last SCORP's expiration date, during which time NPS approval of acquisition and development projects may continue. However, if the State fails to take corrective action within the 90 days, the NPS Regional Director will suspend the State's eligibility. The State may appeal to the NPS Director, along with appropriate justification, within 30 days following the Regional Director's 90-day notice. Appeals will be considered by the Director prior to the termination of the 90 day notice of the State's eligibility. The decision of the Director will be final.

8. NPS actions during periods of state ineligibility. During a period of state ineligibility, the following apply:

- a. Requests for project approval received by the NPS, but not acted upon prior to the State's loss of eligibility, will be returned to the State as inactionable. The State may not submit projects to the NPS during a period of ineligibility.
- b. Only requests for time extensions, deobligations, reimbursements, changes in scope, and project completions will be acted upon during a State's period of ineligibility. Amendments to increase funds will not be acted upon during this period.
- c. Waivers of retroactivity will not be granted.