

Suwannee River Water Management District

March 2015

2014 Land Management Report

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WATER FOR NATURE
WATER FOR PEOPLE



2014 Land Management Report
Suwannee River Water Management District

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INTRODUCTION

The Suwannee River Water Management District's (hereafter SRWMD) jurisdictional boundary includes approximately 7,640 square miles across all or part of 15 north-central Florida counties.

The District holds fee-simple title to approximately 159,160 acres in addition to approximately 126,482 acres of conservation easements (3.2% and 2.6% of the District's land area, respectively) as of September 30, 2014.

District management of these lands provides water resource benefits including:

- Preserving floodplain areas to maintain storage capacity, attenuate floodwaters, and prevent inappropriate development,
- Preventing contamination by maintaining low intensity land uses within the floodplain and high recharge areas,
- Preserving and/or restoring spring areas to maintain or improve ground and surface water,
- Preserving and/or restoring natural communities throughout the area to support or enhance populations of wetland-dependent native species, and
- Providing buffer zones to more intense land uses to protect water quality.

The majority of the parcels are "conservation" lands that are located along rivers and streams, headwaters, and recharge areas. The District also purchases parcels for specific water resource projects such as wellfields, flood storage, water management, aquifer recharge and water resource development, water supply development and preservation. These parcels are managed for the specific purposes as identified in the acquisition.

The District Land Management Plan (DLMP) articulates the goals of the Governing Board that guide the management of all fee title lands held by the District. Lands titled to the Board are managed under a multiple-use policy that emphasizes:

- Water resources protection and management,
- Maintenance and restoration of the land's natural state and condition, and
- Provisions for public access and recreation opportunities on those lands.

To ensure that the District is meeting its land management goals, the Excellence in Land Management Program (ELM) was established. This program quantifies the input of the Land Management Review Team (LMRT) to determine whether land management is meeting the objectives of the DLMP. The following four goals are outlined in the DLMP: Resource Protection, Public Use, Communications, and Fiscal Responsibility.

The purpose of this land management report is to document activities implemented in managing District lands as prescribed in the DLMP.

OBJECTIVES OF THE DISTRICT LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN 2011

Resource Protection

Water Resources

1. Water Resource Objectives

- Minimize structural floodplain management on District-managed conservation lands.
- Maintain ground and surface water quantity and quality during land management activities by using enhanced Silviculture Best Management Practices (BMPs).
- Restore hydrologic regimes to the Desired Future Condition (DFC) where possible.
- Maintain water management structures so they achieve their intended function.
- Develop and maintain water resource projects on the lands to improve water quality and enhance water supplies.*

Natural Community Resources

1. Soils, Topography, Ground Cover and Natural Community Objectives

- Minimize soil degradation (erosion, compaction).
- Manage and/or restore historic natural communities for a given site to DFC standards to the extent practicable.
- Reduce degradation of the existing native groundcover.
- Monitor the grass, herbaceous and shrub layers to detect if the resource falls within the DFC standard acceptable range.
- Reintroduce or supplement current native ground covers with local stock where needed to achieve ecosystem functions.
- Update and maintain current reference data.

2. Forest Resource Objectives

- Manage for natural community heterogeneity to attain a multi-aged and vertically diverse forest, including retaining dominant and/or old growth trees and snags.
- Maintain the dominant and co-dominant tree species within the DFC acceptable parameter range.
- Reforest within DFC standards using techniques that minimize damage to other natural resources.
- Ensure that commercial harvests provide the maximum financial returns that are possible with the consistent attainment of primary natural resource values.
- Maintain an accurate and current forest resource inventory.

3. Rare Species Resource Objectives

- Protect and manage biodiversity on District lands.
- Track rare species locations, status, and use Rare Species Best Management Practices.
- Maintain and/or increase existing rare and imperiled species populations on District lands.

4. Cultural and Historic Resource Objectives

- Protect and prevent negative impacts to cultural and historical resources during all activities.
- Document location of significant cultural and historical resources on District-owned lands and share information with the Division of Historic Resources within the Florida Department of State.
- Monitor the condition of cultural and historical resources on District-managed lands.

5. Aesthetic and Visual Resource Objectives

- Maintain or enhance overall visual quality of District lands.
- Minimize or mitigate short-term negative appearances of land management activities.

6. Public Use Objectives**

- Provide opportunities for resource-based recreation compatible with water resource protection.
- Protect health and safety of visitors.
- Use cooperating agencies and volunteers whenever possible.

7. Communications Objectives

- Maintain and update the District Land Management Plan as needed with a major plan update scheduled for 2021.
- Conduct the Land Management Review Team process and report to the Governing Board.
- Develop and implement communication tools to enhance public recreational use.*

8. Fiscal Responsibility Objectives

- Protect and manage resources on District lands in an efficient manner within the limits of the annual operating budget.
- Revenues generated from land management will be from operations conducted to achieve resource objectives.
- The District will implement the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program for eligible counties in accordance with statutory directives.

*Proposed new item.

**Objectives from April 9, 2013, Governing Board Workshop.

SRWMD FY 2014 REPORT OF LAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

I. RESOURCE PROTECTION

Goal – to protect, enhance and/or restore natural, archaeological, and historical resources on lands owned by the District.

Water Resources

District lands provide unique water resource opportunities because of their proximity to major rivers and their tributaries. At the tract level, there may be opportunities to impact altered water flows and water retention capacities to allow more natural buffering characteristics of the floodplain, such as flood attenuation, to be enhanced and provide protection to the receiving water body. At the site level, many facilities such as river access points, hydrologic facilities and roads require review, construction and maintenance to function in the floodplain without adverse water resource impacts. The objective of facilities' design is to make them transparent to high- and low-flow conditions within the floodplain.

Natural community and facility projects are generally implemented using silviculture BMPs as a minimum standard for implementation. Silvicultural practices, natural community restoration projects, hydrological improvements and road maintenance operations are planned to protect or enhance water resources.

Specific Governing Board approved water resource projects may be initiated for flood control, water storage, water management, conservation and protection of water resources, aquifer recharge, water resource and water supply development. These projects typically require engineered solutions and have project-specific goals and management. In many cases, the water resource benefits are designed to extend beyond the tract.

Active Water Resource Projects

- *Middle Suwannee River and Springs Restoration and Aquifer Recharge Project*
This project is occurring on District, State and private lands near Mallory Swamp. The objectives are to rehydrate wetlands and ponds, and encourage recharge to the aquifer by reconnecting wetlands on the margins of Mallory Swamp with adjacent wetlands on public and private lands. Work to be completed includes the construction of blocks and culverts to reduce adverse impacts of drainage associated with the St. Regis canal.
- *Otter Springs Restoration Project*
Otter Springs is a second magnitude spring that has been the center of public use for years from the affiliated campground. Erosion events over the years have plugged the main vent and the spring pool. Works to be completed include the removal of sediment in the spring and reduce erosion by installing access stairs and other public use improvements to protect the spring.
- *Silviculture Water Yield Research Project*
This project is part of a statewide effort to advance the understanding of the impact of forest management practices on water yield, and whether this water is held in surficial systems or makes it way to the aquifer. The project, within SRWMD, has five plots on District-owned lands at the Little River Tract, one plot on adjacent private land and six

plots near the Gainesville wellfield on private land and Gainesville Regional Utilities land. This project will run through 2019.

- *Road and Hydrologic Facility Maintenance*
The District completed approximately 27 miles of general road maintenance activities at Mallory Swamp, Lamont and Steinhatchee Rise tracts. Two damaged culverts in Lamont and Steinhatchee Rise tracts were replaced; two culverts were cleaned out in the Santa Fe River Ranch tract and an erosion issue was repaired in the Mallory Swamp tract.

Water Projects in Planning and Design

- *West Ridge Water Resource Development Project*
The District has coordinated with Camp Blanding to purchase lands as part of the “military base buffering” initiative. The lands are being analyzed for opportunities to reduce downstream flooding in Starke, and to augment flows to the Upper Santa Fe River and potentially provide aquifer recharge to the Upper Floridan aquifer.
- *Kettle/Britt/Reedy Creek Dispersed Water-Storage Project*
Significant ditching has occurred within and adjacent to these watersheds in Taylor County. Staff is reviewing the condition of the ditch blocks in Kettle Creek at Steinhatchee Springs Tract in Lafayette County. Opportunities to store water within the floodplains, which is currently transported quickly to the river through ditches, will be reviewed. Initial review will be completed in FY 2015 using LIDAR and field investigations.

Natural Community Resources

1. Soils, Topography and Natural Community and Groundcover

The District plans and implements land management operations to maintain and enhance natural resources. The District uses DFC for natural community management. These DFCs detail plant community structure, representative plant species, average hydrologic regime, and the frequency that fire is required to maintain the plant community. By using these DFCs, the District is able to determine if management activities are needed to “restore or maintain the natural condition” as directed by statute. District lands that meet the DFC structural standards are maintained by natural processes (natural flooding events) or “passive” and “custodial” management. Most floodplains and wetlands are in this category. Communities that do not meet standards may receive “active” management to move the community towards the community standards. Most of the uplands and transitional areas are in this category.

Active Natural Communities Projects

- Prescribed Fire*
 Many of Florida’s natural plant communities were historically influenced by lightning-ignited fires. Of those fire-adapted natural communities, the District’s prescribed fire program targets sandhills, upland pine, scrubby flatwoods, mesic flatwoods and shrub bogs communities for maintenance and restoration purposes. Combined, these targeted communities make up approximately 76,000 acres or 76% of the total acres that were historically influenced by fire.

The remaining 24% of fire-influenced communities on District lands consist of wetland natural communities such as basin, depression, tidal marshes and dome and basin swamps. These communities are not actively targeted for prescribed burning. Fire is allowed to carry into these areas from adjacent communities that are being burned, but only when the risk is minimal for long-term smoke-management problems, mortality to wetland vegetation and prolonged organic soil consumption. When necessary, containment firelines are installed and maintained in such a manner as to avoid adverse impacts to wetlands and water resources.

Within the six targeted natural communities, the District focuses most of its efforts on designated core areas. Factors used to distinguish many of these core areas include:

- 1) Areas that have a record of successful prescribed burns,
- 2) Vegetation within these areas can easily be burned without other prior activities such as mechanical or chemical treatments, and
- 3) Areas that have undergone management activities that require the use of prescribed fire for continued maintenance or restoration.

The District uses DFCs to determine the Natural Fire Return Interval (NFRI) for each community. These intervals are derived from the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI). These intervals are the rotation or the number of years that occur between each scheduled prescribed burn. The District’s goal is to increase the acres of targeted core areas that are within their NFRI (Table 1).

Table 2 provides natural community acreage information for all non-targeted and targeted cores areas. Acreage for targeted core areas is further separated to identify NFRI status. For areas out of their NFRI, information is also provided to help identify some of the factors affecting this status.

Table 1. Natural Fire Return Interval and Burn Acreages on District lands.

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
% Targeted Core Areas within Natural Fire Return Interval	59%	66%	47%	36%	26%
Acres Prescribed Burned	11,420	12,136	7,670	11,742	15,765
Acres Burned That Met Objectives	10,935	11,715	6,976	11,692	13,189
Wildfire Acres	0	11	457	5,535	2

Table 2. Acres of fire-maintained natural communities by classification.

SRWMD Fire-Maintained Communities	Acres	% of total
<i>Total Fire-Maintained Natural Communities</i>	100,497	
Targeted Communities	76,508	76
Non-Targeted Communities	23,989	24
<i>Total Targeted Core Areas</i>	50,227	
Acres in NFRI* (end of 2014)	29,719	59
Acres out of NFRI (end of 2014)	20,508	41
<i>Total Acres Out Of NFRI</i>	20,508	
Acres where pine density is too thick to safely burn	6,167	30
Acres where stand age is too young to safely burn**	7,795	38
Acres within Mallory Swamp Tract	4,579	22
Remaining Acreage	1,967	10

*NFRI is Natural Fire Return Interval

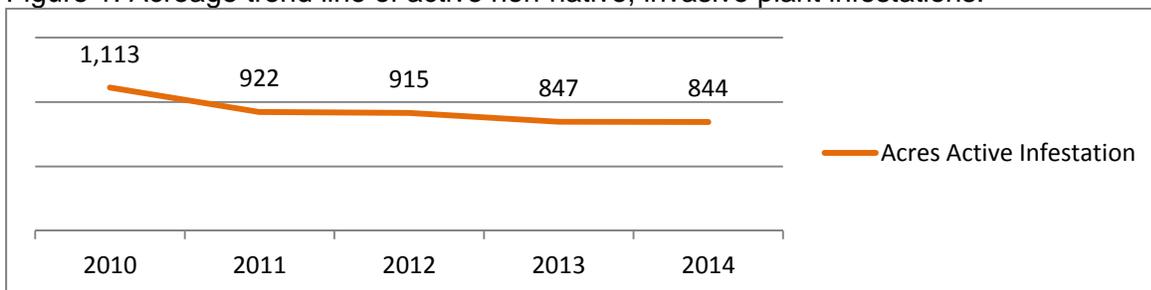
**Applies only to slash pine

- *Non-native, Invasive Plant Control*

A total of 93 infestations were monitored during FY 2014. Of those active infestations, 52 were treated with herbicides.

Efforts to control non-native, invasive plants are showing a reduction of the total acreage of infestations (Figure 1). A total of 17 infestations were reclassified as “Inactive”. Active infestations are reclassified inactive when no remaining living plants are observed at/or within close proximity of the infestation for 3 consecutive years.

Figure 1. Acreage trend line of active non-native, invasive plant infestations.



- *Withlacoochee Quail Farm Upland Restoration*

The District entered into a cost-share agreement with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in July 2011 to restore the native upland-pine community at the Withlacoochee Quail Farm Tract. Of the 620 acres of upland-pine forest on this tract, only 57% contained groundcover resources and fine fuels sufficient for management of the community with prescribed fire. The site was previously an old agricultural field.

This project is expected to restore the natural community by reestablishing native groundcovers, which are vital components to biodiversity and natural community management, and reintroducing fire to the community, and native tree seedlings.

In FY 2013, 12 lbs. per acre of native, upland-groundcover seeds were sown on approximately 145 acres. As part of that agreement, the District monitored groundcover restoration, paid for by USFWS.

In FY 2014, locally sourced, containerized-longleaf pine seedlings were planted at 726 trees per acre. Planned in-kind services include continued monitoring, control of invasive weeds and the continued use of prescribed fire.

2. Forest Resources

- *Reforestation*

Site Preparation

Table 3 indicates site preparation activities on four tracts in preparation for FY 2015 tree planting operations.

Table 3. Site preparation

Management Objective	Management Action	Tract	Acres
Reforestation - Site Preparation	Herbicide – Spot Treatment	Ruth Springs	39
Reforestation - Site Preparation	Herbicide – Spot Treatment	Adams	33
Reforestation – Site Preparation	Herbicide – Spot Treatment	47 Bridge	24
Reforestation – Site Preparation	Herbicide – Spot Treatment	Peacock Slough	49
Total			145

Tree Planting

Table 4 indicates tree-planting activities on two tracts for FY 2014. Both tracts were planted with locally-sourced, longleaf pine seedlings. The seedlings were planted by hand in 12-foot wide rows.

Planting was monitored to ensure that the seedlings were planted to District standards and that the seedlings, per acre, were within 10% of the prescribed rate. At Cabbage Creek Tract, over half of the longleaf pines planted in FY 2011 perished during a flooding event. To bring up the stocking rate to meet District standards, the prescribed

planting rate for FY 2014 was 450 longleaf pine trees per acre. The rate at Withlacoochee Quail Farms was 726 longleaf pine trees per acre.

Table 4. Reforestation of pine seedlings (December 2013 – January 2014).

Tract	Dominant Natural Communities Planted	Pine Seedlings	Actual Seedlings/acre	Acres
Cabbage Creek	Mesic flatwoods	Containerized Longleaf	700*	74
Withlacoochee Quail Farms	Sandhill & upland mixed forest		750	146
			TOTAL	220

*Combination of two plantings.

- *Timber Harvest*

The District harvests timber resources to promote conditions that more closely resemble natural forests (Table 5). Four sales were offered; two harvests were thinnings of pine plantations, one was an ecological restoration harvest, and another was a salvage operation due to bark beetle infestation.

Planning, advertising, contract oversight, timber sales security and financial reconciliation are part of this process.

Timber harvest objectives include:

- Reducing overstocked conditions, and
- Removing undesirable species.

Table 5. Acres of timber harvest and revenue as percent of reported sources.

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
# Acres Timber Sold for DFC	731	267	1,074	1,096	1,314
Total Value as a Percent of Published Regional Market Rate for Pine Products (source: FL. Land Steward Newsletters)	105%	117%	114%	98%	102%

- *Vegetation Management with Herbicides*

Herbicides are applied to create conditions consistent with the natural community desired conditions. Two hundred forty-four (244) acres were chemically treated in 2014 to release planted pine stands from encroaching natural hardwood seedlings. All treatments occurred on either upland pine or sandhill natural communities.

- *Little River Tract Upland Pine Restoration Multi-Year Project*

This is a joint project with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Wild Turkey Federation. The District received multi-year grant funding to reduce mesic oaks on about 473 acres of upland pine plantation. The first activity was a timber harvest to reduce the amount of oaks present on the property. This area will also be used for the silviculture water yield project. Soil moisture probes will be set to determine water use by various densities of trees and species.

- *Forest Resource Inventory*

Data were collected on 752 tree plots in FY 2014. The data from these plots quantify the acres that achieve the community goals, and also provide for data for areas that may be

improved using timber sales. Staff is developing an ongoing inventory plan to keep this data current.

3. Rare Species Resources

The District has procedures for identifying and avoiding detrimental impacts to imperiled species on its lands. Rare species are documented on District lands by surveys and opportunistic observations. Species locations and rare species BMP information are maintained within a geodatabase. To lower the potential for negative impacts on existing species occurrences, District staff consults the rare species GIS layer file and rare species BMPs before planning and conducting management activities. If potential impacts are identified, staff will delineate occurrence areas to avoid or adjust management activities to prevent potential conflicts.

No specific surveys were conducted in FY 2014. However, District staff recognized a potential conflict between Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and harvest equipment during the planning stages of the 2014 timber harvest at Bell Spring tract. Ramp and access locations were adjusted for harvest equipment so that an existing Gopher Tortoise population would be protected during operations. Twenty-five foot buffers for each potentially occupied burrow were staked in field. In addition, all access routes to ramp locations and timber stands were defined by either flagging or staking. District staff worked closely with the harvest contractor during operations and no gopher tortoises or burrows were disturbed.

4. Cultural and Historical Resources

District lands have been reviewed for cultural and historical resources by a professional archaeologist. One hundred sixty nine (169) known sites were found in the Florida Master Site Files of the Florida Department of State. Archaeological review determined that twenty-six sites should be classified as significant cultural sites due to the reported description of the site in the master site files.

The District plans to inspect the twenty-six significant cultural resource sites, while working on other projects in the vicinity, in order to monitor and document any potential impacts by looting or other activities in the past year (Table 6). Inspections are conducted to monitor these resources and identify if any are being negatively impacted beyond the two sites impacted prior to District implementing inspections in 2011.

Table 6. Status of significant cultural resources sites.

Measures	2014
Number of 26 known significant cultural-resources sites inspected	0
Number of 26 known sites damaged since last inspection	Unknown

The District follows “Protocol for Managing Cultural and Historical Resources on Suwannee River Water Management District Lands” to avoid damaging these resources. The most likely areas for cultural resources, based on the known sites, are classified “High Probability Zones” and are included as a GIS layer for planning purposes.

5. Aesthetic and Visual Resources

The consideration of the visual or aesthetic resources while managing property is a key component of the land management program. Every aspect from signs and facilities design to managing contractors and the public has visual impacts.

Key management strategies are to review every activity implemented on the land and try to minimize short-term negative perceptions. Strategies included timing of the operation, minimizing debris or litter, utilizing timber that has been harvested, and in some cases, placing signs to explain the activity.

II. PUBLIC USE

Goal – to provide opportunities for high quality, compatible resource-based recreation and education programs to meet the public’s needs while protecting water resources.

District lands provide many resource-based recreational opportunities. Of the 159,160 acres owned by the District, over 99% are open to the public for recreation. Planning for public uses and facilities takes into account the sensitivity of the site, the proximity of similar recreational opportunities, the time and financial requirements to provide the use, and public demand for the particular use. The District’s Public Use Guide lists allowable recreational uses approved by the Governing Board by tract, including uses that require a Special Use Authorization (SUA).

Recreation Resources

The District has developed facility standards that detail recreational facility, road and trail, sign and kiosk, and fence design, construction and maintenance procedures. These standards ensure that facilities provide a safe, aesthetically pleasing, outdoor environment for the public that can be effectively maintained (Table 7), and minimizes potential impacts to water resources. District staff inspects public-use facilities, and schedules maintenance required to ensure the longevity and continued safe use.

Table 7. Public-use facilities *

Facility	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
# Trailheads	29	30	26	26	22
# Docks & Boat Ramps	11	11	10	10	8
# Hand & Canoe Launch Sites	19	19	27	27	26
# Picnic Areas	14	17	16	16	16
# Interpretive Sites	10	11	9	9	8
# Restrooms	15	18	18	18	14
# Miles Trails	226	242	203	190	183
# Miles Driving Trails	313	310	310	345	302

*Recreation facilities have decreased in 2014 with the conveyance of Otter Springs Park & Campground to Gilchrist County.

- *Recreation Maintenance*
 - The Suwannee River flooded in spring 2014 inundating the walkways at Suwannee Springs. After the flood receded, deposited sand and debris was removed.

- Suwannee Bicycle Association continues to make minor adjustments to the bicycle trails in the White Springs area.
- The Florida Trail Association Cracker Chapter from Gainesville maintains the section of the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) from White Springs to Ellaville, which crosses miles of District land. They rerouted the section of FNST that traversed the Gar Pond Tract on the Columbia County side of the Suwannee River to the Hamilton County side through the White Springs Tract. The trail passes through the downtown section of White Springs. White Springs was designated as the first “Gateway Community” on the FNST.
- The trail at the Sugar Creek Tract was rerouted when the Sugar Creek Bridge was removed due to safety. The trail was rerouted to a shallow section of the creek and a ford was designated.
- As part of the Bell Springs restoration, the blue section of the Florida Trail had to be rerouted. Stephen Roddenberry built a bridge across the Bell Springs Run as his Eagle Scout project and rerouted the alignment.
- *Special Use Authorizations*
Members of the public may apply for a Special Use Authorization (SUA) to engage in those recreational opportunities requiring special authorization as listed in the public use guide. Examples include ATV use and night-time access. An SUA may also be issued for opportunities not listed in the Public Use Guide; examples include research and data collection, placement of bee hives and nuisance hog removal.

An SUA serves as an agreement between the District and user; it details terms, conditions, liability protection and time frame of the proposed use. The District issues SUAs and reserves the right to refuse anyone an SUA if the proposed use threatens water resources, public safety or other natural resources on District lands. A total of 546 SUAs were issued in FY 2014 (Table 8).

Table 8. The number and types of Special Use Authorizations issued.

Recreation	Temporary Ingress and Egress	Mallory Swamp ATV Trail	Non-Recreational*	Goose Pasture Camping	Total
417	40	22	20	67	546

*Non-Recreational SUAs issued during the fiscal year include research and data collection, competitions, hog removal and apiary leases.

- *Hunting and Fishing*
The District’s goal for public hunting is to provide high-quality hunting opportunities. The District meets annually with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to review opportunities for public hunting on District lands. Public hunting on District lands is offered through management agreements with FWC and the US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. Fishing is allowed on District tracts subject to FWC fishing regulations (Table 9).

Table 9. Hunting and fishing access.

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
# acres open to public hunting	105,019	105,131	105,016	96,444*	97,160
# fishing access locations	103	101	130	102	99

*The number of acres of land open for hunting decreased due to the District conveying a portion of the Sandlin Bay Tract to the U.S. Forest Service. These acres remain open to hunting as part of the Osceola National Forest WMA, but the District no longer holds title to the land.

III. COMMUNICATIONS

Goal – to coordinate with public and private stakeholders in the management of District lands.

The District encourages participation from outside agencies, organizations and private citizens when developing management plans for the lands under its stewardship. However, District lands and facilities and other communication opportunities likely provide greater visibility of land management activities to the general public. Public inquiries are addressed by visiting the District or contacting District staff by phone, mail, email, or the website. All boundary and informational signs include District phone numbers and email addresses for this purpose.

- *District Land Management Plan*
The DLMP articulates the Governing Board goals and objectives that guide the management of all fee lands held by the District. The Board approved the DLMP in April 2011.

No revisions were made to the DLMP in 2014.

- *Land Management Review Team*
The Land Management Review Team (LMRT) scores District land management and their report is provided to the Board for its review. Statutorily, the LMRT must evaluate:
 - 1) Whether District lands are being managed for the purposes for which they were acquired, and
 - 2) If the management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the management plan.

District staff conducted two Land Management Review Team meetings and tours in 2014. The reviews focused on activities that were conducted in FY 2013. Areas of review included water resources, natural resource management, public use and facilities on representative areas.

The review of the Withlacoochee and Middle Suwannee basins focused on the 12,584 acres of District fee lands managed by the Florida Forest Service under a lease at Twin Rivers State Forest (TRSF). This review was conducted on March 20, 2014. Questions and responses of this review are summarized in Table 10a.

The second review of District managed land was in the Lower Suwannee and Waccasassa River basins. This area encompasses 15,821 acres of fee lands and

43,470 acres of Conservation Easement lands. This inspection was held on April 24, 2014. Questions and responses of this review are summarized in Table 10b.

Table 10a. Questionnaire responses from the District's LMRT meeting held on March 20, 2014.

Question 1 # of Responses	Are District lands being managed in a manner consistent with the purpose for which they were acquired, including public access?
1	SRWMD is not in compliance.
5	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
7	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.
Question 2	
Question 2 # of Responses	Does SRWMD land management implement the goals identified in the District Land Management Plan?
3	SRWMD is not in compliance.
4	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
6	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.

Table 10b. Questionnaire responses from the District's LMRT meeting held on April 24, 2014.

Question 1 # of Responses	Are District lands being managed in a manner consistent with the purpose for which they were acquired, including public access?
1	SRWMD is not in compliance.
3	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
9	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.
Question 2	
Question 2 # of Responses	Does SRWMD land management implement the goals identified in the District Land Management Plan?
1	SRWMD is not in compliance.
4	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
8	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.

- *New Communication Initiatives*
 - The District "Recreation Guide" is being revised and updated, and will be completed by summer 2015. The web site will have both static and dynamic maps.
 - Land Management staff provides images and text for "Land Management Mondays" for the District's social media outreach efforts including Facebook and Twitter.
 - Staff is using the "Notify Me" feature on the District web page to provide information to the public regarding flooding and closures, and also management activities that may affect public use.
- *Regional Resource Group Participation*

District staff participates in regional groups in order to understand issues that affect District lands and their management, and also to provide input to other managers of recreation and natural resources regarding water resource issues.

 - North Florida Prescribed Fire Council
 - San Pedro Bay Landowners Association
 - 1st Coast Invasive Species Working Group

- North Central Florida Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
- FWC - Invasive Plant Management Section's Weed Control Project
- Suwannee River Wilderness Trail
- USFS - Florida National Scenic Trail
- Florida Trail Association
- Suwannee Bicycle Association
- Florida Greenways and Trails Council
- UF Conserved Forest Ecosystem: Outreach and Research Cooperative
- FWC Wildlife Management Areas – Annual meeting to review hunting opportunities
- Fire Adapted Communities, Baker County

IV. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Goal – to protect resources and manage District lands in an efficient manner within the District's annual budget.

District staff minimizes the costs associated with land management by contracting with the private sector, partnering with other land management agencies and organizations, and submitting proposals for land management grant funding.

- *Facility Construction and Maintenance Review*
Road maintenance is an integral part of land management operations. District road maintenance is combined with hydrological improvements to ensure a more effective and efficient mechanism for water resource protection while providing access for a variety of activities. All roads and hydrologic facilities (i.e. culverts, ditch blocks, low water crossings, etc.) on District property require maintenance at a level commensurate with their environment and use. Some roads are used as a combination drivable surface and fire barrier while others are routinely used by the public for recreation. Others are used for access to restoration projects and land management operations. Each road has been classified to support these activities (i.e. abandoned, administrative, public, and secondary).

In FY 2013, the District investigated opportunities to identify long-term maintenance of public access and District roads. Prior to that time, the District attempted to maintain approximately 1,140 miles of roads. District staff reduced the number of maintained roads to 865 miles, revised management practices by adding hydrological facility maintenance to the program, and concentrating maintenance on public and secondary roads with only minimal maintenance on administrative roads. In FY 2014, District staff further reduced the number of maintained roads to 258 miles, revised management practices by discontinuing maintenance of administrative roads, and added a progressive review and approval process while maintaining public access. Administrative roads will be maintained as firelines or as needed for land management operations.

- *Cooperative Agreements*
The District enters into cooperative management agreements and/or leases with government agencies to reduce the cost of management to the District (Table 11), while providing similar management and protection and public access.

Table 11 Agencies managing District lands.

Managing Agency	Tracts	Acres
Alachua County	1	120
Columbia County	2	139
Department of Environmental Protection	9	1,980
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	2	869
Gilchrist County	1	507
Hamilton County	3	16
Jefferson County	1	22
Levy County	1	4,214
University of Florida	2	738
US Fish and Wildlife Service	4	1,655
Total Acres of No Cost Agreements		10,260
Managing Agency	Tracts	Acres
Florida Forest Service	13	12,963
Total Acres of Shared Revenue Agreements		12,963
Total All		23,223

The Twin Rivers State Forest is managed by the Florida Forest Service (FFS). In FY 2014, there were state expenses of \$148,953, which were reimbursed by the District, and there were no private contracts.

The District has a Cooperative Management Agreement with FFS for lands not under lease at Twin Rivers. This agreement is used primarily to allow FFS to manage and conduct fire-line installation and prescribe fires on District lands. This agreement reduces District costs since the FFS rate for prescribed burning is less than the District's private contractor's rates. During FY 2014, 763 acres were burned under this agreement. Approximately \$9,200 was saved by utilizing FFS for these services.

The District has agreements with private and public entities to provide trail maintenance for 70% of the bike, horse and multi-use trails on District lands. These trails are maintained at no cost to the District and available for use by the general public.

Public hunting is provided on 105,000 acres of District-owned lands in cooperation with FWC and USFWS. These agencies manage hunting dates and limits and provide law enforcement at no cost to the District.

- *Grant Applications and Awards*
The District pursues grants to help reduce the cost of natural community management.
 - The Wild Turkey Cost-Share Program Grant, administered by FWC and National Wild Turkey Federation, for the 5-year Little River Tract upland restoration is in its second year. The timber sale on 473 acres to thin the pines and remove

mesic oak species was completed in October 2014. Almost 14,000 tons of hardwood trees and brush was removed during this operation, greatly increasing the sunlight penetration to the forest floor. The application of herbicide to limit oak sprouts and prescribed fire are the next steps in this proposal. Total maximum grant funds requested were \$94,500.

- The District was awarded \$45,000 by the Wild Turkey Cost-Share Program. This grant is intended to fund some prescribed burning at Mallory Swamp in FY 2015. The goal is to burn 3,000 acres using a helicopter.
- The District was awarded approximately \$20,000 from FWC Upland Invasive Plant Program. These funds were used to treat Japanese Climbing Fern, Camphor Tree, Chinaberry and Chinese Tallow on 70 acres of the Lake Rowell Tract, and 45 acres of Japanese Climbing Fern on the Withlacoochee Quail Farm Tract.
- *Revenues and Expenditures*
The District has opportunities to generate revenues while implementing its natural resource management activities. Timber sales generate the vast majority of revenue from land management activities. In FY 2014, the District sold an estimated 16,600 tons of pine timber in 4 sales on 731 acres. These sales were first thinnings of pine plantations, an ecological restoration harvest, and a salvage operation due to bark beetle infestation. Total gross revenues are estimated (since all sales have not been completed at this time) to be \$376,244.

Expenditures in the land management program are divided into categories for budgeting as follows, Table 12:

- Natural Resource Management – includes water resource projects, reforestation, timber sales, exotic plant control, and protected species management.
- Prescribed Fire – includes FFS and private contractor costs for prescribed burning and fire-line establishment and maintenance.
- Public Use – includes expenses for maintaining site-based and dispersed recreation activities, developing new sites, signs, maps, brochures, and sanitation.
- Facility Management – includes costs for maintaining roads, hydrologic structures, boundaries and gates.
- Administration and Planning - includes expenses for planning, GIS, training, real-estate activities, management plans and reviews, interagency coordination and Payment in Lieu of Taxes.

Table 12. Land resources expenditures.

Category	FY 2014
Natural Resource Mgt.	\$198,538
Exotic Invasive Mgt.	\$24,876
Prescribed Fire	\$369,718
Public Use	\$210,276
Facility Mgt.	\$205,186
Administration and Planning*	\$549,237
Total	\$1,557,831

*Includes Payments in Lieu of Taxes

*Includes inspecting and reporting on Conservation Easements on 126,482 acres

- Payments in Lieu of Taxes*
When the District purchases lands in fee simple (all ownership rights), the lands are taken off the county ad valorem tax roll. The Legislature established a payment in lieu of taxes program in 1992 to reimburse local governments for the loss of revenue. To qualify for this program, the county must have a population of less than 150,000. Payments were made to counties in the amount of \$342,635.
- Surplus Lands*
Disposing of lands that are not needed for water-resource protection allows the District to redirect these funds to higher value, water-resource lands.

Table 13. Surplus lands sold or conveyed.

Closing Date	Tract	County	Transaction	Acres	Price
11/16/2013	Cabbage Grove	Taylor	Sold	29	\$56,614
12/27/2013	Steinhatchee Rise	Dixie	Sold	43	\$129,000
4/14/2014	Otter Springs Campground	Gilchrist	Conveyed to County	121	\$0
5/12/2014	Levings	Columbia	Sold	65	\$122,169
5/12/2014	Blue Sink	Suwannee	Sold	41	\$89,470
9/9/2014	Anderson Conservation Easement	Dixie	Exchange 206 acres while retaining Easement	206	Easement Value
Conveyed or Exchanged				327	
Total Sold				178	\$397,253

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APPENDIX A

SRWMD STATUTORY SUMMARY - MARCH 10, 2014

Land Acquisition and Management

Ch. 373.139(2) Acquisition of real property.

- “Flood control
- Water storage
- Water management
- Conservation and protection of water resources
- Aquifer recharge
- Water resource and water supply development
- Preservation of wetlands, streams and lakes.”

Ch. 373.1391 Management of real property.

- (1a) “Managed and maintained, to the extent practicable, in such a way as to ensure a balance between public access, general public recreational purposes, and the restoration of their natural state and condition. Except when prohibited by a covenant or condition in s. 373.056(2), lands owned, managed, and controlled by the district may be used for multiple purposes including, but not limited to, agriculture, silviculture, and water supply, as well as boating and other recreational uses.”
- (b) “Whenever practicable, such lands shall be open to the general public for recreational uses. General public recreational purposes shall include, but not be limited to, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, swimming, camping, hiking, canoeing, boating, diving, birding, sailing, jogging, and other related outdoor activities to the maximum extent possible considering the environmental sensitivity and suitability of those lands. These public lands shall be evaluated for their resource value for the purpose of establishing which parcels, in whole or in part, annually or seasonally, would be conducive to general public recreational purposes. Such findings shall be included in management plans which are developed for such public lands.”
- (5) “The following additional uses of lands acquired pursuant to the Florida Forever program and other state-funded land purchase program shall be authorized, upon a finding by the governing board, if they meet the criteria specified in (a) – (e): Water resource development projects, water supply development projects, stormwater management projects, linear facilities, and sustainable agriculture and forestry. Such additional uses are authorized where:
- (a) Not inconsistent with the management plan for such lands;
 - (b) Compatible with the ecosystem and resource values of such lands;
 - (c) The proposed use is appropriately located on such lands and where due consideration is given to the use of other available lands;

- (d) The using entity reasonably compensates the titleholder for such use based upon an appropriate measure of value;
- (e) The use is consistent with the public interest.”

373.591 Management review teams.

(1) To determine whether conservation, preservation, and recreation lands titled in the names of the water management districts are being managed for the purposes for which they were acquired and in accordance with land management objectives, the water management districts shall establish land management review teams to conduct periodic management reviews. The land management review teams shall be composed of the following members:

- (a) One individual from the county or local community in which the parcel is located.
- (b) One employee of the water management district.
- (c) A private land manager mutually agreeable to the governmental agency representatives.
- (d) A member of the local soil and water conservation district board of supervisors.
- (e) One individual from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- (f) One individual from the Department of Environmental Protection.
- (g) One individual representing a conservation organization.
- (h) One individual from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ Florida Forest Service.

(2) The management review team shall use the criteria provided in s. 259.036 in conducting its reviews.

(3) In determining which lands shall be reviewed in any given year, the water management district may prioritize the properties to be reviewed.

(4) If the land management review team finds that the lands reviewed are not being managed in accordance with their management plan, prepared in a manner and form prescribed by the governing board of the district and otherwise meeting the timber resource management requirements of s. 253.036, the land managing agency shall provide a written explanation to the management review team.

(5) Each water management district shall, by October 1 of each year, provide its governing board with a report indicating which properties have been reviewed and the review team’s findings.

Ch. 259.036 Management review teams.

(3) “In conducting a review, the land management review team shall evaluate the extent to which the existing management plan provides sufficient protection to threatened or endangered species, unique or important natural or physical features, geologic or hydrologic functions or archaeological features. The review shall also evaluate the extent to which the land is being managed for the purposes for which it was acquired and the degree to which actual management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the adopted management plan.”

Ch. 253.036 Forest management.

“All land management plans described in s.253.034(5) which are prepared for parcels larger than 1,000 acres shall contain an analysis of the multiple-use potential of the parcel, which analysis shall include the potential of the parcel to generate revenues to enhance the management of the parcel. The lead agency shall prepare the analysis, which shall contain a component or section prepared by a qualified forester which assesses the feasibility of managing timber resources on the parcel for resource conservation and revenue generation purposes through a stewardship ethic that embraces sustainable forest management practices if the lead management agency determines that the timber resource management is not in conflict with the primary management objectives of the parcel.”...”All additional revenues generated through multiple-use management or compatible secondary use management shall be returned to the lead agency responsible for such management and shall be used to pay for management activities on all conservation, preservation and recreation lands under the agency’s jurisdiction. In addition, such revenue shall be segregated in an agency trust fund and shall remain available to the agency in subsequent fiscal years to support land management appropriations.”



March 2015

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