

# RiverFronts



November 2011

## Now is the perfect time to paddle the Suwannee

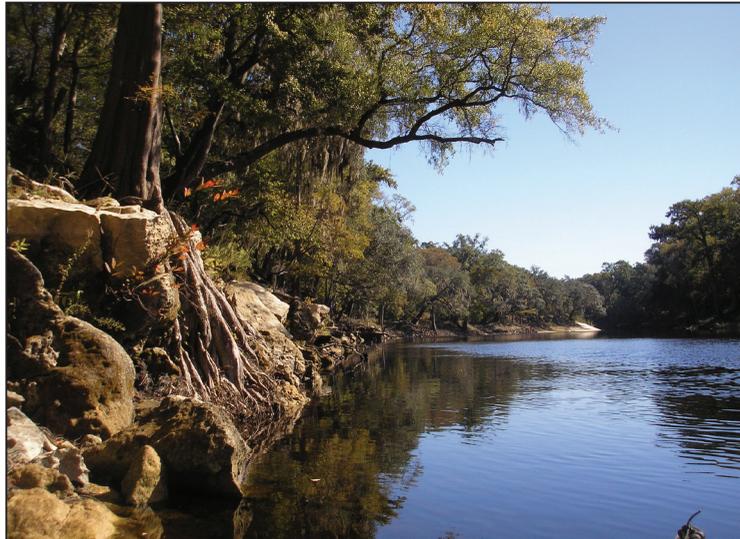
In autumn, the landscape surrounding the Suwannee River is scenic and serene, making it a perfect time to paddle. Temperatures have cooled. Trees that flank the river boast hues of red, orange, yellow, and purple. Several wildlife species often make an appearance – deer, turkey, wading birds, otters, and the Suwannee Cooter among them.

This year, paddlers may have an even better experience.

Drought conditions felt in the Suwannee River Basin over the last several months have drawn down water levels. As a result, sand bars, limerock banks, and tree roots along the river are clearly exposed in some areas and provide a unique glimpse of what lies beneath the water's surface.

Bleached-white sand bars provide a striking contrast against the dark, tea-colored water. Tree roots that wind and run among rock in some areas are fascinating to behold. The exposed thicket-like root system of the Ogeechee tupelo add depth and dimension to the trees' multiple, irregular branches. Cypress knees, the tops of which are seen above the surface during normal water levels, are now exposed from the bottom up.

Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer, said though water



**LEFT:** Limerock and tree roots are currently exposed along the banks of the Suwannee River. Photo taken near Ellaville on Oct. 22, 2011.

levels are low, they are still sufficient to paddle on many sections of the river, although some places may not be a lazy float.

"Everything downstream of Gibson Park in Hamilton County is doable, but from Suwannee Springs down to Gibson Park you might hit bottom in a few places," she said.

She added that much of the Upper Suwannee can be difficult to paddle now, but a great trip for a flavor of that section

of the river is from Cone Bridge to Big Shoals.

Paddlers who are looking to take an overnight trip may enjoy staying at a cabin or rustic river camp along the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail, a system of public and private recreation spots along the river, downstream from White Springs. For more information and/or to reserve lodging, call 800.868.9914 or visit [www.suwanneeriver.com](http://www.suwanneeriver.com). A canoe map is available at [www.mysuwanneeriver.com](http://www.mysuwanneeriver.com).

## Landscape irrigation limited to once per week beginning in November

The time change in November signals changes in landscape irrigation rules within the Suwannee River Water Management District (District). With the start of Standard Time on Nov. 6, residents and others within the District's 15-county region were required to limit lawn and landscape irrigation to one day per week.

Under the landscape irrigation rule that went into effect last year, irrigation is limited to two days per week during

Daylight Saving Time and once weekly during Standard Time. Residents may choose which days to water. However, irrigation should not occur between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and users should water only as much as their landscape needs.

The limits on landscape irrigation are part of an ongoing effort to help address water needs within the District. The rules apply to residential landscaping, public or commercial recreation areas, and public

and commercial businesses that aren't regulated by a District-issued permit.

The rules apply to those who receive water from utilities, private wells, or surface water. However, they do not apply to users of reclaimed water or water captured in rain barrels.

More information about water conservation and the landscape irrigation rule is available at [www.mysuwanneeriver.com](http://www.mysuwanneeriver.com).

# Mobility-impaired hunt at Holton Creek is a hit

An estimated 40 hunters -- some in wheelchairs, others carrying canes, one wearing a prosthetic leg, and many dressed in camouflage -- arrived at the District's Holton Creek Tract in Hamilton County in late October to participate in one of several mobility-impaired hunting events held at Holton Creek Wildlife Management Area and Suwannee Ridge Wildlife Environmental Area.

The District partners with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to provide deer, hog, turkey, and small game hunting on nearly 100,000 acres of District-owned lands. Since 1992, hunting has been offered exclusively to mobility-impaired hunters on the District's Holton Creek Tract.

FWC, which manages hunting on District lands, held a pre-hunt orientation on Oct. 27, to go over safety tips and bag limits, and assign hunting stands in preparation of the hunts that took place that weekend.

Ron Ryals, a 33-year-old who has been confined to a wheelchair since age 5, was among many other mobility-impaired hunters who share a common love of the woods.

"I've been hunting here since I was about 15," said Ryals, an avid hunter and



**Ron Ryals has enjoyed hunting at Holton Creek since he was 15.**

outdoorsman. For 15 years, Ryals has worked as a fishing guide at Bienville Plantation, a hunting and fishing operation in White Springs. He said he learned of the mobility-impaired hunts from a friend.

"I love to eat deer jerky and stew, and my uncle has a taxidermy business so I have them (deer) mounted for my wall," he said.

Hunting is available to certified mobility-impaired hunters who either can't walk or can't walk without an assisting aid.

Scott Johns, FWC district wildlife biologist, said the demand for mobility-

impaired hunting throughout the state is high and Holton Creek is considered one of the best spots in Florida due to its high deer population, fewer hunting restrictions for participants, and special accommodations provided for them.

"Many of the participants don't have the ability to climb a tree stand or walk deep into the woods. At Holton Creek we can let them hunt on the roads," said Johns, noting they must follow extra safety precautions unique to that hunting area.

FWC offers a hydraulic-operated stand that is wheelchair accessible. Many participants, however, hunt from the comfort of their vehicles near the road or ride into the woods on ATVs. Hunters can be accompanied by an assistant to help them get around.

"The District is happy to partner with FWC to provide mobility-impaired hunters this unique opportunity," said Edwin McCook, District land management specialist.

Hunting on District lands is available on limited days from September-March to those who have acquired the appropriate licenses, permits, and stamps. Visit [www.myfwc.com/hunting](http://www.myfwc.com/hunting) for more information about hunting, including mobility-impaired hunting.

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## News briefs

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### Silviculture Training

Personnel that manage and work on District property are now better trained at protecting natural resources while they conduct activities, such as prescribed burning and forest road maintenance, due to a training on the most current silviculture best management practices (BMPs) provided by the Florida Forest Service in October.

The District requires all land managers and private contractors who work on District property to be certified in silviculture BMPs, and nearly 30 workers attended the training to gain or renew their certification.

### Reclaimed Water

The District's Governing Board on Nov. 9 gave staff approval to enter into an interlocal agreement with the City of Fanning Springs to provide cost share funding up to \$400,000 for construction costs to implement a reclaimed water program. The funds will be provided on a reimbursement basis.

In 2010, the City developed a plan to deliver reclaimed wastewater to Simpson Farms for irrigation. Simpson Farms will initially receive about 50,000 gallons of reclaimed water per day and up to 500,000 gallons in the future.

### Hydrologic Conditions

In October, the District received above normal rainfall for the first time in six months, with an average of 3.53 inches. However, the rainfall deficit remains high and record lows are still being set.

River levels at five Suwannee River gages and at the Withlacoochee River near Pinetta fell to their lowest recorded levels. All District monitored lakes remained below their long-term average levels except Lake Sampson in Bradford County. Record monthly lows occurred at 41 wells and historic lows occurred at 13 wells.