



# 2023 Florida Forever Work Plan

Suwannee River Water Management District

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## ADA Statement

Americans with Disabilities Act: The District does not discriminate upon the basis of any individual’s disability status. This nondiscrimination policy involves every aspect of the District’s functions including one’s access to, participation, employment, or treatment in its programs or activities. Anyone requiring reasonable accommodation as provided for in the Americans with Disabilities Act should contact the District at 386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (Florida only). The District’s fax number is 386.362.1056.

## Introduction

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) is required by section 373.199(7), Florida Statutes (F.S.), to update the Florida Forever Work Plan annually. This annual update is presented as a separate chapter in the Consolidated Annual Report pursuant to section 373.036(7), F.S.

The Florida Forever Act also provides funding opportunities for land acquisition projects and water resource development and restoration projects. Florida Forever funding must be used to achieve the following goals, as set out in section 259.105, F.S.:

Enhance the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects.

Increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels.

Protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state.

Ensure that sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state.

Increase natural resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities.

Preserve significant archaeological or historic sites.

Increase the amount of forestland available for sustainable management of natural resources.

Increase the amount of open space available in urban areas.

The Florida Forever Work Plan annual update presents projects the District has identified as eligible for funding under the Florida Forever Act and reports on District land acquisition and management activities. Table 1 lists Florida Forever expenditures for each fiscal year (FY). Table 2 outlines projected expenditures for the next five years.

Table 1. Actual Florida Forever Expenditures

Fiscal Year	Fee Acquisition Expenditures	Fee Acres Acquired	Conservation Easement Expenditures	Conservation Easement Acres Acquired	Water Resource Development	Restoration
2000-2001	-	-	-	-	-	-
2001-2002	\$4,117,869	30,477	\$5,643,127	12,960	-	-
2002-2003	\$1,158,661	564	\$3,382,632	5,026	-	-
2003-2004	\$3,565,225	1,761	\$1,517,048	2,023	-	-
2004-2005	\$3,792,645	2,661	-	-	-	-
2005-2006	\$648,440	123	-	-	-	-
2006-2007	\$13,082,288	4246	-	-	-	-
2007-2008	\$4,041,930	493	\$6,379,514	3,294	-	\$210,510
2008-2009	\$10,965,200	2,171	-	-	-	-
2009-2010	\$494,000	84	\$1,789,725	786	\$23,500	\$309,080
2010-2011	\$5,426,437	1,201	\$1,557,593	682	\$400,000	-
2011-2012	-	-	\$250,710	167	-	-
2012-2013	-	-	-	-	\$20,825	-
2013-2014	-	-	-	-	-	-
2014-2015	\$628,145	85	\$707,850	35	\$97,918	-
2015-2016	\$7,160	-	-	-	\$26,398	-
2016-2017	\$20,073	-	-	-	-	-
2017-2018	\$1,760,918	329	\$8,045	199	-	-
2018-2019	\$12,828	5.41	\$1,795	-	-	-
2019-2020	-	9.8 <sup>3</sup>	\$25,000	-	-	-
2020-2021	-	-	-	-	-	-
2021-2022	-	-	\$66,779	313	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$49,721,819</b>	<b>44,210</b>	<b>\$21,329,818</b>	<b>25,485</b>	<b>\$568,641</b>	<b>\$519,590</b>

Table 2. Projected Florida Forever Expenditures

	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Conservation Land Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-
Water Resource Development and Restoration Projects	-	-	-	-	-
Total Projected	-	-	-	-	-

## Water Resource Development

The District is responsible for managing water resources to ensure there is an adequate supply to satisfy all existing and projected reasonable and beneficial uses while sustaining water resources and protecting natural systems. Potential water resource development projects eligible for Florida Forever funding are detailed below. As the District continues to work with its various partners to further develop these projects, the District will look to leverage multiple funding sources including Florida Forever funding.

### Upper Suwannee River Basin Water Storage and Aquifer Recharge Projects

#### Columbia and Hamilton Counties

These projects propose the identification of areas within the Upper Suwannee River Basin where surface water storage and aquifer recharge can be implemented to attenuate flooding, maintain baseflows in surface streams, and restore the Floridan aquifer system. In some areas, it may be feasible to use surface water as an alternative water supply to reduce reliance on groundwater. The District is looking for suitable public and private lands to site water storage and recharge wells within these counties. The project cost is being determined.

#### **UPPER SUWANNEE RIVER REGIONAL AQUIFER RECHARGE**

This project will evaluate and potentially enhance the quantity and quality of aquifer recharge through the installation of recharge wells in the Upper Suwannee River Basin, adjacent to existing reclaimed wetlands. The number and size of wells to be constructed would be determined by the analyses of water quality and water supply conducted in the study phase. The estimated capital cost is \$2,500,000.

#### **HAMILTON COUNTY AQUIFER RECHARGE**

This project will evaluate and enhance the quantity and quality of aquifer recharge in Hamilton County. This project includes the replacement of two, 12-inch drainage wells to provide aquifer recharge and flood protection in the Alapaha Basin. The wells would allow up to two million gallons per day (MGD) of aquifer recharge to the upper Floridan aquifer (UFA). Positive flows into the wells will provide a benefit to springs along the Upper Suwannee River. The project cost is estimated at \$700,000.

## Suwannee County

### **PILGRIM'S PRIDE WASTEWATER REUSE FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT**

This project is located in western Suwannee County and is to investigate, and potentially implement, the reuse of the wastewater stream from the Pilgrim's Pride poultry processing facility along U.S. Highway 90 near Falmouth Spring. Reuse of the wastewater eliminates a permitted discharge into the Suwannee River and provides an alternate source of up to 1.5 MGD of groundwater to a potential user(s) currently using Floridan aquifer water, thereby helping maintain base flows to nearby springs as well as to the Suwannee River. The project is to assess reuse potential within at least a five-mile radius from the facility, and includes local agricultural irrigation, dairy pasture irrigation, and a sawmill as possible end-users. The project cost has not been determined.

## Lower Santa Fe Basin Recovery and Recharge Projects

The District, together with state and local partners, is evaluating the feasibility of constructing and/or modifying stormwater storage ponds to capture and retain high flows during large rain events such that stored stormwater can be used for alternative water supply or for recharge through percolation, recharge wells or sinkholes. The project cost and benefits have not been determined.

## Upper Santa Fe Basin Flood Mitigation and Aquifer Recharge Projects

### Alachua and Bradford Counties

These projects propose the identification of areas within the Upper Santa Fe Basin where surface water storage and aquifer recharge can be implemented to attenuate flooding, maintain baseflows in surface streams, and restore the Floridan aquifer system. The District is looking for suitable public and private lands to site water storage and recharge wells.

### **WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS**

The District continues to recognize potential projects to enhance natural resources on over 5,390 acres in eastern Alachua and over 2,575 acres in eastern Bradford County. The water resource development area project includes District-owned land adjacent to the Florida National Guard's (Guard) Camp Blanding. The purchase was funded by a grant from the Guard through the Department of Defense (DOD) as part of a program designed to secure buffers around military installations. This project provides an opportunity for natural resource enhancement and restoration (particularly wetlands), flood protection, potential aquifer recharge to the UFA, and to augment flows to the Upper Santa Fe River. Aquifer recharge associated with this project will have regional cross-boundary benefits for stressed water resources in both the District and St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) due to its proximity to the Keystone Heights potentiometric high, which is a regional recharge area for the UFA. The project cost and benefits have not been determined.

### **BROOKS SINK PHASE 2**

Brooks Sink, located in Bradford County, is known as one of the largest cover collapse sink holes in Florida and directly connects to the UFA. In the 1960s, previous landowners excavated a series of ditches to drain the wetlands and divert the natural flow of water away from Brooks Sink. In 2015, the District, partnering with Rayonier Operating Company, LLC, completed the first phase of the Brooks Sink Project, which involved installing a flashboard riser in the main ditch to divert the water back to the sinkhole. The first phase has resulted in 244.2 million gallons of recharge from March 1, 2015 through February 2021. Phase 2 proposes to include an additional 1,020 acres, for a total

project area of 2,020 acres, on which flows would be redirected to the natural sink for additional recharge. Phase 2 is in the conceptual design phase and the project cost is being determined...

### **LAKE SAMPSON DRAINAGE WELLS**

This project proposes to replace an abandoned drainage well to provide aquifer recharge and flood protection in the Lake Sampson Basin. Flow into the well(s) will be monitored with telemetry using a flume and water level instrumentation. Positive flows into the well will provide a benefit to springs in the Lower Santa Fe River Basin as well as to related Minimum Flows and Minimum Water Levels (MFLs) set for the river, which are currently in recovery. The District is reviewing this as part of the Bradford County Silviculture Enhancement and Recharge project. The project cost is estimated to be \$1,200,000.

### **LAKE SAMPSON, LAKE ROWELL, AND CROSBY LAKE**

This project is being reviewed for the potential to store and treat floodwaters. It is also a potential site for aquifer recharge using treated wastewater. The project is currently in a feasibility status. The project cost and benefits have not been determined.

## Outstanding Springs and Priority Focus Area Projects

### [Sustainable Suwannee – Forestry Cost-Share Pilot Project](#)

This cost-share project would benefit springs by encouraging land uses that use less water and reduce potential nutrient inputs into surface or groundwaters. Three Outstanding Florida Springs - Ichetucknee, Madison Blue, and Troy Springs, as well as Primary or Priority Focus Areas (PFAs) within those respective springsheds will be addressed for potential opportunities. Approximately 3,000 acres may be enrolled.

### [Accelerating Suwannee River Restoration and Silviculture Management](#)

This cost-share project will incentivize silviculture and land conservation to reduce groundwater pumping and nitrogen loading with preference given to the PFAs throughout the Suwannee and Santa Fe River Basins.

## Dispersed Water Storage Initiative

Several decades ago, industrial landowners excavated ditches to drain land for commercial purposes, including pine tree production. This draining had detrimental impacts to the environment including: increased risk of downstream flooding due to an increase in peak stormwater discharge; loss of natural wetland systems and reduced aquifer discharge due to lowering the water table and shortening the wetland hydro-period; and adverse impacts to the fishery resources due to an increase in freshwater discharge to estuaries.

This project will enhance water resources and restore natural systems by dispersing water over wetland areas. To expand this concept, the District plans to partner with private landowners to gain additional water resource benefits. The District will establish project budgets as individual projects are identified and developed.

## Drainage Well Replacement/Rehabilitation and Enhancement of Natural Recharge Features

The District's karst landscape is characterized by frequent interaction between groundwater and surface water through sinkholes and other natural recharge features that promote rapid recharge to

the Floridan aquifer. In the past, local governments used this phenomena to their advantage by accelerating rainfall drainage and reducing flooding impacts using drainage wells. Over time, most of the wells have fallen into disrepair or have been plugged entirely. Drainage well replacement and rehabilitation projects would accelerate aquifer recharge and provide increased flood protection, while incorporating modern flow conveyances to provide a greater level of control and implement water quality improvements. The District has identified existing and/or abandoned drainage wells within the Northern Highland geographic region for replacement/rehabilitation. In addition, the District will identify natural recharge features that may provide recharge projects on an opportunistic basis.

## Engineering for Regional Water Resource Development

Preliminary engineering feasibility and scope-identification analyses are typically required to leverage regional water resource development projects to derive enhanced benefits related to water supply or water quality improvement goals. Within the District, the vast majority of municipalities and counties are economically distressed and are not fiscally able to implement this type of effort. This project would serve to identify and define ‘shovel-ready’ projects that can be initiated upon securing of other funding avenues.

## Conservation and Alternative Water Supply Projects

Develop and implement alternative water supplies throughout the Suwannee River Basin to offset groundwater demands and enhance water supply. Projects include pivot retrofits for reducing groundwater pumping, upgrades of wastewater treatment facilities to Advanced Treatment (AWT) for reuse, public supply efficiency improvements, feasibility studies targeting Wastewater Treatment Facilities in PFA and basin management action plan (BMAP) areas, construction of AWT facilities as determined by the feasibility studies, and groundwater recharge wetlands.

## Aquifer Recharge Projects

Develop and implement aquifer recharge projects throughout the Suwannee River Basin to offset groundwater demands and enhance water supply. The source could be surface, stormwater, or reclaimed water from an AWT facility.

## Restoration Projects

The District, together with state and local partners, has devoted significant funding to projects that focus on restoring water quality and quantity to protect natural systems, especially springs, rivers, and wetlands. Descriptions of water resource restoration projects identified as eligible for Florida Forever funding are provided below. The District continues to work with its state and local partners to identify additional project needs. As projects are developed, the District will look to leverage various funding sources including Florida Forever.

### San Pedro Bay, Mallory Swamp, and Waccasassa Flats

#### **HYDROLOGIC RESTORATION**

The District contains extensive ‘pocosin swamps’ that were historically ditched and drained to reduce groundwater saturation of the pocosin soils to allow more intensive plantings of pine species. The largest of these swamps are known as San Pedro Bay in Madison, Taylor, and Lafayette counties, Mallory Swamp in Lafayette and Dixie counties, and the Waccasassa Flats in central Gilchrist County.



While successful in increasing plantation densities, derivative impacts included declines in the UFA underlying the swamps, periodic drying of sand-bottom lakes at the perimeter of the swamps, and increased suspended solids in the canals and riverine systems leading to the Gulf of Mexico.

The goal of future projects in these critical areas is to restore natural hydrology and thereby improve wetland conditions and enhance aquifer recharge at the swamp perimeters to aid in perimeter lake level recovery, as well as, to provide increased springflows to major river systems. These hydrologic restoration projects will also reduce the discharge of suspended solids through the extensive remaining canal networks to natural receiving water bodies and eventually the Gulf of Mexico.

Hydrologic restoration projects in these areas can be accomplished through the acquisition of large conservation easements within the swamp boundaries and along man-made drainage features to permit construction of and perpetual maintenance access for control structures (culverts, ditch blocks, controlled gates), recharge wells and related conveyances, and other restoration activities. An estimated minimum practicable project size would be 4,000 acres, with an estimate cost of \$4.0 million. Total acreage within the three swamps is more than 600,000 acres. Currently, 59,697 acres are conserved in these regions - 52,428 acres in fee simple and 6,269 acres in conservation easements.

### Lafayette County

#### **MIDDLE SUWANNEE RIVER AND SPRINGS RESTORATION PROJECT: PHASE II**

The proposed Phase II of the Middle Suwannee River and Springs Restoration and Aquifer Recharge Project is anticipated to be a private-public partnership between a timber company and the District. The Phase II property is adjacent to Mallory Swamp and adjacent to the existing boundary of the Middle Suwannee Project. The Phase II property is in excess of 6,000 acres, and the District is investigating conservation easement acquisition opportunities to optimize the water resources development potential of the Middle Suwannee Project. Phase II will rehydrate natural systems along and adjacent to the southeastern margin of Mallory Swamp; thereby, increasing available surface water for wetland hydration and groundwater recharge, which will enhance springs restoration. The District's approach includes re-establishment of natural drainage patterns by modifying and constructing hydraulic structures (such as culverts and flashboard risers) adjacent to Mallory Swamp, and using natural recharge features and potentially one or more aquifer recharge wells at strategic locations. Phase II is in the initial stages of investigation with potential benefits being determined. The project cost and benefits are being determined.

### District-wide

#### **SPRING WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY RESTORATION**

Since 2012, the District's Regional Initiative Valuing Environmental Resources (RIVER) program has contributed over \$8.8 million along with state contributions over \$12.1 million for projects generating water quantity and quality improvements, which focus on springs protection and restoration activities. These projects increase springflow, improve erosion and sediment control, reduce nutrient (Total Nitrogen, Total Phosphorous, Suspended Solids) loading, improve recreational opportunities, support economic growth and development within our communities, and provide natural systems restoration and protection. Projects focused on springs restoration may include: construction of stormwater management systems, parking lot paving, bank repair and stabilization, sediment and debris removal from spring boils/pool/run, construction of distinct access entrance points to protect bank (i.e. steps, ramp, diving platform, canoe launch, etc.), invasive vegetation removal, and/or native aquatic plant installation. These types of springs restoration projects cost approximately \$100,000 – \$300,000 depending on scope.

### **WASTEWATER SEPTIC TO SEWER UPGRADES**

Efforts to reduce wastewater pollution may include the elimination of small wastewater package plants and septic tanks that have low levels of treatment and redirect the wastewater to larger regional plants with higher treatment levels. Eliminating septic tanks and package plants can be accomplished by installing service connections to existing sanitary sewer collection systems which directly connect to regional wastewater treatment plants (WWTP). Costs vary greatly depending on the existence of a collection system and the capacity of the WWTP. If the plant can handle the additional wastewater and the collection system is close by, the scope simply involves pumping out the wastewater, crushing the septic tank, and adding a sanitary sewer service connection line. If grinder pumps are needed, project costs will increase. The District will continue to work with local governments to develop wastewater infrastructure upgrades and septic to sewer conversion projects. Project costs will be determined as individual projects are identified.

### **STORMWATER TREATMENT**

Agricultural and urban runoff has been identified as significant sources of nutrient, bacterial, and potential toxic contaminant pollution. The goal of stormwater treatment projects is to collect and treat stormwater runoff before it is discharged to surface waters and groundwater. This can be accomplished using hydrodynamic separators or screening devices as a pretreatment method and then using best management practices such as retention and detention systems to filter and/or dilute storm waters. Benefits include preventing trash, debris, suspended solids, oils, and other pollutants from entering surface waters and groundwater, reducing flow rates to match predevelopment rates, reducing erosion, reducing nutrient loading, and maximizing storage capacity and property usage. Stormwater treatment projects cost vary depending on type of treatment and if land is needed. Project costs average approximately \$50,000 per acre of impervious area for treatment.

## **Land Acquisition and Land Management**

Land acquisition and management activities protect water resources and the overall ecological health of communities within the District. The Save Our Rivers, Preservation 2000, federal, District and Florida Forever programs have preserved approximately 289,343 acres to protect the region's river systems and groundwater resources. The following table summarizes fee and less than fee acres owned by the District as of December 2022.

*Table 3. Protected Lands by River Basins\**

<b>Basin</b>	<b>Fee Acres</b>	<b>Less Than Fee Acres</b>	<b>Potential Acquisition Project Acres</b>
Alapaha	2,875	1,544	8,422
Aucilla/Wacissa	15,750	12,033	38,963
Coastal River/Econfina/Steinhatchee	49,954	52,666	42,654
Santa Fe/Ichetucknee	15,428	8,458	62,598
Suwannee	65,940	28,833	39,808
Waccasassa	5,266	24,159	12,934
Withlacoochee	6,421	16	15,007
<b>Total</b>	<b>161,634</b>	<b>127,709</b>	<b>220,386</b>

\*Acreage updated to reflect best data available via GIS and land database

## Land Acquisition Planning

The District’s land acquisition efforts focus on areas for springs protection and to support potential water resource development projects. Water resource development project areas are located in two broad zones:

- Areas of high recharge adjacent to the Cody Escarpment: These areas provide the highest potential for identifying and/or locating natural recharge features in the vicinity of possible upgradient recharge water sources, with the intent of minimizing eventual water resource development project transmission and treatment costs.
- Areas of potentiometric high groundwater: These areas constitute the greatest relative benefit with respect to the duration of time that recharged or otherwise retained waters remain in the UFA, as well as maximizing groundwater gradients in springsheds.

The land acquisition program is strictly voluntary – all land acquisition projects are negotiated with willing sellers within the constraints of appraised market value. Lands offered for sale are evaluated by District staff and contractors, who then make recommendations to the Governing Board Lands Committee for review and approval to send the proposed acquisition to the full Governing Board for consideration. The following objectives guide the District’s evaluation of potential acquisition areas:

- Preserving floodplain to maintain storage capacity, attenuate floodwaters, and mitigate flood risk;
- Protecting groundwater quality by maintaining low intensity land uses;
- Preserving natural buffers along water bodies where adjacent uses have a high potential to degrade surface water quality;
- Preserving and protecting springs and surrounding areas to protect and improve surface and groundwater; and

- Increasing recharge to the UFA via water resource development projects restoring natural hydrology in headwater swamps and increasing water retention for recharge enhancement.

## Approved Land Acquisition Projects

The Governing Board has directed staff to use a watershed approach to conduct detailed assessments of potential acquisitions and water resource development projects within the Aucilla, Coastal Rivers, Lower Suwannee, and Waccasassa River basins. This allows staff to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities and leverage District resources on potential projects with RESTORE funds and other funding sources. The Governing Board also approved District staff to work with local partners to identify potential acquisition and water resource development projects in the Santa Fe and Ichetucknee basins that benefit the Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers and Associated Springs MFLs and the Santa Fe BMAP. If benefits for acquisition are identified, staff will make a recommendation to the Lands Committee for review and then forward to the Governing Board for consideration.

*Table 4. Acquisition Projects Approved for Detailed Assessment*

<b>Seller</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>County</b>
Waldo Tree Farms	Fee Acquisition	44.5	Alachua
Pflieger	Riverbend Estates (exchange for District Surplus property)	1.1	Dixie
Camp and Abel	Camp and Abel	366	Hamilton
Florida Department of Transportation	Quail Heights	40.63	Columbia
Lasky	Lasky	351.74	Gilchrist

*Table 5. Acquisitions Closed in FY 2022 & Early FY 2023*

<b>Seller</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Transaction</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>
Alachua Conservation Trust (Telford Springs)	94	Suwannee	7.29.22	Fee Acquisition	Springs Grant/Save our Rivers
Harpo Holdings	313	Gilchrist	9.30.22	Conservation Easement	Save Our Rivers/Florida Forever
McB-Pinehatchee/R.O. Ranch Exchange	2950/1277	Lafayette	10.07.22	Fee Exchange	Save Our Rivers
Alachua Conservation Trust	282	Columbia	10.17.22	Conservation Easement	Save Our Rivers/Surplus Funds

### Surplus Lands

The District reviews its land holdings to identify any areas that may not be critical for floodplain management, aquifer recharge, and the protection of surface waters, wetlands, and springs. Such lands are declared surplus and either sold or exchanged on the private market or conveyed to other units of government. The proceeds of any sales and exchanges are dedicated to the acquisition of lands with higher water resource and conservation values. Table 6 lists lands declared no longer needed for conservation and to be surplus during FY 2022. Table 7 lists lands surplus in FY 2022.

*Table 6. Lands Approved for Surplus FY 2022*

Tract	Acres	County	Acquired Date	Funding
Branford Bend	50	Suwannee	06.30.2004	Florida Forever
Country Club Road	80	Columbia	07.01.2015	Enforcement Action
Forest Woodlands	11	Gilchrist	10.11.1996	Save Our Rivers
Santa Fe Oasis	1	Gilchrist	04.28.1998	Save Our Rivers
Suwannee Run Shores	1.175	Dixie	12.30.1997	Save Our Rivers
Three Rivers Estates	1	Columbia	12.30.1997	Save Our Rivers
Turtle Spring Surplus Tract	32	Lafayette	05.13.2015	Florida Forever
Newberry Wellfield	58.66	Alachua	1.11.2000	P-2000

*Table 7. Surplus Lands and Easement Activity FY 2022*

Surplus/Easement Parcels	Acres	County	Disposition Date	Transaction	Proceeds
Double Run Creek	107	Bradford	09.12.2022	Conveyance to SJRWMD*	None
R.O. Ranch	1,277	Lafayette	10.7.2022	Exchange	None

\*Deed recording from the original 2015 acquisition which included 107 acres within SJRWMD that was to be conveyed to the neighboring district.

### Land Management

The April 2022 Land Management Review Team (LMRT) meeting and field tour was in the Upper Suwannee River basin (Madison and Hamilton counties). The reviews focused on activities conducted during FY 2021. The areas of the review included water resources, natural resource management, public use, and facilities in representative areas. The LMRT participants were asked to score the District on its ten management strategies from the District Land Management Plan (DLMP) and two core statutory requirements using the following scores:

- 0 – not meeting the strategies of the DLMP;
- 1 – meeting the strategies of the DLMP; and
- 2 – meeting and exceeding the strategies outlined in the DLMP.

For the activities conducted in FY 2021 the scores ranged from a low of 1.47 for Water Resources management to the highest scores of 1.76 for the management of Ground Cover Resources, Forest Resources, Rare Species Resources, Cultural and Historic Resources, Public Use, and Fiscal Responsibility. Water resource management obtained a 1.62. The overall average score of the ten management strategies was 1.69. The scores for “managed for purposes acquired” was 1.76 and the score for “in accordance with Management Plan” was 1.71; these scores are required statutorily.

The participants' scores indicate substantial acceptance with the programmatic achievement of the management strategies set by the Governing Board and Florida Statutes. Overall, the participants approve the planning and methods used by District staff in managing the District’s fee titled lands in FY 2021.

The Annual Land Management Report addresses social and economic management goals and management activities which are key components of the land management program and include resource protection, public use, communications and fiscal responsibility.

The following summarizes significant natural community resource projects during FY 2022. Once completed, a complete listing of activities and accomplishments will be found in the FY 2022 Annual Land Management Report and will be made available on the District’s website.

### Natural Resource Management

#### **FOREST RESOURCES**

In FY 2022, the District completed eleven timber sales totaling 1,224 acres.

Final harvests of offsite pine species were conducted on 765 acres. These sites will be reforested with longleaf pines.

Pine thinning and/or hardwood chipping was conducted on 459 acres to improve forest health and groundcover conditions. Additionally, this will allow the introduction of prescribed fire to work towards the natural community restoration goals.

Forest inventory data was collected on 150 plots by District staff. The data from these plots is used to quantify the acres that have achieved their natural community goals, provides data for areas that could be or have been improved by silvicultural activities, and identifies volumes and other tree species data for restoration project planning.

In FY 2022, containerized and bare-root longleaf pine seedlings were planted on 114 acres of sandhill and upland pine natural communities for the purposes of natural community restoration. Bare-root slash pine seedlings were also planted on 50 acres of mesic flatwoods at the Lake Butler Wellfield.

In FY 2022, the District received \$16,000 in grant funding from Alachua Conservation Trust and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Longleaf Landscape Stewardship Fund for 114 acres of longleaf pine reforestation on the Adams tract in Lafayette County and the Westwood West tract in Madison County. This work was conducted for the purposes of natural community restoration.

### **PRESCRIBED FIRE**

In FY 2022, prescribed burning was conducted on approximately 9,654 acres of District lands to help meet natural community restoration/management objectives.

### **MECHANICAL VEGETATION CONTROL**

In FY 2022, approximately 605 acres were roller-chopped, and 1,645 acres were mowed to help facilitate the use of prescribed fire and to help meet natural community restoration/management objectives.

Approximately 101 miles of ditch edges were mechanically treated on various tracts throughout the District in FY 2022. This work was done to increase the width of areas along road edges to provide better fire break capabilities, facilitate the use of prescribed fire and help protect forest resources from the damaging effects of wildfires.

### **CHEMICAL VEGETATION CONTROL**

In FY 2022, approximately 527 acres were treated with herbicide to prepare sites for reforestation, to help meet natural community restoration/management objectives and to help facilitate the use of prescribed fire. Approximately 76 miles of ditch edges were also treated with herbicide to control the resprout of woody vegetation from mechanical treatments that occurred in 2021.

In FY 2022, District contractors treated approximately 45 acres of invasive plant infestations throughout the District.

### **INVASIVE PLANT CONTROL**

In FY 2022, District staff monitored 164 invasive plant infestations and treated 104 of those infestations (70 acres) with herbicides.

### **RARE SPECIES**

In FY 2022, District staff monitored 41 known rare plant occurrence points throughout the District. Rare plant species were observed at 27 of these locations. The Florida Natural Area Inventory (FNAI) monitored 37 known rare plant occurrence points on the Steinhatchee Springs and Steinhatchee Falls tracts. Rare plant species were observed at 15 of these locations. FNAI also conducted new rare plant surveys on several tracts throughout the District. 232 new rare plant occurrences were documented at these locations.

In FY 2022, District staff conducted gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) surveys on 10 tracts throughout the District. This survey work included establishing and surveying 318 transects in areas that were most likely to support this species. Estimated population densities within these survey areas are still being calculated. In FY 2022, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and FNAI also conducted gopher tortoise surveys on several tracts located within the Woods Ferry Conservation Area on District lands. Based on their survey work, they estimated these tracts contain 587 tortoises with an estimated population density of 1.5 tortoises/acre.

### **PUBLIC USE**

The District continues to update information kiosk on District lands. In FY 2022, 10 kiosk panels were updated or added.

Many District lands contain springs, karst windows, and other geologically significant systems for North Florida. The District issues research special use authorizations (SUAs) for underwater cave system mapping, water testing, and research to private non-profit research firms. The SUAs are for 12 separate tracts of land. The SUAs are re-issued each year to continue the research. This research

data is shared with the District at no cost.

A total of 768 SUAs were issued during FY 2022.

Recreation SUA	Temporary Ingress/Egress	Non-Recreational	Goose Pasture Camping	Mallory Swamp ATV Trail
295	42	21	339	71

Nearly 97% of District fee-titled lands are open to the public for recreation. Lands which are not open to the public include wellfields, spray fields, and water resource development project sites.

The District cooperated with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and United States Fish and Wildlife Service to provide public hunting opportunities on approximately 106,146 acres.

The District partnered with Suwannee River Strutters, Jefferson County King of Springs, and Gator Gobblers, all chapters of the National Wildlife Turkey Federation to sponsor women in the outdoors and youth special opportunity hunts. These special opportunity hunts allow additional hunting opportunities on 4,410 acres. Additionally, the 2,030-acre Double Run Creek Tract managed by Camp Blanding is leased for hunting.

Suwannee Bicycle Association sponsored three bicycle events using District lands in the White Springs area, and one organization sponsored a 36-hour adventure race.

## FACILITIES PROJECTS

Approximately 96 miles of road maintenance was completed on the following tracts: Alapahoochee, Cabbage Creek, Devil’s Hammock, Goose Pasture, Holton Creek, Mallory Swamp, Natural Well Branch, Scanlon, Shelly, Steinhatchee Falls, Steinhatchee Springs, Withlacochee Hills, and Withlacochee Quail Farm

Hydrological improvement projects were completed on 7 District tracts (Shelly, Santa Fe River Ranch, Steinhatchee Springs, Lamont, Devil’s Hammock, Hunter Creek, McAlpin Landing, and Natural Well Branch) resulting in 47 Hydrological repair or replacements. The Natural Well Branch Hydrological improvement project was done in cooperation with Four Rivers Land and Timber LLC. where the District provided six culverts and four Rivers provided the labor to repair access to the Natural well Branch Tract via the Meatball Express Road.

District staff cleaned up an old dump site on the Big Pine Tract in Columbia County, FL.

The District completed the Ruth Springs River Access Project to improve recreational access and decrease bank erosion along the Suwannee River. This location is popular for fishing and nature watching; unfortunately, there had never been a stair system at this location. The access was unsafe, foot traffic and vehicular traffic had caused severe bank erosion. Once all permits were obtained, the District improved the site by installing a set of prefabricated aluminum stairs. Along with stair installation, the surrounding area was shaped to prevent further erosion. Lastly, W-beam barricade was added to the parking area to prevent vehicles from driving to the edge of the riverbank. This project has accomplished the intended goal of improving access and reducing erosion into the river.



Staff completed the planning and permitting for two river access improvement projects on the Mt. Gilead and Cabbage Gove tracts. The two recreation sites located at Mt. Gilead and Cabbage Gove tracts are popular river access points for fishing, swimming, and launching canoes. The planned projects consist of installing concrete steps, constructing soil cement pathways at the Cabbage Gove site, and shaping the grounds at both locations to prevent erosion. The projects are two-fold in purpose. First, reduce riverbank impacts from pedestrian traffic. Second, the newly constructed concrete steps will provide a safer river access for the public.

## **Florida Forever Plan Map**

View the interactive 2023 Florida Forever Plan map online at

<https://srwmd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=55ce0e0a99434b0c840d5150cba41cae>.