

Florida's Wildlife Management Area System



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Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

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The following presentation provides an overview of Florida's Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system.

Overview

- Past
 - How the WMA system began
- Present
 - Public use on WMAs
 - Planning
 - Monitoring
 - How management is accomplished
- Future
 - Moving forward
 - Management challenges



Overview of the presentation components.

In The Beginning...



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The beginning of the Wildlife Management Area system.

- 62,500 acre Cecil Webb (Originally Charlotte WMA, Charlotte County), was purchased in 1941 for \$3 -5 per acre
- 52,000 acre J. W. Corbett, (Palm Beach County) was purchased in 1947

The WMA Landscape in 1960

YOU CAN HUNT

ON FLORIDA'S 28 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS
OPEN TO
MANAGED PUBLIC HUNTING
ENJOY
FLORIDA'S FINEST PUBLIC HUNTING

AREAS	LOCATION COUNTY	TOTAL ACRES OPEN	PRINCIPAL GAME SPECIES
FLORINWATER (28) (77)	SAFETY HILLS & WILLOWDALE	25,000	DEER - QUAIL - SQUIRREL
WALNUT HILL (28) (77)	DADE	20,000	DEER - QUAIL - SQUIRREL
ROY & GARDEN (28) (77)	DADE	114,000	DEER - QUAIL
LIBERTY (28) (77)	DADE	114,000	DEER - QUAIL
ARMACHON (28) (77)	DADE	2,000	DUCK - QUAIL
LEON-MARILLA (28) (77)	DADE	47,000	DEER
QUINN (28) (77)	DADE	11,000	WATERFOWL
MOGILLA (28) (77)	DADE	11,000	DEER - QUAIL - TURKEY - SQUIRREL - BUCK
STONEMATCHER (28) (77)	DADE	22,000	DEER - QUAIL - SQUIRREL
LAKE BUTLER (28) (77)	DADE	40,000	DEER - TURKEY - SQUIRREL
CAMP BLANCKEN (28) (77)	DADE	20,000	QUAIL - DEER - TURKEY - WILD BOAR
GULF HARBOR (28) (77)	DADE	100,000	DEER - TURKEY - SQUIRREL - WATERFOWL
DEALA (28) (77)	DADE	20,000	DEER - TURKEY - SQUIRREL
TONGUE (28) (77)	DADE	20,000	DEER - TURKEY - SQUIRREL
CLYDE (28) (77)	DADE	41,000	DEER
OSORN (28) (77)	DADE	11,000	DEER - QUAIL - SQUIRREL
BERNARD (28) (77)	DADE	20,000	DEER - TURKEY - QUAIL - SQUIRREL
PARANTON (28) (77)	DADE	20,000	DEER - TURKEY - SQUIRREL
AYON PARK (28) (77)	DADE	100,000	TURKEY - QUAIL
ORANGEWOOD (28) (77)	DADE	10,000	TURKEY - QUAIL
DEAN W. WEBB (28) (77)	DADE	21,000	QUAIL
FOUNTAIN CREEK (28) (77)	DADE	100,000	TURKEY - QUAIL - SQUIRREL
A. W. CORREY (28) (77)	DADE	40,000	DEER - QUAIL - WILDBIRD
LEE (28) (77)	DADE	40,000	DEER - TURKEY - QUAIL
WALLEN (28) (77)	DADE	20,000	DEER - TURKEY
SPRINGLAND (28) (77)	DADE	100,000	WATERFOWL - DEER - WILD BOAR
DEVIL'S GARDEN (28) (77)	DADE	40,000	TURKEY - QUAIL

OTHER GAME SPECIES FOUND IN ALL AREAS
FOR INFORMATION - REGULATIONS - PERMITS
CONTACT ANY COUNTY JUDGE

Florida
GAME AND FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION
TALLAHASSEE • PANAMA CITY • LAKE CITY • DEALA • LAKELAND • WEST PALM BEACH



In 1955- 3,002,000 acres were open to hunting, however, 741,250 acres were closed to hunting. About half of the WMAs were on public land in 1955.

In 1960 there were 3,403,100 acres open to hunting on 28 WMAs.

The Early Years on WMAs



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Just like today, in the early years the WMA system was used by the citizens of Florida for hunting and fishing activities.

The Early Years on WMAs



The limited staff during these years focused on providing access to users of the WMAs, maintaining an infrastructure to support their use, administering hunting activities and monitoring wildlife populations. Habitat management efforts were focused on enhancing wildlife habitats, primarily for game species.

Wildlife Management Area System

5.9 Million Total Acres

- 1.4 Million Acres: FWC Lead (54 areas)
- 4.5 Million Acres: FWC Co-op (93 areas)



The Wildlife Management Area (WMA) System consists of both conservation lands on which FWC is the lead manager and cooperative management areas.

Lead vs Co-op

Lead Area:

FWC either holds fee title to the property or Division of State Lands (DSL) has assigned FWC to be the lead managing agency for that property.

Co-op Area:

Lands owned or managed by other government agencies, water management districts, private industry, etc.



The Wildlife Management Area (WMA) System consists of conservation lands that FWC is the lead manager on, meaning FWC either holds fee title to the property or Division of State Lands (DSL) has assigned FWC to be the lead managing agency for that property. A lead area manager is responsible for all aspects of land management on that property. In addition, the Wildlife Management Area System contains Co-op or cooperative management areas. These lands are owned or managed by other government agencies, water management districts, private industry, etc. FWC's role on these areas is to provide hunt administration as well as various forms of wildlife technical assistance.

Hunting Opportunities

	Corbett	Hunter-Days	Doe	Buck	Hog	Turkey
<u>J.W. Corbett WMA</u>						
2012 - 2013		14,476	30	115	255	32
<u>Palm Beach County</u>						
2013 - 2014		15,786	14	71	138	37
2014 - 2015		10,434	18	94	244	21



Florida's WMA system is well known for their hunting opportunities and - just like in yesteryear - part of our current habitat management efforts are designed to enhance habitats for game species and improve the hunting experience for the areas users. A variety of hunting opportunities are offered across the state.

Family Hunts



Blackwater WMA
Okaloosa and
Santa Rosa
Counties



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In recent years special hunting opportunities have been offered on select WMAs around the state. For example the Blackwater Family Hunt first started in 2008 was designed to increase opportunities for family hunting, proactively address continued deer depredation complaints from adjacent landowners, and promote ecological education, conservation, and good stewardship. Local FWC Law Enforcement and WMA staff hold a pre-hunt meeting with an emphasis on safety, conservation, and fun. Area businesses donate goods such as tree stands, bows, and safety harnesses that are raffled off to the youth participants. LE and WMA staff run a check station where lucky hunters check game and get to show off what is for many of the participants their very first harvested deer.

Mobility Impaired Hunt



Seminole Forest WMA
Lake County



Another special hunt opportunity offered on some WMAs is the Mobility-Impaired Hunt, like the one held on the Seminole Forest WMA each year. Sixty Mobility-Impaired Hunters and their guests attend.

This hunt has grown over the years and has become a big event. Thanks to a small army of volunteers, we are able to assist these sportsmen and women before, during and after their hunt. With the support of the community, food is provided each of the 3 days during our mid-day lunch. These gatherings build comradery amongst the hunters and result in life-long friendships.

Diverse Recreational Opportunities

Big Bend WMA
Taylor and Dixie
Counties



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Today's WMA system though very popular with hunters, is increasingly visited by many individuals seeking other types of wildlife-centric recreation opportunities. As these users have increased we have tried to enhance their experiences on the WMAs but still maintain the rustic, wild nature of the area. Big Bend WMA has a wide variety of recreational opportunities, everything from a self-guided driving tour through the area to 105-mile paddling trails featuring primitive camping sites along the way.



A portion of our habitat management efforts are focused on enhancing habitats for game species and use of the WMAs by hunters, however our overall management approach today is more of a comprehensive ecological management which balances the needs of the wildlife resource on a particular area and the recreational access desired by the public.

Management is adaptive and based on a feedback loop of monitoring data that not only directs management efforts but also provides accountability for our actions.

Management Planning



Each WMA has a 10 year Management Plan that guides the management for the area. The vertical process outlines the various steps and entities involved in development and approval of the plan.

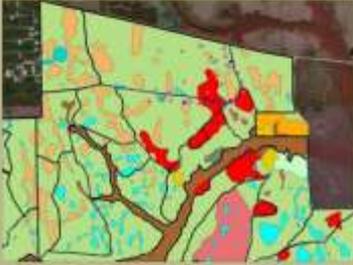
Wildlife Conservation Prioritization and Recovery (WCPR)

- Guides management efforts on individual areas
- Considers management of 67 Focal Species and Imperiled Species



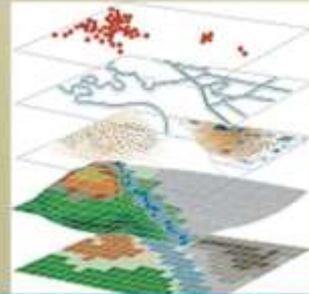
To help guide the management efforts on each individual Area the Wildlife Conservation Prioritization and Recovery program (WCPR) develops a wildlife management plan for the area.

Wildlife Conservation Prioritization and Recovery (WCPR)



Developed Using:

- Potential habitat models
- Natural community data
- Species experts
- Local staff



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The plan is developed using potential habitat models, natural community data specific to the area, input from species experts, and information and local knowledge of land managers.

Wildlife Monitoring



WCPR plans identify appropriate monitoring protocols for the focal and imperiled species on each of our lead WMAs. The reasons for wildlife monitoring are varied but most often help us determine if our habitat or population management is having the desired effect on a particular species.

Monitoring Partnerships

Three Lakes WMA
Osceola County



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Wildlife monitoring is normally conducted by WMA staff, however, at times monitoring may be conducted by contractors or even volunteers acting as citizen scientists.

In 2013, a collaborative intensive monitoring and research effort between Biologists at Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area and Biologists with FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute was initiated in an effort to determine the yet unknown causes for the decline in the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow across its range. The study is investigating nesting success; nestling, fledgling, and adult survival rates; causes of mortality including predation, disease, and genetics; home range sizes; habitat requirements; and movement of adults as well as fledglings.

Objective-Based Vegetation Management (OBVM)



Over-story

Mid-story

Ground cover

- Sets clear, measurable objectives for habitat management
- Regular monitoring conducted



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In addition to wildlife monitoring we use Objective-Based Vegetation Management or OBVM, to monitor the habitats on the lead WMAs to ensure that our management actions are having the desired effect. The first step in our OBVM program is establishing desired future conditions for our managed habitats. Vegetation characteristics are measured to give the land manager a quantifiable snap shot of where the habitat condition is in relation to the desired condition.

Culture of Continuous Improvement

- Habitat management objectives established
- Habitats periodically monitored
- Management techniques changed if needed



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Vegetation parameters are measured every 5 years on our lead WMAs and is currently contracted out to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory - a highly respected non-profit organization dedicated to gathering, interpreting, and disseminating information critical to the conservation of Florida's biological diversity. In addition Fish and Wildlife Research Institute staff conduct audits of the data collected and provide a measure of quality control for the program.

Monitoring results are used by WMA staff to determine if their management efforts are having the desired affect or if they need to change the management technique being used.

Desired Habitat Conditions

Triple N WMA
Osceola County



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Triple N WMA located in Osceola County, was one of the first areas to be monitored using OBVM. It was also one of the first areas to reach the desired habitat conditions, meaning our current management efforts are more for maintenance of the habitat rather than the more expensive habitat restoration.

How Management Activities Are Accomplished

- Core WMA staff
- Other FWC Divisions
- Contractual Services
- Volunteers & Partners



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Our operational model consists of these four key components. We have a core unit of WMA staff, the number of which has remained at a consistent level over the past 10 years.

Other sections within the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, Division of Hunting and Game Management, Division of Law Enforcement, the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, and Office of Public Access and Wildlife Viewing play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation of the WMA system.

Contractual Services are a major component of our operation model on WMAs. Over the years, we have strategically identified land management activities that can be accomplished more efficiently through private sector contracts.

We also lean on the expertise of our partner land managing agencies, volunteer support and prison labor where practical. For example, the Florida Forest Service provides us with timber sale assistance and forest assessment information.

Moving Forward



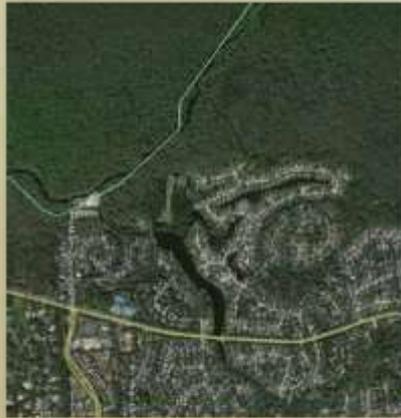
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As we continue to move forward we face immediate challenges and opportunities

Management Challenges

Social

- Incompatible uses
- Urban interface issues
- Public perceptions
- Human/ wildlife conflicts
- User groups needs/wants



Biological

- Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Exotic species
- Restoration of altered systems



Each WMA is different and may have a unique set of management challenges, however, this list is common to many of the WMAs now or will soon be in the future. Given what we know now, we are working to better understand the changing demographics of Florida and to identify ways we can adapt to those changes and ensure that the WMA system continues to be an important contributor in accomplishing the mission of FWC.

A Strategic Vision for the Future

Thematic Areas

1. WMA system land base
2. Resource management
3. Influencing Adjacent land use
4. Wildlife-centric recreation
5. External support
6. Agency personnel resources
7. Financial support
8. Internal awareness
9. Public awareness
10. Decision making and organizational structure



We have developed ten thematic areas of importance to the future of the WMA system. In each of these items we will consider the various aspects that must be addressed to ensure that the WMA system continues to contribute to the achievement of FWC's mission.



In summary, the WMA system plays a major role in conserving wildlife in Florida and helps to keep the people and visitors of Florida connected to nature through a variety of recreational opportunities.