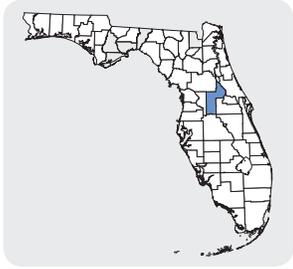


# Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area Habitat Restoration

## Lake County, FL



### Introduction

Historically, Emeralda Marsh consisted of sawgrass marsh and wet prairie habitats, extending for more than 10,000 acres on the northeast side of Lake Griffin. This historic marsh acted as a natural filter for water flowing north between Lake Griffin and Lake Yale. In the 1950s, levees

were constructed around most of the Emeralda Marsh to drain the marshes for farming. Farming activities ceased in the 1990s when St. Johns River Water Management District began purchasing farm lands to restore the hydrologic and ecological functions of the floodplain. Former marsh lands now are referred to as the Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area (EMCA). Recently, the FWC's Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration Section partnered with SJRWMD to restore and enhance aquatic habitat in EMCA's Area 3, and hydrologically reconnect these marshes back to Lake Griffin.

### Objectives

- Reconnect isolated marshes within Area 3, then re-connect Area 3 back to Lake Griffin
- Using mechanical means, reduce the number and volume of tussocks
- Control invasive plant species and plant native vegetation

### Approach

This project consisted of two phases. During Phase 1, excavators were used to breach portions of the internal levees that had isolated several marshes within EMCA Area 3. Overall, 1,200 feet of internal levees and roads were removed to create six breaches. Material excavated from these levee breaches was used to construct four habitat islands. The internal levees and habitat islands then were planted with native trees, including cypress and other hardwoods. Phase 2 of the project involved breaching the external levee separating EMCA Area 3



from Lake Griffin. A total of 1,070 feet of external levee was removed, creating seven breaches. In addition, 220 acres of floating tussock material causing habitat degradation and access issues were removed.

### Benefits

Reconnecting once-isolated internal marshes improved water circulation and flow of water within Emeralda Marsh's Area 3. Reconnecting Area 3 to Lake Griffin increased water exchange between the systems, allowing clean filtered marsh water to once again enter Lake Griffin. EMCA's Area 3 is now a year-round, high-use recreational area offering a high-quality bass fishery, waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing. Removing floating tussocks increased the diversity of native plants, allowing for higher quality fish and wildlife habitat, while also improving access and navigation for recreational users.



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