

Ocala National Forest Striped Newt Pond Restoration

Marion County, FL



Introduction

The Ocala National Forest covers over 600 square miles and conserves three of Central Florida's most imperiled ecosystems: scrub, springs and sandhill. Nestled within the scrub habitat lies a complex of wet prairies which provides important habitat for several threatened species. Decades ago, roads were constructed across these wet prairies which altered their hydrology. Also, road access allowed off-road vehicles to access wet prairie areas for "mudding" or "mud-bogging." These activities disturbed vital habitat that supports the long-term survival of striped newts and gopher frogs, both imperiled Florida species.

The FWC lists loss of breeding ponds, fire suppression and degradation of wet prairie habitat associated with unauthorized vehicles as threats contributing to the decline of these species.

Objectives

- Remove and relocate roads and trails from ecologically sensitive wet prairie areas
- Restore wet prairies to pre-disturbance form and hydrologic function
- Provide suitable aquatic habitat conditions for imperiled species

Approach

Heavy equipment was used to remove 17 miles of unauthorized, user-created trails from four wet prairies and create new roads that avoid sensitive wet prairie habitat. To restore their natural topography, the areas with vehicular tire ruts and soil compaction were mechanically graded and aerated. Local vegetation was used to initiate ground cover regrowth in the restored areas. To deter unauthorized access into restored wet prairies, large piles of trees also were stacked at potential access points.



Before restoration



After restoration

Benefits

Removing unauthorized roads was essential to deter access into sensitive native wet prairies in scrub habitat utilized by striped newts and gopher frogs. Mitigating damage to these wet prairies restored both the form and hydrologic function of these wetlands, and improved water flow and recharge, thus improving the quality of habitat available to imperiled striped newts and gopher frogs.

Done in partnership with



Striped newt

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