

75th Anniversary of Florida's Wildlife Management Area System



February 9, 2017

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The FWC will be celebrating the 75th Anniversary of our wildlife management area system in 2017.

All photos in the presentation by FWC staff or from the Florida Archives

A look back



150 years ago Florida was a wilderness

Vast pine forests, swamps and wetlands covered the state and wildlife was abundant.

Flocks of birds were said to be so large and dense they could block out the sun.



By 75 years ago Florida was still mostly undeveloped.

Only 3 million people lived in the entire state (as much as metropolitan Tampa today).

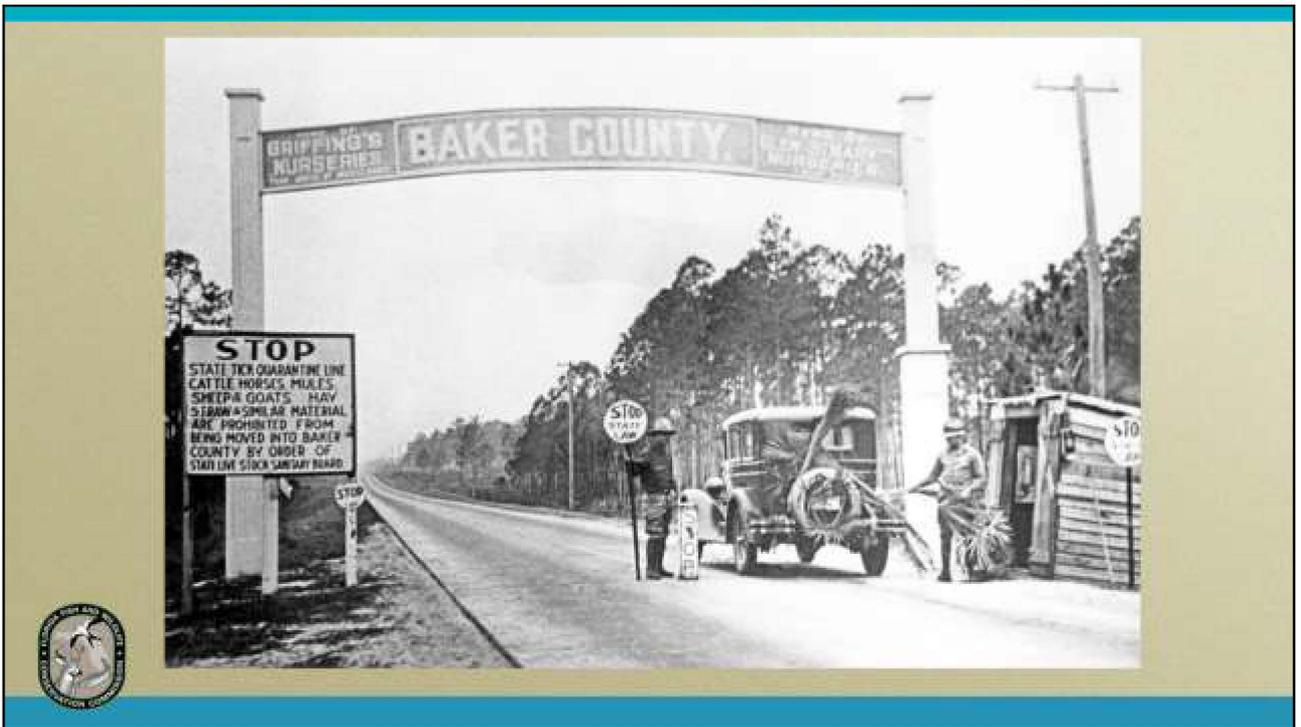


However all was not well for wildlife. Coastal swamps had already been mostly cleared of thousand year old cypress.

Railroads were beginning to push deep into upland pine forests.



The concept of wildlife conservation was still in its infancy. Fishing and hunting was largely unregulated.



A campaign to eradicate the cattle-fever tick had led to the destruction of 10,000 deer in southern Florida alone from 1939-1941.

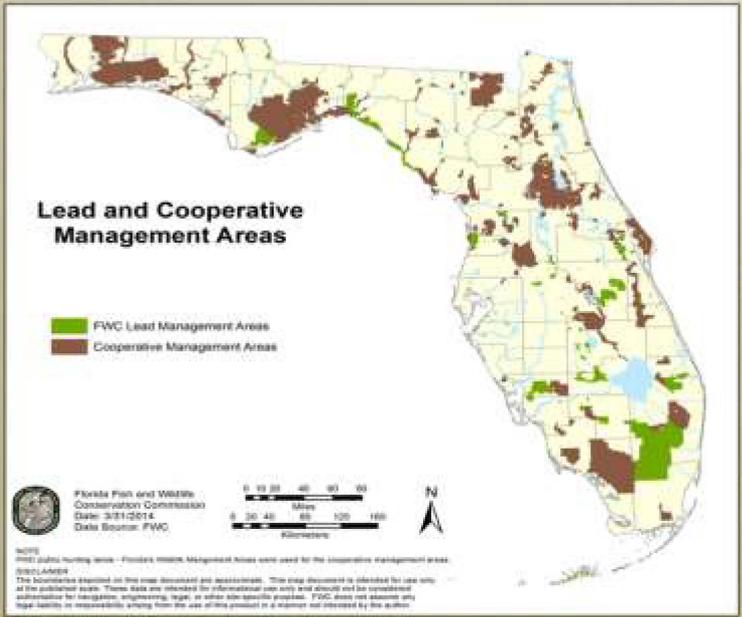


With the changing landscape of Florida underway, the newly formed Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission purchased the first parcel of what became the Babcock-Webb WMA in 1941 for about \$3-5 per acre.

Webb was managed as a game refuge until 1950 when public hunting was allowed.



This visionary idea laid a foundation for large-scale conservation.



WMA System Today

Now, spanning over 5 million acres, Florida's wildlife management area system anchor a carefully planned system of interconnected lands that help sustain our diverse fish and wildlife heritage





MyFWC.com/WMA75
#WMAzing





Celebrating 75 Years of Florida's WMAs



One purchase of land in 1943 has grown into an almost 6 million acre system of conserved habitat across Florida. WMA management areas provide homes for some of Florida's most iconic, and threatened, wildlife species. At the same time, they contribute unparalleled hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Celebrate with Us!

- Chesegut - Beginning Birding: Jan 27, 2017
- Chesegut - Archery for Beginners: Jan 28, 2017
- Ratt Branch - Red-tailed Woodpecker: Feb 4, 2017
- Chesegut - Jay and Crows: Feb 6, 2017
- Florida Keys - Wings Over Florida: Feb 12, 2017
- Chesahawitzka Bogart: April 1, 2017



Throughout the year we will be reaching out to share with Floridians and visitors the important role that WMAs play in conserving our fish and wildlife heritage. We will celebrate our conservation partners, tell conservation stories and hope to hold a proclamation event with the Governor and Cabinet in upcoming months.



We will also promote awareness of the opportunities to hunt, fish, view wildlife and make lasting family memories on these beautiful “crown jewels” of Florida’s public lands.

75th Anniversary Activities

- Geocaching Challenge
- Tours
- Photo Contest
- Bioblitzes
- Volunteer Days



MyFWC.com/WMA75



In addition we are offering activities around the state to encourage Floridians to explore WMAs, learn about them and get involved in their mission.

The 75th Anniversary gives us a great opportunity to Promote Participation in Conservation, one of our agency's strategic initiatives.

Geocaching, is a an outdoor "treasure hunt" using GPS-enabled devices. In this challenge, caches will be placed in spots chosen for their unique qualities and participants will find 75th anniversary wooden tokens. There will be two anniversary travel bugs so participants (and we) can track their travels around the WMA system.

We will offer a variety of tours and will soon announce a photo contest to encourage visitors to share their experiences with us.

Bioblitzes, a type of citizen science wildlife discovery activity will be offered on several areas around the state. Participants will go out to look for wildlife, with the help of experts, and will photograph and upload their data into our new FWC *iNaturalist* portal. Over the summer Bioblitzes tailored for children will be held at the youth camps on Corbett and Joe Budd WMAs.

Finally there will be opportunities to get even more involved by joining in on one of a variety of volunteer stewardship and citizen science projects. Each of these projects are developed by our regional volunteer coordinators working with WMA staff and are focused on strategic agency needs.

All of these opportunities are advertised on the 75th Anniversary website and will be promoted through Gov Delivery and social media posts.

Kick-off at Babcock-Webb WMA



The 75th Anniversary began with a kick-off celebration on January 21 at Florida's original wildlife management area, Babcock Webb WMA. Commissioner Priddy, Nick Wiley and Thomas Eason offered opening remarks.

Interpretive Tours



- Natural Communities
- Vegetation Management
- Prescribed Fire
- Quail dog demonstration
- Fish population monitoring



And the beautiful day continued with interpretive tours, exhibits and recreational activities.

Tour wagons ran all day, with biologists interpreting the wildlife on the area and management techniques such as prescribed fire fish population monitoring in Webb Lake.

Educational Exhibits and Activities



The conservation concepts were reinforced through a variety of hands on activities and exhibits and there were many recreational activities enjoyed by the many children who attended.

The vast majority of the close to 500 people who attended had never been to a wildlife management area before. There were many families and scouting groups. About 150 children participated in the kids activity tent.

Rounding up the year

- Closing event at Tosohatchee WMA
- Photo contest winners
- Video
- Evaluation
- Continuation



As you can imagine planning and implementing an event like the kickoff was a big undertaking and continuing it throughout the year requires that much more coordination and collaboration. The 75th Anniversary has been an example of great team work. In addition to the Wildlife Habitat Management Section and my office, staff from the divisions of Law Enforcement, Freshwater Fisheries, Hunting and Game Management and Community Relations have been and will continue to be involved.

The year will culminate with a similar event at Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area in eastern Orange County on Saturday, December 2.

In December, we will announce the winners of the photo contest and plan to compile the winners in a set of post cards and Gus and his team will produce a video compilation of the years events.

Throughout the year we will monitor participation, reach and effect of communication.

Based on our evaluation we hope to continue some of these WMA activities: to promote *iNaturalist*, to hold periodic bioblitzes and tours, and to increase the stewardship and citizen science volunteer opportunities on the WMA system.

