

# STATE FOREST SPOTLIGHT

## *Mosaic of Unique Topography*

Some of Ralph E. Simmons State Forest's most unique scenery can be found along the banks of the tannin-stained river that forms its northern boundary, the St. Marys River. The forest enjoys more than seven miles of unspoiled river frontage along this river.

In addition to the river, a key attribute to this land is its pronounced topography. The forest contains some of the highest elevation in all of Nassau County. Notable elevation changes occur throughout the property, resulting in a mosaic of unique habitats. The landscape transitions from upland sandhill to wet flatwoods and bottomlands in a relatively short distance.

## *Love the state forests? So do we!*

The Friends of Florida State Forests is a direct-support organization of the Florida Forest Service dedicated to ensuring Florida's State Forests are available for future generations to enjoy. Make a difference by joining today to help protect Florida's State Forests.

Membership dues go to the forests for conservation and improvement projects. To join Friends of Florida State Forests or for more information, visit:

[www.FloridaStateForests.org](http://www.FloridaStateForests.org)



## Things to Know When Visiting Ralph E. Simmons Memorial State Forest

- Day use hours are 1½ hours before sunrise to 1½ hours after sunset.
- All horses require proof of negative Coggins test results.
- Registered vehicles are allowed only during designated hunting seasons or by State Forest Use Permit.
- Unregistered vehicles, motorcycles and ATVs are prohibited at all times.
- Creating new roads or trails is prohibited.
- During established hunting seasons, excluding small game season, all other forest recreation activities, including horseback riding, are prohibited.
- Foot traffic, bicycles and horses are welcome on roads and designated trails.
- Please take all garbage with you where trash receptacles are not provided.
- Camping is only permitted in designated campgrounds and may require a State Forest Use Permit.
- Removal of plants, animals and archeological artifacts is prohibited.
- For additional information contact Ralph E. Simmons Memorial State Forest, Monday-Friday, 8a.m.-5p.m., at (904) 845-4933 or (904) 845-3597 on weekends.
- Hunting requires a permit and license and is allowed in designated areas during appropriate seasons. We encourage all visitors to check the Wildlife Management Area regulations and hunting season dates before visiting the forest at [www.MyFWC.com](http://www.MyFWC.com).

For more information, visit:

[www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests](http://www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests)

DACS-P-00169 Rev. 8-2026



Florida Forest Service

## Ralph E. Simmons Memorial State Forest



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Commissioner Wilton Simpson

# History

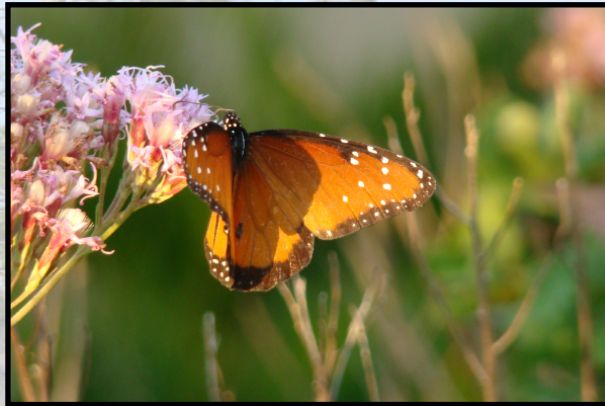
Ralph E. Simmons Memorial State Forest is located in northern Nassau County along the Florida-Georgia border. Given its proximity to the St. Marys River, evidence of human presence on the property stretches back thousands of years. Native American pottery has been found on the forest that is believed to be several thousand years old. Remnants of lumber mills that were established along the river during the 1700's have been found within a few miles of the forest. It is believed that longleaf pine from the forest helped supply these mills. By the mid-19th century, ownership of the forest was by a private timberland company. At that time, the property was primarily used as a private hunting preserve with little silvicultural activity occurring, except for selective logging. In the early 1990's the property changed hands several times, with The St. Johns River Water Management District finally acquiring the property in 1992 utilizing Preservation 2000 and Save Our Rivers funds. Previously known as St. Mary's River State Forest, the forest was renamed in 1996 as a memorial to Ralph E. Simmons, a former chairman of the St. Johns River Water Management District Board of Directors, who was instrumental in the purchase of the property.

# Forestry

Timber management practices on Ralph E. Simmons Memorial State Forest are important in the restoration and maintenance of forest ecosystems and provide a variety of socio-economic benefits to Floridians. Longleaf pine is being reintroduced in an effort to restore the forest for the enjoyment of future generations. As you explore the forest, you will notice different stages of longleaf pine restoration, from young pine plantations to mature pine forests. The Florida Forest Service has worked to restore longleaf pine as the dominant species of the upland landscape through active timber management, plantings and an aggressive prescribed burning program. With an average historical fire interval of two to four years over most of the forest landscape, the goal is to burn between 550 and 1,200 acres annually. This combination of efforts has resulted in exceptionally beautiful areas of open pine forests carpeted with wiregrass and other associated species.



St. Mary's River



Queen butterfly



Fox Squirrel

**For more information contact:**  
**Ralph E. Simmons State Forest**  
**3742 Clint Drive Hilliard, FL 32046**  
**Telephone (904) 845-4933**  
**[www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests](http://www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests)**

# Natural Resources

Ralph E. Simmons Memorial State Forest is comprised of 3,638 acres featuring 12 different community types. Of these community types, the four dominant communities are sandhill, wet flatwoods, upland pine and bottomland hardwood forest.

The river and ox-bow lake, along with numerous cypress ponds and swamps, provide habitat for an abundance of fish as well as a water source for the many types of wildlife that live on the forest. These natural systems, combined with the other natural communities, serve as an important refuge for a number of rare and endangered plants such as the Florida toothache grass, purple baldwinia, many-flowered grass-pink and hooded pitcher plant.

Many species of wildlife can be found residing on the forest. Wildlife that is frequently seen includes whitetail deer, fox, wild turkey, bobcat, gopher tortoise and otter.

# Recreation

The combination of water resources and upland forest communities provide excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and other resource-based recreational pursuits. There are three different loops that provide over 10 miles of trails for hiking, horseback riding and off-road bicycling. The 3-mile St. Mary's River Trail and the 6.5-mile Big Timber Wilderness Trail are part of the state-wide Trailwalker program, which encourages both casual and avid hikers to get out and experience hiking trails on different state forests.

Two primitive campsites located along the St. Mary's River are available on a first-come, first-serve basis and are hike-in or river access. A group camping area is located on Scott's Landing Road and is available for organized groups. The group camping area is reserved during hunting season for hunters with a valid hunt permit. Finally, the cabin shelter, a restored, primitive, cabin that contains bunk beds and a screened picnic area, is now available by permit. Permits can be obtained from the Florida Forest Service. During established hunting seasons, Ralph E. Simmons State Forest does not allow camping at these sites.