

STATE FOREST SPOTLIGHT

Florida Scrub Jay

The Florida Scrub Jay makes Ross Prairie State Forest its home. This bird was federally listed as a threatened species in 1987 primarily because of habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation. Florida Scrub Jays are picky about habitat, restricted to thickets of oak scrub 3 to 10 feet in height with areas of bare sand interspersed. The habitat needs to be dry and well drained. Unfortunately for the Scrub Jay, this same habitat is desirable for urban development because of the well-drained soils.

Florida Scrub Jays are often confused with the more common Blue Jay because they are similar in size. However, Scrub Jays have no crest, are much duller in overall color, have no bold black markings, and lack white-tipped wings and tail feathers. The most common Scrub Jay vocalization is a loud scratchy weep. The principal plant food for the Scrub Jay is the acorn. The majority of acorns gathered, up to 6,000 per year, are hidden in the sand for future meals.

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



Things to Know When Visiting Ross Prairie State Forest

- The Florida Park Service's trailhead and campground gates close at 7 P.M. during daylight savings time.
- Pets are welcome but must remain on a leash.
- Do not create new trails.
- All horses must have proof of current negative Coggins test results when on state lands.
- Take all garbage with you when you leave the forest. Containers are not provided.
- For primitive camping information visit FloridaForestService.ReserveAmerica.com.
- The removal of state forest plants or animals is prohibited (with the exception of legal game during scheduled hunts).
- We encourage all visitors to check the Wildlife Management Area regulations and season dates before visiting the forest at www.MyFWC.com

For more information, visit:

www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

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Florida Forest Service

Ross Prairie State Forest



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Commissioner Wilton Simpson

History

This property was acquired in 1995 under the Preservation 2000, Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) program, specifically, the Longleaf Pine Uplands Project. The Colen Parcel was the primary acquisition consisting of 3,511 acres. Three small privately owned lands within the boundary of the forest have since been acquired. The four parcels were originally managed as part of Goethe State Forest but were later reassigned as a separate State Forest, Ross Prairie State Forest, totaling 3,527 acres.

This state forest is part of a larger project encompassing approximately 13,902 acres in southwestern Marion County. Prescribed fire will be one of the most important tools for the management of this project. Long-range plans for this property include the restoration of disturbed areas to as close to the original condition as practical. Management activities will also stress the enhancement of threatened and endangered species.

Forestry

The Florida Forest Service consists of dedicated employees with the mission to protect and manage the forest resources of Florida, ensuring that they are available for future generations. The Florida Forest Service manages more than one million acres of state forests for multiple public uses including timber, recreation and wildlife habitat.

Timber management activities primarily consist of improvement thinning and regeneration harvests aimed at maintaining and perpetuating forest ecosystems. Prescribed burning is also used in managing the forest. Timber stands will be managed to maintain a broad diversity of age classes ranging from young stands to areas with old growth characteristics. This will provide habitat for the full spectrum of species that would be found in the natural environment. Timber harvesting and other silvicultural activities follow the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services guide to Silviculture Best Management Practices.



Prairie holding water in depression area



Cloudless Sulphur *Phoebastria sennae* female



Hiking trail with spur trail to primitive campsite

For more information contact:
Ross Prairie State Forest / Ocala Forestry Station
6675 NE 40th Ave Road, Ocala, FL 34479
(352) 732-1779
www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

Natural Resources

Ross Prairie State Forest is located on the southern end of a wetland known as Ross Prairie. The main area of the wetland lies north of the forest on properties managed by the Office of Greenways and Trails. This wetland is a freshwater depression marsh characterized by open areas of wetland grasses surrounded by xeric hammocks. These prairies will be wet or dry depending on current rainfall levels. The 150-acre portion of the prairie located on the forest is made up of depression marshes varying in size from one acre to more than 50 acres.

In addition to the depression marshes, the forest's diverse ecological communities include sandhill, scrubby flatwoods mesic hammock, mesic flatwoods, and scrub. Sandhill is the largest natural community in this state forest. Healthy sandhills feature rolling, sandy hills, dominated by longleaf pine, turkey oak and wiregrass that feature gopher tortoises, gopher frogs, and indigo snakes.

Recreation

Recreational opportunities on the forest include hiking, horseback riding, primitive camping, and hunting. The main trailhead and access point is the Ross Prairie Trailhead located along State Road 200 one mile south of County Road 484. This trailhead, managed by the Office of Greenways and Trails, has vehicle and equestrian parking, restrooms, and picnic pavilions.

The Holly Hammock Trail is a 2.3 mile hiking trail providing the visitor opportunities for nature study, wildlife viewing and photography. A primitive campsite is located off this hiking trail near one of the larger depression marshes for the more adventurous recreationist. For equestrian users, the forest has 15 miles of designated trails along existing service roads and firelines. This is in addition to the trails at the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway property, which borders the forest.

Hunting (seasons, license requirements, & quantity limits) is regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in cooperation with the Florida Forest Service. Visit MyFWC.com for more information.