

STATE FOREST SPOTLIGHT

Magnificent Waters

Water is the key to the unique features of Welaka State Forest. This forest contains two springs, a historic river and a creek. Additionally there are a generous scattering of flatwoods ponds. Mud Spring and Sulphur Spring have a flow up to 60,000 and 8,000 gallons of water per hour, respectively.

Mud Spring is a fourth magnitude spring with an oval-shaped basin about 85 feet long and 65 feet wide. This spring forms the head of Mud Creek, with the discharge flowing down a meandering half-mile run to the St. Johns River. The spring is located along a hiking trail. Sulphur Spring has an elongated pool about 30 feet long and 7 feet wide with at least two vents. The spring run meanders 2.5 miles toward the St. Johns River.

Welaka State Forest has approximately 4 miles of river frontage on the St. Johns River. The forest boundary along the river is the best place to see a bald eagle.

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 forests.

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

www.FloridaStateForests.org



Things to Know When Visiting Welaka State Forest

- The forest is open only during daylight hours, except for campers at designated sites.
- Pets are welcome on trails but must remain on a leash.
- Do not create new trails.
- All horses must have proof of current negative Coggins test results.
- Take all garbage with you when you leave. Containers are not provided in all areas.
- Primitive camping requires a State Forest Use Permit. Permits are issued through the Welaka State Forest office, Monday-Friday, 8a.m.–5p.m.
- Plants and animals are protected. Please do not damage, remove, or destroy these natural resources.
- Visitors may be required to pay entrance or recreation use fees in designated areas. Annual Day Use Entrance Passes are available for purchase at the office or online.
- Welaka State Forest is an Operation Outdoor Freedom (OOF) program site. The forest with the help of staff and volunteers provide hunting opportunities to wounded veterans a couple times a year.

For more information, visit:

www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

DACS-P-00180 Rev. 12-2019



Florida Forest Service

Welaka State Forest



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND CONSUMER SERVICES



History

Prior to Juan Ponce de Leon's arrival in Florida, Timuquans made the area of Welaka their home. Utilizing the St. Johns River as a major source for food and travel, these Native Americans built middens (mounds) along the river, consisting of leftover mystery snail shells from their meals and other unwanted debris from their daily lives.

William Bartram describes the ceremonial mound, Mount Royal, built less than a mile from the river using sand that was excavated from Welaka State Forest and carried by hand to the present mound. While Mount Royal still exists (south of the forest boundary), most of the other Timuquan middens along the river were removed after the turn of the 20th century to be used for roadbed material.

In 1935, under the Federal Resettlement Administration, the United States Government started the Welaka Forestry and Wildlife Conservation Project. The Welaka property was later transferred to the University of Florida as a Florida Conservation Reserve for the study of forestry and wildlife. The Florida Forest Service took over management of the property in 1992 through a transfer of lease from the University of Florida.

Forestry

The Florida Forest Service's mission is 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 practices on Welaka State Forest are important in the restoration and maintenance of forest ecosystems and provide a variety of socio-economic benefits to Floridians. The use of prescribed fire is one of the most important management tools used on the forest. The prescribed fire program also helps to stimulate the recovery of native ground cover. Harvesting activities follow the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services guide to Silviculture Best Management Practices.



Trail within the forest



Sandhill Cranes



Horse stall area near arena

For more information contact:
Welaka State Forest
P.O. Box 174 Welaka, FL 32193
(386) 292-2478
www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

Natural Resources

Welaka State Forest has a variety of natural communities that provide habitat for many species of plants and wildlife. The river swamps along the St. Johns River contain bald cypress, ash, ogeechee, red maple, cabbage palm, swamp tupelo and water locust. These areas grade into baygalls dominated by broad-leaved evergreen trees growing in organic soils. Common baygall trees include loblolly bay, sweet bay and swamp bay.

Hammocks, an early Florida Native American term meaning "shady place," are hardwood dominated sites, found in hydric (wet), mesic (moderately wet) and xeric (dry) areas.

Sandhills (found primarily on the east side of CR 309) are open habitat dominated by longleaf pine, turkey oak and wiregrass. A common sight in sandhills is mounds of sand created by pocket gophers and "gopher holes" created by gopher tortoises. In areas with a good prescribed fire history, you will hear Bachman's sparrows calling during the summer.

Recreation

A series of trails has been established that allow the forest visitor to experience firsthand the natural and cultural richness of Welaka State Forest. The forest is divided by County Road 309, which provides good public access to the east and west portions of the forest.

The forest area to the west of County Road 309 contains one educational trail and two hiking trails (Mud Spring and John's Landing). Both hiking trails are part of the Trailwalker Program. There are also two primitive campsites located along the St. Johns River.

The forest trails east of County Road 309 are designated as multiple use, although mainly used by equestrian riders. There are approximately 20 miles of trails, forest roads, and firelines to explore. The Sandhill Horse Trail is included in the Trailtrotter Program. A 72-horse-stall stable, training arenas, show horse arena and 10 primitive campsites are also located on the eastern side of Welaka State Forest.