

STATE FOREST SPOTLIGHT

St. Johns River

The most prominent feature of Lake George State Forest is the 3.5 miles of river frontage along the picturesque St. Johns River. This frontage provides a large area of ecologically valuable floodplain swamp community as well as opportunities for shoreline protection and river access-based recreation. Located on the river, Bluffton Recreation Area provides opportunities for fishing, birding, picnicking, hiking and interpretative information.

Kiosk displays at Bluffton illustrate the rich history of the St. Johns River and Lake George area, including the Bluffton Mound and Midden and early 20th century inhabitants of the site. As early as 1774, William Bartram, a famous explorer and naturalist, traveled down the St. Johns River documenting the many groups of Native Americans living in the area as well as the rich bird life living along the river near Bluffton.

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 Lake George State Forest

- Drive on designated roads only.
- Unlicensed vehicles, unlicensed motorcycles and ATVs (all terrain vehicles) are not allowed on the forest.
- Horses and bicycles are allowed only on named or numbered roads, fire lines, and designated trails.
- Do not make new roads or trails.
- Take all garbage with you when you leave the forest.
- For vehicle access to areas other than St. John's River Road and the Bluffton Recreation Area, a Day Use Permit is required. This permit can be obtained by phone at (386)585-6151 or (386)384-5256.
- Primitive camping is available at the River Road Campground. Authorization is required for camping. Campsites can be reserved through Reserve America online at FloridaStateForests.ReserveAmerica.com or by calling (877)879-3859 or (800)373-3851 (TDD).
- Visitors may be required to pay entrance or recreation use fees in designated areas. Annual Day Use Entrance Passes are available. All entrance passes are handled through our online payment system at FloridaStateForests.ReserveAmerica.com.
- We encourage all visitors to check the Wildlife Management Area regulations and hunting season dates before visiting the forest. For further information visit: www.MyFWC.com.

For more information, visit:

www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

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Florida Forest Service

Lake George State Forest



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Commissioner Wilton Simpson

History

The initial purchase of the Astor Tract was in 1993 under Florida's Conservation and Recreation Lands Program. Additional tracts were acquired from 1995 to 2007, bringing the total acres to 21,473. Past uses include timber management, naval stores production, grazing and hunting. There were citrus groves and truck farms on a few areas within the Dexter/Mary Farms Tract. Prior to 1910 logging, canals were excavated through the swamps to remove the valuable cypress timber. In the 1930s much of the upland area was forested in longleaf and slash pine and also used for cattle grazing. Starting in the 1960s, most of the forest was planted with slash pine. In 1998, wildfires impacted about 40 percent of the state forest, requiring extensive salvage harvesting of the timber and reforestation.

Forestry

Using sound forest management, the Florida Forest Service provides for multiple uses of forest resources which include timber management, wildlife management, natural resource based recreation and ecological restoration. Approximately 70 percent of LGSF is in pine timber, with slash pine trees dominating many areas of the forest which originally consisted of mixed stands of slash and longleaf pine. After the 1998 wildfires, restoration efforts included reforestation with slash and longleaf pine, with an emphasis on longleaf pine. The long term goal is to practice sustainable forest management. Timber harvesting practices follow the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services guide to Silviculture Best Management Practices (BMPs).

The use of prescribed fire is an effective tool in maintaining forest health, promoting wiregrass flowering, improving wildlife habitat, and reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Prescribed fire can reduce the regeneration failure of various species by preparing a suitable seedbed for seedfall. The timing and frequency of prescribed burning has a heavy influence on understory species by influencing their composition, size, and abundance. Longleaf pine ecosystems have very diverse understories and almost 90% of species richness can be found in this canopy layer. Prescribed burning is used on portions of the forest on a three to five-year cycle.



Fishing Pier



St. Johns River Road



Bluffton Interpretive Trail

For more information contact:
De Leon Springs Forestry Station
5458 N. US 17 De Leon Springs FL. 32130
(386) 384-5256
www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

Natural Resources

This diverse forest is part of a large conservation corridor extending from the Ocala National Forest to the Daytona Beach area. The corridor includes Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge, DeLeon Springs State Park, Lake George Forest and the St. Johns River Water Management District's Lake George and Heart Island Conservation Areas, as well as Tiger Bay State Forest. LGSF's position in the surrounding landscape contributes to water resource protection of the Lake George watershed and aquifer recharge. LGSF's proximity to a number of publicly owned lands also contributes to wildlife corridors for several listed species including the Florida Black Bear. Other wildlife that roams this corridor includes bobcat, coyote, whitetail deer and turkey. LGSF also provides nesting and foraging areas for the bald eagle.

More than 10 natural communities are present on the forest including pine flatwoods, floodplain wetlands and basin swamps.

Recreation

Bluffton Recreation Area, located on the St. Johns River, is open during daylight hours for fishing boating, hiking, and picnicking. The site also offers birding opportunities and is part of the Great Florida Birding Trail program. Part of our Trail Walker program, Bluffton Interpretive Trail is a 0.75-mile trail for hikers. This self-guided interpretive trail moves through several different ecosystems, and numbered markers along the trail correspond to information provided in the brochure available at the trailhead kiosk. A handicap accessible, floating fishing pier is available, and canoes may be launched from the bank. Motorized boats are not permitted. Fishing and picnicking are also available at Jenkins Pond (forest day use permit required). Lake George State Forest offers over 100 miles of open roads, "two trail" roads, and permanent fire lines. Horses and bicycles are allowed only on named and numbered roads, permanent fire lines, and designated trails.

Fishing and hunting in Lake George State Forest are regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in cooperation with the Florida Forest Service, according to information and seasons published at www.MyFWC.com.