

A photograph of a dirt path winding through a forest. The trees have sparse foliage, with many leaves turned brown and orange, indicating autumn. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into the distance. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees.

From Devastation to Reforestation: The Story of the Withlacoochee State Forest

**Sid Taylor
Park Naturalist**

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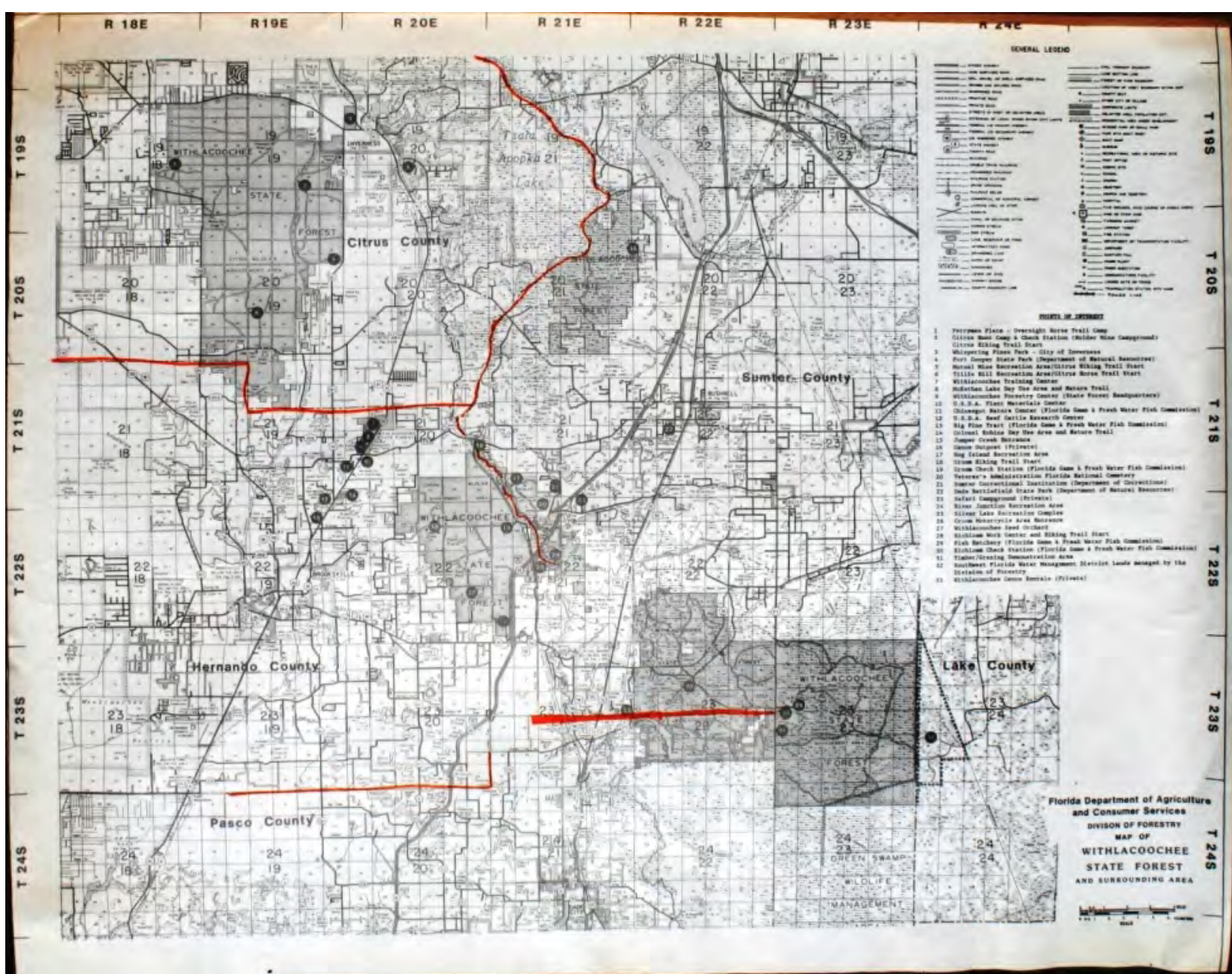
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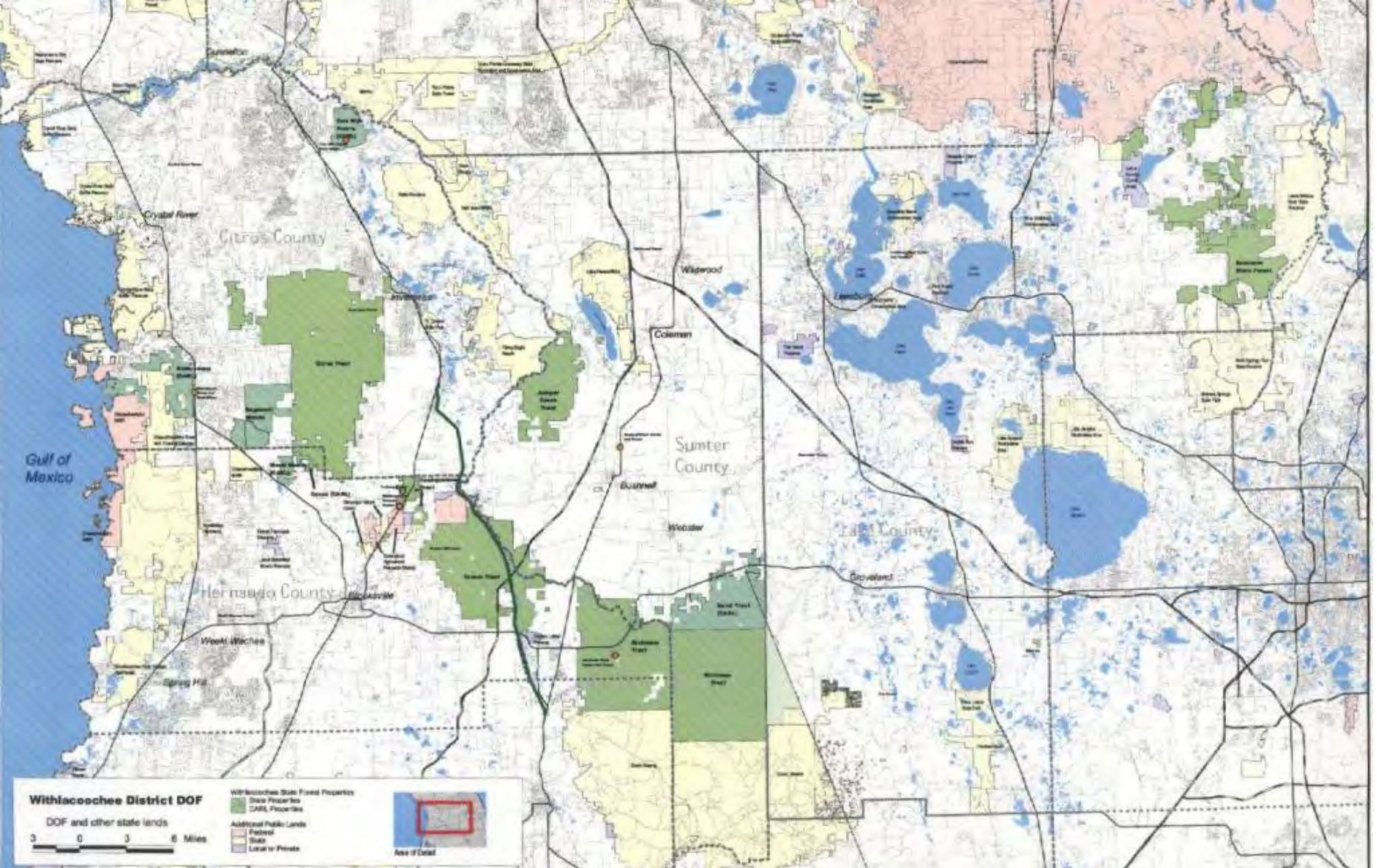
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May 19, 2001





Original 113,000 acres included parts of Citrus (39,309 acres), Sumter (31,510 acres), Hernando (35,273 acres) and Pasco (6852 acres) Counties.



159,310 acres providing the public with space, solitude and self-reliance.



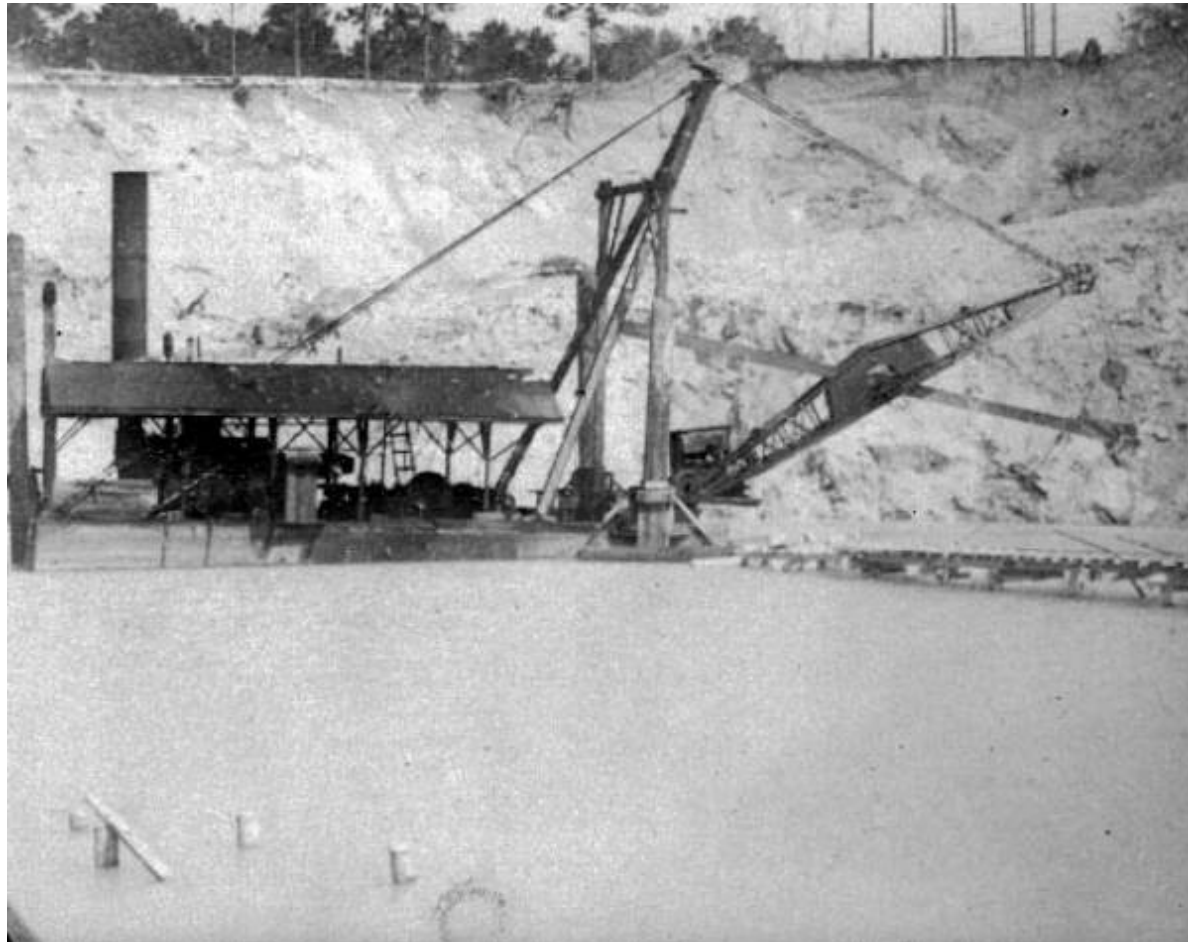
The Withlacoochee River from which the project derives its name has two moods: tranquil and flood stage. Withlacoochee=“little great water” from the Creek language: *wi-*, “water,” *la’ko*, “big,” and *-ichi*, “little.” The *-thl-* is an attempt to reproduce the sound of the Creek voiceless *l* in *lako*. *Florida Place-Names of Indian Origin and Seminole Personal Names*, @1934, by William A. Read, Ph.D. at Louisiana State University

Cyprian Jenkins in the *Florida Crescent* in 1872, said “the name was misspelled Withlacoochee in the early part of the (Second) Seminole War.” The original name was *Ouithacoochee*.



Due to recurring floods, the Withlacoochee problem area was selected. The project was first conceived during a visit of the Land Planning Consultant of the National Resources Board in August, 1934 and became the Withlacoochee Resettlement Land Use Demonstration Project.

In the mid-1890s, the Withlacoochee River was cleared of logs, stumps and snags allowing barges (with a two foot draw) to move the phosphate through Port Inglis until WW I. The war closed the shipping lanes in 1914. By the early 1930s most of the phosphate deposits were mined out and the pits were abandoned.

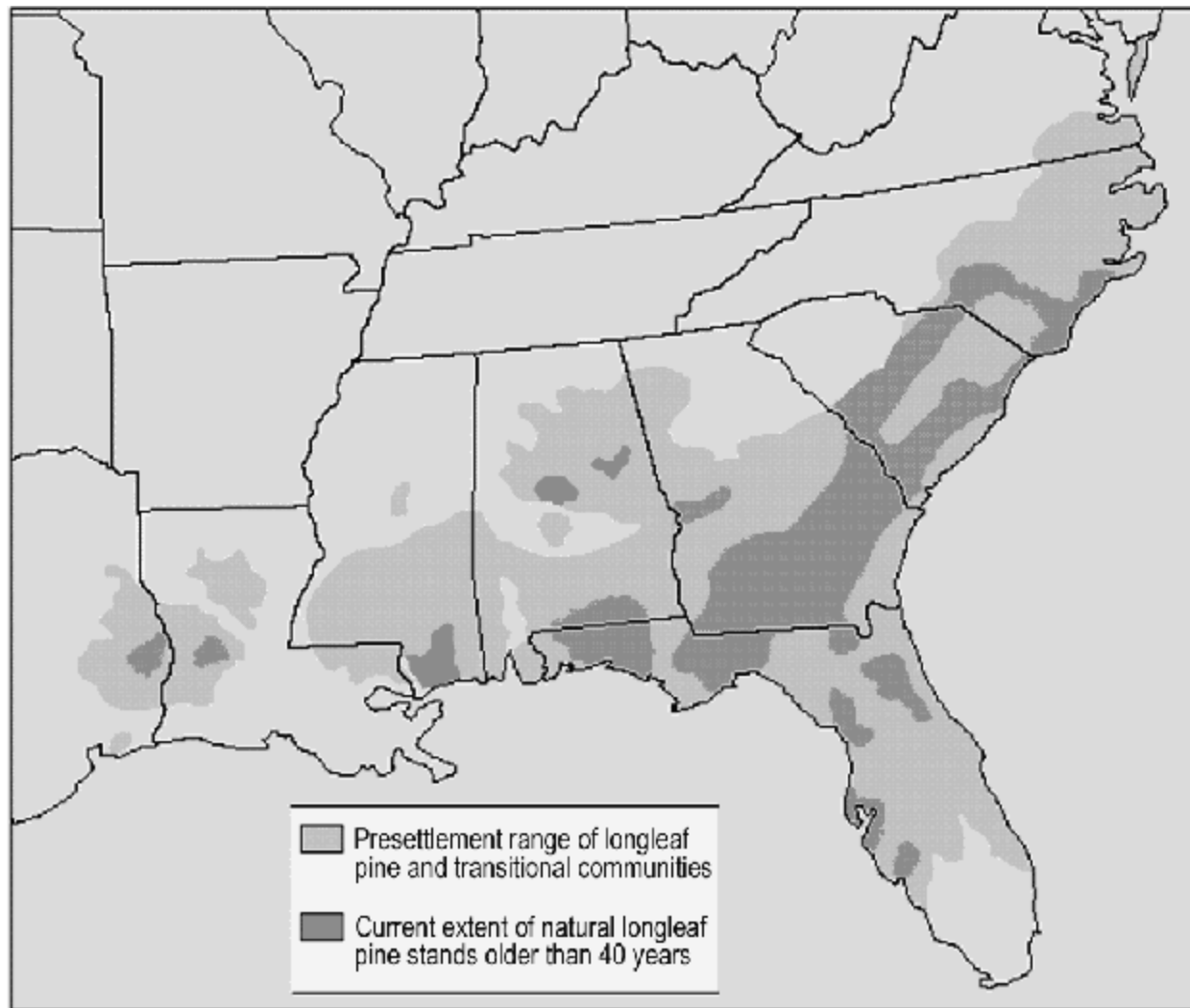




Trees were “cat-faced” for gum extraction then cut for lumber in about six years. By WWI, 17 million acres were cut-over in Florida with only stumps and an occasion straggler tree remaining, a poor source for seeds for regeneration of the pinewoods. Wild fires were rampant.



Florida Board of Forestry mandated a total exclusion of fire in 1928. “Cut over and then burned-over due to extensive Naval Stores, logging and yearly pasture burning to improve fodder for cattle” (prompted the mandate). From the Oral History with of John Bethea, Fl. State Forester,1970-1987.



2002

This is the historic range of Longleaf Pine forests in the Southeast with extant natural LL forests in the darker color. Only 6 million acres of the 92 million acres of virgin pine remained by WW I (now: 2/1000 %). Largest contiguous virgin LL now is at Eglin Air Force Base with 5000 acres.



Naval Stores are comprised of turpentine and rosin, the products created when pine resin (gum) is distilled. The invention of the copper still in 1824 was the catalyst for the wide spread fire stills in the piney woods.



In 1912 the United States Forest Service reported naval stores production in Florida as 350,000 barrels of turpentine and more than 1 million barrels of rosin (which sharply declined over the next 5 years).



I'm still looking for credit: who, what, when, where on this late 1940s or early 1950s photo. It could be Lewis Plantation, Brooksville.



Lager-Sullivan Lumber Company, 1900

**Bradenton ox-drawn high
wheeler, 1904**





The virgin longleaf and slash were logged out by about 1906 on most of the acreage in the project area.



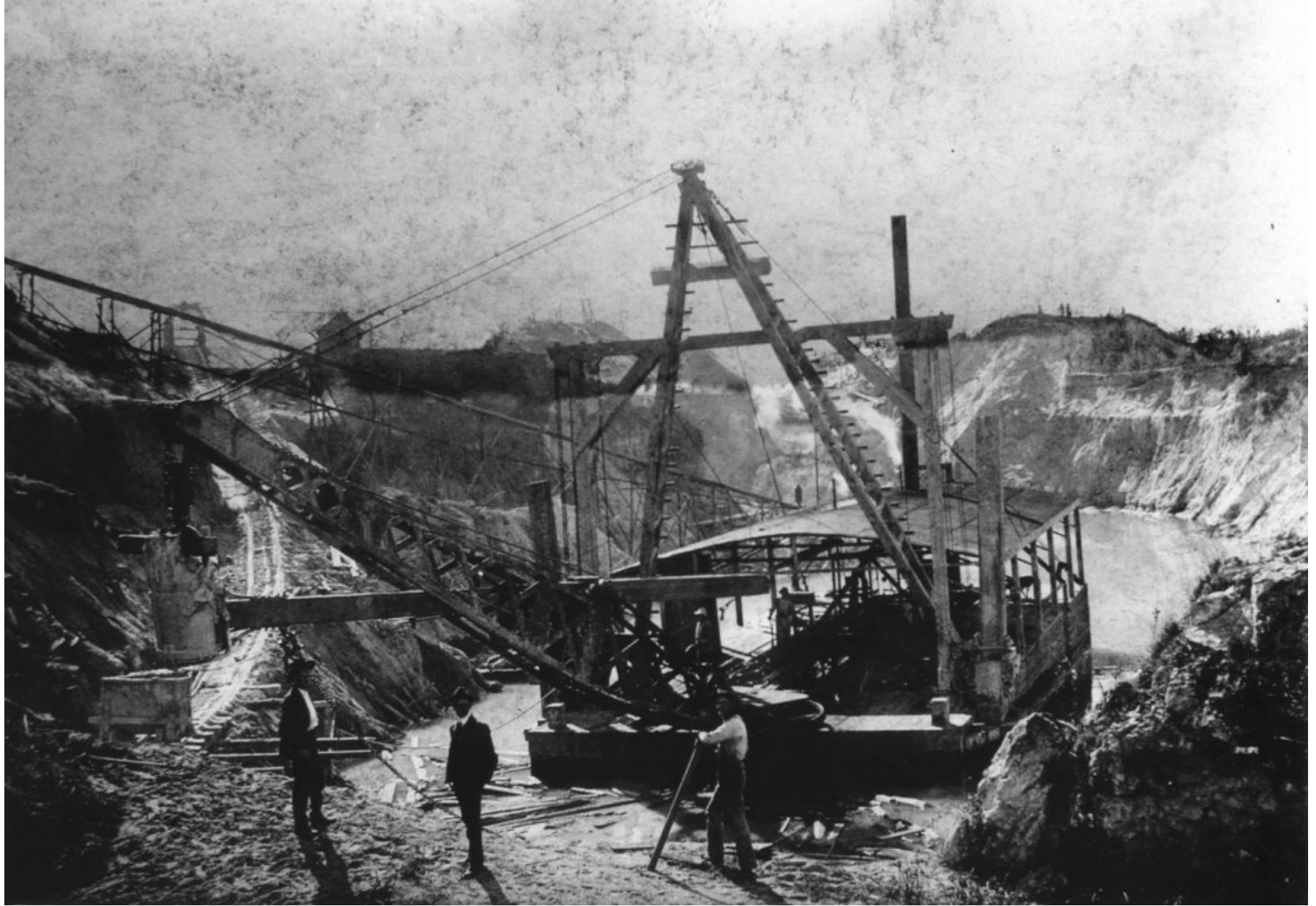
Southern States Lumber Company, 1910s



Locally the Phosphate boom took an ecological toll of its own on the forest and sandhill landscape.



The discovery of hard rock phosphate was a welcome boom for poor dirt farmers trying to grow crops on the scrubby Sandhills of Citrus and Hernando Counties.



Hamburg mine phosphate dredge created on site. Now Mutual Mine Recreation Area, Citrus Tract, WSF. Earliest photograph in the collection.



The desired mineral was high in bone of lime phosphate (fossils of large, extinct mammals) and low in iron and alumina. The main phosphate buyers were Germany and Belgium, who used the mineral as fertilizer for sustaining crops. World War I abruptly halted the shipping and production.



Abandoned phosphate pits left potential lakes for recreation.



Mutual Mine, Citrus Tract



Due to colder winters, vegetable farming shifted to the Lake Okeechobee area. These economic factors dramatically reduced gainful employment. Four-fifths of the population was without income. More than 95% of the lands became delinquent for taxes, ravaging communities. Tax based governmental agencies could no longer discharge their responsibilities to the public.

**Photo by
Carl
Mydans,
Jan. 1936
Brooksville**



Within the four county area that constituted the Withlacoochee project, more than 50% of the population was on some form of relief, while within the actual project area, the rate was higher rate of 75%.



Ninety-five percent of the land was in the process of being foreclosed by state and county authorities for unpaid taxes. Federal purchase of the land would provide at least a modicum of financial relief for individuals and regional governments and an opportunity for federal land use planners to develop and refine new techniques for land management.

Clay Sink in SE Richloam Tract



The oldest settlement in this project area was from the 1840s. Most of the folks had relocated from the Carolinas and planted cotton with slave labor and ranged cattle in the timber. Cotton depleted the soil fertility. The arrival of the Cotton Boil Weevil forced crop changes. Crops in the 1930s were corn (30%), truck (barter) vegetables (23%), sweet and Irish potatoes (21%), peanuts for hogs (10%), hay (6%), Chufas or Nutgrass (5%), and Citrus (5 %).



Also in the Richloam area, Cummer Cypress Mill in Lacoochee was sited for “ruthless destruction of” timber resources.



“The natural resources were so depleted and the land so infertile that the population was no longer able to support itself without governmental aid. Goals of these projects were reconstruction and rehabilitation of human resources with the help of available land resources so disastrously destroyed my man.” John Wallace, March 31, 1937

At the beginning of FDR's New Deal in 1933 the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) bought "submarginal" farmlands and resettled farm families on better soils elsewhere. This program moved to the Resettlement Administration, then to the Farm Security Administration (Sept.1937), and later died of insufficient funding under the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Due to the lack of financial support many farm families received payment for their land but no further aid (as originally planned).





In the Southeastern United States there were thirteen such project areas in Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, and Florida. “.....these areas were representative of the most serious social, fiscal, and sub-marginal land problems existing within a broad land use problem area...”



The federal government began resettling the destitute farmers of the area by buying the land and creating a reforestation program in 1935. North of Madison, FL at Cherry Lake people were actually resettled into a newly constructed community on an old Tobacco Plantation purchased by the WPA: Cherry Lake Rehabilitation Community, Cherry Farms Project, Inc.



Most people here had already been run off their farms by the poor economics of the Depression. Of the 113,000 acres only 44 families were still on the land.



Thirty six of the forty four families were on some federal assistance between 1933 and 1935. And all had moved off the property by 1940.



Following resettlement of the families these buildings were salvaged for building material made available to local residents and used for project development.



The Works Progress Administration (renamed Work Projects Administration in 1939, identified by the acronym WPA from 1935-1943), was created by executive order by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and authorized by Congress in 1935. Taking up where the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) left off, the WPA employed 8.5 million people on 1.4 million public projects in its eight years of existence. The WPA provided work (and pay) to those hard hit by the Great Depression. Locally, the FERA provided funds that saved Hernando County Schools from closing in March of 1934.



This project was given tentative approval by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, September 25, 1935 and by the Administrator of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, C. F. Clayton, October 8, 1935. WLUP-FL3



“ Burned over WLUP will be re-seeded” Arthur Rothstein Feb. 1937

First objective was to place the area under minimum fire control at earliest possible date. This included construction of fire breaks; trails, providing transportation access to various points in the project area; patrol system to protect the remaining area not included under the other mentioned planned “roads”. Trails 2 and 3 in the Croom Tract





and only 5000 acres of the 113,000 acres burned in that winter.



The Works Progress Administration also paid artisans and photographers in the creation of murals, state guidebooks, and folk life surveys, and other accomplishments.

Hernando County near WLUP-FL3, February 1937



Rothstein has 54 photographs archived at the Library of Congress that were taken on the Withlacoochee Land Use Demonstration Project (WLUP-FL3) from January 1936 through February 1937. You will see them in the order that the projects were accomplished and identified by their archival negative numbers.



Resettlement Administration as an agency lasted only 2 years. First conceived in August of 1934, John Wallace was pulling his staff together in Brooksville by late the end of that year.



A skeleton staff was recruited to begin the work of purchasing and developing this submarginal area. These men flew over the proposed purchase area in a plane of corrugated metal with a tri-ford motor, gaining the first birds' eye view of what was in store for them. Note the fuel being added from 5 gallon container atop.



There were Civilian Conservation Corps laborers in the Brooksville area working at the Chinsegut Hill Wildlife Sanctuary (donated by Col. Raymond Robins, April 1932) Emergency Relief Work started there almost immediately as “CCC Ag-1”. Photo depicts the local CCC springtime housing believed to be on top of the hill north of Church of Latter Day Saints (20143 Yountz Rd) about a mile E of Howell Ave.



The CCC was the most popular part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program as it put 3.1 million young men back to work, 1933 through early 1943. The Works Project Administration (WPA) funded the hiring of local expertise to plan and built the infrastructure still in use today. Unemployment in the US was 25% in 1933.



The WPA funded, planned and provided projects nation-wide. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) provided labor for planting trees, fighting fires and soil conservation. Here at Withlacoochee Forest, local workers were paid by WPA and perhaps the local CCC camp was utilized as well for reforestation.



Contemporary plaque at McKethan Lake #32 is disbanded



After his election, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed Henry Agard Wallace as Secretary of Agriculture (his VP in 1940). Wallace immediately confronted the immense responsibility of implementing a program of relief for American farmers. The Wallaces were all Progressives and eager for reforms.



Henry Agard was the son of Henry Cantwell Wallace of Iowa, who preceded him as Secretary of Agriculture (1921-1924). HCW died in office and his book, *Our Debt and Duty to the Farmer*, was published posthumously in 1925.

John Wallace was the brother of Henry Agard Wallace. He came up to Brooksville from St. Petersburg, and served as Project Manager for WLUP-FL3 from its inception in late in 1934 until the Resettlement Administration became the Farm Security Administration, September 1937. The familial relationship was significant to our survival in light of Congressional budget cuts in 1937.



Alan F. Furman, of the Projects Plans Division at Regional Level of Resettlement Administration, stands on a desk with the title abstracts from just one land owner. Two large Syndicates sold their holdings to WLUP-FL3. You had to have a Florida address, so one of the agents from Chicago rented a PO box in Orlando.

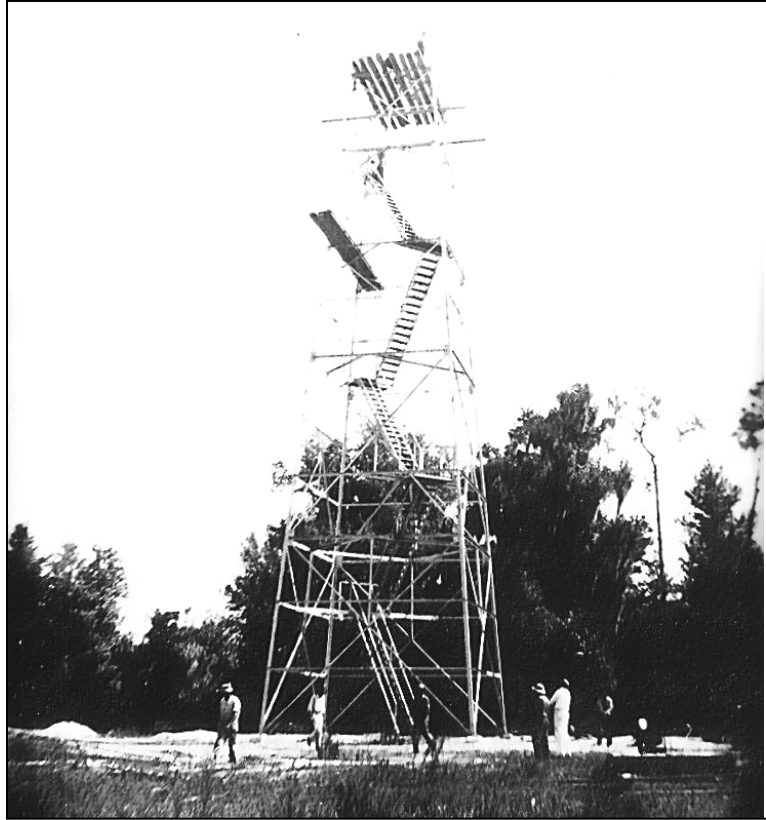


**Fifth from left: Robert C. Brent, Jr., Chief of Land Acquisition
Front kneeling, left: Hux Coulter, Florida Board of Forestry**



In the summer and early fall of 1935, project engineering and technical staff prepared numerous plans for jobs. From February 15, 1935-September 8, 1936, this staff consisted of ten appraisers, five option clerks, two secretaries, three draftsmen, one forester, one janitor and three stenographers, and two attorneys.

Resettlement Administration's "Mission Statement":



(To provide) acreage for forestry, wildlife, game conservation, recreation and extensive grazing or multi-land use, embodying principles and practices adaptable by private individuals and corporations as well as state and Federal agencies. Accomplishment of these objectives will show the way towards more desirable land use for approximately 23M acres of idle land in Florida as well as millions more across the Southeastern United States.



Within weeks of the establishment of the Withlacoochee Land Use Project, Manager Wallace and his staff started to put parts of their program into operation.

Benefits derived from the Project John Wallace's 3-31-1937

Number of people employed since project inception:

December 1935	166
January 1936	428
February 1936	690
March 1936	899
April 1936	873
May 1936	792
June 1936	730
July 1936	746
August 1939	803
September 1936	746
October 1936	616
November 1936	578
December 1936	526
January 1937	541
February 1937	536

**Largest
Southern/Evergreen
Magnolia know in the
country at the time. It
was featured in all the
newspaper articles
announcing the project
and in the reports back
to Washington, D C.**

**John Wallace was
photographed with it at
“Lake McKethan”, so
someplace on Hdqts.
Tract.**



Its girth was 13.5 feet according to one report.

Another said 58 inches diameter (DBH), which would be 15.2 feet girth.

110 feet in height.



Marden Brush Cutter



Wallace supervised the construction of 357 miles of fire breaks.....



and the erection of four steel fire towers, each 100 feet high, and a wooden tower at East Tower Camp in Richloam.



WPA firefighters on Citrus Tract with fire flaps and backpack tanks.



Water Pumper truck ca. 1936



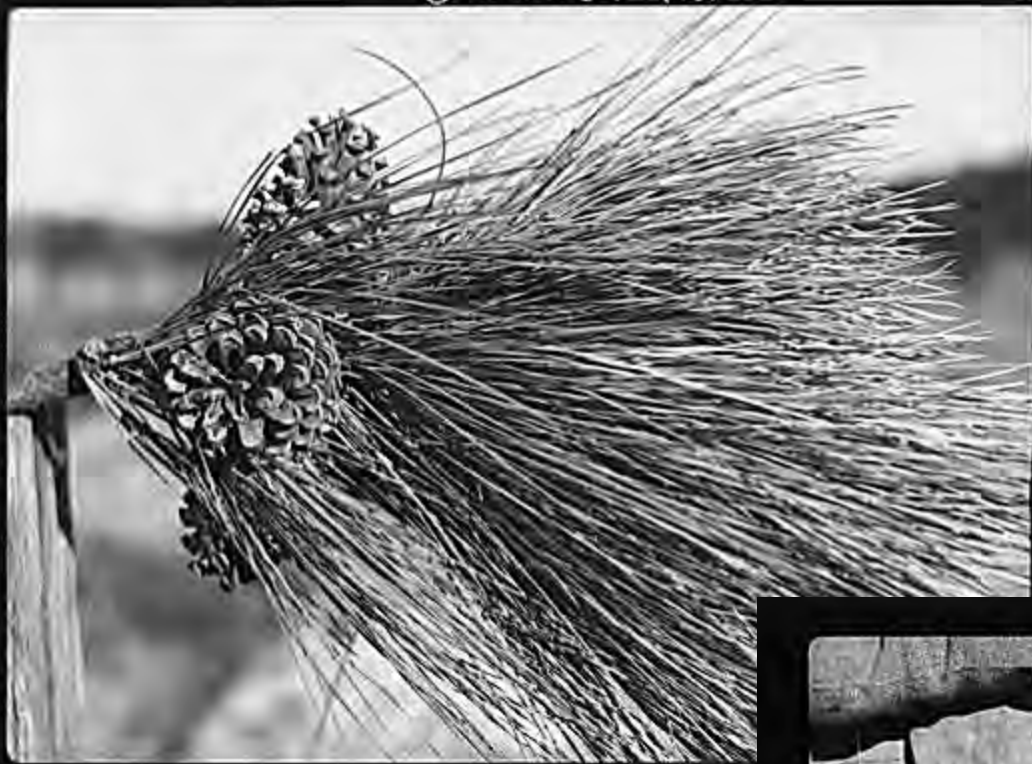
Demonstrating water pressure from the pumper truck.

To ensure that the seedlings would have every chance of surviving, 23,000 acres of land were cleared of competing oak and brush stands.





In January 1936, a temporary tree nursery was established at Richloam.



6A-52041-D



6A-52041-D

12

Slash pine cones

**WPA laborers
cleaned 326 # of
Slash Pine seeds
and 125# of
Longleaf seed and
planted them at
Richloam Nursery
in January 1935.
This resulted in.....**



GA-92021-E



..... over 330,000 slash and longleaf pine seedlings being planted, with an additional 913,000 planted by March 1937.



They found that with the use of common mineral spirits as a spray for weeds that trees can be grown for about one fourth the former cost. No hand weeding was required. Demonstrations were tried for three years and a system of planting the trees during the summer rainy season was perfected.

Site of Richloam nursery from tower



The pine trees nursery operated during 1937, 1938, and on a reduced basis in 1939. About 100,000 pines were produced annually for the planting in areas almost totally devoid of seed trees.

1944





Extracting and bundling bare root slash pines for transporting for planting, February 1937.



John Wallace oversaw the growing and planting of pines trees by WPA workers.



Showing off the fast growth rate of slash pine.







Heeling in trees on site for planting over several days.



Hux Coulter advertised that “two men...working methodically can plant 1000 trees a day”. CCC planted well over three million trees in Florida from 1933 through 1941 according to David Nelson’s FSU dissertation (source: Char Mills, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of the Modern Environment* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000), p 134).



Croom Road west of (the now) Smith Prairie Trail Head and FR 7?



To support the growing population of these animals, over 3,000 cuttings of wild blackberries, wild plums and mulberry trees were planted in protected nesting areas created by project workers.



**These WPA workers are spreading seed for foraging crops
behind the brush cutter for wild game: quail, turkey and deer.
February 1937**

Annual censuses of fur-bearing animals – raccoons, squirrels and otters – were also conducted.



Fox Squirrel photo by Joe Johnson, Florida Wildlife Commission



Photo by Gene Smith, May 18, 1968



Cattle grazing produced secondary benefits to the Withlacoochee experiment.



First, cattle feeding on open ranges tended to reduce the hazards of forest fires by consuming patches of high grass and underbrush; second, fattened cattle provided a source of revenue for their owners.

Richloam grazing permit, Pasco County, April 1946



A shocking statistic: in Richloam, due to the lush vegetation, saw palmettos and ground cover, it takes 40 to 60 acres for each cow to find enough grass to sustain herself.

**“Planting” bass
fingerlings at Silver
Lake.**



**Stocking fish at Lake
McKethan.**



**Game fish fingerlings were
introduced into the
numerous ponds, sink
holes and phosphate pits
in the area. In 1936 alone,
over 75,000 bass
fingerlings were raised in
Welaka and were released.**

McKethan Lake



Buttenbach March 1946



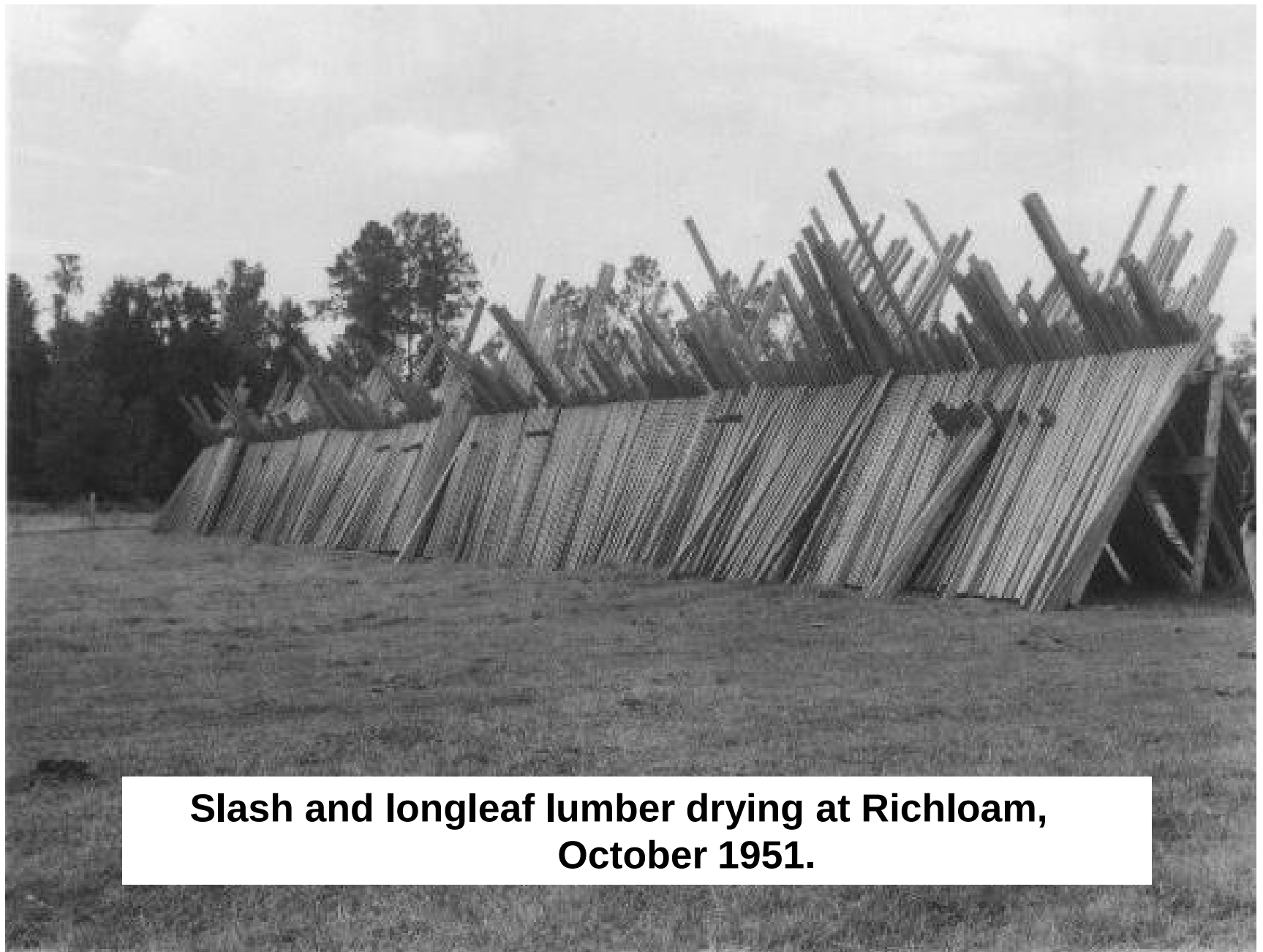
Ingenious devices were developed for cutting undesirable underwater weeds and others for removing “trash” fish. Applications of fertilizer increased the growth of food suitable for fish. Fishing in natural lakes was being improved through the control of undesirables and the improvement of the banks.



Mabel Hackett, 1967



This sawmill was used to prepare the lumber for all the work sites and their structures and fences. Sitting idle here in 1946, it was moved to Austin Cary St. Forest and used to train many more sawyers through UF.



**Slash and longleaf lumber drying at Richloam,
October 1951.**



Windmill pumped water up from the well till electricity was installed, 1951.

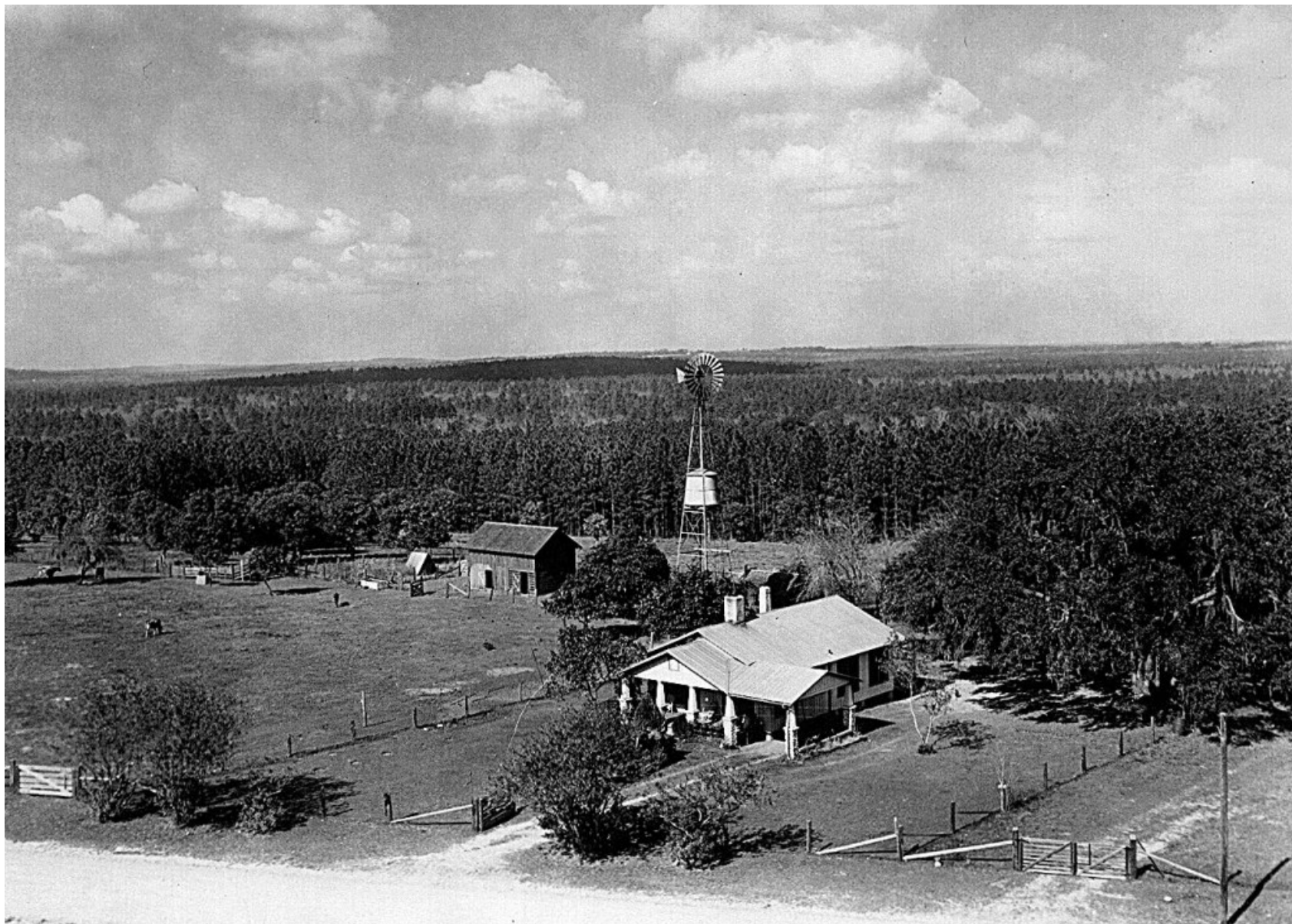


Buildings provided at each Subsistence Worker Unit consisted of an employee dwelling, garage, barn, chicken house, hog house and smokehouse for curing and storing meat. Under WLUP-FL3 subsistence workers worked half a day for RA and the other half to provide for their families.

• FEB • 58



George Cason, Sr. (right) and son, Sonny, at Tillis Hill residence. George was the “Forest Guard” and Subsistence worker from early 1937. George stayed on until Sonny came back from the Military in California and wanted to go to work for Florida Forest Service in about 1962.



**Tucker Hill Subsistence Worker Unit from perspective of tower.
Note the Pine tree growth in 1945, since planting in 1936-37.**



Tucker Hill, April 4, 1946, Terry Chapman was the resident then.



“Site 4” Headquarters, June 5, 1945



These so-called “infirm” WPA men skinned the pine trees that were harvested for telephone poles. 41 miles of wire were strung to connect the Headquarters building to the 4 towers.



41 miles of telephone line were created from a metallic circuit, which included East Tower site (per Tracy Hobson who logged Richloam for the Tarrytown Sawmill).



**“ Telephones were of the old-crank variety. In many rural areas of Florida, these Florida Forest Service communications were the only connection to the rest of the world into the early 1950s.”
(source: Harold Mikell, Director of DOF (1987-91), “Early Trends in Florida” speech from 2001)**



Coulter Hammock in Lacoochee was an “estate” the RA purchased. They created a recreation area with a ball field and a boat launch/fishing area primarily for the employees at Cummer Cypress Sawmill.

July 1967 fees began



The USFS brokered a lease-to-purchase deed between the Federal Government and Florida in 1958. Robbins Manufacturing Co. was coaxed up from Tampa to Tarrytown. Hardwoods and pines were cut off of Richloam and delivered to their sawmill to create the revenue to pay \$6.2M dollars over 25 years.



**Swing bridge on South end of Silver Lake over to Cypress Glen,
July, 1967**



Iron Bridge: impassable by the 1940s



At the State level, the Florida Forest Service was one of a succession of state offices responsible for overseeing the commercial, industrial, and natural resources of Florida's forests.



The Florida Forest Service was established in 1928, succeeding the Florida Board of Forestry. It cooperated with federal and state agencies, counties, towns, corporations, and individuals in disseminating information about Florida forests, managing fire prevention and control programs, and enforcing laws pertaining to forests and woodlands.



Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was authorized to work on state lands, but in 1933, Florida had no State Parks nor State Forests. Therefore the CCC gave great impetus to the forestry program. Florida's state forest system began in the mid-1930s with the establishment of Pine Log (1935-36) and Cary State Forests (1936-37), totally 6000 acres. The mission of the CCC was to put young men to work in conservation jobs during the time of the great depression.



In 1934 Florida's first forestry training camp, "Camp O'leno", for agriculture students was held in cooperation with the forest industry, and in 1935 legislation was passed resulting in the formation of the Board of Forestry and Park (what is now the Florida State Park System was originally a joint operation with Florida Forest Service).



At O'leno forestry training center, a Magnolia tree was cut with a two man cross-cut saw. Myakka River (1934-35) and O'leno (1935-36) were the first two Florida State forests purchased, later becoming State Parks in 1948-50 and 1940-2, respectively. Is this John Wallace (Jr.) on the stump?



Fl Park Service created under
Florida Board of Forestry



1942-
1944
Shield

Florida Forest Service worked with
CCC to est. camps such as
Highlands Hammock St. Park

1935, forester C. H. Coulter issued a circular ordering employees to give the campaign (to promote parks) “as much publicity as possible...The more money to advertise the attractions and resources of Florida outside the State, the more visitors we will have...thus resulting in the increased interest in state parks and forests and forestry in general. This means you are fully justified in giving as much of your time as you can...”

1903-1987



As a career employee, Clinton Huxley Coulter was Florida State Forester: 1945 – 1969 and was inducted into the Florida Society of American Foresters Hall of Fame. Florida's first pine trees were grown at Raiford State Prison September, 1929 under his supervision and expertise. 150,000 slash and 100,000 longleaf were grown from 80 bushels of seed (#100). Hux opened the cones in a "glue box" in a Jacksonville factory, P. 407, Baynard Kendrick, *A History of Florida Forests*



John Wallace

Hux Coulter

Hux Coulter was the consultant for the Richloam nursery and pine seed collection and tree planting at WLUP-FL3 from the beginning.



Blackwater was purchased (1939) as a Resettlement Demonstration Land Use Project as was Withlacoochee. Seventy five of the photos in our collection are the development of Munson nursery and the special erosion problems caused by the river, sheep grazing and peanut farming.



Blackwater and Withlacoochee State Forests were added in 1938-39 and 1957-58. Along with Cary and Pine Log, they comprised the Florida state forest system until 1987-88. FFS now manages over 1,060,434 acres according to Florida Natural Areas Inventory. They claim 9.9 million acres of Florida are managed as conservation land (February 2011).



***Forest Fires in Florida*, a 36-page booklet by Harry Lee Baker (USFS) was published in 1926 by Florida Forestry Association in cooperation with the USFS. Harry Lee Baker became first Florida Forester for the Florida Board of Forestry on April 1, 1928.**



The attitude of fire suppression prevailed until controlled burning by prescribed fire was awakened as a management tool in 1941. John Bethea, Florida State Forester from 1970-1987, told an Oral Historian on 11-18-1998 the first real effort to promote controlled burning happened in 1949. Trainers and demonstrators were sent out by Tallahassee to change minds about fire and to distinguish between burning as a tool vs. uncontrolled wildfires.



Withlacoochee remains a living legacy from the New Deal.

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