

NATURE TRAIL POINTS OF INTEREST

Station 1

The cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) is the state tree of Florida and is found over the entire peninsula. The large green leaves or fronds shed as the tree grows to a height of over 50 feet, reinforcing the characteristic view of the Florida skyline. It is the bud of this tree that is used to prepare the native *swamp cabbage* dish.

Station 2

This tree, commonly called the blue beech or American hornbeam, is identified by the muscular appearance of the trunk. This species seldom reaches a height of over 30 feet. The wood is extremely hard and can be used to make tool handles. Another common name for this tree is ironwood.

Station 3

This area is representative of a bottomland hardwood forest. This stand of timber represents the end result of many years of vegetative progression, from open field to grasses, shrubs, pines and hardwoods. If left alone by man or natural disasters (fire, insects, disease or wind damage), this community will remain relatively unchanged.

Station 4

The parallel rows of holes encircling this elm tree are the work of the yellow-bellied sapsucker, a migratory bird that resides in Florida during the winter months. The bird feeds on the sap in the tree and eats insects attracted by the sap.

Station 5

No southern hardwood forest would be complete without the Southern magnolia. It is easily identified by its large, shiny leaves, which remain on the tree year-round. The wood is used for veneer and cabinetwork. It is more widely known for its beautiful, fragrant, white flowers that bloom in the spring.

Station 6

Here you have walked into a different forest type. Can you notice any change in vegetation since the last station? You have walked from a bottomland hardwood area up a ridge and are now in an upland location. What tree at this station is indicative of this change? (Pine) Due to fire suppression, this site is now converting to bottomland hardwood forest as pine and other fire dependent species are disappearing.

Station 7

The resurrection fern growing on these oaks can be found on many Florida hardwoods. It derives its name from the interesting way it acts under varying weather conditions. If moisture is available, the fern turns a lustrous green. However, under conditions of drought, it curls up and reverses to a drab brown. When rain falls again, it almost magically changes back.

Station 8

The trees on both sides of this sign are sweetgums that are highly prized as ornamental shade trees. They exhibit rapid growth, thick shade and spectacular autumn coloration. In addition, note the presence of palms.

Station 9

This is a flowering dogwood easily identified by its alligator skinned bark and its small, rather bushy appearance. The dogwood is prized as an ornamental because of its fall coloration and white blossoms in the spring. The bright red dogwood berries are also an excellent source of food for wildlife.

Station 10

Sparkleberry is a shrub that grows well on a variety of forest sites. The real trademark of the plant is the purple colored berries, which mature from August to September. Quail, deer and other wildlife readily eat the berries.

Station 11

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Station 12

The thin vines growing up this tree are poison ivy. Poison ivy has an infamous reputation for the itchy rash it can cause when oils it produces contact human skin. An easily remembered rhyme aids in identification of this species. *Leaves of three, let it be.* This, of course, refers to the leaves, which are composed of three leaflets. Some animals can eat the leaves or berries with no apparent ill effects.

Follow the trail directly toward the lake, cross the bridge and enter the woods on the other side to continue your walk

Station 13

This large tree is a pignut hickory. It grows on high ground and is identified by its tight bark, leaves of five to seven leaflets, and typical thick-husked nut. The wood, because of its hard nature, is used for handle stocks and is an excellent fuel for smoking meats.

Station 14

The two trees flanking the marker are black cherry. This tree is noted for its pale green leaves and a bounty of delicate white flowers it produces in the spring. Its black fruit is favored by wildlife. The wood is of excellent quality for wood turning projects. The leaves become toxic to livestock as they wilt.

Station 15

This is a cluster of tree sparkleberry characterized by its bushy appearance, reddish brown bark and small, somewhat stiff, oval leaves. Tree sparkleberry is an understory plant found on dry soils. The bark is suitable for tanning leather and the plant is an excellent source of food for wildlife.

Station 16

You have just walked from a natural forest cover to a planted loblolly pine plantation established for experimental purposes. These trees were planted in 1960 in an attempt to produce both pulp and saw timber size trees. You may notice very few surviving pines because this location is not suited to loblolly and there was minimal management.

Station 17

American Holly grows in hammocks and damp soils over northern and middle Florida. It is much less abundant now, due to large amounts gathered and shipped to cities for Christmas decorations. The leaves are simple alternate, oval, thick and leathery, growing 1 to 4 1/2 inches long and armed with spiny teeth.

Station 18

If you look carefully you can see that some of these laurel oaks serve as nesting habitat for grey squirrels.

Station 19

This is an example of a trunk rot caused by a fungal disease. This type of disease, affecting oaks primarily, probably causes the greatest monetary loss to the hardwood lumber industry in Florida. Spores are carried by wind and animals, infecting trees that have been damaged by fire, wind breakage or any other natural or manmade causes. The spores land on exposed wood, geminate and begin to decay the trees.

Station 20

This longleaf pine stand is an example of man's interference with nature. Hardwoods are invading the ground under these pines. Left undisturbed, this stand will eventually be inhabited only by hardwoods because fire is a necessity for the reproduction of longleaf pine. In a natural environment, a low intensity, naturally caused fire would have periodically swept through and killed the hardwoods, allowing the longleaf to regenerate itself. Aggressive fire suppression by man has kept wildfire out of this area, causing a change in species composition.

Station 21

This is an American Beautyberry is an open-habit, native shrub of the Southern United States which is often grown as an ornamental in gardens and yards. American beautyberries produce large clusters of purple berries, which birds and deer eat, thus distributing the seeds. Its delicate pink flowers are attractive to bees.

Station 22

Yucca Plant

Station 23

A dead tree can be a host to many species of organisms as this fallen log clearly illustrates. Some are simply using it as a place to live while others actively consume it. You can see a variety of conks, which are the fruiting structures of various fungi living within the log. Mosses and lichens also grow on the surface.

Station 24

Since this very old and large live oak blew down during a storm, the newly opened canopy has encouraged the growth of young trees. Live oak trees provide a majestic canopy around the lake, shading the roadway and picnic areas with wide spreading limbs creating broad, round-topped crowns.

McKethan Lake Day Use Area

Withlacoochee State Forest



Florida Forest Service management plans include prescribed burning most months of the year. For personal safety reasons, area users should contact the FFS for information and location of burn areas, (352) 797-4100.

McKethan Lake Day Use Area

15185 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601
USNG: 17R LM 69451 69347

Withlacoochee Visitor Center

15003 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601
Phone: (352) 797-4140 Fax: (352) 797-4108

www.FDACS.gov

www.FDACS.gov/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service/Our-Forests/State-Forests/Withlacoochee-State-Forest

LOCATION & FEES

McKethan Lake is located just north of the Withlacoochee Visitor Center on Broad Street/US 41. Travel north on Us 41 out of Brooksville toward Floral City. Continue through the blinking light at Lake Lindsay. McKethan Lake is located at the 2nd road to the left after the blinking light.

McKethan Lake is open daily from 8:00 am to sunset. There are picnic tables, grills, restrooms and a playground. The 3 pavilions may be permitted for group events. Fishing from the lake shore or a small watercraft is allowed. Canoes and small boats may use only electric motors. All proper fishing licensing is required.

McKethan Lake has a day use fee of \$2 per person per day. An Annual Day Use Pass may be purchased for \$45 and is good for up to 6 persons at a time. Please contact the Visitor Center for more information.

To reserve the pavilions, please visit www.FloridaStateForests.ReserveAmerica.com or call 877-879-3859 (TDD/for Hearing Impaired 800-373-3851). There is a \$20 per day fee to be paid at the time it is reserved. The \$2 day use fee for all guests over the age of 6 is to be paid the day of the event.

GROUP INFORMATION

All group and organizations using McKethan Lake Day Use Area are required to have a Special Use Permit. At least 2 weeks prior to your activity, please call the Withlacoochee State Forest Visitor Center at 352-797-4140. Permits are also required for use of a pavilion.

Pet Policy

As this area is a designated bird sanctuary, pets are not allowed within the McKethan Lake Day Use Area.

PROTECTION & PRESERVATION

- All plant & animal life is protected & must not be harmed or removed.
- To protect shore vegetation, vehicles & bicycles are not allowed beyond mowed grass line
- No traps (including trot lines), cast nets or eel baskets allowed.
- No hunting, trapping or firearm possession allowed.
- The lake is closed to swimming for safety reasons.
- Refrain from amplified music. Be courteous to other visitors.
- The use of metal detectors is prohibited.
- Alcoholic beverages are not allowed.
- No ground fires allowed.
- Use refuse facilities provided. Please do not litter.

NATURE TRAIL

The Nature Trail is approximately 2 miles and is for pedestrian use only.

For your convenience, 24 points of interest on the trail have been identified. The trail is divided into two sections and the approximate time it takes to complete the trail is one hour. Please do not destroy or remove any of the vegetation. Your assistance in keeping the trail free from litter will be appreciated.

WILDLIFE

McKethan Lake is home to various species of migratory birds and wildlife. It is considered to be a bird sanctuary. Wildlife found in the area includes red cockaded woodpeckers, deer, quail, turkey, fox squirrels, gopher tortoises and armadillo. Please remember alligators and snakes may also be present as they are part of the natural habitat in Florida.

No hunting allowed within the McKethan Lake Day Use Area.

