

STATE FOREST SPOTLIGHT

Endangered Ecosystems

The Lake Wales Ridge State Forest contains three unique and endangered ecosystems: scrub, sandhill, and cutthroat seeps. The forest is situated along the ancient Lake Wales Ridge and a portion is in the Kissimmee Valley. The Lake Wales Ridge contains the highest concentration of endangered plants in the continental United States, many of which are found on the state forest.

There are 33 plants and 36 animals found on the forest that are either state or federally listed as threatened or endangered. The forest is the largest property on the ridge under public ownership and has excellent examples of scrub, scrubby flatwoods, southern ridge sandhill, cutthroat seeps and pine flatwoods. The forest occupies a keystone position in the network of protected sites along the Lake Wales Ridge.

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 Wales Ridge State Forest

- Drive on designated roads only.
- Unlicensed vehicles, motorcycles and ATVs (all terrain vehicles) are not allowed on the forest.
- Foot traffic, bicycles, and horses are welcome on trails designated for their use.
- Do not make new roads or trails.
- Hunting requires a permit and license and is allowed in designated areas during appropriate seasons.
- Take all garbage with you when you leave the forest. Containers are not provided.
- Primitive camping in primitive campgrounds and campsites along hiking trails on Arbuckle and Walk In Water tracts require a campsite reservation through a Campground Reservation System-FloridaStateForests.ReserveAmerica.com. For further assistance please contact Lake Wales Ridge State Forest Headquarters, Monday-Friday, 8a.m. - 5p.m. or call (863)589-0545. For camping reservations please visit FloridaStateForests.ReserveAmerica.com or call 877-879-3859/ TDD 800-373-3851.
- Visitors may be required to pay entrance or recreation use fees in designated areas. Annual Day Use Entrance Passes are available. Contact your local Florida Forest Service office for information.
- 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.govFLStateForests

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Florida Forest Service

Lake Wales Ridge State Forest



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND CONSUMER SERVICES



History

Most parts of the state forest have historically been used for cattle grazing and the Prairie Tract still contains an active cattle operation. Several areas have been used for citrus and there is still an active grove on the Prairie Tract. Timber harvests, hunting, and some turpentineing all occurred on the forest. In the 1940s a raised bed railroad was constructed to connect the Avon Park Air Force Range to existing railroad near Frostproof.

The Arbuckle Tract was the first property purchased in 1984 by the State of Florida's Conservation and Recreation Lands Program to preserve and protect the unique ecosystems and species found on the property. Other properties (Walk-in-Water, Hesperides, and Prairie Tracts) were purchased over the next 20 years.

Lake Wales Ridge State Forest covers 26,713 acres in Polk County. This forest is a unique, beautiful place where many of Florida's rare and endangered plants and animals flourish.

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 1 million acres of state forests for multiple public uses including timber, recreation and wildlife habitat.

The forest management practices on the forest are important in the restoration and maintenance of forest ecosystems and they provide a variety of socio-economic benefits to Floridians.

In addition to timber operations, the state forest staff has an active prescribed fire program that helps to maintain the health of the many fire dependent ecosystems and species, many of them threatened or endangered.



Lake Godwin Day Use Area and Dock on Arbuckle



Dinner Lake on the Babson/Hesperides tract



Historic McLean cabin

For more information contact:
Lake Wales Ridge State Forest
851 C.R. 630 E Frostproof, FL 33843
(863)589-0545
www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

Natural Resources

The scrub on the Lake Wales Ridge is unique compared to most ecosystems in North America, consisting of long isolated islands. The plants and animals, many of them found nowhere else in the world, that reside in the scrub have had to develop strategies for surviving with little moisture and few nutrients. The sandhills on the ridge consist of longleaf pine, turkey oak and wiregrass, but they also share many of the endangered plants and animals of the scrub.

Cutthroat seeps are an unusual plant community consisting of mostly cutthroat grass with scattered pine trees. Scientists estimate that only 1 percent of these seeps still exist today. Cutthroat grass communities are strongly dependent on frequent fire. They become invaded by shrub and rarely flower in the absence of prescribed burning.

Recreation

Hiking, camping, birding, hunting and horseback riding are some of the more popular activities on the forest. On the Arbuckle Tract there is a large 25 mile trail that contains roughly 12-13 miles of overlapping trails each, that is part of the Arbuckle Trail and there is a short 0.8 mile Nature loop trail at the historic McLean cabin.

The two trails on the Arbuckle Tract as well as the Big Bay trail and Scrub jay trail on the Walk-in-the Water tract are part of the Florida Forest Service Trailwalker program. Arbuckle and Walk-in-the Water tracts have primitive campgrounds and seven primitive campsites off of hiking trails with picnic tables and fire rings. Babson on the Hesperides tract has public access parking area by Dinner Lake and allows vehicle access by Special Use Permit only. Reedy Creek II Hunt camp is available for hunters during hunt dates on Arbuckle (see kiosk on site for hunt camp rules).

The majority of the forest is open for hunting and managed cooperatively with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. See FWC hunting information for Arbuckle and Walk-In-the Water WMAs at MyFWC.com.