

STATE FOREST SPOTLIGHT

Thomas Creek

Thomas Creek meanders through a nearly intact, mature bottomland hardwood forest and floodplain swamp. A closed canopy of large live oak, swamp laurel oak, swamp chestnut oak, sweetbay, southern magnolia, swamp tupelo, sweetgum, red maple, cypress and loblolly pine dominate this unique natural feature of Cary State Forest. The slowly flowing waters of Thomas Creek are darkly stained with naturally occurring tannic acids from the hardwoods through which the creek flows. This beautiful blackwater creek is home to otters, alligators and water moccasins. The creek can be viewed from the three wooden bridges along Acree Road. Thomas Creek forms a historical boundary between Nassau and Duval Counties. Interestingly, one of the southernmost engagements of the American Revolution, the Battle of Thomas Creek, took place a few miles upstream from present-day Cary State Forest.

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 Cary State Forest

- Day use is allowed 1 1/2 hours before sunrise to 1 1/2 hours after sunset.
- Drive on designated roads only; speed limit 15 mph.
- Unlicensed vehicles, motorcycles and ATVs are prohibited.
- Foot traffic, bicycles and horses are welcome on forest roads, firelines and designated trails only.
- Do not create new roads or trails.
- Please take all garbage with you when you leave the forest. Containers are not provided.
- Camping is only permitted in designated campgrounds and requires a reservation.
- Visitors may be required to pay entrance or recreation use fees in designated areas. Annual Day Use Entrance Passes are available.
- Leashed dogs are welcome.
- Possession of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- Fuelwood permits are available for designated areas only.
- For additional information contact Cary State Forest, Monday-Friday, 8a.m.-5p.m., at (904) 266-8398 or (904) 266-8396 on weekends.
- Hunting requires a permit and license and is allowed in designated areas during appropriate seasons. We encourage all visitors to check the Wildlife Management Area regulations and hunting season dates before visiting the forest at www.MyFWC.com

For more information, visit:

www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

DACS-P-00137 Rev. 8-2026



Florida Forest Service

Cary State Forest



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Commissioner Wilton Simpson

History

Cary State Forest is named after the George F. and Charlotte C. Cary family who sold the first parcel to the state. George Cary is the brother of Austin Cary, an early proponent and pioneer of southeastern forestry practices.

In the mid-1930s, Florida Governor David Sholtz, at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, appointed a Conservation Committee. This committee drafted legislation, which was passed by the 1935 Florida Legislature, authorizing the funding, acquisition, development and management of a system of state forests and parks. The original Cary Tract was established through this program as Florida's second state forest by acquiring several parcels from multiple families between 1935 and 1942. The Thomas Creek, Monticello and Norfolk Southern Tracts were acquired between 2005 and 2008 through Florida Forever's Northeast Florida Timberlands Project, the Save Our Rivers program and funds provided by the U.S. Navy and the City of Jacksonville.

Forestry

The Florida Forest Service's mission is to protect and manage the forest resources of Florida, ensuring 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 on Cary State Forest is a valuable tool used for restoration and maintenance of natural communities while generating revenue that helps offset operating costs. Timber harvesting on Cary includes thinning of dense pine plantations, natural regeneration in older timber stands and clearcutting to remove offsite species to allow reforestation and restoration of the historically dominant longleaf pine ecosystem. Prescribed fire is another important land management tool used within Cary State Forest's fire dependent natural communities. Without prescribed fire, most of these communities would be altered or lost by overgrown hardwoods and dense brush, posing a greater risk of catastrophic wildfire.



Basin marsh



Prescribed burn



Nature trail boardwalk through wetlands

For more information contact:
Cary State Forest
7465 Pavilion Road Bryceville, FL 32009
(904) 266-8398 or 266-8396
www.FDACS.gov/FLStateForests

Natural Resources

This 15,192 acre forest is located in western Duval and southwestern Nassau Counties. The Cary, Monticello, and Norfolk Southern Tracts are contiguous while the Thomas Creek Tract is separate and located to the north.

Cary State Forest contains nine different natural communities, each containing unique flora and fauna. Mesic and wet flatwoods, basin swamp and sandhill are the dominant community types. Thomas Creek and three unnamed tributaries flow through Cary.

The natural communities found on the forest support a variety of wildlife, including Sherman's fox squirrel, gopher tortoise, wood stork, swallow-tailed kite, bluebirds, wild turkey, white-tailed deer, bobcat and various wading birds. The forest also supports several threatened and endangered protected plant species including night-flowering wild petunia, purple honeycomb-head and several wild orchids.

Recreation

Cary State Forest offers the public a variety of resource-based recreational opportunities. Camping, horseback riding, hiking, picnicking, wildlife viewing, hunting and bicycling are popular activities. Foot traffic, bicycles and horses are welcome on forest roads, firelines and designated trails. Hunting requires a permit and license and is allowed in designated areas during appropriate seasons.

The Pavilion Road Trail Complex is located on Pavilion Road within the original Cary Tract. The Cypress Swamp and Wetland Pine Boardwalk Loops, Red Root and Fireline Trails begin at this trailhead. A bathhouse with hot showers is available for paid day-users and campers. An open air pavilion with BBQ grill is located nearby and is used by the Florida Forest Service for programs and may also be rented by the public.

The Nature and Red Root Trails are included in the Trailwalker and Trailrotter programs.