

# Suwannee River Water Management District

November 2015

## **2015 Land Management Report**

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WATER FOR NATURE  
WATER FOR PEOPLE



**2015 Land Management Report**  
***Suwannee River Water Management District***

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The 2015 Land Management Report is an annual overview of management objectives and activities conducted on fee-simple title lands held by the Governing Board of the Suwannee River Water Management District (hereafter District or SRWMD). The report is used by the District during the Land Management Review Team which is required by Florida Statute 373.591. The report summarizes objectives of the approved 2011 Land Management Plan and generally follows its organizational format addressing key topics that provide information as to whether District lands are being managed for the purposes for which they were acquired and in accordance with land management objectives.

The report indicates an ongoing effort by District's land management program staff to include and participating in water resource related projects on District lands. It provides details and accomplishments on natural community resource projects which are designed to maintain or improve natural communities, forest resources, rare species, cultural and historical resources, and aesthetic and visual resources. It addresses social and economic management goals and activities which are key components of the land management program and include public use, communications and fiscal responsibility.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The District jurisdictional boundary includes approximately 7,640 square miles across all or part of 15 north-central Florida counties.

The District holds fee-simple title to approximately 160,203 acres in addition to approximately 126,821 acres of conservation easements (3.3% and 2.6% of the District's land area, respectively) as of September 30, 2015.

District management of these lands provides water resource benefits including:

- Preserving floodplain areas to maintain storage capacity, attenuate floodwaters, and prevent inappropriate development,
- Preventing contamination by maintaining low intensity land uses within the floodplain and high recharge areas,
- Preserving and/or restoring spring areas to maintain or improve ground and surface water,
- Preserving and/or restoring natural communities throughout the area to support or enhance populations of wetland-dependent native species, and
- Providing buffer zones to more intense land uses to protect water quality.

The majority of the parcels are “conservation” lands that are located along rivers and streams, headwaters, and recharge areas. The District also purchases parcels for specific water resource projects such as wellfields, flood storage, water management, aquifer recharge and water resource development, water supply development and preservation. These “project” lands are managed for the specific purposes as identified in the acquisition.

The District Land Management Plan (DLMP) articulates the goals of the Governing Board that guide the management of all fee title lands held by the District. Lands titled to the Board are managed under a multiple-use policy that emphasizes:

- Water resources protection and management,
- Maintenance and restoration of the land’s natural state and condition, and
- Provisions for public access and recreation opportunities on those lands.

The following four goals are outlined in the DLMP:

- Resource Protection,
- Public Use,
- Communications, and
- Fiscal Responsibility.

The purpose of this land management report is to document activities implemented in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 on District-owned lands.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE 2011 DISTRICT LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

### Resource Protection

#### **Water Resources**

##### 1. Water Resource Objectives

- Minimize structural floodplain management on District-managed conservation lands.
- Maintain ground and surface water quantity and quality during land management activities by using enhanced Silviculture Best Management Practices (BMPs).
- Restore hydrologic regimes to the Desired Future Condition (DFC) where possible.
- Maintain water management structures so they achieve their intended function.
- Develop and maintain water resource projects on the lands to improve water quality and enhance water supply.\*

#### **Natural Community Resources**

##### 1. Soils, Topography, Ground Cover and Natural Community Objectives

- Minimize soil degradation (erosion, compaction).
- Manage and/or restore historic natural communities for a given site to DFC standards to the extent practicable.
- Reduce degradation of the existing native groundcover.
- Monitor the grass, herbaceous and shrub layers to detect if the resource falls within the DFC standard acceptable range.
- Reintroduce or supplement current native ground covers with local stock where needed to achieve ecosystem functions.
- Update and maintain current reference data.

##### 2. Forest Resource Objectives

- Manage for natural community heterogeneity to attain a multi-aged and vertically diverse forest, including retaining dominant and/or old growth trees and snags.
- Maintain the dominant and co-dominant tree species within the DFC acceptable parameter range.
- Reforest within DFC standards using techniques that minimize damage to other natural resources.
- Ensure that commercial harvests provide the maximum financial returns that are possible with the consistent attainment of primary natural resource values.
- Maintain an accurate and current forest resource inventory.

##### 3. Rare Species Resource Objectives

- Protect and manage biodiversity on District lands.
- Track rare species locations, status, and use Rare Species Best Management Practices.
- Maintain and/or increase existing rare and imperiled species populations on District lands.

#### 4. Cultural and Historic Resource Objectives

- Protect and prevent negative impacts to cultural and historical resources during all activities.
- Document location of significant cultural and historical resources on District-owned lands and share information with the Division of Historic Resources within the Florida Department of State.
- Monitor the condition of cultural and historical resources on District-managed lands.

#### 5. Aesthetic and Visual Resource Objectives

- Maintain or enhance overall visual quality of District lands.
- Minimize or mitigate short-term negative appearances of land management activities.

#### 6. Public Use Objectives\*

- Provide as many opportunities for resource-based recreation compatible with water resource protection as possible.
- Protect health and safety of visitors.
- Use cooperating agencies and volunteers whenever possible.

#### 7. Communications Objectives

- Maintain and update the District Land Management Plan as needed with a major plan update scheduled for 2021.
- Conduct the Land Management Review Team process and report to the Governing Board.
- Develop and implement communication tools to enhance public recreational use.

#### 8. Fiscal Responsibility Objectives

- Protect and manage resources on District lands in an efficient manner within the limits of the annual operating budget.
- Revenues generated from land management will be from operations conducted to achieve resource objectives.
- The District will implement the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program for eligible counties in accordance with statutory directives.

\*Objectives from April 9, 2013, Governing Board Workshop.

## **SRWMD FY 2015 REPORT OF LAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

### **I. RESOURCE PROTECTION**

**Goal – to protect, enhance and/or restore natural, archaeological, and historical resources on lands owned by the District.**

#### **Water Resources**

District lands provide unique water resource opportunities because of their proximity to major rivers and their tributaries. At the tract level, there may be opportunities to impact altered water flows and water retention capacities to allow more natural buffering characteristics of the floodplain, such as flood attenuation, to be enhanced and provide protection to the receiving water body. At the site level, many facilities such as river access points, hydrologic facilities and roads require review, construction and maintenance to function in the floodplain without adverse water resource impacts. The objective of facilities' design is to make them transparent to high- and low-flow conditions within the floodplain.

Natural community and facility projects are generally implemented using silviculture BMPs as a minimum standard for implementation. Silvicultural practices, natural community restoration projects, hydrological improvements and road maintenance operations are planned to protect or enhance water resources.

Specific Governing Board approved water resource projects may be initiated for flood control, water storage, water management, conservation and protection of water resources, aquifer recharge, water resource and water supply development. These projects typically require engineered solutions and have project-specific goals and management. In many cases, the water resource benefits are designed to extend beyond the tract.

#### **Active Water Resource Projects**

- *Middle Suwannee River and Springs Restoration and Aquifer Recharge Project*  
In support of the project District staff removed debris, applied herbicide and generally maintained approximately 210 culverts in the Mallory Swamp tract that provided surface waters to the project. Overall District staff maintained 220 of the 300 culverts in the Mallory Swamp tract including replacing one damaged culvert.
- *Otter Springs Restoration Project*  
Otter Springs is a second magnitude spring that has been the center of public use for years from the affiliated campground. Over the years, sediment has eroded into the spring vent and run. Work completed in FY 2015 included the removal of 700 cubic yards of sediment from the main vent and spring pool. Efforts continue into FY 2016 to install access stairs, complete erosion control measures and other public use improvements to protect the spring.

- *Silviculture Water Yield Research Project*  
This project is part of a statewide effort to advance the understanding of the impact of forest management practices on water yield, and whether this water is held in surficial systems or makes it way to the aquifer. The project, within SRWMD, has five plots on District-owned lands near the Little River Tract, one plot on adjacent private land and six plots near the Gainesville wellfield on private land and Gainesville Regional Utilities land. Collection of data on surficial water status and vegetation characteristics continued this year. This project will run through 2019.

### Water Projects in Planning and Design

- *West Ridge Water Resource Development Project*  
The District has coordinated with Camp Blanding to purchase lands as part of the “military base buffering” initiative. The lands are being analyzed for water resource development opportunities including localized flood protection and aquifer recharge to the Upper Floridian aquifer. An additional 2,007 acres was acquired for this project.

## Natural Community Resources

### **1. Soils, Topography and Natural Community and Groundcover**

The District plans and implements land management operations to maintain and enhance natural resources. The District uses existing Desired Future Conditions (DFC) standards as a guide to plan, implement and track natural community management activities. These DFCs detail plant community structure, representative plant species, average hydrologic regime, and the frequency that fire is required to maintain the plant community. By using DFCs, the District determines if management activities are needed to “restore or maintain the natural condition” as directed by statute.

District lands that meet the DFC structural standards are maintained by natural processes (flooding events) or “passive” management. Most floodplains and wetlands are in this category. Communities that do not meet standards may receive “active” management (installation of hydrologic structures, prescribed fire, timber harvest, and reforestation) to move the community towards the defined community standards. Most uplands and transitional areas are in this category.

### Active Natural Communities Projects

- *Prescribed Fire*  
Many of Florida’s natural plant communities were historically influenced by lightning-ignited fires. Of those fire-adapted natural communities, the District’s prescribed fire program targets sandhills, upland pine, scrubby flatwoods, mesic flatwoods and wet flatwoods communities for maintenance and restoration



purposes. Combined, these targeted communities make up approximately 59,879 acres or 71% of the total acres that were historically influenced by fire.

The remaining 29% of fire-influenced communities on District lands consist of wetland natural communities such as shrub bogs, depression marshes and dome swamps. These communities are not actively targeted for prescribed burning. Fire is allowed to spread into these areas from adjacent communities that are being burned, but only when the risk is minimal for long-term smoke-management problems, mortality to wetland vegetation and prolonged organic soil consumption. When necessary, containment firelines are installed and maintained in such a manner as to avoid adverse impacts to wetlands and water resources.

Within the five targeted natural communities, the District focuses most of its efforts on designated core areas. Factors used to distinguish many of these core areas include:

- 1) Areas have a history of successful prescribed burns;
- 2) Vegetation within these areas can easily be burned without other inputs such as mechanical or chemical treatments;
- 3) Areas have undergone management activities that require the use of prescribed fire for continued maintenance or to complete a management prescription.

The District uses DFCs to determine the Natural Fire Return Interval (NFRI) for each community. These intervals are derived from information provided by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI). These intervals are the rotation or the number of years that occur between each scheduled prescribed burn. The District's goal is to increase the number of targeted core areas that are within their NFRI (Table 1).

Table 2 provides natural community acreage information for all non-targeted and targeted core areas. Acreage for targeted core areas is further separated to identify NFRI status. For areas out of their NFRI, information is also provided to help identify some of the factors affecting this status.

Table 1. Fire Return Interval and Burn Acreages on District lands

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
<b>% Targeted Core Areas within Natural Fire Return Interval</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>36%</b>
Acres Planned*	12,750	11,800	12,000	16,000	10,500
Acres Burned	8,919	13,581	12,277	7,212	11,742

Acres Burned That Met Objective	8,088	12,996	11,843	6,529	11,691
Wildfire Acres	25	0	11	457	5,535

\*2015 planned acreage were not met because wet weather conditions limited burning opportunities.

Table 2. Acres of fire-maintained natural communities by classification.

<b>SRWMD Fire-Maintained Communities</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>% of total</b>
<i>Total Fire-Maintained Natural Communities</i>	<b>83,932</b>	
Targeted Communities	59,879	71
Non-Targeted Communities	24,053	29
<i>Total Targeted Core Areas</i>	<b>50,011</b>	
Acres in NFRI* (end of 2015)	26,571	53
Acres out of NFRI (end of 2015)	23,440	47
<i>Total Acres Out Of NFRI</i>	<b>23,440</b>	
Acres where pine density is too thick to safely burn	5,931	25
Acres where stand age is too young to safely burn**	7,409	31
Acres within the Mallory Swamp Tract	5,576	24
Remaining Acreage	4,770	20

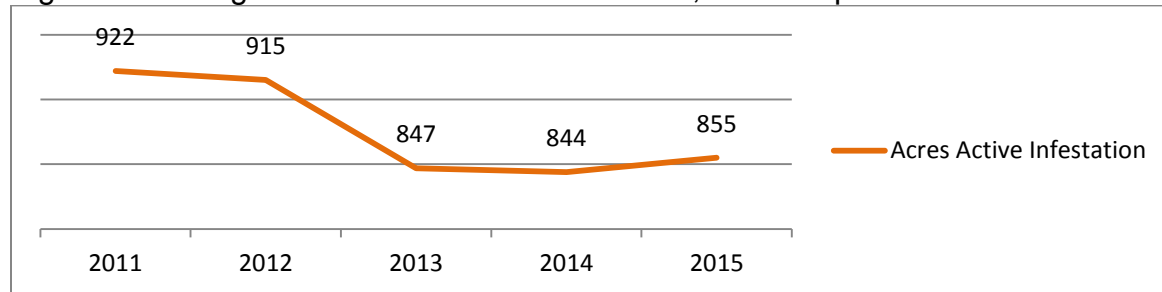
\*NFRI is Natural Fire Return Interval

\*\*Applies only to slash pine

- *Non-native, Invasive Plant Control*

54 infestations were monitored and 115 infestations were treated with herbicides during FY 2015. Total infestation acreage increased in FY 2015 (Figure 1). Acreage increases were due to existing infestations increasing in size as well as the addition of new infestations. Decreases in infestation acreage also occurred and resulted from the removal of infestations due to land disposal actions as well as 8 infestations being reclassified as "Inactive". Active infestations are reclassified inactive when no remaining living plants are observed at/or within close proximity of the infestation for 4 consecutive years.

Figure 1. Acreage trend line of active non-native, invasive plant infestations.



## 2. Forest Resources

- *Reforestation*

### Tree Planting

Table 4 indicates tree-planting activities on four tracts in FY 2015. Tracts were planted with locally-sourced, longleaf pine seedlings. The seedlings were planted by hand in 12-foot wide rows. The areas planted were portions of past sandhill restorations that either failed or did not meet DFCs.

Planting was monitored to ensure the seedlings were planted to District standards and that the seedlings, per acre, were within 10% of the prescribed rate.

Table 4. Reforestation of pine seedlings (December 2014 – January 2015).

Tract	Dominant Natural Communities Planted	Pine Seedlings	Scheduled Seedlings/acre	Acres
Adams	Scrubby Flatwoods & Upland Pine Forest	Containerized Longleaf	750	39
Ruth Springs	Sandhill		750	39
47 Bridge	Sandhill		750	24
Peacock Slough	Sandhill		750	49
			TOTAL	151

- *Timber Harvests*

The District harvests timber resources to promote conditions that more closely resemble natural forests. Seven sales were offered; (Table 5) six harvests were thinnings of pine plantations and one was a salvage operation due to wildfire at the Devils Hammock tract.

The District has initiated the use of “operator select” first thinnings. In these sales the trees are not marked in advance. The logger works under the supervision of the District to implement the sale. This approach, if it proves to be

acceptable, will save money and allow the District to sell timber faster and reduce the acres that do not meet current stocking standards for the natural community faster. This trial approach led to a significant increase in acres harvested from the previous two years.

Timber harvest objectives include:

- Reducing overstory stocking to meet desired levels for the natural community,
- Improving forest health by removing suppressed and diseased trees, and
- Reducing species not native to the natural community, if commercially viable.

Planning, advertising, contract oversight, timber sale security and financial reconciliation are part of this timber sale process.

Table 5. Acres of timber harvest and revenue as percent of reported sources.

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
# Acres Timber Sold	1,071	731	267	1,074	1,096
Total Value as a Percent of Published Florida Market Rate for Pine Products (source: FL. Land Steward Newsletters)	117%	105%	117%	114%	98%

- *Vegetation Management with Herbicides*  
Herbicides are applied to create conditions consistent with the natural community desired future conditions and to help with general land management activities. Two hundred forty-nine (249) acres were chemically treated in 2015. Herbicide applications were done to release planted pine stands from hardwood encroachment facilitate the use of prescribed fire and to control vegetation encroachment around water control structures.
- *Little River Tract Upland Pine Restoration Multi-Year Project*  
This is a joint project with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Wild Turkey Federation. The District received multi-year grant funding to reduce mesic oaks on about 473 acres of upland pine plantation. The first activity in FY 2014 was a timber harvest to reduce pine density and the amount of mesic oaks present on the sandhill community. In FY 2015, 106 acres of hardwood re-sprout were treated with herbicides and 319 acres were prescribed burned.

This area is also being used for the Silviculture Water Yield Project. Soil moisture probes measure water use by various densities and species of trees.

- *Forest Resource Inventory*  
Data was collected on 964 inventory plots in FY 2015. The data from these plots quantify the acres that achieve the community goals, and also provide data for areas that may be improved using timber harvest.

### 3. Rare Species Resources

The District has procedures for identifying and avoiding detrimental impacts to imperiled species on its lands. Rare species are documented on District lands by surveys and opportunistic observations. Species locations and rare species BMP information are maintained within a geodatabase.

To lower the potential for negative impacts on existing species occurrences, District staff consults the rare species GIS layer file and rare species BMPs before planning and conducting management activities. If potential impacts are identified, staff will delineate occurrence areas to avoid or adjust management activities to prevent potential conflicts.

No specific surveys were conducted in FY 2015.

### 4. Cultural and Historical Resources

District lands have been reviewed for cultural and historical resources by a professional archaeologist. One hundred sixty nine (169) known sites were found in the Florida Master Site Files of the Florida Department of State. Archaeological review determined that 23 sites should be classified as significant cultural sites due to the reported description of the site in the master site files.

The District plans to inspect the 23 significant cultural resource sites, while working on other projects in the vicinity, in order to monitor and document any potential impacts by looting or other activities in the past year (Table 6). Two significant sites at the Suwannee Sprayfield tract have been removed from the list, since the tract was disposed to the Suwannee Water and Sewer District. Two sites have no land access and was not been inspected. Inspections are conducted to monitor these resources and identify if any are being negatively impacted beyond the two sites impacted prior to District implementing inspections in 2011.

Table 6. Status of significant cultural resources sites.

<b>Measures</b>	<b>2015</b>
Number of 23 known significant cultural-resources sites inspected	21
Number of 23 known sites damaged since last inspection	0

The District follows “Protocol for Managing Cultural and Historical Resources on Suwannee River Water Management District Lands” to avoid damaging these resources. The most likely areas for cultural resources, based on the known sites, are classified “High Probability Zones” and are included as a GIS layer for planning purposes.

### 5. Aesthetic and Visual Resources

The consideration of the visual or aesthetic resources while managing property is a key component of the land management program. Every aspect from signs and facilities design to managing contractors and the public has visual impacts.

Key management strategies are to review every activity implemented on the land and try to minimize short-term negative perceptions. Strategies included timing of the operation, minimizing debris or litter, utilizing timber that has been harvested, and in some cases, placing signs to explain the activity.

## II. PUBLIC USE

**Goal – to provide opportunities for high quality, compatible resource-based recreation and education programs to meet the public’s needs while protecting water resources.**

District lands provide many resource-based recreational opportunities. Of the 160,203 acres owned by the District, over 97% are open to the public for recreation. Planning for public uses and facilities takes into account the sensitivity of the site, the proximity of similar recreational opportunities, the time and financial requirements to provide the use, and public demand for the particular use. The District’s Public Use Guide lists allowable recreational uses approved by the Governing Board by tract, including uses that require a Special Use Authorization (SUA).

### Recreation Resources

The District has developed facility standards that detail recreational facility, road and trail, sign and kiosk, and fence design, construction and maintenance procedures. These standards ensure that facilities provide a safe, aesthetically pleasing, outdoor environment for the public that can be effectively maintained (Table 7), and minimizes potential impacts to water resources. District staff inspects public-use facilities, and schedules maintenance required to ensure the longevity and continued safe use.

Table 7. Public-use facilities\*

Facility	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
# Trailheads	30	29	30	26	26
# Docks & Boat Ramps	11	11	11	10	10
# Hand & Canoe Launch Sites	19	19	19	27	27
# Picnic Areas	21	14	17	16	16
# Interpretive Sites	10	10	11	9	9
# Restrooms	15	15	18	18	18
# Miles Trails	237	226	242	203	190
# Miles Driving Trails**	325	313	310	310	345

\*Recreation facilities in GIS were reviewed and updated during the recreation guide upgrades on the web site. The review process allows staff to evaluate the facilities for changes or upgrades of use.

**\*\*Driving trails are drivable surfaces owned by the District or other entities that may or may not be maintain by the District.**

*Recreation Maintenance*

- The Steinhatchee River tracts and Devil’s Hammock tract were closed in August 2015 due to flooding and the issuance of special use authorizations for the 47 Bridge tract were suspended in September 2015.
- The Mallory Swamp ATV trail planned reroute has been completed to utilize maintained roads and add an additional trail head near the McCall’s Chapel Road entrance. Implementation will occur in FY 2016.
- Suwannee Bicycle Association continues to make minor adjustments to the bicycle trails in the White Springs area.
- The Florida Trail Association continues to make reroutes. The trail was moved off Foley Timber & Land Property to various road county roads that brought the trail in from the north along of the Mt. Gilead Road (Madison County) thus removing the trail from the Natural Well Branch tract at the Fulford Bridge.

- *Special Use Authorizations*

Members of the public may apply for a Special Use Authorization (SUA) to engage in those recreational opportunities requiring special authorization as listed in the public use guide. Examples include ATV use, night-time access or persons with disabilities. An SUA may also be issued for opportunities not listed in the Public Use Guide; examples include research and data collection, placement of bee hives and nuisance hog removal.

An SUA serves as an agreement between the District and user; it details terms, conditions, liability protection and time frame of the proposed use. The District issues SUAs and reserves the right to refuse anyone an SUA if the proposed use threatens water resources, public safety or other natural resources on District lands.

Table 8. The number and types of Special Use Authorizations issued.

<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Temporary Ingress and Egress</b>	<b>Mallory Swamp ATV Trail</b>	<b>Non-Recreational *</b>	<b>Goose Pasture Camping</b>	<b>Total</b>
423	25	11	15	99	573

\*Non-Recreational SUAs issued during the fiscal year include research and data collection, competitions, hog removal and apiary leases.

- *Hunting and Fishing*

The District’s goal for public hunting is to provide high-quality hunting opportunities. The District meets annually with the Florida Fish and Wildlife

Conservation Commission (FWC) to review opportunities for public hunting on District lands. Public hunting on District lands is offered through management agreements with FWC and the US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. Fishing is allowed on District tracts subject to FWC fishing regulations (Table 9).

Table 9. Hunting and fishing access.

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
# acres open to public hunting	104,945	105,019	105,131	105,016	96,444
# fishing access locations	107	103	101	130	102

In FY 2015 the acreage of available hunting lands was slightly reduced however the District is coordinating with FWC to open additional lands to hunting such as the 695-acre Withlacoochee Quail Farms Tract.

### III. COMMUNICATIONS

#### **Goal – to coordinate with public and private stakeholders in the management of District lands.**

The District encourages participation from outside agencies, organizations and private citizens when developing management plans for the lands under its stewardship. However, District lands and facilities and other communication opportunities likely provide greater visibility of land management activities to the general public. Public inquiries are addressed by visiting the District or contacting District staff by phone, mail, email, or the website.

- *District Land Management Plan*  
The DLMP articulates the Governing Board goals and objectives that guide the management of all fee lands held by the District. The Board approved the DLMP in April 2011.

No revisions were made to the DLMP in FY 2015.

- *Land Management Review Team*  
To ensure that the District is meeting its land management goals, the Excellence in Land Management Program (ELM) was established. This program quantifies the input of the Land Management Review Team (LMRT) to determine whether land management is meeting the objectives of the DLMP. Statutorily, the LMRT must evaluate:
  - 1) Whether District lands are being managed for the purposes for which they were acquired, and



- 2) If the management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the management plan.

District staff conducted a Land Management Review Team meeting and tour in FY 2015. The reviews focused on activities that were conducted in FY 2014. Areas of review included water resources, natural resource management, public use and facilities on representative areas. The LMRT was asked to score whether the District was achieving its objectives using the following scores:

- 0 – not meeting objectives;
- 1 – meeting objectives; and
- 2 – exceeding objectives.

The review of District managed land was in the Aucilla, Econfina and Wacissa River basins. This area encompasses 24,190 acres of fee lands and 11,962 acres of Conservation Easement lands. This inspection was held on April 22, 2015.

Nine objectives of the DLMP were scored during the inspection ranging from a low score of 1.28 for rare species resources to a high score of 1.86 for public use. Water resource objectives were scored 1.47. The overall average score was 1.53 signifying that the management activities were both meeting and exceeding the Governing Board's objectives. The overall average score of 1.53 was slightly higher than last year's LMRT.

The scores for "managed for purposes acquired" were higher (1.85 compared to 1.65) than last year. The score for "in accordance with Management Plan" was also slightly higher (1.68 compared to 1.58) than last year. Questions and responses to the statutory component of this review are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Questionnaire responses from the District's LMRT meeting.

<b>Question 1</b> # of Responses	<b>Are District lands being managed in a manner consistent with the purpose for which they were acquired, including public access?</b>
1	SRWMD is not in compliance.
4	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
16	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.
<b>Question 2</b> # of Responses	<b>Does SRWMD land management implement the goals identified in the District Land Management Plan?</b>
0	SRWMD is not in compliance.
8	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
12	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.

- *Communication Initiatives*

- The District “Recreation Guide” revision and update was completed in the summer 2015. The web site has both static and dynamic maps.
  - Land Management staff provides images and text for District’s social media outreach efforts including Facebook and Twitter.
  - Staff is using the “Important Notices” feature on the District web page to provide information to the public regarding flooding and tract closures, and management activities that may affect public use.
  - Staff has begun to update and revise kiosk panels on District lands to be transparent with the recreation guide on the web.
- *Regional Resource Group Participation*  
District staff participates in regional groups in order to understand issues that affect District lands and their management, and also to provide input to other managers of recreation and natural resources regarding water resource issues.
    - North Florida Prescribed Fire Council
    - San Pedro Bay Landowners Association
    - FWC - Invasive Plant Management Section’s Weed Control Project
    - USFS/Florida Trail Association Florida National Scenic Trail
    - Suwannee Bicycle Association
    - UF Conserved Forest Ecosystem: Outreach and Research Cooperative
    - FWC Wildlife Management Areas and Management Plan
    - Fire Adapted Communities, Baker County

#### **IV. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY**

**Goal – to protect resources and manage District lands in an efficient manner within the District’s annual budget.**

District staff minimizes the costs associated with land management by contracting with the private sector, partnering with other land management agencies and organizations, and submitting proposals for land management grant funding.

- *Facility Construction and Maintenance*  
In FY 2014 the District reduced road coverage, revised management practices and added a progressive review and approval process for general road maintenance. The culmination of this effort was a new general road maintenance plan that centers on a three year rotation for all roads deemed necessary for public access. Road maintenance completed in FY 2015 is the first year of the three year rotation. The District completed approximately 96.4 miles of general road maintenance at Mallory Swamp, Steinhatchee Springs, Steinhatchee Falls, Mt. Gilead, Little River, Cabbage Grove, Goose Pasture, and Jones Mill Creek tracts.

*Boundary Line Marking and Painting*

The District has a five year rotation plan to mark and paint District land boundaries. The District has approximately 1,000 miles of boundary lines. One hundred forty-two (142) miles was marked or painted.

- *Cooperative Management Agreements*

The District enters into cooperative management agreements and/or leases with government agencies to reduce the cost of management to the District (Table 11), while providing similar management and protection and public access.

Table 11 Agencies managing District lands.

<b>Managing Agency</b>	<b>Tracts</b>	<b>Acres</b>
<i>No Cost Management Agreements</i>		
Alachua County	1	120
Columbia County	2	139
Department of Environmental Protection	9	1,980
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	2	869
Gilchrist County	1	507
Hamilton County	3	16
Jefferson County	1	22
Levy County	1	4,214
University of Florida	2	738
US Fish and Wildlife Service	4	1,655
No Cost Management Total Acres:		10,260
<i>Shared Revenue Agreements</i>		
Florida Forest Service	13	12,963
Shared Revenue Total Acres		12,963
<b>Total All</b>		<b>23,223</b>

The Twin Rivers State Forest is managed by the Florida Forest Service (FFS). In FY 2015, there were state expenses of \$133,471, which were reimbursed by the District, and there were no private contracts.

The District has a Cooperative Management Agreement with FFS for lands not under lease at Twin Rivers. This agreement is used primarily to allow FFS to manage and conduct fire-line installation and prescribe fires on District lands. This agreement reduces District costs since the FFS rate for prescribed burning is less than the District's private contractor's rates. During FY 2015, 304 acres were burned under this agreement. Approximately \$3,344 was saved by utilizing FFS for these services.

Public hunting is provided on 104,945 acres of District-owned lands in cooperation with FWC and USFWS. These agencies manage hunting dates and limits and provide law enforcement at no cost to the District. No fees for hunting are charged by the District.

The District has agreements with private and public entities to provide trail maintenance for 70% of the bike, horse and multi-use trails on District lands. These trails are maintained at no cost to the District and available for use by the general public.

- *Grant Applications and Awards*

The District pursues grants to help reduce the cost of natural community management, Table 12:

- The Wild Turkey Cost-Share Program Grant, administered by FWC and National Wild Turkey Federation, for the 5-year Little River tract upland restoration is in its second year. One hundred six (106) acres were herbicide to limit hardwood sprouting and prepare for longleaf pine reforestation. Three hundred nineteen (319) acres were prescribed burned successfully in FY 2015. Burn results were improved as a result of the reduced mesic oak component from phase 1. Total maximum grant funds requested for reimbursement of expenses from the program were \$94,500.
- The District was awarded \$20,000 by a joint National Wild Turkey Federation and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Cost-Share Program. This grant is intended to help fund FY 2016 aerial burning operations on approximately 3,000 acres on the Mallory Swamp WMA
- The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Invasive Plant Management Section paid contractors approximately \$20,000 to treat 64 acres of invasive plant infestations on the District owned Falmouth Spring and Branford Bend tracts.

- *Revenues and Expenditures*

The District has opportunities to generate revenues while implementing its natural resource management activities. Timber sales generate the vast majority of revenue from land management activities, Table 12.

In FY 2015, the District sold an estimated 50,000 tons of pine timber in 7 sales on 1,071 acres. These sales were thinnings of pine plantations and a salvage operation due to wildfire. Total gross revenues are estimated (since all sales have not been completed as of October 1, 2015) to be \$1,023,000.

Expenditures in the land management program are divided into categories for budgeting as follows, Table 13:

- Natural Resource Management – includes water resource projects, reforestation, timber sales, and protected species management.

- Invasive Plant Management - Includes the costs associated with invasive plant treatments including hiring private contractors and staff time/field supplies needed to conduct in-house treatments.
- Prescribed Fire – includes FFS and private contractor costs for prescribed burning and fire-line establishment and maintenance.
- Public Use – includes expenses for maintaining site-based and dispersed recreation activities, developing new sites, signs, maps, brochures, and sanitation.
- Facility Management – includes costs for maintaining roads, hydrologic structures, boundaries and gates.
- Administration and Planning - includes expenses for planning, GIS, training, real-estate activities, management plans and reviews, interagency coordination and Payment in Lieu of Taxes.

Table 12. Land resources revenues.

<b>Category</b>	<b>FY 2015</b>
Timber	\$637,763
Land Use	\$250
FWC	\$5,100
State Appropriation (Operations)	\$454,065
General Fund/Reserves.	\$393,111
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,490,289</b>

Table 13. Land resources expenditures.

<b>Category</b>	<b>FY 2015</b>
Natural Resource Mgt.	\$179,453
Exotic Invasive Mgt.	\$25,607
Prescribed Fire	\$317,071
Public Use	\$225,763
Facility Mgt.	\$214,998
Administration and Planning*	\$527,397
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,490,289</b>

\*Includes Payments in Lieu of Taxes, inspecting and reporting on Conservation Easements on 126,482 acres, and non-native invasive plant control monitoring

- *Payments in Lieu of Taxes*  
When the District purchases lands in fee simple (all ownership rights), the lands are taken off the county ad valorem tax roll. The Legislature established a

payment in lieu of taxes program in 1992 to reimburse local governments for the loss of revenue. To qualify for this program, the county must have a population of less than 150,000. Payments were made to counties in the amount of \$311,971.

- *Surplus Lands*  
Disposing of lands that are not needed for water-resource protection allows the District to redirect these funds to higher value, water-resource lands.

Table 14. Surplus lands sold or conveyed.

<b>Closing Date</b>	<b>Tract</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Transaction</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Price</b>
10/31/2014	Cuba Bay	Madison	Exchange - Out	22	\$34,650
10/31/2014	Chitty Bend West	Madison	Exchange - Out	121	\$254,100
10/31/2014	Chitty Bend East	Hamilton	Exchange - Out	20	\$48,000
10/31/2014	Jennings Bluff	Hamilton	Exchange - Out	23.35	\$56,971
10/31/2014	Hunter Creek Parcel 1	Hamilton	Exchange - Out	36	\$56,110
10/31/2014	Hunter Creek Parcel 2	Hamilton	Exchange - Out	60	\$90,000
10/31/2014	Hunter Creek Parcel 3	Hamilton	Exchange - Out	23	\$36,800
10/31/2014	Blue Sink West	Suwannee	Exchange - Out	39	\$92,200
11/18/2014	Lake City Wellfield	Columbia	Conveyed to Municipality	16.25	\$0
11/26/2014	Perry Sprayfield	Taylor	Conveyed to Municipality	248.5	\$0
6/23/2015	Holly Point Lot 23	Hamilton	Exchange - Out	0.86	\$15,000
<b>Conveyed or Exchanged</b>				<b>610</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Sold</b>				<b>0</b>	<b>\$0</b>

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## APPENDIX A

### SRWMD STATUTORY SUMMARY

Checked November 17, 2015

#### Land Acquisition and Management

##### Ch. 373.139(2) Acquisition of real property.

- “Flood control
- Water storage
- Water management
- Conservation and protection of water resources
- Aquifer recharge
- Water resource and water supply development
- Preservation of wetlands, streams and lakes.”

##### Ch. 373.1391 Management of real property.

- (1a) “Managed and maintained, to the extent practicable, in such a way as to ensure a balance between public access, general public recreational purposes, and the restoration of their natural state and condition. Except when prohibited by a covenant or condition in s. 373.056(2), lands owned, managed, and controlled by the district may be used for multiple purposes including, but not limited to, agriculture, silviculture, and water supply, as well as boating and other recreational uses.”
- (b) “Whenever practicable, such lands shall be open to the general public for recreational uses. General public recreational purposes shall include, but not be limited to, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, swimming, camping, hiking, canoeing, boating, diving, birding, sailing, jogging, and other related outdoor activities to the maximum extent possible considering the environmental sensitivity and suitability of those lands. These public lands shall be evaluated for their resource value for the purpose of establishing which parcels, in whole or in part, annually or seasonally, would be conducive to general public recreational purposes. Such findings shall be included in management plans which are developed for such public lands.”
- (5) “The following additional uses of lands acquired pursuant to the Florida Forever program and other state-funded land purchase program shall be authorized, upon a finding by the governing board, if they meet the criteria specified in (a) – (e): water resource development projects, water supply development projects, stormwater management projects, linear facilities, and sustainable agriculture and forestry. Such additional uses are authorized where:
- (a) Not inconsistent with the management plan for such lands;
  - (b) Compatible with the ecosystem and resource values of such lands;
  - (c) The proposed use is appropriately located on such lands and where due consideration is given to the use of other available lands;



- (d) The using entity reasonably compensates the titleholder for such use based upon an appropriate measure of value; and
- (e) The use is consistent with the public interest.”

### 373.591 Management review teams.

(1) To determine whether conservation, preservation, and recreation lands titled in the names of the water management districts are being managed for the purposes for which they were acquired and in accordance with land management objectives, the water management districts shall establish land management review teams to conduct periodic management reviews. The land management review teams shall be composed of the following members:

- (a) One individual from the county or local community in which the parcel is located.
- (b) One employee of the water management district.
- (c) A private land manager mutually agreeable to the governmental agency representatives.
- (d) A member of the local soil and water conservation district board of supervisors.
- (e) One individual from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- (f) One individual from the Department of Environmental Protection.
- (g) One individual representing a conservation organization.
- (h) One individual from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Florida Forest Service.

(2) The management review team shall use the criteria provided in s. 259.036 in conducting its reviews.

(3) In determining which lands shall be reviewed in any given year, the water management district may prioritize the properties to be reviewed.

(4) If the land management review team finds that the lands reviewed are not being managed in accordance with their management plan, prepared in a manner and form prescribed by the governing board of the district and otherwise meeting the timber resource management requirements of s. 253.036, the land managing agency shall provide a written explanation to the management review team.

(5) Each water management district shall, by October 1 of each year, provide its governing board with a report indicating which properties have been reviewed and the review team's findings.

### Ch. 259.036 Management review teams.

(3) “In conducting a review, the land management review team shall evaluate the extent to which the existing management plan provides sufficient protection to threatened or endangered species, unique or important natural or physical features, geologic or hydrologic functions or archaeological features. The review shall also evaluate the extent to which the land is being managed for the purposes for which it was acquired and the degree to which actual management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the adopted management plan.”

## Ch. 253.036 Forest management.

“All land management plans described in s.253.034(5) which are prepared for parcels larger than 1,000 acres shall contain an analysis of the multiple-use potential of the parcel, which analysis shall include the potential of the parcel to generate revenues to enhance the management of the parcel. The lead agency shall prepare the analysis, which shall contain a component or section prepared by a qualified forester which assesses the feasibility of managing timber resources on the parcel for resource conservation and revenue generation purposes through a stewardship ethic that embraces sustainable forest management practices if the lead management agency determines that the timber resource management is not in conflict with the primary management objectives of the parcel.”...”All additional revenues generated through multiple-use management or compatible secondary use management shall be returned to the lead agency responsible for such management and shall be used to pay for management activities on all conservation, preservation and recreation lands under the agency’s jurisdiction. In addition, such revenue shall be segregated in an agency trust fund and shall remain available to the agency in subsequent fiscal years to support land management appropriations.”



November 2015

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