

# Suwannee River Water Management District

January 2018

## 2017 Land Management Report

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WATER FOR NATURE  
WATER FOR PEOPLE



**2017 Land Management Report**  
***Suwannee River Water Management District***

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**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The District does not discriminate upon the basis of any individual’s disability status. This nondiscrimination policy involves every aspect of the District’s functions including one’s access to, participation, employment, or treatment in its programs or activities. Anyone requiring reasonable accommodation as provided for in the Americans with Disabilities Act should contact the District at 386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (Florida only). The District’s fax number is 386.362.1056.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2017 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 (District). The report is used by the District during the Land Management Review Team annual review of District lands which is required by Section 373.591, Florida Statute (F.S.). 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 participate 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 160,158 acres in addition to approximately 126,825 acres of conservation easements (3.3% and 2.6% of the District's land area, respectively) as of October 1, 2017.

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 resource 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
- Fiscal Responsibility

The purpose of this land management report is to document activities implemented in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 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 BMPs.
- 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 2017 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**

- *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 continue through 2019.
- *Woods Ferry Hydrologic Restoration Project*  
The District replaced eleven damaged or destroyed culverts on the Woods Ferry Tract to remedy erosion problems along an administrative road and reconnect hydrological flow between existing wetlands.
- *Monitoring Well Improvement Plan*  
In 2014, the divisions of Water Supply and Water Resources identified groundwater monitoring data gaps areas throughout the District and developed a monitoring well



network improvement plan to close the gaps. This plan included the installation of 25 new monitoring wells. Closing these gaps is essential for groundwater modeling improvements and long-term trend monitoring assessments. Land Management staff continues to assist and support Water Supply and Water Resources divisions in the installation of monitoring wells. It is expected the Improvement Plan will be completed in FY 2018.

- **Stalons Camp Road Hydrologic Facilities Project**  
The District partnered with Four Rivers Land & Timber Company LLC (Four Rivers) to complete a hydrologic facility improvement project on a co-owned road in the Steinhatchee Springs tract. Sections of the road were routinely degraded and damaged by significant storm events sending sediment down an unnamed stream. To facilitate the project the District studied the drainage basin and determined what facilities were needed to manage the stormwater. Four Rivers purchased and delivered all soft rock material and three culverts (two 60 inch culverts and one 38-inch culvert). The District provided the contractor and all hard rock for the project.
- ***Public Use Area Erosion Control Project***  
Majority of FY 2017 the District was in discussions with the University of Florida Conserved Forest Ecosystems Outreach and Research Program to form a project that would improve possible erosion problems at public use areas along the Steinhatchee River. The discussions lead to the identification of five locations that could be improved. The District contracted with a design and construction firm to improve four of river access locations along the river. In FY 2017, the District worked with the firm to plan and design of facilities at the river access locations. During FY 2018 the District will implement the plan that will resolute in improving or maintaining existing public access while reduce the potential for erosion.

#### Water Projects in Planning and Design

- **Pot Springs Environmental Restoration and Enhancement Project**  
In 1997-98, the District developed a small parking area and boardwalk with stairs that provided access to the spring. The site has been significantly impacted by bank erosion due to public use and flood events. In 2017, Springs funding was approved to restore the site. Improvements will consist of bank stabilization, access to the springs and improvements to limit erosion from uplands. Funding for this project will come from Florida Department of Environment Protection (FDEP) through the Pot Springs Restoration contract.

### **Natural Community Resources**

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

The District plans and implements land management operations to maintain and enhance natural resources. The District uses existing DFC standards as a guide to plan, implement and track natural community management/restoration activities. These DFCs detail plant community structure, representative plant species, average hydrologic regime, and the frequency of fire that 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 Community Management 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 59,955 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 Fire Return Interval (FRI) 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 FRI (Table 1).

Table 2 provides natural community acreage information for all non-targeted and targeted cores 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

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
<b>% Targeted Core Areas within Fire Return Interval</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>66%</b>
Acres Planned	13,000	12,000	12,750	11,800	12,000
Acres Burned	6,398	12,528	8,919	13,581	12,277
Acres Burned That Met Objective	5,901	12,289	8,088	12,996	11,843
Wildfire Acres	29	54	25	0	11

Table 2. Acres of fire maintained natural communities by classification (FY 2017).

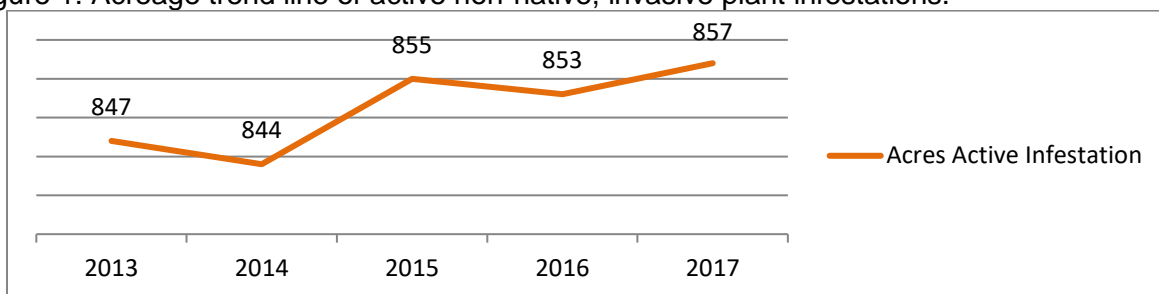
<b>SRWMD Fire Maintained Communities</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>% of total</b>
<i>Total Fire Maintained Natural Communities</i>	<b>84,058</b>	
Targeted Communities	59,955	71
Non-Targeted Communities	24,103	29
<i>Total Targeted Core Areas</i>	<b>49,321</b>	
Acres in FRI* (end of 2017)	25,044	51
Acres out of FRI (end of 2017)	24,277	49
<i>Total Acres Out of FRI</i>	<b>24,277</b>	
Acres where pine density is too thick or stand age is too young to safely burn**	11,040	45
Acres within Mallory Swamp Wildlife Management Area	4,545	19
Remaining Acreage	8,692	36

\*FRI is Fire Return Interval

\*\*Stand age only applies to slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*)

*Non-native, Invasive Plant Control:* (82) infestations were monitored and 67 infestations were treated with herbicides during FY 2017. Total infestation acreage increased during FY 2017 (Figure 1). Increases resulted from the addition of new infestations and the increased size of some existing infestations. Seven infestations were reclassified from active to inactive. Active infestations are reclassified as inactive when no remaining living plants are observed at/or within close proximity to the infestation for four consecutive years.

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



- *Vegetation Management (Mechanical)*  
Mechanical treatments such as whole tree chipping, roller chopping, and woods mowing are used as tools to help meet natural community DFC objectives and prepare sites for reforestation. In FY 2017 the following mechanical treatments were implemented:
  - I. Approximately 1,740 acres were roller chopped on the Mallory Swamp tract in Lafayette County to help reduce fuel loading and facilitate the use of prescribed fire. A \$144,000 grant was received from Florida Forest Service to help fund this work.
  - II. Approximately 93 miles of ditch edges were mowed on the Mallory Swamp tract to help reduce fuel loading and facilitate the use of prescribed fire by helping to expand the area used for installing containment lines.
- *Vegetation Management (Chemical)*  
The application of herbicides to control vegetation is also a tool used to help meet natural community DFC objectives and prepare sites for reforestation. In FY 2017, the following herbicide treatments were implemented:
  - I. Approximately 41 miles of ditch edges were treated with herbicides on the Mallory Swamp tract to help reduce fuel loading and facilitate the use of prescribed fire by helping to expand the area used for installing containment lines. This was a follow-up treatment to the ditch mowing that occurred during FY 2017.

#### Active Natural Community Restoration Projects:

- *Mattair Springs Restoration Project*  
The Mattair Springs Restoration Project is a joint project with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to help restore approximately 680 acres of sandhill natural communities on the Mattair Springs tract in Suwannee County. In FY 2017, approximately 250 acres were whole tree chipped to reduce hardwood encroachment and 88 acres were treated with herbicides to control hardwood resprouts. The District

received \$10,172 from USFWS to help fund the herbicide applications. This project is scheduled for completion fall 2018.

- Swift Creek Restoration Project:*  
 The Swift Creek Restoration Project is a joint project with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help restore approximately 103 acres of mesic and wet flatwoods natural communities on the Swift Creek tract in Hamilton County. During FY 2017, 103 acres were roller chopped, burned, and treated with herbicides to control hardwood vegetation. The District received \$9,522 from USFWS to help fund the herbicide application. This work was done in preparation for longleaf pine reforestation that will occur in FY 2018. This project is scheduled for completion in the winter of FY 2018.

**2. Forest Resources**

- Timber Harvests*  
 The District harvests timber resources to promote conditions that more closely resemble natural forests. Nine sales were offered; (Table 3) six harvests were thinning's of pine plantations, two harvests were salvages with thinnings due to fire damage, and one was a salvage operation due to Southern Pine Beetle. There were also two small bark beetle salvage operations added on to existing sale contracts.

The District 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 saves money and allows the District to sell timber faster and reduce the acres that do not meet current stocking standards for the natural community more quickly. This approach is increasing the number of first thinnings sold in a fiscal year.

Timber harvest objectives include:

- o Reducing over story stocking to meet desired levels for the natural community,
  - o Improving forest health by removing suppressed and diseased trees, and
  - o 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 3. Acres of timber harvest and revenue as percent of reported sources.

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
# Acres Timber Sold	1,472	1,214	1,071	731	267
Total Value as a Percent of Published Florida Market Rate for Pine Products (source: FL. Land Steward Newsletters)	115%	117%	114%	105%	117%

- Forest Resource Inventory*  
 Data was collected on 166 inventory plots during FY 2017. The data from these plots can be used to quantify the acres that have achieved their natural community goals and provide data for areas that could be improved by a timber harvest.

### 3. Rare Species Resources

The District has in place 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 during FY 2017.

### 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 4). Two sites have no land access and was not 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 during 2011.

Table 4. Status of significant cultural resources sites.

<b>Measures</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>
Number of 23 known significant cultural-resources sites inspected	12	7
Number of 23 known damaged sites inspected	6	1

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 160,158 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).

Conservation lands not opened to the public are tracts located in gated communities or access is otherwise restricted rendering them closed to the public. Also closed to the public are District fee-title lands that were purchased to develop infrastructure for water resource development projects. These tracts may not be open to the public for recreational activities due to the purpose for which the properties were purchased however public use may be allowed once the project is completed and only after a plan is made on the suitability of public use.

### 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 5), and minimizes potential impacts to water resources. District staff inspects public-use facilities, and schedules maintenance required to ensure longevity and continued safe use.

Table 5. Public-use facilities\*

Facility	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
# Trailheads	31	31	30	29	30	26	26
# Docks & Boat Ramps	11	11	11	11	11	10	10
# Hand & Canoe Launch Sites	19	19	19	19	19	27	27
# Picnic Areas	22	22	21	14	17	16	16
# Interpretive Sites	9	9	10	10	11	9	9
# Restrooms	15	15	15	15	18	18	18
# Miles Trails	232	232	237	226	242	203	190
# Miles Driving Trails**	332	332	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*

- Land management staff continues to work with IT staff to upgrade and improve operational inspections and data collecting. Using iPads and ESRI online applications land management staff has found these innovations to be a more efficient and effective process than traditional methods.

- The District improved the entrance road and constructed two parking areas and a kiosk on the Withlacoochee Quail Farms tract. The tract can now be accessed without a SUA and is available for public hunting.
- The District improved the seven-mile spine road on the Bay Creek tract. The tract can now be accessed without a SUA and is available for public hunting.
- District contractors replace forty-three (43) cable gates with farm gates on the Steinhatchee Springs, Steinhatchee Falls, Steinhatchee Rise, and RO Ranch tracts.
- All District lands in were closed on September 6, 2017 due to the impending landfall of Hurricane Irma and all SUAs were suspended. All District tracts were re-opened for public use by the end of November 2017. District roads had trees down on them and some tracts on the Upper Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers were closed due to river flooding.
- 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 and trail adjustments to enhance the trail user experience.

- *Special Use Authorizations*

Members of the public may apply for a SUA to engage in those recreational opportunities requiring special authorization as listed in the public use guide. Examples include all-terrain vehicle (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, adventure races, 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 (Table 6). 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 6. The number and types of Special Use Authorizations issued.

Recreation	Temporary Ingress and Egress	Mallory Swamp ATV Trail	Non-Recreational*	Goose Pasture Camping	Total
311	66	33	15	145	570

\*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 7).



In FY 2017 the District and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) opened the following tracts to public hunting: Withlacoochee Quail Farms (696 acres), Bay Creek (2,125 acres) and Westwood West (504 acres).

Table 7. Hunting and fishing access.

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
# acres open to public hunting	108,292	104,945	104,945	105,019	105,131	105,016	96,444
# fishing access locations	109	109	107	103	101	130	102

### 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 during FY 2017. The District intends to revise and update the DLMP during FR 2018.

- Land Management Review Team (LMRT)*  
 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 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 LMRT meeting and tour on April 5, 2017. The reviews focused on activities that were conducted during FY 2016. 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 was conducted in the Upper Suwannee River basin. This area encompasses 20,857 acres of fee lands and 4,227 acres of Conservation Easement lands.

Nine objectives of the DLMP were scored during the inspection ranging from a low score of 1.40 for aesthetics and visual resources to a high score of 1.87 for public use. Water resource objectives were scored 1.43. The overall average score was 1.58 signifying that the management activities were both meeting and exceeding the Governing Board's objectives. The overall average score of 1.58 was slightly higher than last year's LMRT. The scores for "managed for purposes acquired" were higher (1.68 compared to 2.0) than last year. The score for "in accordance with Management Plan" was also slightly higher (1.80 compared to 1.79) than last year. Questions and responses to the statutory component of this review are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Questionnaire responses from the District's LMRT meeting.

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

*Note: Total scores may differ due to non-response on questionnaire.*

- *Communication Initiatives*
  - Land management staff provided the communications staff with current status and information of District lands during Hurricane Irma.
  - 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 completed five new kiosk panels.
  - Staff updated and reprinted the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail Boat Ramp & Canoe Launch Map.
- *Regional Resource Group Participation*

District staff participates in regional groups in order to understand issues that affect District lands and their management, and 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. In FY 2017, the District completed approximately 99 miles of general road maintenance at Mallory Swamp, Alapahoochee, Woods Ferry, White Springs, Stephen Foster State Park, Steinhatchee Springs, Suwannee Springs, Linville, Blue Sink, Mattair Springs, Holton Creek, Swift Creek, Peacock Slough, Mt. Gilead and Lamont tracts.
- FWC provided the District approximately 2,907 tons of crushed limerock for road repairs for Mallory Swamp and Holton Creek tracts during FY 2016. The District fully utilized the material during FY 2017.
- FWC also contracted with a firm to completed \$15,775 (approximately 14.5 miles) of road and hydrological maintenance work in Mallory Swamp and Steinhatchee Springs tracts. The District managed the efforts of the contractor and supplied 1,837 tons of material. The success of this mission greatly enhanced the overall achievement of the hydrological and road maintenance program for FY 2017.
- *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-six (146) miles were 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 9), while providing similar management and protection and public access.

Table 9 Agencies managing District lands.

<b>Managing Agency</b>	<b>Tracts</b>	<b>Acres</b>
<i>No Cost Management Agreements</i>		
Alachua County	2	222
City of Lake City	1	27
City of Newberry	1	1
City of White Springs	1	7
Columbia County	2	139
Department of Environmental Protection	9	1,980
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	2	862
Florida National Guard	2	2,678
Gilchrist County	1	513
Hamilton County	3	17
Jefferson County	1	22
Levy County	1	4,274
Suwannee County	2	11
University of Florida	2	738
US Fish and Wildlife Service	5	1,635
No Cost Management Total Acres:		13,126
<i>Shared Revenue Agreements</i>		
Florida Forest Service	13	12,444
Shared Revenue Total Acres		12,444
<b>Total All</b>		<b>25,570</b>

Under a lease agreement the Florida Forest Service (FFS) manages approximately 12,444 acres of District lands as part of the Twin Rivers State Forest. As part of the lease, the District has agreed to reimburse the State for expenses each year. In FY 2017, there were a total of \$162,701 State expenses, which were reimbursed by the District.

Additionally, the District has a cooperative management agreement with FFS for lands not under lease at Twin Rivers State Forest. 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 2017, 561 acres were burned under this agreement. Approximately \$5,610 was saved by utilizing FFS for these services.

Public hunting is provided on 108,292 acres (68%) 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 162 miles (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*

In FY 2017, the District received several sources of grant funding to help reduce the cost of natural community management work listed in Table 10.

Florida Forest Service Prescribed Fire Enhancement Program:

- The District received \$142,205.25 to conduct roller chopping work on approximately 1,740 acres on the Mallory Swamp tract in Lafayette County. This work was done to help reduce fuel loads and facilitate the use of prescribed fire.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partner’s for Fish and Wildlife Program:

- The District received \$10,172.52 for herbicide application work on the Mattair Springs tract in Suwannee County. This work was done in association with a sandhill natural community restoration project on this site. Herbicide was applied on approximately 88 acres to control hardwood re-sprouts and help facilitate the use of prescribed fire.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partner’s for Fish and Wildlife Program:

- The District received \$9,522.35 for herbicide application work on the Swift Creek tract in Hamilton County. This work was done in association with a mesic/wet flatwood natural community restoration project on this site. Herbicide was applied on approximately 103 acres to control hardwood re-sprouts and prepare the site for longleaf pine reforestation during the winter months of 2017 and 2018.

- *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 10.

Table 10. Land resources revenues.

<b>Category</b>	<b>FY 2017</b>
Timber	\$1,206,496
Land Use (Apiary Leases)	\$550
Grants	\$161,900
State Appropriation (Operations)	\$1,777,210
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,146,156</b>

In FY 2017, the District sold an estimated 63,500 tons of pine timber in 9 sales on 1,472 acres. These sales were thinning’s of pine plantations and salvage operations due to bark beetle infestations. Total gross revenues are estimated (since all sales have not been completed as of October 1, 2017) to be \$1,315,000.

Expenditures in the land management program are divided into categories for budgeting as follows, Table 11:

- 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 and Equipment 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 11. Land resources expenditures.

<b>Category</b>	<b>FY 2017</b>
Natural Resource Management	\$423,403
Exotic Invasive Management	\$15,282
Prescribed Fire	\$328,992
Public Use	\$162,701
Facility & Equip. Management.	\$226,405
Administration and Planning*	\$119,343
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,276,126</b>

\*Does not include Payments in Lieu of Taxes

- *Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)*  
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 \$357,978.64. The State appropriated the funds for PILT in FY17.
- *Surplus Lands*  
Disposing of lands that are not needed for water-resource protection allows the District to redirect funds to higher value, water-resource lands or reduce land management costs. The surplus lands indicated in Table 12 were conveyed to municipalities at no cost.

Table 12. Surplus lands sold or conveyed.

Surplus Parcels	Acres	County	Disposition Date	Transaction	Proceeds
Greenville Sprayfield	151	Madison	05/05/2017	Conveyance to Town of Greenville	\$0.00
Horseshoe Beach Wellfield	100.22	Dixie	07/11/2017	Conveyance to the Town of Horseshoe Beach	\$0.00
Cross City Sprayfield	147	Dixie	07/11/2017	Conveyance to the Dixie County School District	\$0.00
City of Perry Sprayfield	248.5	Taylor	07/18/2017	Conveyance to Taylor County	\$0.00

**APPENDIX A****SRWMD STATUTORY SUMMARY**

Checked December 2017

**Land Acquisition and Management****Section 373.139(2) F.S. 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.”

**Section 373.1391 F.S. 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) F.S., 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.”



Section 373.591 F.S., 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 F.S., 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.

Section 259.036 F.S., 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."

Section 253.036 F.S., Forest Management.

"All land management plans described in s.253.034(5) F.S., 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."



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