



# SUWANNEE RIVER

## WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

January 2024

# FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

# LAND MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT



**Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Land Management Annual Report**  
***Suwannee River Water Management District***

**Governing Board**

Virginia H. Johns, Chair  
Richard Schwab, Vice Chair  
Charles Keith, Secretary/Treasurer  
William Lloyd  
Larry Sessions  
Harry Smith  
Larry Thompson

**Executive Director**

Hugh Thomas

**CONTENTS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION ..... 1

GOALS OF THE DISTRICT LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN ..... 2

REPORT OF LAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES..... 5

I. RESOURCE PROTECTION ..... 5

II. PUBLIC USE.....14

III. COMMUNICATIONS.....19

IV. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY .....22

APPENDIX A: SRWMD STATUTORY SUMMARY .....27

**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 Fiscal Year 2022-2023 (FY 2023) 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) during the fiscal year. The report is used by the District during the Land Management Review Team (LMRT) annual review of District lands, which is required by section 373.591, Florida Statutes (F.S.). The report summarizes objectives of the approved Fiscal Year (FY) 2017-2018, District Land Management Plan (DLMP) 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 established land management objectives.

The report illustrates 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, historical resources, and aesthetic and visual resources. It also 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's 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 162,030 acres in addition to approximately 127,688 acres of conservation easements (3.3% and 2.6% of the District's land area, respectively) as of November 3, 2023.

District management of these lands provides water resource benefits including:

- Preserving floodplain areas to maintain storage capacity, attenuate floodwaters, prevent flood-related injury and damage, and prevent inappropriate development.
- Preventing groundwater contamination by maintaining low-intensity land uses within the floodplain and high recharge areas.
- Preserving and/or restoring spring areas to improve surface and groundwater.
- Preserving and/or restoring natural communities throughout the area to support or enhance populations of native species.
- Preserving aquatic buffer zones from high impact uses that have a high potential to degrade surface water quality.
- Supporting water resource development initiatives.

The majority of District lands are considered conservation lands, and most are located along river corridors, streams, headwaters, and recharge areas. The District has also purchased real property for specific water resource projects such as wellfields, flood storage, water management, aquifer recharge, water resource development, water supply development, and preservation. These project lands are managed for specific purposes as identified in the acquisition.

Lands titled to the District are managed under a multiple-use policy that emphasizes water resource protection, maintenance, and restoration of the land's natural state and condition, and

provides for public access and recreation. Planning land management activities and uses at the ownership level allows for efficient and effective implementation of Governing Board priorities and achievement of goals. The following four goals are outlined in the DLMP:

- Resource Protection
- Public Use
- Communications
- Fiscal Responsibility

To ensure the District is meeting its four land management goals, the Excellence in Land Management Program (ELM) was established in 2004. This program uses quantifiable data to measure and track qualitative goals. ELM is used in conjunction with the statutorily required annual LMRT evaluation. LMRT participants use the ELM scorecard to determine whether land management is meeting the goals of the DLMP by scoring the strategies used to achieve those goals.

Additionally, LMRT participants evaluate if the District is achieving its statutory requirements (section 259.036, F.S.) by scoring the following questions, the LMRT must evaluate:

- Are District lands being managed in a manner consistent with the purpose for which they were acquired, including public access?
- Are District land managers implementing the DLMP?

## **GOALS OF THE DISTRICT LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **Goal 1: Resource Protection**

**Objectives** - ensure District lands are managed for natural resource protection and maintain/restore lands using natural community Desired Future Condition (DFC) guidelines when practical and as referenced in Appendix A of the DLMP.

#### Water Resource Strategies

- 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 DFC where possible.
- Maintain water management structures to achieve their intended function.
- Develop and maintain water resource projects on the lands to improve water quality and enhance water supply.

#### Soils, Topography, Ground Cover, and Natural Community Strategies

- Minimize soil degradation (e.g., erosion, compaction).
- Manage and/or restore historic natural communities for a given site to DFC standards to the extent practical.
- 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 supplementing current native ground covers with local stock were needed to achieve ecosystem functions.

- Update and maintain current reference data.

#### Forest Resource Strategies

- 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.

#### Rare Species Resource Strategies

- Protect and manage biodiversity on District lands.
- Track rare species locations, status, and implement rare species BMPs.
- Maintain and/or increase existing rare and imperiled species populations on District lands.

#### Cultural and Historic Resource Strategies

- Protect and prevent negative impacts on 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.

#### Aesthetic and Visual Resource Strategies

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

### **Goal 2: Public Use**

**Objectives** - provide resource-based public use opportunities.

#### Public Use Strategies

- Establishing and maintaining public use on District lands.
- Provide Special Use Authorizations (SUA) for compatible public use activities.
- Follow Governing Board Directives 90-2 and 92-1 for exclusive use requests.
- Provide hunting and fishing opportunities on District lands.
- Coordinate with law enforcement agencies to enforce Florida statutes and administrative rules on District-managed lands.
- During emergency situations, staff will assist persons in danger and communicate responses with the appropriate agency.

**Goal 3: Communications**

**Objectives** - encourage participation from outside agencies, organizations, and private citizens when developing management plans for the lands under its stewardship.

## Communications Strategies

- Obtain public and private stakeholder input in the management of District lands.
- Use applicable modes of communication to encourage and promote public recreation on District lands.
- Ensure public inquiries into management activities or public use are addressed in a timely manner.
- Complete an annual land management report and conduct the annual LMRT following the guidance of the DLMP.

**Goal 4: Fiscal Responsibility**

**Objectives** - minimize 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.

## Fiscal Responsibility Strategies

- Ensure revenues are derived from operations conducted to achieve land management objectives.
- Minimize structural operational management approaches wherever practical.
- Contract with the most cost-effective and experienced firms to complete land management activities following District policies.
- Coordinate with other land management agencies and organizations to complete land management activities to reduce District costs.
- Attempt to locate and obtain grants to help fund projects on District lands.
- Assist with the surplus lands program to ensure funds derived from the disposals of unneeded land holdings are redirected to fund the purchase of higher value, water-resource lands.

## FISCAL YEAR 2023 REPORT OF LAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

### I. RESOURCE PROTECTION

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

#### 1. 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 natural buffering characteristics of the floodplain, such as flood attenuation. Flood attenuation can enhance 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 implemented using silvicultural 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, 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. The District's Florida Forever Work Plan describes all District-wide projects. The projects listed below are specifically targeted for District fee-owned lands.

#### Water Resource Projects

##### *Cabbage Grove River Access Improvement Project*

The project on the Cabbage Grove Tract was meant to improve recreational access and decrease bank erosion along the Aucilla River at a set of shoals called "Lost Dog Falls." The recreation site is popular for fishing, swimming, launching canoes, and observing the shoals. Foot traffic, frequent floods, and stormwater runoff from the parking area caused severe bank erosion. The erosion scars not only created hazards for the public but also cast turbidity into the waterway. Once all permits were obtained, the District improved the site by installing two sets of formed and poured concrete steps and two sections of soil cement walkways. Large rocks were installed to slow the flow of water around the river access. The parking area was also improved by installing "W" beam barricades which prevents vehicles from access the highly erodible riverbank and bollards were installed to prevent unauthorized ATV traffic from driving down the steps to the river's edge.



### *Mount Gilead Tract River Access Improvement Project*

The project on the Mount Gilead Tract was meant to improve recreational access and decrease bank erosion along the Aucilla River at a popular recreation site for fishing, swimming, launching canoes, and observing the river. This project consisted of replacing a set of wooden terraced steps with formed and poured concrete steps of similar size. The existing wooden steps had reached the end of their service life and were in poor repair. The completed project will reduce riverbank erosion from pedestrian traffic and create a safer river access for the public. Once all permits were obtained the District made the improvements, then installed boulders that blocked an unauthorized access road that led to the top of the steps, which will further protecting the riverbank at this site.

### *Underwater Cave System Research*

Numerous District lands contain springs, karst windows, and other geologically significant systems for North Florida. The District issues research special use authorizations (SUAs) for underwater cave system mapping, water testing, and research to private non-profit research firms. The SUAs are for twelve (12) separate tracts of land. The SUAs are re-issued each year to continue the research. This research is shared with the District at no obligation or cost.

### *Hydrological Facility Restoration Projects*

Hydrological facility improvement projects were completed on six District tracts (Steinhatchee Springs, Devil's Hammock, Lukens, Steinhatchee Falls, Wolf Creek and Natural Well Branch) resulting in 28 hydrological facility repairs or replacements.

### *West Ridge Water Resource Development Area*

The West Ridge Water Resource Development Area project includes approximately 640 acres of District-owned land adjacent to the Florida National Guard's (Guard) Camp Blanding in Bradford County. The purchase was funded by a grant from the Guard through the Department of Defense (DOD) as part of a program designed to secure buffers around military installations. The Guard manages the property for the District at no cost.

The original Florida Environmental Protection Department (FDEP) mine reclamation permit required restoration of pre-development flows within the mined areas of Chemours Corporation and District lands. However, due to current concerns about westward stormwater flow the District and Chemours Corporation have collaborated on a permit modification. The modification will control the discharge rates by detaining the flows and releasing them slowly in a controlled manner. The modification also has the future potential for water conservation through water re-use and aquifer recharge to the Upper Floridan Aquifer to augment flows to the upper Santa Fe River basin. In FY 2020, Chemours Corporation received the modified FDEP permit to reclaim the mine which includes the work on the West Ridge Tract. In FY 2023 there was no activity.

## **2. Soils, Topography, Ground Cover, and Natural Communities**

Florida Statutes direct District staff to manage lands, "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." The District uses existing desired future condition (DFC) standards as a

guide for planning, implementing, and tracking natural community management activities on its properties. The DFCs provide information about plant community structure, representative plant species, hydrologic regimes, and the frequency that prescribed fire or other vegetation management activities should be implemented to help meet and/or maintain DFC objectives. By using these standards, District staff can evaluate the current condition of a natural community and then determine what management activities are needed to help meet statutory requirements and DFC objectives.

Many District lands currently meet DFC objectives including floodplain swamps and other wetland areas. These areas are often easily maintained through passive management or natural processes such as periodic flooding. However, many upland natural communities or transitional communities require active management to help meet and/or maintain DFC objectives. Management practices that may be used in these areas include the installation of hydrologic facilities, prescribed fire, mechanical or chemical treatments, timber harvesting, and reforestation.

## Natural Community Management & Restoration Projects

### *Prescribed Fire/Vegetation Management*

Many natural plant communities on District lands were historically influenced and maintained by the periodic occurrence of fire and other disturbances on the landscape. The District continues to use prescribed fire and other vegetation management tools, such as mechanical and chemical treatments, to manage vegetation within these communities to help meet DFC objectives. The five main fire-adapted natural communities the District targets for management and restoration work include sandhills, upland pine, scrubby flatwoods, mesic flatwoods, and wet flatwoods. The District focuses on these communities because of their vegetation type or structure, their need for frequent fire or disturbance, and their proximity to other wetland communities that require periodic disturbance. Combined, these targeted communities make up approximately 58,778 acres or 70% of the total acres on District lands that were historically influenced by fire.

The remaining 30% of fire-influenced communities consist of wetland natural communities such as shrub bogs, depression marshes, and dome swamps. These communities are not actively targeted for prescribed burning or periodic disturbances. 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 issues, mortality to wetland timber, and prolonged consumption of organic soils. When necessary, fire lines are installed to help avoid adverse impacts on wetlands, water resources, or the public.

The District has developed disturbance intervals (DI) for the five targeted communities listed above. These intervals are derived from the fire return intervals developed by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) for these communities (Table 1). These intervals indicate the disturbance rotation or the number of years that should occur between each disturbance.

Although these return intervals are listed as a range, the District's goal is to implement prescribed fire or create a similar disturbance within these natural communities on a 2 to 3-year return interval. This interval falls within the low to mid-range of the FNAI standards and was chosen to better address the high productivity of woody vegetation on many District lands. This targeted two to three-year return interval will also continue to be evaluated for effectiveness based on field results and any additional research or data made available.

From a planning and budgeting standpoint, all land management core areas that contain these listed communities will be targeted for work on a 2 to 3-year return interval. When measuring the success of meeting this fire or disturbance return interval standard, the District will use a 3-year return interval to quantify individual fiscal year results. In this case, a 3-year return interval was chosen because it is close or equal to the maximum range for many listed communities and it better reflects fluctuating results that are often influenced by factors such as weather.

Table 1. Fire Return/Disturbance Intervals (DI)

<b>Natural Community</b>	<b>Acres (approximate)</b>	<b>Fire Return Disturbance Interval</b>
Sandhill	10,006	1-3 yrs.
Upland Pine	6,601	1-3 yrs.
Scrubby Flatwoods	3,980	5-15 yrs.
Mesic Flatwoods	25,655	2-4 yrs.
Wet Flatwoods	12,534	1-10 yrs.

#### *Designating Land Management Core Areas*

Within the five targeted natural communities listed above, the District allocates most of its resources to areas designated as land management core areas. These core areas contain one or more of the following attributes:

- Areas have a recent history of prescribed fire or other disturbance type,
- Vegetation within these areas can be effectively maintained using prescribed fire or other mechanical/chemical treatments, and/or
- Areas have received other land management activities (timber thinning, reforestation, etc.) requiring additional vegetation management practices to complete a restoration prescription or help meet a DFC goal.

The total acreage of these core areas can increase or decrease based on various factors. For example, some District lands contain targeted natural communities that are not included in the core areas because the current vegetative structure/composition inhibits the successful application of prescribed fire. However, if a preliminary management practice such as a mechanical or chemical treatment is implemented that creates conditions favorable for the use of prescribed fire, these areas can then be added to the total core acreage. Conversely, there may be core areas removed from the system because of size, location, and/or vegetative characteristics that consistently inhibit the efficient use of prescribed fire. Core acreage can also increase or decrease if natural community lines are adjusted, or community designations are changed based on field observations or updated information.

The District's goal is to consistently increase the percentage of core areas that are within their designated disturbance interval (Table 2). This can be achieved by using prescribed fire or other disturbances to control targeted vegetation, and help the District meet DFC

objectives. Table 3 provides additional information on core areas and the status of their disturbance intervals.

Table 2. Land Management Core Areas - Disturbance Interval Status

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
% Core Acres within Disturbance Interval (DI) (All Disturbance Types)	<b>68%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>63%</b>
Acres Planned (All Disturbance Types)	10,280	12,133	13,169	15,002	10,500
Acres Treated (All Disturbance Types)	9,766	10,854	10,161	14,545	6,308
Acres Burned That Met Objective	5,183	9,651	6,790	10,768	6,040
Wildfire Acres	2.9	3.70	0.00	11	0.2

Table 3. Acres of Managed Natural Communities by Classification (FY 2023).

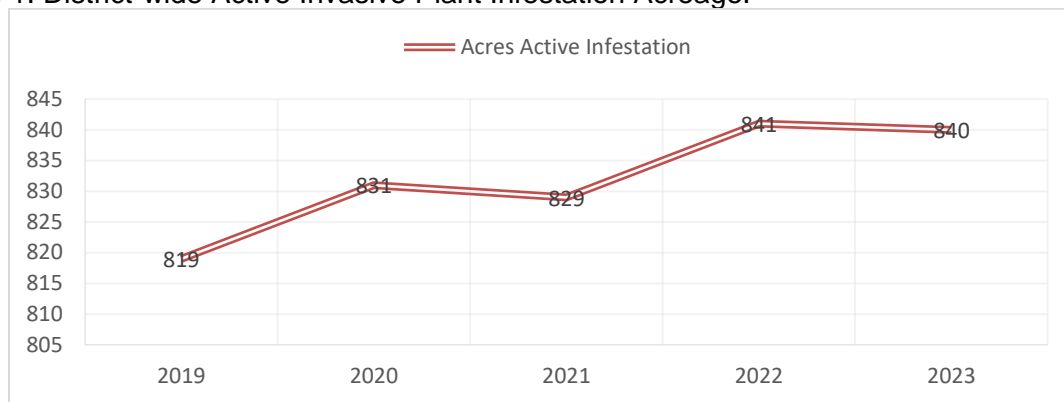
	Acres	% of total
Land Management Core Areas - <b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49,346</b>	
<b>Total Acres IN Disturbance Interval (end of 2023)</b>	<b>33,637</b>	<b>68.2</b>
<i>Last Management Tool - Prescribed Fire</i>	21,050	42.7
<i>Last Management Tool - Mechanical/Chemical</i>	12,587	25.5
<b>Total Acres OUT Of Disturbance Interval (end of 2023)</b>	<b>15,709</b>	<b>31.8</b>
Acres where pine density is too thick or stand age is too young to safely burn*	6,929	14.0
Acres within Mallory Swamp Wildlife Management Area	4,274	8.7
Remaining Acreage	4,504	9.1

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

*Invasive Plant Control (District staff)*

In FY 2023, District staff monitored 133 invasive plant infestations; 73 of those infestations were treated with herbicides. Total District-wide infestation acreage decreased slightly during FY 2023 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. District-wide Active Invasive Plant Infestation Acreage.



*Invasive Plant Control (Contractors)*

Contractors are used to treating larger more complex areas of invasive plant infestations. Contracts for this work are either procured by District or through cooperating agencies when grants are pursued. Work completed in FY 2023 is listed in Table 4.

Table 4. FY 2023 Completed Invasive Plant Treatment Projects (Contractors)

Work Location	County	Extent	Targeted Species	Contract Amount	Funding Source
Multiple	Multiple	93.4 acres	Japanese Climbing Fern, Chinese Tallow, Kudzu, Cogon Grass	\$34,931.60	SRWMD
Edwards Bottomland	Bradford	30 acres	Japanese Climbing Fern, Chinese Tallow, Camphor tree	\$11,220.00	SRWMD

*Vegetation Management (Mechanical)*

Mechanical treatments such as whole tree chipping, roller chopping, woods mowing, and ditch mowing are used to help meet natural community DFC objectives, prepare sites for prescribed fire and reforestation, and protect District resources from the damaging effects of wildfires. Work completed in FY 2023 includes:

- Approximately 1,719 acres were roller-chopped, and 2,494 acres were mowed to help facilitate the use of prescribed fire and to help meet natural community management objectives.
- Approximately 6.8 miles of ditch edges were mechanically treated on the Sugar Creek Tract in Hamilton County. This work was done to increase the width of areas along road edges to provide better fire break capabilities and/or improve access for equipment. This will facilitate the safe use of prescribed fire and help protect forest resources from the damaging effects of wildfires.

*Vegetation Management (Chemical)*

The application of chemical herbicides on District lands is periodically used to help control hardwood competition on sites that are being prepared for pine reforestation or to facilitate the use of prescribed fire and help meet natural community DFC objectives. Work completed in FY 2023 includes:

- Approximately 312 acres were treated on multiple tracts for reforestation site-prep purposes.

**3. Forest Resources***Timber Harvest*

The District harvests timber resources to promote conditions that more closely resemble natural forests. In FY 2023, 12 sales were contracted (Table 5):

- Two final harvests (conditions met to achieve DFCs),
- Seven stand improvement pine thinning's,
- One restoration pine thinning with hardwood removal, and
- Two Hurricane Idalia timber salvage final harvests.

Timber harvest objectives include:

- Reducing overstory stocking to meet desired levels for the natural community,
- Improving forest health by removing poor health trees or stands, and
- Reducing species not native to the natural community.

Planning, advertising, contract oversight, timber sale security, and financial reconciliation are components of the timber sale process.

Table 5. Timber Sale Acres by Harvest Type and Species.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Harvest Type</b>	<b>FY 23 Acres (12 sales)</b>	<b>FY 22 Acres (12 sales)</b>	<b>FY 21 Acres (12 sales)</b>
<b>Loblolly Pine</b>	First Thin			
	Second Thin	29		
	Final Harvest	4		265
	Hurricane Salvage	180		
	<b>ALL LOBLOLLY</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>265</b>
<b>Slash Pine</b>	First Thin	881	265	1,061
	Second Thin	250	348	
	Final Harvest	88	492	194
	BTB Salvage		50	
	Hurricane Salvage	72		
	<b>ALL SLASH</b>	<b>1,291</b>	<b>1,155</b>	<b>1,255</b>
<b>Longleaf Pine</b>	First Thin	108	229	
	BTB Salvage			5
	<b>ALL LONGLEAF</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Hardwood</b>	Removal	<b>177</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>541</b>
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,789</b>	<b>1,556</b>	<b>2,066</b>

*Forest Resource Inventory*

In FY 2022, District staff inventoried 150 forest plots throughout the District. The data from these plots are used to quantify the acres that have achieved their natural community goals and provide data for areas that could be improved by silvicultural activities. This timber cruise data also updates data in operational timber stands and identified volumes and other species data in areas where a restoration project has been potentially identified.

*Reforestation*

In FY 2023, the District reforested 254 acres with containerized longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) and two acres with containerized pond pine (*Pinus serotina*). The longleaf pine was planted on the RO Ranch, High Springs Wellfield, Gar Pond, and Mattair Springs tracts while the pond pine was planted on the Mud Swamp Tract.

**4. Rare Species Resources**

The District conducts rare species monitoring and survey work on a regular basis to help document the location of new species and to monitor the status of existing occurrences. This information is documented and recorded in a rare species geodatabase that is made available to District staff. To help lower the potential for negative impacts on existing species occurrences, District staff can consult the rare species geodatabase before planning and conducting management activities. If potential impacts from management activities are identified, staff locate and delineate areas to prevent potential conflicts. Management activities are also adjusted if needed to prevent impacts to these resources.

In FY 2023, District staff and contractors conducted several types of rare species monitoring/surveying work including rare plant monitoring/surveying, gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) surveys and wading bird rookery monitoring. FY 2023 work accomplishments are listed below in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. FY 2023 Rare Plant Monitoring/Survey Work.

<i>Number of Tracts Monitored/Surveyed</i>	<i>Number of Known Rare Plant Locations Monitored</i>	<i>Number of Locations Where Rare Species Were Observed</i>	<i>Number of New Rare Species Locations Documented</i>
13	86	64	33

Table 7. FY 2023 Rare Animal Monitoring/Survey Work.

<i>Number of Tracts Surveyed for Gopher Tortoise</i>	<i>Number of Gopher Tortoise Transects Surveyed</i>	<i>Number of Wading Bird Rookeries Monitored</i>
4	118	10

**5. Cultural and Historical Resources**

Majority of District lands have been studied for cultural and historical resources by a professional archaeologist. One hundred sixty-nine (169) known sites are located on District

lands and can be found in the Florida Department of State Master Site Files. The Master Site Files indicate that approximately 26 of these sites are considered significant cultural or historical sites and should be monitored by the District. Another 42 sites have been discovered by District staff over the years and in FY 2023 District staff discovered 14 previously looted sites that were observed to have new looting activity occurring. Additionally, five of these sites are monitored by cooperating agencies and are not inspected by District staff.

Staff attempt to inspect these sites annually while working on other projects in the vicinity. During the inspections, staff documents damage (i.e., looting) and other illegal activities. Staff provide Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) law enforcement with that information. Table 8 summarizes staff monitoring activities.

Table 8. Status of Cultural and Historical Resource Sites.

<b>Measures</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019*</b>
Significant sites inspected	24	19	26	26	2
Looted sites discovered	0	6	27	23	1
Sites managed by other agencies	5	5	5	5	5
Number recently damaged sites	14	3	1	7	0

*\*The technology used to collect and process information during tract inspections was not available for the entire year.*

The District follows the “Protocol for Managing Cultural and Historical Resources on Suwannee River Water Management District Lands” to avoid damaging these resources. The area’s most likely for cultural resources, based on the known sites, are classified “High Probability Zones,” and are included as a geodatabase for planning purposes. Before District staff initiates any major ground disturbance activities staff reviews the Protocol and the geodatabases, including the Master Site Files, to determine if the activity could negatively impact a cultural or historical resource. If there are concerns a planned activity could be impactful, District staff may contract with a professional archaeologist to delineate a site or help plan the activity.

**6. Aesthetic and Visual Resources**

The consideration of visual or aesthetic resources while managing property is a key component of the land management program. Every aspect of these resources, from facility planning to managing contractors or the public, has visual impacts.

There is a vast array of opportunities to improve or maintain aesthetic values during land management activities. Some of these include timing of operations, minimizing debris or litter along internal roads, minimizing clearcuts during timber harvests, consistency in facility designs, placement of signage, or maintaining the District’s unwritten rule of not posting boundaries or installing signs along riverbanks. District staff has found one of the greatest impacts to visual quality is education. When appropriate the District attempts to post interpretive information about activities (either on District lands or online) however our one-on-one conversations with the public about short-term and long-term objectives have and continue to be very effective. Overall, District staff desires to maintain our lands in such a way that the public perceives wilderness or natural beauty when visiting.



## II. PUBLIC USE

**Goal: Provide opportunities for high quality, compatible resource-based recreation, and educational programs to meet the public's needs while protecting water resources.**

District lands provide many resource-based recreational opportunities. Of the 162,030 acres owned by the District, approximately 95% are open to the public for recreation. Of these 7,769 acres closed to the public, 1,740 acres were purchased for the purposes of water supply/water quality projects such as municipal wellfields or spray fields and are currently closed to the public except for the 60-acre Newberry Wellfield which is leased to the City for water supply and recreation purposes. The 2,686-acre Double Run Creek and West Ridge tracts are managed by the Florida National Guard and closed to the public because they were purchased for future water resource development projects. Once completed, the tracts may be opened to the public. The 3,343-acre Lasky and Steinhatchee Springs Pinehatchee Addition tracts were recently purchased and require improvements before they can be made accessible. Once the improvements are complete, they will be opened to the public.

Planning for public uses and facilities considers the sensitivity of the site, the proximity of similar recreational opportunities, time, financial requirements to provide the use, and public demand for the use. Within the DLMP the District provides the public with a Public Use Standard which 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 where access is otherwise restricted. Lands classified in the Public Use Standard as "project lands" may also be closed to the public. These fee-title lands were purchased to develop infrastructure for water resource development projects and these tracts may not be open to the public for recreational activities due to the primary purpose for which the properties were purchased. Public use may be allowed once a project is completed but only after a suitability study has been undertaken.

### Recreation Resources

The District has developed facility standards that detail recreational facilities, roads, trails, signs, kiosks, fence design and construction, and maintenance procedures. These standards ensure facilities provide a safe, aesthetically pleasing, outdoor environment for the public that can be effectively maintained and minimizes potential impacts to water resources. District staff inspect public use facilities, and schedules maintenance to help ensure longevity and safety. Table 9 indicates the facility type, number of facilities, and fiscal year.

Table 9. Public-Use Facilities

Facility Type	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Trailheads	30	30	31	32	31
Docks & Boat Ramps	8	8	8	11	11
Hand & Canoe Launch Sites	20	19	19	19	19
Picnic Areas	20	21	22	23	23
Interpretive Sites*	31	30	8	11	11
Restrooms	14	14	14	16	18
Miles Trails	257	285	279	228	228
Miles Driving Trails	389	391	377	383	381

\*All kiosks have been added as interpretive sites. Trail miles decreased due to the sale of RO Equestrian Park.

### *Public Use and Facility Maintenance and Construction*

- Trash cans at Falmouth and Suwannee Springs were replaced with green painted cans that were installed on posts with custom brackets so that they are suspended off the ground.
- One (1) new single panel kiosk was installed at Sneads Lake.
- Approximately eleven (11) gate repairs, installations were completed on the following tracts: Steinhatchee Springs, Mattair, Adams, McAlpin Landing, Swift Creek, and Little River Tract.
- Completed construction on two river access improvement projects on the Mount Gilead and Cabbage Gove tracts. The improved recreation sites are popular river access points for fishing, swimming, launching canoes, and observing the river (details are on pages 5-6 of this report).
- 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 those efforts was a new road maintenance plan that centered on a three-year rotation for all roads deemed necessary for public access. In recent years, the District has had a renewed interest in increasing timber harvests and providing improved public access which have required additional road maintenance outside of the three-year rotation. In FY 2021, the Executive Director approved a Road and Hydrological Maintenance Program Standard which does not adhere to the three-year rotation and instead directs staff to complete maintenance of the roads and hydrological facilities at a level commensurate with their use.

Approximately 136 miles of roads were maintained in FY2023. Tracts include Wolf Creek, Cuba Bay, Lamont, Mount Gilead, Cabbage Grove, Jones Mill Creek, Cabage Grove, Goose Pasture, Scanlon, Cabbage Creek, Natural Well Branch, Peacock Slough, Holton Creek, Suwannee Springs, Mattair Springs, Woods Ferry, Swift Creek, Little Shoals, Gar Pond, Cypress Creek, Hunter Creek, Devil's Hammock, Lukens, Mallory Swamp, Steinhatchee Springs, Steinhatchee Falls, and Steinhatchee Rise.

Hydrological facility improvement projects were completed on six District tracts resulting in 28 hydrological facility repairs or replacements as referenced on page 6 of this report.

- District staff cleaned up an old dump site on the Big Pine Tract in Columbia County, FL.
- The District has a five-year rotation plan to mark and paint District land boundaries. The District has approximately 1,000 miles of property boundary line with forty-five (45) miles being marked or painted in FY 2023. There were less miles painted than planned due to the contractor withdrawing from their contract.

### **Special Use Authorizations**

As authorized in 40B-9.1411 F.A.C., District staff may issue special use authorizations (SUA) which are meant to provide individuals or groups to use District lands on a temporary basis for compatible activities that are either not covered in District's Land Management Plan (DLMP) or which require special access. Governing Board Program Directives 90-1 and 90-2 provides guidance on how the public can apply for an SUA and enables District staff to respond to

requests received from the public in a fair, consistent and timely manner. SUA applicants must be eighteen (18) years of age or older.

As indicated in 40B-9 F.A.C., the “Governing Board delegates to the Executive Director or such District staff member as designated by the Executive Director the authority to issue, deny or revoke Special Use Authorizations...” By virtue of the Governing Board approved District Land Management Plan (DLMP), District staff has the responsibility of issuing SUAs associated with activities referenced in the Public Use Standard of the DLMP. All other activities must be authorized by the Executive Director or his/her designee including activities that are commercial in nature. All exclusive uses are approved by the Governing Board.

District staff must also incorporate the specific criteria for the activity which the public must adhere to when using the SUA. This SUA criteria includes Standard Conditions, Rules for Public Use and Warnings.

To protect sensitive resources and reduce management costs sometimes it is necessary to limit some recreational opportunities and the use of certain roads or other access on District lands. Some uses, such as camping and other night uses, require an SUA. The Public Use Standard provides recreational users with a list of recreational activities that require an SUA. Examples of these activities include all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use, night-time access, or access for persons with disabilities.

SUAs may also be issued for opportunities not listed in the Public Use Standard. By virtue of the Governing Board-approved DLMP, District staff have the responsibility of issuing SUAs associated with activities referenced in the Public Use Standard. Examples include research and data collection, adventure races, trail maintenance, placement of beehives, and nuisance hog removal.

An SUA serves as an agreement between the District and user; it details terms, conditions, liability protection, and period of the proposed use (Table 10). 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 10. FY 2022 Special Use Authorizations

<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Temporary Ingress and Egress<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Mallory Swamp ATV Trail</b>	<b>Non-Recreational<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Goose Pasture Camping</b>	<b>Total</b>
305	44	80	25	280	734

<sup>1</sup>Temporary Ingress and Egress SUAs may include recreational use on the Lukens Tract in Cedar Key.

<sup>2</sup>Non-Recreational SUAs issued during the fiscal year include research and data collection, recreation competitions, hog removal, and apiary leases.

Requests for uses that are clearly or potentially exclusive require Governing Board consideration before any agreement, license, or authorization are approved. Such uses may include legal conveyance of property rights, such as rights-of-way or access easements; tract closures for research or media projects; or exclusive use of resources as in resource harvesting. Governing Board Directives 90-2 and 92-1 set guidelines for District staff involved with land acquisition or surplus to respond to public requests for certain exclusive uses.

### Hunting and Fishing

The District’s goal for public hunting and fishing on District lands is to provide high-quality hunting opportunities and access to the rivers for fishing. The District meets annually with the FWC to review opportunities for public hunting on District lands. Public hunting on District lands is offered through management agreements with FWC and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Fishing is allowed on District tracts subject to FWC fishing regulations (Table 11).

Table 11. Hunting and Fishing Access.

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Number of acres open to public hunting	106,146	106,146	106,146	106,146	106,146	108,298*	108,292*
Number of fishing access locations	123	120	120	111	111	111	109

*\*In FY 2017 the 2,157-acre Bay Creek Tract was added to the FWC public hunting program and was subsequently removed in FY 2018 due to legal issues.*

- Starting in FY 2018, the District continues to partner with Suwannee River Strutters, Jefferson County King of Springs, and Gator Gobblers Chapters of the National Wildlife Turkey Federation to sponsor women in the outdoors and youth special opportunity hunts. These special opportunity hunts allow additional hunting opportunities on 4,410 acres.
- Camp Blanding manages the District’s Double Run Creek Tract and leases it to hunting (2,030 acres). The Double Run Creek Tract was purchased as part of the Blanding Buffers project and may be used for future water resource projects.

### Law Enforcement

The District relies on FWC and county sheriffs’ offices to enforce Florida Statutes and administrative rules on District-managed lands. FWC and sheriffs perform regular patrols on District lands as part of their normal operations. The District also manages interagency contracts with FWC and various counties to utilize enhanced law enforcement services. The contracts allow the District to pay off-duty officers for enhanced patrols in areas with chronic violations or during periods of intensive use such as holiday weekends at high-use areas.

In FY 2023, the FWC officers who participated in the enhanced law enforcement program spent 675 hours patrolling District lands, the Suwannee County Sheriff’s Office spent 48 hours patrolling Suwannee and Falmouth Springs, Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office spent 60 hours patrolling Goose Pasture Campground, and Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office spent 48 hours patrolling Pot Springs recreation area. The District also paid for additional patrols on Independence Day and Labor Day. There were no Labor Day patrols due to Hurricane Idalia.

FWC made several significant cases involving the illegal camping on District lands, illegal harvesting of palmetto berries, and looting of archaeological sites on District lands. All perpetrators looting archaeological sites were written citations and will receive a five-year no-trespass warning.

**Emergencies**

Staff encourages the public to dial 911 when emergencies arise on District lands. During emergencies involving facilities, natural disturbances, or hazard materials, the District’s land management staff play an integral role. The District maintains a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) required by the Florida Department of Emergency Management and has an active District Staff Safety Team that is organized internally.

The COOP addresses coordinated post-disaster response and recovery, rapid deployment, and pre-deployment of resources, communications, and warning systems, and presents annual exercises to determine the District’s ability to respond to an emergency. The essential role of land management staff during emergencies is associated with facilities, field operations, District headquarters, and public safety.

The District has established Tract Closing Procedures, which are followed during events that require COOP activation (e.g., hurricanes) or when conditions become unsafe for public access (e.g., flooding). Table 12 identifies all District tracts, facilities, or roads that were closed due to emergencies, extreme weather events, or vandalism.

Table 12. FY 2023 District Land Closures

<b>Tract, Facilities or Roads</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Closure Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
All District Lands	All Counties in the District	11/09/2022	Tropical Storm Nicole
All District Lands	All Counties in the District	9/29/2023	Hurricane Idalia

### III. COMMUNICATIONS

#### **Goal – Coordinate with Public and Private Stakeholders in the Management of District Lands.**

The District encourages public and private stakeholder input for the management of District lands. Communication opportunities and public inquiries into management activities and recreation are facilitated through a variety of applications including but not limited to, phone calls, mail, print materials, press releases, outreach activities, social media, website, and other electronic applications. Discussions during the Land Management Review Team (LMRT) and comments received during the Excellence in Land Management (ELM) process are important communication opportunities that staff utilize to determine management effectiveness each year.

#### **FY 2023 Land Management Review Team**

District staff conducted a Land Management Review Team (LMRT) meeting and site inspection on April 12, 2023. The review focused on District-wide land management activities that were conducted in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. Program areas reviewed include water resources, natural resource management, public use, and facilities on representative areas. The field tour focused on the 41,570 acres of fee owned lands located in the Steinhatchee River and Coastal Basin. The review team visited Steinhatchee Springs and Steinhatchee Falls tracts.

The LMRT was asked to score whether the District was achieving its management strategies from the District Land Management Plan (DLMP) using the following scores:

- 0 – District is not meeting the strategies of the DLMP;
- 1 – District is meeting the strategies of the DLMP; and
- 2 – District is meeting and exceeding the strategies outlined in the DLMP.

The review team scored the ten management strategies from the District Land Management Plan (DLMP). Scores ranging from a low of 1.50 for Water Resources, Rare Species, and Cultural Resources management to the highest score of 1.86 for Forest Resources management. Management of Groundcover and Fiscal Responsibility received a score of 1.82. Management of Public Use and Soils, Topography, and Natural Community received a score of 1.73. Aesthetic and Visual Resources management received a score of 1.64 and Communications management received a score 1.59. The overall average score of the ten management strategies was 1.67 which was slightly lower than last year's average score of 1.69.

There are two statutory scores. The first, "Are District lands being managed in a manner consistent with the purpose for which they were acquired, including public access" received a score of 1.77. The second, "Are District land managers implementing the District Land Management Plan" received a score of 1.68. These scores signify the land management activities meet and exceed the Governing Board's management strategies outlined in the DLMP and Florida Statutes (F.S.).

The participants scores indicate substantial acceptance with the programmatic achievement of the management strategies set by the Governing Board and Florida Statutes. Overall, the participants approve the planning and methods used by District staff in managing the District's fee titled lands in FY 2022.

Table 13. 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>
Number of Responses	
0	SRWMD is not in compliance.
5	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
17	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.
<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Does SRWMD land management implement the goals identified in the District Land Management Plan?</b>
Number of Responses	
0	SRWMD is not in compliance.
7	SRWMD compliance is adequate and acceptable.
15	SRWMD exceeds compliance regularly.

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

### District Land Management Plan

On March 13, 2018, the Governing Board adopted an updated DLMP which retains the goals and guidance of the 2011 DLMP. A new section was added called Land Management Operations and Facilities. The section outlines the minimum requirements for operational activities such as the District's DFC and silviculture best management practices. The new section also provided direction in five core programs: timber management, invasive exotic management, prescribed fire/vegetation management, public use management, and road/hydrologic facility management.

The revised DLMP requires staff to create and maintain documents detailing standards that provide guidance for each program. These standards are approved by the District's Executive Office and are meant to communicate how each program functions, what is required, outline management activities, provide reliable information to users and improve land management continuity while achieving ELM goals. In fiscal years 2019 - 2022 four program standards were approved but due to new programs standards and program changes most of the standards are being revisited. As of November of 2023, one standard is approved, three are being reviewed by District leadership, and two are being drafted by staff.

### Land Management Communication Initiatives

- All District Land Management Annual Reports and the District's Land Management Plan are posted on the District's website.
- Staff continues to provide images and text for the District's social media outreach efforts via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Staff continues to use the "Important Notices" feature on the District web page to provide information to the public regarding flooding, tract closures, and management activities that may affect public use.
- Staff installed two (2) kiosks with interpretive information.

## Regional Resource Group Participation

District staff participates in regional groups to provide input, understand issues, or gain more knowledge about managing publicly owned conservation lands.

- 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
- Natural Resources Leadership Institute
- National Wild Turkey Federation and three local chapters
- Florida Master Loggers
- Society of American Foresters
- Florida Forestry Association
- North Central Florida Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
- Alachua Conservation Trust
- Aucilla River Watershed Coalition (Tall Timbers)
- Groundcover Restoration Workshop (Longleaf Alliance)
- Public Lands Acquisition and Management (FDEP)
- Levy County Coon Hunters Association
- Karst Underwater Research
- Karstreams
- North Florida Springs Alliance
- North Florida Backcountry Horsemen Association
- Florida Trail Association
- US Forest Service



#### IV. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Goal: Protect resources and efficiently manage District lands within the District's annual budget.**

District staff minimizes the costs associated with land management by contracting or collaborating with other agencies and private sector firms, entering into agreements with other land management agencies and organizations, and submitting proposals for land management grant funding. The District also tracks revenues, expenditures, land purchases, and the surplus of lands each year to ensure the District stays fiscally responsible and compliant with Florida Statutes.

#### Management Agreements

The District enters into management agreements and/or leases with organizations that reduce District management costs and still provide similar management, protection, and public access (Table 14).

Table 14. Agencies Managing District lands.

<b>Managing Agency</b>	<b># of Parcels</b>	<b>Acres</b>
<i>No Cost Management Agreements</i>		
Alachua County	2	222
City of Lake City	1	26
City of Newberry	1	60
Columbia County	2	96
Florida Department of Environmental Protection	9	1,980
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	2	862
Florida National Guard	2	2,696
Gilchrist County	1	515
Hamilton County*	4	~22
Jefferson County	1	22
Levy County	1	4,274
University of Florida	2	737
US Fish and Wildlife Service	5	1,640
<b>No Cost Management Total Acres:</b>		<b>13,152</b>
<i>Shared Revenue Agreements</i>		
Alachua Conservation Trust	1	169
Florida Forest Service	13	12,452
<b>Shared Revenue Total Acres</b>		<b>12,621</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>25,773</b>

\*Hamilton County took over the management of the Roline boat ramp in FY 2022 and the exact acreage has not been defined, but the agreement indicates would be the approximate size of the Turner Bridge Park parcel which is approximately 5 acres.

Under an existing lease agreement, the Florida Forest Service (FFS) manages approximately 12,452 acres of District lands as part of the Twin Rivers State Forest (TRSF). As part of the lease, the District has agreed to reimburse FFS for management expenses each year and FFS provides the District the revenue from timber sales on District lands associated with TRSF. In FY 2023, the District reimbursed FFS \$125,275 for management expenses and the District received \$179,720 in revenue from timber sales.

In January 2019, the District entered into a cooperative management agreement with Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT), a Florida not-for-profit corporation, to manage the District-owned J.H. Anderson, Jr., Memorial Park – Rock Bluff Springs Tract. At the time of the agreement, a management plan was approved that detailed the responsibilities of each party. As part of this management plan, the District agreed to provide quarterly funding until October 1, 2021 (\$14,843 per quarter) and allowing ACT to charge an entrance fee provided that revenues generated by ACT through fees would be used to fund ACT's budget and any remaining funds should be returned to the District. In FY 2021, the District paid ACT \$59,374 for operational expenses. No remaining funds were available or provided to the District in FY 2021. On July 27, 2021, the management plan was amended, and the annual management funding was reduced to \$22,822 until October 1, 2023.

Public hunting opportunities are provided on 106,146 acres (66%) of District-owned lands in cooperation with FWC and USFWS. These agencies manage hunting opportunities, dates, bag limits, and law enforcement at no cost to the District. No fees for hunting are charged by the District and no revenues are received by the District.

The District has agreements with private and public entities to provide trail maintenance for 126 miles (46%) of the bike, horse, and multi-use trails on District lands. These trails are maintained at no cost to the District and are available for use by the public.

### **Collaborations**

- The District partnered with Suwannee Bicycle Association to continue improvements to the trails in the White Springs Area.
- In a cooperative effort with Four Rivers Land and Timber Company, LLC., an access road to the Natural Well Branch Tract was improved. The District provided six (6) culverts and Four Rivers Land and Timber Company, LLC., provided the labor and other materials to repair the road.
- Following Hurricane Idalia, staff with Florida State Parks and Northwest Florida Water Management District assist with debris removal from District managed lands. The work help facilitate some of the initial opens of District lands for the public.

### **Grant Applications and Awards**

In FY 2023, the District received grant funding from the following sources to help reduce the cost of natural community management.

#### *Florida Forest Service – Prescribed Fire Enhancement Program*

The Florida Forest Service awarded the District \$209,317.50 to conduct mechanical vegetation control work on the Mallory Swamp Wildlife Management Area in Lafayette

County. This work was done for both natural community restoration and fuel reduction purposes.

*US Fish and Wildlife Service – Partners for Fish and Wildlife*

US Fish and Wildlife Service awarded the District \$12,791.25 to fund the establishment of longleaf pine on 38 acres of the Mattair Springs Tract to help restore pine snake habitat.

*Alachua Conservation Trust – Longleaf Landscape Stewardship Fund*

Alachua Conservation Trust serves as a liaison for the Ocala Longleaf Implementation Team (LITS), and the Federal (USDA, NRCS, and USFS) grant funding for longleaf pine habitat restoration is facilitated through the local LITS. To further advance the objectives of the various cooperators, the District was awarded \$46,000 to complete 215 acres of longleaf pine habitat restoration (funds supported a portion of the FY23 longleaf pine planting activities and site preparation for FY24 reforestation) on the Gar Pond, High Springs Wellfield, Mattair Springs and Steinhatchee Springs tracts.

*Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission – Uplands Program*

In FY 2023 the District partnered with FWC to complete an invasive plant treatment project on 53.68 acres of the Lake Rowell Tract. The FWC Uplands Program completely funded the project which was \$15,493.14.

**Revenues**

The District has opportunities to generate revenues while implementing its natural resource management activities (Table 15). Timber sales generate most of the revenue from land management activities. This table was generated on November 6, 2023, before the District’s books officially closed.

Table 15. FY 2023 Land Resources Revenues.

<b>Category</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>
Timber	\$2,528,012
Land Use (Apiary Leases)	\$250
Land Use (Other)	\$300
Grants*	\$268,108
State Appropriation (Operations)	\$1,777,210
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,573,880</b>

*\*Does not include awarded grants (funds have not yet been received).*

In FY 2023, the District sold an estimated \$1,162,982 in 12 sales on 1,612 acres. Total revenues are estimated since all FY 2023 sales have not been completed as of October 1, 2023. In FY 2023 the District completed 16 timber sales and partially completed 4 timber sales realizing \$2,528,012 in revenue.

**Expenditures**

Expenditures in the land management program can be divided into categories for review (Table 16):

- Natural Resource & Prescribed Fire Management – includes water resource projects, reforestation, timber sales, protected species, vegetative management, and prescribed fire.
- 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.
- Public Use – includes expenses for maintaining site-based and dispersed recreation activities, developing new sites, signs, maps, brochures, and sanitation.
- Facility and Road Management – includes costs for maintaining roads, hydrologic structures, boundaries, rental equipment, gates, debris removal, and other facility improvement projects.
- Administration and Planning – includes expenses for planning, GIS, real-estate activities, fees, permits, training, rentals, management plans and reviews, interagency law enforcement coordination, legal services, software, and other operational expenses.
- Florida Forest Service Agreement – includes expenses for Twin River State Forest which is explained on page 23 of this report.
- Other Expenditures – includes District uniforms, Rock Bluff Springs project, Country Club Road project, RO Ranch Equestrian Park trade, and adjacent property tree removal and other maintenance.

Table 16. FY 2023 Land Resources Expenditures.

<b>Category*</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>
Natural Resource & Prescribed Fire Management	\$1,093,154
Invasive Plant Management	\$19,801
Public Use	\$309,464
Facility & Road Management.	\$549,268
Administration and Planning	\$55,179
Florida Forest Service Agreement (Twin Rivers State Forest)	\$125,275
Other Expenditures	\$85,957
Salaries and Benefits	\$653,441
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,891,539</b>

*\*Does not include Payments in Lieu of Taxes.*

**Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)**

When the District purchases land 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 \$360,100. The state appropriated the District’s \$357,026 for PILT in FY 2023.

**Land Acquisitions**

District lands are acquired following section 373.139 F.S. and 40B-9 Florida Administrative Code. District staff who participate in processing acquisition-related activities are guided by Governing Board Directive 19-0005. Table 17 is a list of acquisitions completed in FY 2023.

Table 17: FY 2023 Land Acquisitions

<b>Tract</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Closing Date</b>	<b>Transaction</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>
Lasky	351.74	Gilchrist	9/29/2023	Fee	Save Our Rivers
Lukens Exchange	1.0	Levy	9/29/2023	Fee for Fee	FL Forever

**Surplus Lands**

Disposing of lands that are not needed for water-resource protection allows the District to redirect funds to a higher value, water-resource lands and/or reduce land management costs. Land management staff participate in the review process of any potential surplus parcels and provide feedback to the executive office and Governing Board. Table 18 is a list of surplus lands in FY 2023.

Table 18: FY 2023 Surplus Lands

<b>Tract</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Transaction</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>
Lukens Exchange	0.49	Levy	9/29/2023	Fee for Fee	FL Forever

**APPENDIX A****SRWMD STATUTORY SUMMARY***Verified October 2023***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 section 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.”
- (1b) “Whenever practical, such lands shall be open to the general public for recreational uses. General public recreational purposes shall include, but not 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, storm-water 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 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 a land management review team to conduct periodic management reviews. The land management review team 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 section 259.036 F.S., 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 section 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.”





For additional information please contact  
***Suwannee River Water Management District***  
9225 CR 49, Live Oak, FL 32060  
386.362.1001  
[www.mysuwanneeriver.com](http://www.mysuwanneeriver.com)