

## 16. BREAKFAST POINT PENINSULA CONSERVATION UNIT

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### 16.1 General Description of Conservation Unit

The approximately 2,289-acre Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit is located the farthest east of the conservation units along the conservation network and extends along almost 11 miles of West Bay shoreline adjacent to the Breakfast Point Mitigation Bank (Figures 2-1 and 16-1). The Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit supports high quality uplands and fresh and saltwater wetlands which filter surface water entering West Bay and are important to wildlife diversity in the Florida panhandle. Data sheets reporting the results of the GIS ERATools™ analyses for the Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit are included at the end of this section.

The current land cover (NFWFMD 1995) is primarily saltwater marsh (51%) with substantial acreages in upland coniferous forest and tidal flats. The National Wetlands Inventory (NWI, 1982-87) classifies almost all of the land cover as wetlands dominated by estuarine, open water, with some palustrine forested wetlands (Figure 4-2).

Historically, this area was almost entirely in salt marsh (75%) with some acreage in north Florida pine flatwoods and less in hardwood and cypress swamps and shrub bogs (NRCS 1989) (Figure 4-1). Little restoration is called for in the Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit as this area has been very little affected by anthropogenic activities, other than fire suppression. Tables 2-1 and 2-2 present wildlife and listed species generally associated with these natural communities.

### 16.2 Regional Significance

The Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit is important to maintaining ecological integrity within the region because it comprises large acreages primarily in high quality natural communities; it buffers about 11 miles of West Bay shoreline; it filters surface waters flowing into West Bay; it contains bald eagle foraging habitat, as well as other wildlife habitat; and the extent of its tidal flats and estuarine communities, which support Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), are unique among the conservation unit network. Limiting construction in this area and protecting and restoring components of both the upland and wetland systems will help maintain the ecological integrity of the region (Figure 2-1).

An FWC-designated strategic habitat conservation area (SHCA) for the Gulf salt marsh snake (*Nerodia clarkii clarkii*) covers 408 acres within this conservation unit. FNAI-identified priority/under-represented natural communities of pine flatwoods and scrub; 1,139 acres of FNAI-identified coastal priority area; and seagrass beds occur within this unit. Within the 2-mile buffer around this unit, scenic roads, one managed land (Naval Coastal Systems Center), and hundreds of acres of seagrass beds occur (FDEP 2003). Within the 5-mile buffer, another managed land (St. Andrews State Park) and more seagrass beds occur. Additional features of regional ecological significance, such as listed species observations, are discussed in the following subsections.

### 16.3 Biodiversity

Currently and historically, the Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit is dominated by saltwater marshes, tidal flats, and north Florida pine flatwoods, with some cypress and hardwood swamps and shrub bogs. A small portion of the north Florida pine flatwoods is now in pine plantation. This conservation unit is primarily unaffected by silviculture or other land uses. Pine flatwoods are an FNAI-identified priority/under-represented natural community; a small area of scrub, another FNAI priority community, also occurs within this conservation unit (FNAI 2000, 2001). Numerous pine islands, which are a Bay County-protected natural community, occur among the tidal flats and salt marshes.

About 17% (394 acres) of this conservation unit and about 30% of the landscape within the 1-mile buffer around the unit are identified as priority habitats for key focal wetland-dependent species (Kautz et al. 1994). These areas include uplands identified as priority habitat for 1-3 wetland-dependent species. About 408 acres of a FWC-designated SHCA for the Gulf salt marsh snake (*Nerodia clarkii clarkii*) overlaps this conservation unit. Sea turtle nesting beaches occur within the 3-mile buffer around this unit.

This conservation unit provides for wildlife habitat conservation, the preservation of wildlife corridors, and protects marine and estuarine species, including EFH, in West Bay. Because of the extensive existing saltwater marshes and tidal flats, the predominance of high quality natural communities, the unit's direct surface water connection with West Bay, the unit's far eastern location relative to the other conservation units, and its large size, the protection and restoration of this conservation unit will contribute to the state's conservation strategy for both upland and wetland focal species (Kautz et al. 1994; Cox et al. 2000).

### Threatened and Endangered Species

There have been no previously recorded occurrences within the Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit of federally or state-listed threatened or endangered species<sup>1</sup>. No U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-designated critical habitat occurs within the unit. During 2003 field surveys, one state-listed animal species, the snowy egret (*Egretta thula*), a species of special concern, was observed within the conservation unit (WilsonMiller 2003).

Within a 1-mile buffer around this unit, two federally listed species have been observed (within the Breakfast Point Mitigation Bank): the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)<sup>2</sup> and an active

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<sup>1</sup> Surveys completed by FNAI and FWC are not comprehensive or exhaustive and are opportunistically based on priorities and funding as well as access to land.

<sup>2</sup> The American alligator was first listed as endangered in 1967. Due to its rapid recovery, the species was reclassified as threatened in 1977 to protect the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) due to the similarity of appearance between these two species.

bald eagle nest (FNAI 2003; FWC 2002; WilsonMiller 2003). Within a 3-mile buffer around this unit, three federally listed species have been observed including the American alligator, the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), and the threatened Telephus spurge (*Euphorbia telephioides*). Many state-listed animal and plant species also have been observed (FNAI 2003; WilsonMiller 2003).

The proposed conservation plan for the Breakfast Point Peninsula unit should protect the quality of suitable habitat for listed species within the unit as well as protecting and maintaining the suitability of the regional landscape for listed species (St. Joe Timberland Company 2003). Tables 2-1 and 2-2 present many of the common and federally and state-listed animal and plant species, respectively, that might benefit if this conservation unit's acreage in natural communities is protected and its planted acreage restored to its historical natural land cover.

## 16.4 Water Quality

The Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit spans six drainage basins: Basin Bayou, Botheration Bayou, Direct Runoff to Bay, Harrison Bayou, St. Andrews Bay, and Unnamed Bayou. All of the Breakfast Point Peninsula conservation unit buffers and contributes surface waters directly to West Bay. The environmental issues surrounding West Bay focus primarily on maintaining water quality and quantity and protecting EFH and living marine resources in the bay. In the 305(b) report, water quality status for West Bay is listed as good (FDEP 2000). The 1998 305(b) report (FDEP 1998) lists the water quality trend to be good with high confidence. The 1996 305(b) report lists West Bay as fully meeting the water quality standards set forth by the state. West Bay is not listed on the 1998 303(d) Impaired Waters list.

The water quality statuses for the various drainage basins has been reported as fair to excellent in the 305(b) reports for 1996 through 2000 (FDEP 1996, 1998, 2002). The ERATools™ reports at the end of this section provide more details.

The wetland systems within this conservation unit connect directly with wetland systems in the Breakfast Point Mitigation Bank and with West Bay. Surface water flows into West Bay. About 4% (98 acres) of the Breakfast Point Peninsula unit contributes to maintaining blackwater inflow to West Bay, most of which comes from Rutledge Sand soils, a primary hydric depressional soil. The direct flows into the West Bay system emphasize the importance of this conservation unit within the study area.

There are no known immediate point-source water quality threats to the system in the boundary or within 1 mile of the boundary. Silvicultural activities account for limited non-point source water quality threats. Most of the land cover is in natural communities, primarily salt marshes, of high quality. The estimated percentage of land use within the Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit that is wetland ranges from 72% to 96% (NFWMD and NWI, respectively) to 87% (1,984 acres) using the method for estimating Corps' jurisdiction. These wetlands currently filter surface water in the six drainage basins. This unit currently buffers runoff into West Bay from silviculture and potential future development south of the unit.

## 16.5 Essential Fish Habitat and Living Marine Resources

The Breakfast Point Peninsula Conservation Unit encompasses extensive salt marshes and tidal flats and some seagrass beds. This conservation unit also buffers and filters surface water flow into West Bay. West Bay supports extensive saltwater marshes and seagrass beds that are designated as EFH. In addition, about 50% of this unit is classified as an FNAI-identified priority coastal area. Conserving and

restoring this conservation unit will protect and improve the abundance and health of the existing EFH and other living marine resources in West Bay.