

Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park

Planning Region: North Florida Highlands

County: Clay

Lease/Management Agreement Number: 2455

Overview

One of Florida's oldest state parks, Gold Head Branch has a rich Civilian Conservation Corps history evident in many of the park's structures including the entrance station and cabins. Located at the southern extent of the Trail Ridge, the park protects the largest steephead ravine system in northeast Florida cradled within an old-growth longleaf pine and wiregrass dominated sandhill.

Total Acreage: 2,366.87

Natural Communities	Acres
Mesic Flatwoods	23.28
Sandhill	1767.44
Scrub	134.35
Slope Forest	46.35
Xeric Hammock	28.90
Basin Marsh	79.63
Baygall	22.96
Depression Marsh	0.56
Seepage Slope	26.94
Shrub Bog	0.99
Sandhill Upland Lake	142.60
Sinkhole Lake	23.75
Seepage Stream	1.83

Altered Landcover	
Developed	65.90

Acquisition: Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park was initially acquired on January 11, 1935, as one of the original eight Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Florida. Subsequent acquisitions were funded by the Park Board, LATF, CARL/P200. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees) hold fee simple title to the park and on September 3, 2019, the Trustees renewed (Lease Number 2455) to DRP under a 50-year lease. The current lease will expire on September 3, 2069.

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Resource Management Component Objectives

Hydrology

- Conduct an assessment of the parks hydrological restoration needs by continuing to monitor surface, groundwater, rainfall and lake level data including participation with the LAKEWATCH Program.
- Address park facility water quality impacts on Lake Johnson and on hydrological regimes of the park.

Natural Communities

- Maintain 1800 acres within the optimum fire return interval.
- Continue restoration of 80 acres of sandhill.
- Protect resources from visitor impacts at the ravine, Devil's Washbasin and Sheeler and Pebble Lakes.

Imperiled Species

- Monitor and document seven selected imperiled animal species (Indigo snake, gopher tortoise, Florida mouse, gopher frog, bald eagle, scrub jay, and Say's Spiketail and Purple Skimmer dragonflies).
- Monitor and document five selected imperiled plant species (Curtiss' milkweed, Showy dawnflower, Buckthorn bully, Diverseleaf crownbeard, hooded pitcherplant).
- Continue nest box program for Southeastern Kestrels and other cavity nesting species.
- Restore scrub natural community to benefit imperiled scrub plant and animal species.

Invasive and Nuisance Species

- Annually treat 140 gross acres containing 6 infested acres of invasive plant species.
- Scout every zone within the park at least twice within ten years for new populations of invasive plants.
- Practice preventative measures to avoid accidental introduction or spreading of invasives within the park.
- Implement control measures on three nuisance and invasive animal species in the park (armadillos, feral cats, and dogs).

Cultural Resources

- Assess and evaluate 53 of 53 recorded cultural resources in the park.
- Compile reliable documentation for all recorded historic and archaeological resources.
- Bring 53 of 53 recorded cultural resources into good condition.

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Land Use Component Objectives

Conceptual Land Use

Park Entrance

- Reconfigure entrance for better functionality.

Ravine Overlook

- Address erosion issues

Ravine Trailhead

- Develop new ADA accessible pathway.
- Develop new ADA accessible overlook.

Lake Johnson Day Use Area

- Improve wayfinding and interpretation.
- Construct a new larger recreational hall.
- Remove stone picnic tables and replace with up to three small or large pavilions.

Mill Site Trailhead

- Add boardwalk from parking area to trailhead.
- Replace metal footbridge.
- Update interpretation and wayfinding at trailhead

Cabin Area

- Continue historic preservation and maintenance of CCC Cabins
- Perform improvements and renovations as needed.

Campgrounds: Sandhill, Turkey Oak, and Lakeview

- Upgrade utilities
- Realign road at Lakeview to expand campsites.
- Remove with provision to relocate interpretive amphitheater at Lakeview Campground.

Big Lake Johnson Boat Ramp

- Remove boat ramp.
- Remove section of boat ramp access road and create cul-de-sac parking at terminus.
- Create a nature trail to lake edge.
- Develop interpretation along nature trail.

Support Area

- Condense current shop support buildings.
- Continue historical preservation and maintenance of CCC buildings.
- Add one lumber shed, two pole barns, and an administrative building.
- Replace Sign Shop Building
- Develop volunteer village.

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Optimum Boundary

The park optimum boundary includes approximately 720 acres of adjacent lands that would protect additional sandhill and sandhill upland lakes. These lands support intact sandhill or are considered to have high restoration potential. Furthermore, they would buffer existing support facilities, improve the park's ability to prescribe burn, and provide expanded opportunities for recreation. Although the parcels are not identified in current state land acquisition projects nor in the proposed Ocala NF to Osceola N.F to Okefenokee Swamp Greenway (O2O2O) advocated by several conservation groups, the addition does expand the area of habitat that should be protected, one of the goals of both land acquisition projects.

This project will also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, providing more recreational opportunities for the public. All optimum boundary parcels are close to a multi-use trail corridor. According to FWC, more than ¼ of this project includes 7 or more focal species, and FNAI reports that more than ½ of the project is a habitat conservation priority for rare species. The project parcels would provide wildlife and recreational corridors to Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park.

Just southwest of the park is a 960-acre parcel that is commercially owned. The land contains a mix of disturbed land, open water pits, and planted slash pines. Acquisition of this parcel of land will allow for a buffer from any future developments and adjacent roadways and expand opportunities for natural community restoration/reconstruction.