

**ITEM 20:**

Consider an update to the Belmore State Forest Management Plan (Lease No. 4482).

**LOCATION:**

Clay County

**APPLICANT:**

Florida Forest Service (FFS)

**DSL STAFF REMARKS:***Background*

Belmore State Forest (BSF) is located in northeastern Florida, in southern Clay County. The forest is approximately 15 miles west of Green Cove Springs and 27 miles southwest of Orange Park. The forest is comprised of two tracts, the Satsuma Tract in the north and the Ates Creek Tract to the south. Many natural communities can be found on BSF including sandhills, mesic flatwoods, baygalls, wet flatwoods and floodplain forests; each with unique plants, animals, and physical characteristics.

The Ates Creek Tract of BSF was acquired in June 2004 under the Florida Forever Program, specifically the Northeast Florida Timberlands and Watershed Reserve Project. The Satsuma Tract was purchased in April 2009 by the St. Johns River Water Management District using Forest Legacy Stewardship funds. The FFS has management responsibility for all tracts of BSF.

The primary mission of the FFS is to “protect Florida and its people from the dangers of wildland fire and manage the forest resources through a stewardship ethic to assure they are available for future generations.” Management strategies for BSF center on the multiple-use concept, as defined in sections 589.04(3) and 253.034(2)(a) F.S. Implementation of this concept will utilize and conserve state forest resources in a harmonious and coordinated combination that will best serve the people of the state of Florida, and that is consistent with the purpose for which the forest was acquired. Multiple-use management for BSF will be accomplished with the following strategies:

- Practice sustainable forest management for improved forest health and efficient generation of revenue in support of state forest management objectives;
- Provide for resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities for multiple interests;
- Restore and manage healthy forests and native ecosystems ensuring the long-term viability of populations and species listed as endangered, threatened or rare, and other components of biological diversity including game and nongame wildlife and plants;
- Protect known archaeological, historical, and cultural resources;
- Restore, maintain, and protect hydrological functions related to water resources and the health of associated wetland and aquatic communities.
- Provide research and educational opportunities related to natural resource management.

*Management Plan Overview*

In 2013 and 2016, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory completed an inventory and natural community mapping project on the Satsuma and Ates Creek Tracts of BSF, respectively, and a historic natural community type map was created. Twelve natural community types are found on

BSF. The predominant natural community is mesic flatwoods, followed by baygall. There are sixteen rare, endangered or threatened species documented on BSF.

A review of information contained in the Department of Historical Resources (DHR) Florida Master Site file has determined there are two archeological sites, one historic cemetery, and one historic bridge within BSF. FFS will consult with DHR public lands archaeologists as necessary to determine an appropriate priority and frequency of monitoring at each of the listed sites, as well as any protection measures that might be required. All archaeological and historical sites within the state forest will be monitored at least annually. FFS field staff will monitor the listed sites to note condition and any existing or potential threats.

The forest is open during daylight hours for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, and wildlife viewing. The current network of unpaved roads is ideal for these activities, and a trail system is being planned to improve these activities, along with plans to provide overnight primitive camping areas. Coot's Shanty Recreation Area on the Ates Creek Tract provides an ideal location for picnicking as well as a good place to begin hiking the forest. BSF is open to regulated hunting and fishing under the direction of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. BSF's Satsuma Tract is an Operation Outdoor Freedom program site and provides recreational opportunities to wounded veterans.

The BSF is a participant in a Firewise community program. Communities in wildfire prone areas must work together to be fully prepared for wildfire. A "Fire Adapted Community" incorporates people, buildings, businesses, infrastructure, cultural resources, and natural areas to prepare for the effects of wildfire. The Fire Adapted Community concept serves as an umbrella to the various programs that help communities become more fire adapted. The FFS has implemented the Fire Adapted Community concept for prevention statewide. Specifically, in the area adjacent to or nearby BSF, efforts in this regard will continue to identify communities at risk and to contact their representatives.

The Florida Legislature requires that all land management plans include long and short-term (ST) goals. These goals must be measurable objectives, and ST goals must be achievable within a two-year planning period. Pursuant to changes to Section 253.034, F.S., the Division of State Lands tracks the status of ST goals in each land management plan approved since July 1, 2016. The ST goals from this management plan are included as part of this item.

#### *Public Involvement*

FFS responds to public involvement through liaison panels, management plan advisory groups, public hearings, and through ongoing direct contact with user groups. The plan was developed with input from the BSF Management Plan Advisory Group and was reviewed at a public hearing on August 25, 2020. There was no input from the public.

#### *Surplus Lands*

On conservation lands where FFS is the lead manager, FFS assesses and identifies areas for potential surplus land. This consists of an examination of: resource and operational management needs, public access and recreational use, and GIS modeling and analysis. The evaluation of BSF by FFS has determined that all portions of the area are being managed and operated for the original purposes of acquisition, therefore, no portion of the BSF is recommended for potential surplus.

*State Land Management Review Team*

A Land Management Review (LMR) was conducted in September 2019. The review team found that the property is managed in accordance with the purposes for which it was acquired and the management practices, including public access, are in compliance with the management plan. Two consensus recommendations were offered:

- The team recommended the FFS increase the number of acres burned and continue to move towards more growing season burns as restoration continues.
- The team recommended the FFS convert the District (OPS) Biologist to an FTE position.

The 2019 LMR notes were reviewed as part of developing this plan and the agreed upon changes and recommendations were made to this management plan.

**DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve the management plan.

**ARC RECOMMENDATION:**

**APPROVE**

**APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DEFER**

**WITHDRAW**

**NOT APPROVE**

**OTHER:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Belmore State Forest Land Management Plan Short Term Goals

Goal (ST)	Details of Goal	Objective	Details of Objective	Performance Measure
2	Public Access and Recreational Opportunities	2	Assess additional public access and recreational opportunities.	Number of additional visitor opportunities.

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*Source:* Florida DEP, Office of Environmental Services, Revised 2018.

LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LEAD AGENCY: Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Forest Service  
 COMMON NAME: Belmore State Forest  
 LOCATION: Clay County  
 ACREAGE TOTAL: 12,262.30 acres (more or less)

Historical Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage
Mesic Flatwoods	5,917
Wet Flatwoods	2,569
Sandhill	1,152
Baygall	1,010
Floodplain Swamp	570
Bottomland Forest	453

Historical Natural Communities	Approximate Acreage
Dome Swamp	319
Depression Marsh	126
Upland Mixed Flatwood	59
Wet Prairie	52
Scrubby Flatwoods	27
Upland Hardwood Forest	7

TITF LEASE AGREEMENT NUMBER: 4482  
 SJRWMD LEASE AGREEMENT NUMBER: BOT Contract # 9548 and SJRWMD Contract # 14718  
 USE: Single  Multiple

MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FDACS, Florida Forest Service  
 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
 St. Johns River Water Management District  
 Department of State, Division of Historical Resources

RESPONSIBILITY

General Forest Resource Management  
 Wildlife Resources & Laws  
 Water Resource Protection & Restoration  
 Historical & Archaeological Resource Management

DESIGNATED LAND USE: Multiple-Use State Forest  
 SUBLEASES: None  
 ENCUMBRANCES: Multiple, See II.D.6  
 TYPE ACQUISITION: Florida Forever and Save Our Rivers programs  
 UNIQUE FEATURES: Ravine mosaic created by Ates Creek and its tributary, Devil's Den Creek  
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL / HISTORICAL: Three (3) known sites  
 MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Ecosystem Restoration  
 ACQUISITION NEEDS: 14,576 Additional Acres  
 SURPLUS ACREAGE: None  
 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: 2014 and 2019 Land Management Reviews, Management Plan Advisory Group and Public Hearing, FDEP Acquisition and Restoration Council Public Hearing, and local liaison panel





















