

## Manatee Springs State Park

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**Planning Region:** Suwannee River

**County:** Levy

**Lease/Management Agreement Number:** 3634

### Overview

Manatee Springs State Park protects one of the largest first magnitude springs in the lower Suwannee River Basin with connection to 6.3 miles of mapped aquatic caves and a 1,200-foot spring run stream. It offers remarkable resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities, including swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving, paddling, hiking and camping.

**Total Acreage:** 2,454.48

<b>Natural Communities</b>	<b>Acres</b>
Aquatic Cave	unquantified
Alluvial Forest	230.64
Bottomland Forest	46.26
Basin Swamp	43.63
Blackwater Stream	16.47
Depression Marsh	29.91
Floodplain Swamp	521.49
Limestone Outcrop	0.004
Mesic Hammock	363.63
Scrubby Flatwoods	227.19
Sandhill	61.11
Sinkhole	0.51
Sinkhole Lake	1.82
Spring-Run Stream	3.17
Swamp Lake	13.09
Upland Hardwood Forest	61.00
Upland Mixed Woodland	561.57
Upland Pine	1.23
Xeric Hammock	100.83

  

<b>Altered Land Cover</b>	<b>Acres</b>
Clearing/Regeneration	1.3
Developed	36.0
Restoration Natural Community	1.04
Successional Hardwood Forest	133.76

**Acquisition:** Manatee Springs State Park was initially acquired on January 6, 1949. Since this initial purchase, the State has acquired several additional parcels, through Land Acquisition Trust Fund and P2000/Acquisitions and Inholdings programs.

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### **Resource Management Component Objectives**

#### **Hydrology**

- Conduct/obtain an assessment of the park's hydrological restoration needs by monitoring surface and groundwater quality, continue monitoring all onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems (OSTDSs), and perform dye trace studies.
- Address water quality and quantity concerns within the manatee spring shed by developing programming to educate the public about anthropogenic impacts to the Manatee/Fanning spring shed.
- Restore natural aquatic habitat to approximately 3.17 acres of spring-run stream through SAV plantings, annually surveying for SAV, and seeking approvals and funding to implement the Manatee Springs Shoreline Restoration Project.
- Restore natural hydrology to approximately 33,000 feet of aquatic cave passages by monitoring physical and biological changes within the Manatee cave system.
- Restore natural hydrology to approximately 7 acres of floodplain swamp, alluvial forest, and basin swamp natural communities by determining if the culverts on the Scenic Trail and along the north boundary of the park allow necessary water flow between wetlands.
- Monitor impacts of visitor use on the aquatic cave system.

#### **Natural Communities**

- Develop and implement an annual burn plan to maintain 1,107 acres within the optimum fire return interval.
- Conduct natural community improvements on 250 acres of upland mixed woodland, upland pine, and successional hardwood forest through chemical/mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and planting longleaf pines as needed.
- Conduct natural community improvements on 107 acres of scrubby flatwoods through mechanical treatment, prescribed fire, and potentially removing windrows in the Meade Scott tract.
- Conduct natural community improvements on 18 acres by removing loblolly pines encroaching on depression marshes.
- Convert up to 30 acres of xeric hammock to either sandhill, upland pine, or scrubby flatwoods natural community as determined through appropriate evaluation.

#### **Imperiled Species**

- Develop and implement monitoring protocols for 3 troglobitic species and continue monitoring Suwannee alligator snapping turtle and Florida manatee.
- Develop and implement monitoring protocols for Florida milkvine and Florida mountain mint.

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### **Invasive and Nuisance Species**

- Annually treat 0.5 acres of invasive plant species.
- Prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plants into the park.
- Survey the entire park for invasives at least 2 times over 10 years.
- Implement control measures on 2 invasive animal species in the park (feral hogs and grass carp).

### **Cultural Resources**

- Assess and evaluate 23 of 23 recorded cultural resources in the park.
- Compile reliable documentation for all recorded historic and archaeological resources.
- Bring 7 of 23 recorded cultural resources into good condition.

## **Land Use Component Objectives**

### **Conceptual Land Use**

#### Springhead Day Use Area

- Relocate/replace the existing restroom/concession structure.
- Bring sidewalks into ADA compliance.
- Redesign the spring run access area.
- Remove the spring run retaining wall and restore the shoreline.
- Add interpretation focused on first magnitude spring and Suwannee River.

#### Suwannee River Access

- Maintain the spring run boardwalk and perform routine decking replacements.

#### Catfish Hotel and Sue Sink

- Reduce impact to sinkholes by limiting visitor access and siting appropriate interpretive observation points.

#### Hickory Campground

- Assess and implement measures to eliminate impacts to the spring and underlying aquatic caves. Alternatives include infrastructural upgrades or facility relocation.

#### Magnolia Campground

- Relocate Hickory tent-only campground here.
- Replace the bathhouse in Magnolia Loop 2.
- Connect the campground to the Levy County sewer system.

#### Semi-Primitive Group Camp

- Replace portable toilets with a permanent restroom.
- Improve parking area.

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### Parkwide Trail System

- Create a more formal trailhead.
- Add directional signage to bring attention to trail connecting springhead to trailhead.
- Create new trails from Sink Trail Loop to newly acquired southern parcel in coordination with restoration activity.

### **Optimum Boundary**

A large tract to the south of the park is included in the optimum boundary in order to further buffer water resources with additional conservation lands. Adjacent lands include subterranean and surface drainage routes into the springhead, as well as wetlands that are hydrologically connected to the spring recharge area.

There is a small group of parcels separating the current approved optimum boundary from the existing northern park boundary which are proposed for inclusion so that the boundaries are contiguous.

If acquired, the over 2,000 acres of agricultural lands to the northeast of the park within the current approved optimum boundary would further buffer water resources from surrounding agricultural operations. These cleared agricultural lands also represent ideal habitat to engage in longleaf pine restoration efforts. This land would also connect the existing park boundary to Andrews Wildlife Management Area which connects to Fanning Springs State Park's Optimum Boundary. If acquired, this optimum boundary would complete a large wildlife corridor that extends all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

DRP has a long-term sublease with Levy County regarding a boat ramp situated to the north of Manatee Springs State Park. If the county were ever to discontinue managing this boat ramp, DRP would reincorporate it back into the park boundary.

The park boundary should also extend about 50 feet into the Suwannee River to facilitate further protection of adjacent water resources and the manatee populations that depend on them.