



Chapter 2

Credit: Frank Weber, Orange County Government

A comprehensive statewide plan for outdoor recreation requires a thorough analysis of the state's social and physical settings. Florida's unique settings and attributes make it a paradise for outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

Florida's People And Economy

As the 21st century rolls onward, the Sunshine State's remarkable rate of population growth shows no signs of slowing anytime soon. Florida's population is now the nation's third largest, having surpassed New York in 2014. According to the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research, Florida's population grew to 20.1 million in 2016, a 6.9 percent increase from 2010. Florida is projected to have 22.8 million residents by 2025 and 23.8 million by 2030. In comparison, when Florida's first SCORP was written in 1965, its

population was only 5.9 million.

As of 2017, 29 of Florida's 67 counties (43 percent) are considered rural (see Figure 2.1). These counties are grouped into three regions and are designated by the Office of the Governor as Rural Areas of Opportunity (RAO). The Rural Economic Development Initiative works to assist Florida's rural communities by "providing a more focused and coordinated effort" among agencies that provide rural programs and services.

The state continues to become more ethnically and culturally diverse, and as reported in the 2013 SCORP, Hispanics represent the fastest growing segment of Florida's population. In 2015, the Hispanic/Latino population rose to 24.5 percent (a 44 percent increase since 2000).

Mirroring national trends, Florida's population is also getting older. In fact, Florida is known as a "retirement state," with the highest proportion of retirees in the country. In 2015, nearly one in five (19.4 percent) Floridians were aged 65 or older, as compared to the national average of 14.9 percent. By 2020, Florida's median age is expected to climb to 42.1, an upward shift from 40.7 in 2010. By comparison, the projected U.S. median age in 2020 will be 38.5 years.

The state's rapid population growth, increasing ethnic diversity and the shift in age of its population continues to create complex challenges affecting many aspects of the state's social and economic framework. The planning and coordination of Florida's outdoor recreation programs will likewise be affected by these changes.

If current trends continue, most of the new

Although more than 90 percent of Florida's residents live in urban and suburban areas, many of the state's counties are still designated as rural. Section 288.0656, Florida Statutes, defines a rural county as:

- A county with a population of 75,000 or less
- A county with a population of 125,000 or less which is contiguous to a county with a population of 75,000 or less



population will concentrate in less populated counties adjacent to highly developed metropolitan areas, particularly in coastal areas. As these areas become more developed, problems such as loss of open space and natural areas, crowding and a higher cost of living will provide an impetus for further expansion into more rural areas.

Sprawl also reduces the availability of outdoor recreation land and facilities, unless more land is acquired and more facilities developed in pace with the expansion. Rapid development continues to be a major challenge for recreation planning and programming in Florida. Ensuring an adequate land base for outdoor recreation and securing the necessary funding for development and operation of recreation facilities are

critical to Florida’s continued recreation supply.

To ensure a high quality of life in Florida, the amenities provided by the state’s outdoor recreation providers must be coupled with a healthy social and economic climate. Among socioeconomic variables, income is a major factor in determining the ability of people to participate in many kinds of recreational activity. Florida’s economic situation has improved significantly since the 2008 recession, when per capita annual income dropped by roughly \$2,600 to \$37,382. As of 2015, Florida’s per capita personal incomes had rebounded to an estimated \$44,429 according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

As of October 2017, Florida’s unemployment rate remains low (3.6 percent), as compared to the

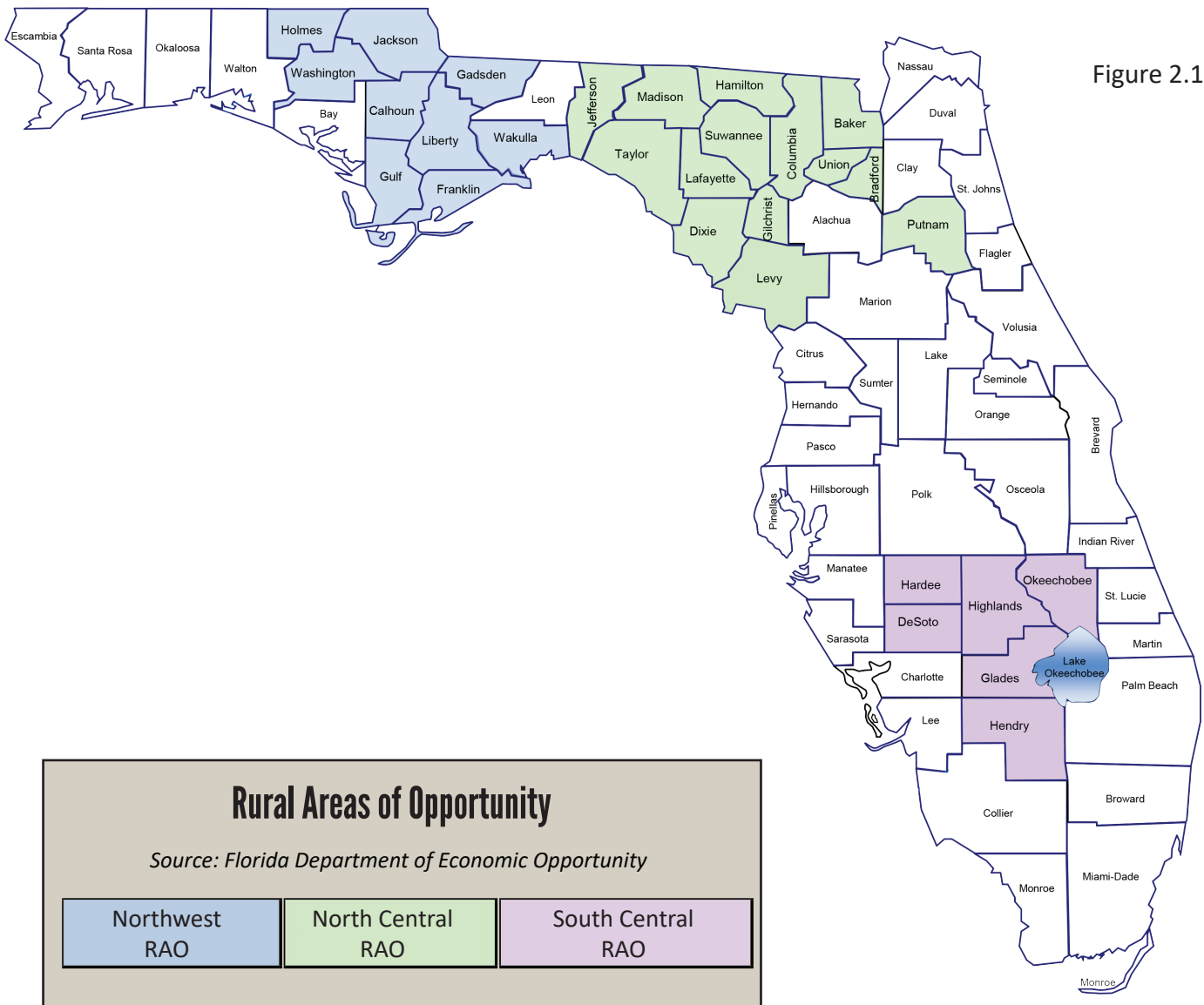


Figure 2.1





national average (4.1 percent). The health of the state and local economies will always directly affect the public resources available to support outdoor recreation. Therefore, current economic conditions and subsequent financial support for recreation remains priority issues for recreation system planning in Florida.

Tourism remains Florida’s number one industry, and tourism-based activities continue to dominate Florida’s economy. An estimated 112.4 million tourists visited Florida in 2016, a 5.4 percent increase from 2015 and a 29.2 percent increase since 2011. Tourism in Florida accounted for nearly 1.4 million jobs in

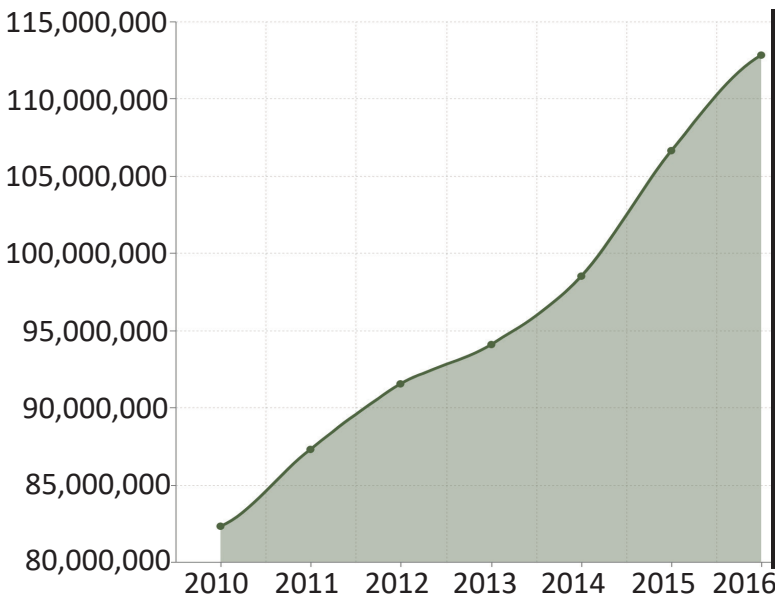
2016. Taxable spending in the tourism and recreation category during 2015 totaled \$89.1 billion, according to data from VISIT FLORIDA.

Outdoor recreation is a key component of the Florida’s tourism industry, contributing an estimated \$145 billion to the state’s economy (see Appendix K). Given Florida’s setting, and the breadth of recreation opportunities available, the state will likely remain a popular destination for both domestic and international travelers, although increased competition from other vacation destinations, the emergence of the Zika virus, hurricanes and increases in travel costs are major concerns.

Figure 2.2

Visitor Estimates for Florida 2010-2016

Table 2.1



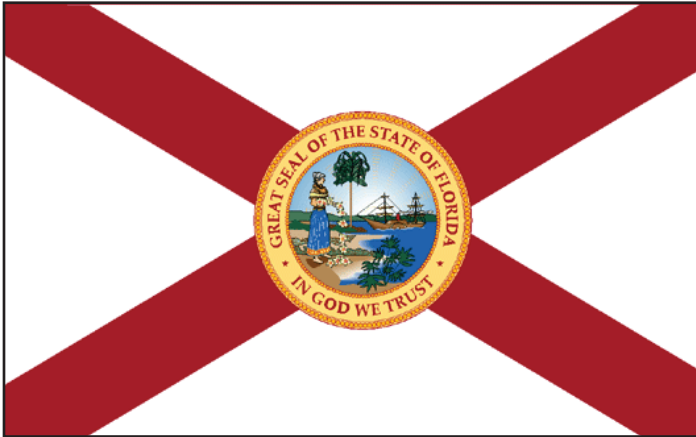
Year	Annual Visitors (millions)	Percentage Change
2010	82.3	N/A
2011	87.3	6.1%
2012	91.5	4.8%
2013	94.1	2.8%
2014	98.5	4.7%
2015	106.6	8.2%
2016	112.4	5.4%

Source: VISIT FLORIDA



Physical Situation

Florida, the second largest state east of the Mississippi River, has an elongated peninsula stretching 447 miles from north to south; the state is 361 miles from east to west. Despite its size, no point in Florida is more than 70 miles from either the Atlantic or Gulf coasts. Florida's diverse coastline extends 1,350 miles around the peninsula. To the north, Florida shares borders with Alabama and Georgia.



Florida By The Numbers

Land Area: 34.7 million acres
Interior Waters: 2.9 million acres
Total Area: 42.1 million acres
Smallest County: Union (156,800 acres)
Largest County: Palm Beach (1.65 million acres)

Climate

Florida's climate is one of its primary assets, enabling residents and visitors to enjoy year-round outdoor activities. Florida lies within the temperate zone, yet its climate, particularly in the lower peninsula, is subtropical, with wet, humid summers and relatively dry, cool winters. The influence of the Gulf of Mexico's waters on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east helps moderate seasonal temperature extremes.

Most of the state enjoys a long, warm summer, relatively minor seasonal transitions and a short, mild winter. The mean annual temperature ranges from the upper 60s in the northern portions of the state to the upper 70s in the south. North Florida's average monthly temperature highs range from 60° to 92° F and lows range from 39° to 75° F. South Florida's average monthly temperature highs range from 70° to 92° F and lows range from 49° to 80° F.

Florida's abundant rainfall is seasonal. Most of the state's average annual rainfall of 53 inches consists of short summer showers. In the winter months, when sunshine is conducive to outdoor activity, Florida enjoys the greatest average percentage of seasonal sunshine in the eastern U.S.

Florida's geography makes it extremely vulnerable to tropical storms and hurricanes. These cyclonic weather systems have always been a part of Florida's natural climatic patterns, and in any given year, it is possible for multiple storm events to impact both inland and coastal areas. As the science surrounding climate change indicates that carbon emissions are affecting global climate, the state's outdoor recreation resources may be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than many others.

Changes in climate can affect water temperatures and salinity, disrupting natural conditions in sensitive areas such as coastal wetlands and coral reefs. Coastal erosion has also compromised many of the state's saltwater beaches, necessitating costly restoration and stabilization efforts to protect this vital component of Florida's economy and culture.

Florida's Recreation and Leisure-Based Tourism

Florida is a popular place to visit and vacation for many reasons. Climate, beautiful beaches, theme parks, wildlife, scenery and access to water are all well-known draws. Many of Florida's most unique traits are rooted in its landscape, leading millions of people each year to participate in outdoor recreation and leisure activities while in Florida.

According to VISIT FLORIDA, the percentage of tourists who choose to visit the state because of outdoor opportunities is significant.



Percentage of visitors who came to Florida primarily for recreation and leisure



Geology

A map of Florida as it appears today does not divulge its geological past. What we think of as the state of Florida occupies only about half of a larger geological unit known as the Floridian Plateau. This plateau is a partly submerged platform nearly 500 miles long and up to 400 miles wide that separates the deep waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The submerged portions of the plateau are called the continental shelf, extending out to an ocean depth of about 300 feet.

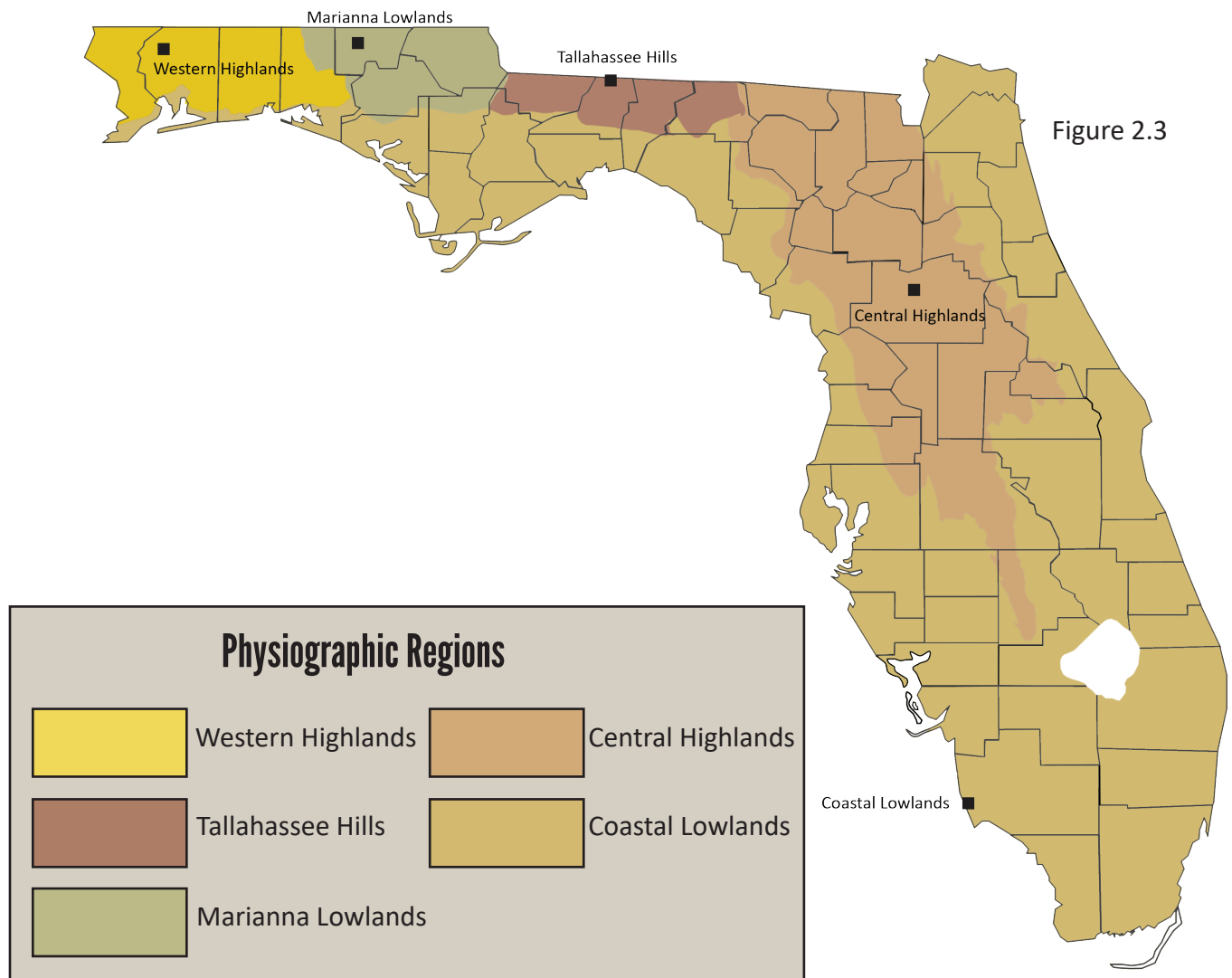
The Floridian Plateau has been in existence for millions of years, during which time it has been alternately dry land or shallow sea. It consists of a core of metamorphic rocks buried under layers of sedimentary rocks (mostly limestone) which vary in thickness from a little less than one mile to more than four miles.

Physiography

The state is divided into five physical or natural regions. These are the Western Highlands, the Marianna Lowlands, the Tallahassee Hills, the Central Highlands and the Coastal Lowlands (see Figure 2.3).

The **Western Highlands** region includes much of the Florida Panhandle between the Perdido and Apalachicola Rivers, and lies north of the Coastal Lowlands. It is a southward-sloping plateau, hilly in the northern part and carved by narrow steep-walled stream valleys. The hills in the northern part of the plateau are more than 300 feet in elevation and include the highest measured elevation in the state (the 345-foot Britton Hill is located here within Lakewood Park in Walton County).

The **Marianna Lowlands** region, found west of the Apalachicola River, is characterized by low, rolling



Topsail Hill Preserve State Park, Credit: Walter Ebbert



hills, sinkholes and numerous small lakes. This region occupies a roughly quadrilateral area, with its southern and western limits marked by a rise to the Western Highlands. The elevation is due to the increasing thickness of sand covering the limestone base that lies near the land surface.

The **Tallahassee Hills** region, north of the Coastal Lowlands, stretches from the Apalachicola River to the northern Withlacoochee River. It is approximately 100 miles wide by 25 miles in length and is characterized by long, gentle slopes with rounded summits.

The **Central Highlands** region extends from the Tallahassee Hills and the Okefenokee Swamp in the north almost to Lake Okeechobee in the south. It is approximately 250 miles long, with the northern half being approximately 60 miles wide. Much of the northern part is a nearly level plain approximately 150 feet above sea level. The western portion consists of hills and hollows interspersed with broad, low plains. This sub-region ranges in altitude from 200 feet to less than 40 feet above sea level. Adjoining this sub-region to the east and extending southward to the end of the Central Highlands is a sub-region known as the Lake Region. It is characterized by numerous lakes and high hills of up to 325 feet above sea level.

The **Coastal Lowlands** region forms the entire Florida coastline, including the Florida Keys, and reaches inland as much as 60 miles at some points. The

inner edge generally lies along the 100' contour line. In recent geologic times, these lowlands were marine terraces and experienced three or more successive inundations by higher sea levels. This is a flat region, except where ancient shorelines or dune ridges occur or where the surface has been modified by stream erosion or underground solution.

The Gulf Coast has the appearance of a drowned coastline, one that is sinking into the sea. The east coast has the appearance of an emergent coast, one that is rising from the sea. However, sea levels on both coasts are rising gradually as the result of changes in global climatic patterns.

Hydrology

Much of Florida is covered by water; roughly 2.9 million acres are submerged, in fact. These include some 7,700 natural and man-made lakes larger than 10 acres, as well as marshes, swamps and seasonal floodplains. More than 11,000 miles of rivers, streams and waterways wind through the state, mostly in the northern half. South Florida's paucity of river systems is due to its differing geological history and flatter terrain. Drainage in south Florida occurs through broad, shallow channels, many of which have





Florida is tailor-made for boating and paddling.

been altered extensively by humans for purposes of reclamation and water management.

In addition to lakes, rivers and streams, wetlands comprise a major component of the state’s surface waters. It has been estimated that in 1973, wetlands and their associated open waters accounted for approximately one-third of Florida’s total area. An overview of wetlands in Florida, including a description of wetland protection efforts, is contained in Appendix I.

A considerable amount of Florida’s waters percolate through the underlying limestone rock, forming groundwater reservoirs. These underground reservoirs, or aquifers, discharge tremendous quantities of fresh water to wells and to some of the world’s largest springs. Florida has 33 first magnitude springs (flows of >100 cubic feet per second), more than anywhere else in the world, discharging more than 6 billion gallons of water per day. The combined flow of all 700-plus of the state’s springs is estimated to be 8 billion gallons per day.

Between Florida’s offshore waters and its inland fresh waters are sheltered coastal waters generally

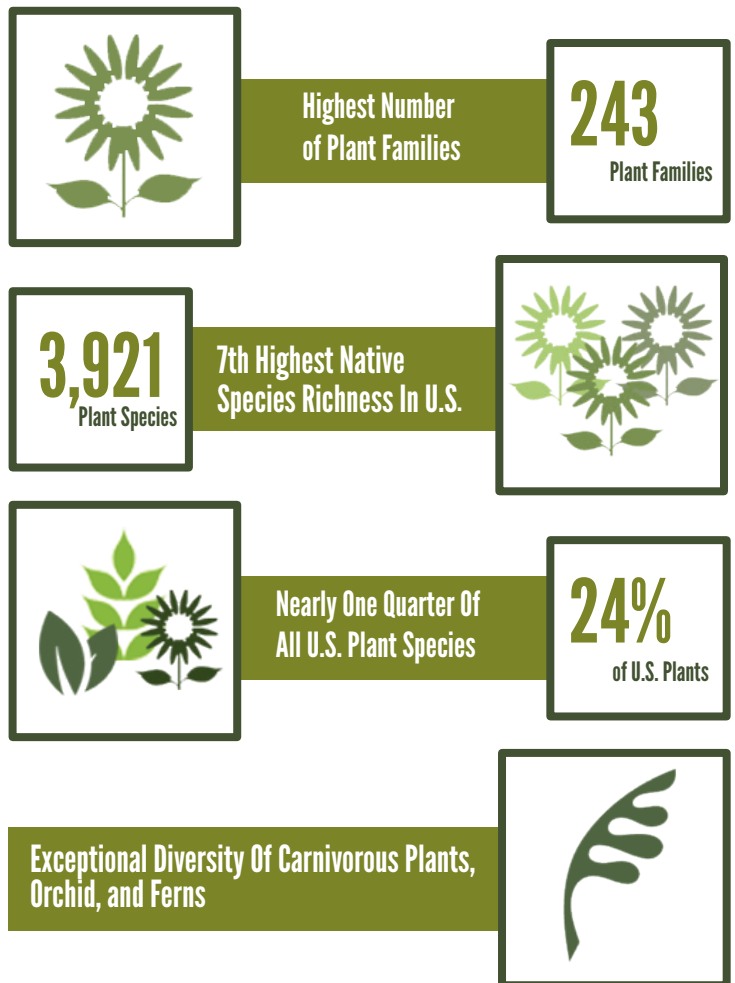
referred to as estuaries. Estuaries form where the flow of fresh water from inland rivers and streams meets coastal waters. Estuaries are among Florida’s most biologically productive waters, and are vital to the state’s commercial and sport fisheries.

Vegetation

Vegetation is one of the most significant features of Florida’s landscape. Florida’s name “Land of Flowers” stems from Juan Ponce de Leon’s exploration of “La Florida” in the 1500s. Even today, a tremendous variety of plant associations and natural communities cover more than 65 percent of the state.

Historically, Florida’s landscape was shaped by fire (e.g. lightning); more than 80 percent of its natural communities are fire-adapted. Frequent, low-intensity fires remain essential to the survival of many plant and animal species.

According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, the Sunshine State has the highest number of plant families (243) and the sixth highest native species





Credit: John Moran/Florida Wildflower Foundation

richness in the U.S, with approximately 2,600 species; approximately one quarter of all U.S. plant species occur here. The state supports an exceptional number of carnivorous plants, orchids and ferns.

It is estimated that more than one-third of Florida's native plants held ethnobotanical values for its original inhabitants, either as food, shelter, medicine, clothing, fiber and dyes, or had some form of cultural use.

Florida's natural vegetation is noteworthy from the standpoint of outdoor recreation. In addition to its obvious aesthetic qualities, the state's flora utilizes carbon dioxide, produces oxygen, absorbs wastes, maintains water quality, provides food and habitat for

wildlife and performs a host of other environmental functions that themselves contribute to outdoor recreation.

More than 1,300 naturalized exotic plants occur here; roughly 140 of these are particularly invasive (e.g. kudzu, Brazilian pepper and cogongrass) and threaten Florida's natural areas and native species. Significant resources are required annually to combat them.

Effective management of Florida's diverse native plant communities through prescribed burning, exotic plant control, hydrological restoration and other methods is critical for maintaining their ecological and recreational values.

SPOTLIGHT

According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), the state has 68 natural community types. Some of these include mesic flatwoods, upland hardwoods, bottomland forest, maritime hammock, dome swamp, sandhill, scrub, dry prairie, wet prairie, floodplain marsh, salt marsh, mangrove swamp, beach dune, coral reef, seagrass bed, blackwater stream and aquatic and terrestrial caves.





Florida’s wildlife is as varied as the habitats that support it. Florida’s bird and butterfly diversity is the highest in eastern North America. Species range from those common throughout the southeastern United States to some that occur nowhere else in the U.S. such as the American crocodile, Florida panther and the Florida scrub-jay.

Florida’s native species include thousands of saltwater fishes and marine invertebrates, more than 500 birds, 185 butterflies, 140 freshwater fishes, 135 non-marine reptiles and amphibians and nearly 80 mammals that spend all or part of their lives on land. Roughly 30 species of marine mammals such as the Florida manatee and bottlenose dolphin can be found off Florida’s coasts, and five of the world’s sea turtle

species nest here.

The state’s diverse wildlife resources provide a major attraction for many types of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Fish, both freshwater and saltwater, are exceptionally important to the economy and to outdoor recreation in Florida, which prides itself as the “Fishing Capital of the World.” Numerous game species such as white-tailed deer and wild turkey play an important role as well. Non-game species, particularly Florida’s rich bird life, support wildlife viewing and appreciation, along with a wide range of environmental education activities. Approximately 10.4 million acres of managed conservation lands in Florida (roughly 30 percent of the total land area) make many forms of outdoor recreation possible (see Table 2.2).

Managed Conservation Lands in Florida (non-submerged) 10.4 million acres

Table 2.2

Source: FNAI

Manager	Fee Simple Acres	Percent	Less-Than-Fee Simple Acres	Percent
Federal	4.06 million	11.7	131,251	0.4
State	4.89 million	14.1	620,032	1.8
Local	495,466	1.4	9,117	0.03
Subtotal	9.45 million	27.2	760,400	2.2
Private Conservation Lands	127,777	0.37	66,799	0.19
Private Mitigation Banks	69,478	0.02	0	0
Total	9.64 million	27.7	827,199	2.38



History and Culture

There is evidence that humans have inhabited Florida for approximately the last 14,500 years. Prehistoric cultures thrived in this hospitable area and left behind much evidence of their way of life. This evidence is a source of wonder and curiosity for modern humans. The story is still unfolding from professional exploration and analysis of the data gathered from the many Native American mounds, other prehistoric and historic archaeological sites and historic structures found throughout the state. Native American cultures in Florida are not lost however, as tribes including the Seminole, Miccosukee and Creek persist today.

Just 20 years after the first voyage of Columbus, Florida was forever transformed when it was opened up to the western world by Spanish “discovery” in

1513. Shortly thereafter, the city of Pensacola was established in 1559, which is regarded as the oldest European settlement in North America. The founding of St. Augustine, the oldest continually settled city on the continent, occurred six years later in 1565. More than 450 years of exploration, colonization, settlement and development by Spanish, French, British and American people have followed, contributing to Florida’s long, colorful and unique modern history.

Both the Prehistoric and the Modern eras combine to leave rich historical and cultural resources. These resources provide abundant opportunities for a highly popular form of outdoor recreation, visiting historical and archaeological sites. According to the Florida Outdoor Recreation Inventory, more than 2,400 of these sites are available to the public to explore.



Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park

