

APPENDIX E

Wakulla Springs State Park Unit Management Plan

SR 267/Bloxham Cutoff Road Shared-Use Trail Feasibility Study

Only the pages relating to the SR Trail Feasibility Study are included in this appendix. **References to the SR 267 are in red.**

Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park

Acquisition and Restoration Council Approved Unit Management Plan

**STATE OF FLORIDA
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

**Division of Recreation and Parks
December 2022**





FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Jeanette Nuñez
Lt. Governor

Shawn Hamilton
Secretary

December 13, 2022

Mr. Daniel Alsentzer
Division of Recreation and Parks
Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 525
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3000

RE: Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park – Lease No. 3463

Dear Mr. Alsentzer,

On **December 9, 2022**, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) recommended approval of the **Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park** management plan. Therefore, Division of State Lands, Office of Environmental Services (OES), acting as agent for the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, hereby approves the **Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park** management plan. The next management plan update is due December 9, 2032.

Pursuant to s. 253.034(5)(a), F.S., each management plan is required to “describe both short-term and long-term management goals and include measurable objectives to achieve those goals. Short-term goals shall be achievable within a 2-year planning period, and long-term goals shall be achievable within a 10-year planning period.” Upon completion of short-term goals, please submit a signed letter identifying categories, goals, and results with attached methodology to the Division of State Lands, Office of Environmental Services.

Pursuant to s. 259.032(8)(g), F.S., by July 1 of each year, each governmental agency and each private entity designated to manage lands shall report to the Secretary of Environmental Protection, via the Division of State Lands, on the progress of funding, staffing, and resource management of every project for which the agency or entity is responsible.

Pursuant to s. 259.032, F.S., and Chapter 18-2.021, F.A.C., management plans for areas less than 160 acres may be handled in accordance with the negative response process. This process requires small management plans and management plan amendments be submitted to the Division of State Lands for review, and the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) for public notification. The Division of State Lands will approve these plans or plan amendments submitted for review through delegated authority unless three

Mr. Daniel Alsentzer

Page 2

December 13, 2022

or more ARC members request the division place the item on a future council meeting agenda for review. To create better efficiency, improve customer service, and assist members of the ARC, the Division of State Lands will notice negative response items on Thursdays except for weeks that have State or Federal holidays that fall on Thursday or Friday. The Division of State Lands will contact you on the appropriate Friday to inform you if the item is approved via delegated authority or if it will be placed on a future ARC agenda by request of the ARC members.

Pursuant to s. 259.036(2), F.S., management areas that exceed 1,000 acres in size, shall be scheduled for a land management review at least every 5 years.

Conditional approval of this land management plan does not waive the authority or jurisdiction of any governmental entity that may have an interest in this project. Implementation of any upland activities proposed by this management plan may require a permit or other authorization from federal and state agencies having regulatory jurisdiction over those particular activities. Pursuant to the conditions of your lease, please forward copies of all permits to this office upon issuance.

Sincerely,

Deborah Burr  Digitally signed by
Deborah Burr
Date: 2022.12.13
12:04:43 -05'00'

Deborah Burr
Office of Environmental Services
Division of State Lands



EDWARD BALL WAKULLA SPRINGS STATE PARK

Unit Management Plan

Executive Summary

Management Goals & Objectives

Recreational Use & Infrastructure

Recreation and Facilities Management

Goal: Develop and maintain use areas and support infrastructure

Objective: Improve 9 use areas and create 2 new use area.

To improve and expand visitor use at the park, plans include the improvements below:

Park Entrance

- Replace Ranger Station
- **Multi-Use Trail Connection**
- Traffic Pattern Alterations

Main Day Use Area

- Interpretive Center
- Redesign Parking Area
- Remove Dogwood Pavilion
- Playground Improvements
- 2 Additional Trails
- Cypress Dome Observation

Lodge

- Replace Windows and Doors
- Repair/Replace Elevator

Water Structures

- Inspect and Improve Water Tower
- Repair Boat Dock and Observation Dock
- Replace Floating Swim Platforms
- Improve Dive Tower
- Maintain/Replace Tour Boats
- Enhance Ways Area for Park Boat Access
- Improve River Boundary Fence

River Sinks Day Use Area

- Perimeter Fencing

- Reconfigure Trails as Needed
- Enhance Interpretation

Emerald Sink Area

- Replace Stairs

Employee Entrance

- Improve Entrance
- Traffic Pattern Alterations
- Pedestrian Gate

Cherokee Sink

- Restroom
- Additional Swimming Option

Rock Road Trailhead

- Improve Trailhead

Sanctuary

- Designate as Wilderness Preserve

Ferrell Tract

- Stabilized Parking
- Trailhead Kiosk
- Potential Connection to State Forest
- Safety Enhancement with FDOT
- Configure Trails

Creation of impervious surfaces is minimized to the greatest extent feasible in order to limit the need for stormwater management systems, and all facilities are designed and constructed using best management practices to limit and avoid resource impacts. Federal, state, and local permit and regulatory requirements are addressed during facility development. This includes the design of all new park facilities consistent with the universal access requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). After new facilities are constructed, park staff monitors conditions to ensure that impacts remain within acceptable levels.

Public Access and Recreational Opportunities

Goal: Provide public access and recreational opportunities in the park.

The existing recreational activities at this state park are appropriate to the natural and cultural resources contained in the park and should be continued.

Objective: Maintain the park's current recreational use.

The park is heavily visited throughout the year due to the draw of the Wakulla Spring. Water-based activities include swimming and boat tours. The park offers the Lodge with various food options while overlooking the spring to enhance the visitor experience. Trails accommodate bicyclists, hikers, and equestrian use.

Objective: Expand the park's recreational use.

Proposed activities such as adding recreational opportunities to the new Ferrell Tract, **connecting with existing trails on Wakulla State Forest and St. Marks Trail**, additional swimming opportunities at Cherokee Sinks, and adding cycling opportunities and improvements will increase the recreational use of the park.

Additionally, the current laundry building could be repurposed from its current use by the concessionaire as a laundry facility for the lodge and for the concessionaires shop area. If the building is repurposed from its current use there will be a need to relocate these concession services elsewhere in the park.

Objective: Continue to provide interpretive programs.

Wakulla Springs offers a variety of programs throughout the year. Each ranger hosts programs based on their interests and specialties. Examples of programs offered include campfire programs, monthly hikes, hikes with focuses such as wildflowers, birds, plants, and animals. Additionally, boat tours run throughout the day for interpretation of the Wakulla River. Other programs frequently held at the park focus on the rich history of Wakulla Springs and the area of Wakulla.

Objective: Develop new interpretive programs.

Potential program options at the park may include but are not limited to, Lunch with Archeologist, which would be with scientists that conducted the studies at the park and sharing that information and history with park visitors. Additional options include expanding the boat tours to include a Historic Boat Tour, a bike tour to Hidden Springs, a Photo Tour, various programs or tours of the Ferrell Tract, interpretive signs, and kiosks on important topics, and a Songbird Walk.

second trail is proposed as an interpretive trail that utilizes existing service roads and trails to interpret the historical and cultural significance of numerous buildings and artifacts from the park's past. A more permanent structure is proposed on the existing concrete slab behind the admin building to house numerous props and tools that were used on the property for more interpretative opportunities.

Lodge

The windows, doors, and elevator are original to the lodge and are in need of replacement. Repairs to the original elevator are needed to address issues with unlevel landings as this elevator is the only ADA access for the lodge.

Water Structures

Improvements are also proposed for numerous water structures at the park. The water tower at the park needs to be inspected for safety concerns and improvements made as they are deemed necessary. The tour boat dock and observation t-dock are both in need of repairs as they are aging and beginning to show wear and cracks. Both floating docks should also be replaced as well as improvements made to the dive tower to ensure visitor safety in this area.

The tour boats should be repaired, renovated, or replaced to ensure their continued use and visitor satisfaction. The area of the river bottom directly behind the tour boat dock should be dredged to allow deeper water for boat operations. This has been done previously and the dredged sand replaced on the beach area where it eroded from. Improvements are needed to allow for enhanced park boat activities as well as improvements to the boundary fence that stretches across the Wakulla River.

River Sinks Day Use Area

The trailhead at River Sinks along CJ Spears Road has been relocated to accommodate the widening of U.S. 319. The relocation of the trailhead and parking area will also include perimeter fencing and reconfiguring of the trail system as needed while also adding interpretation opportunities.

Emerald Sink Property

The stairs that provide access to the sink are being replaced to provide a safer experience for visitors and divers.

Park Entrance

A new ranger station is currently being built to replace the original ranger station and provide for better flow of visitors into the park. Additional improvements include the conversion of the park's entrance road to accommodate for the proposed multi-use trail connection to the St. Marks Trail. This trail connection would run along the outside edge of the park property and will enter the park at the main entrance where the new proposed traffic pattern will begin. The entrance road is proposed to be turned into a one-way entry-only lane with the existing exit lane converted into bicycle and pedestrian lane. This new traffic pattern would start at the park entrance and end where the main park drive intersects with the road to the lodge. All traffic would exit through the current employee entrance and onto SR 61. **Additional alterations to existing traffic patterns and/or rerouting of existing roads may be necessary to ensure the effectiveness of this conversion. This conversion will accommodate for visitors entering the park via the proposed**

multi-use trail connection to the St. Marks Trail and would provide additional recreational opportunities for guests.

Employee Entrance

The proposals for this area are to improve the entrance with a larger gate that would accommodate for the increase in visitor use as this would be the new location for all exiting traffic out of the park. Additionally, a pedestrian gate should be installed to promote bicycle and pedestrian access from the main park area to the Cherokee Sink property that lies directly across SR 61. Additional alterations to existing traffic patterns and/or rerouting of existing roads may be necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the proposed new traffic pattern.

Cherokee Sink Tract

Proposals for this area include general use area improvement and the addition of a restroom facility to allow visitor use as an additional swimming option.

Rock Road Parking Area

Improvements are proposed at this location include enhanced use for a better equestrian experience.

Objective: Develop 2 new use areas.

Sanctuary

The current sanctuary area of the park acts as a wilderness preserve and should be formally designated as such to ensure the protection of this area in the future.

A wilderness preserve is an area within a state park that retains its primeval character and is managed to preserve and interpret its natural character and values. A designated wilderness preserve generally appears to have been shaped by the unaltered forces of nature, with the imprint of human influence substantially unnoticeable. A wilderness preserve offers outstanding opportunities for the conditions of solitude and remoteness that are essential for a wilderness experience. The area may contain environmental, archaeological, or other kinds of features of scenic, educational, natural, or historic value. Facilities are limited to those considered essential for resource management and specified public uses.

Ferrell Tract

This property was recently acquired through the Forest Legacy Program and provides great recreational opportunities to visitors. The property comprises 717 acres with numerous sinkholes, ecotonal changes, and pristine natural beauty.

The proposals for this acquisition will be minimal in nature to allow the property to stay in its natural state while allowing access for the public. Proposals for this property include adding a stabilized parking area, adding a trailhead kiosk with trail maps and wayfinding guidance, a potential connection to the Wakulla Springs State Forest to lengthen the current experience for equestrians and other trail users, and engagement with FDOT for traffic calming and safety enhancements for the intersection of Old Shell Point Road and SR 61 for a safe crossing of SR 61 for the potential connection to the state forest. New trail should be established for users that provide a great experience while minimizing the potential for degradation of the sensitive resources on this property. New trails should allow

- Clearcut and planted eleven acres in resource management zone WK-EE to restore it.
- Transplanted 1,694 American eelgrass (*Vallisneria americana*) plants in the spring run to restore native submerged aquatic vegetation.
- Created and maintain photo documentation to track and count the manatees visiting the park. Manatees have been overwintering at Wakulla Spring since the winter of 2007-2008, and are seen more frequently year-round than in the past.
- Wakulla Springs Cave System expanded by 7.5 miles by Woodville Karst Plain Project divers.
- Cooperate with the USGS Sirenia Project, FFWCC, and USFWS to study and monitor the manatee population in the park.
- Restoration Project began at River Sinks in 2020.

Cultural Resources

- In 2007, park ranger Jason Vickery reported what is now recognized as the Vickery Mastodon. That discovery led to an investigation led by the Bureau of Archaeological Research (BAR) with the assistance of FGS and Joe Donoghue, a geologist then at FSU. The Vickery mastodon is encompassed within the underwater site 8WA24.
- In 2008, the BAR investigated the Wakulla Lodge site (8WA329). Under a National Geographic grant they successfully dated the site using Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating. The age of the early Paleoindian component identified by the late Calvin Jones in 1996 is a minimum of 13,500 years old with a median age of 14,600.
- The Friends of Wakulla Springs, Aucilla Research Institute, and the Panhandle Archaeological Society at Tallahassee (PAST) have cooperated to extensively study the park. Since 2015, they have completed grid testing on just over 50 acres of park property, conducting 857 grid tests. This effort has allowed them to identify actual site boundaries of recorded sites and revise them, as well as to identify a few new sites. Study continues as funding allows. Most recently, ARI was awarded a grant to investigate and remediate areas where Hurricane Michael upturned trees in known cultural sites.
- In 2016, park biologist Patty Wilbur reported a new mastodon in the river, which is also being added to the Florida Master Site File.
- Level I Archaeological Study completed at River Sinks.

Recreation and Visitor Services

- Expansion of Interpretive programming, adding numerous new programs including: campfire cooking, ranger-led bike tours, plant identification walks, and birding tours, restoring glass bottom boat tours as conditions warrant and utilizing the glass bottom boat for new types of tours.
- Coordinated with Wakulla Lodge to provide enhanced programs such as the Creature of the Black Lagoon 3-D movie night, evening music festivals, dinner cruises, and more.
- **In 2020, Friends of Wakulla Springs contracted HALFF to conduct a review of existing and future regional multi-use trail systems, evaluate the existing trails and pathways within the core area of the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park (the Park) and review potential alternatives for a primary access way for visitors traveling on bicycles to enter the park. This resulted in a plan for connection with the Tallahassee-St. Marks trail and improved traffic conditions to allow for safe pedestrian and bicycle use on the paved park drive.**