



LAKE COUNTY  
FLORIDA

**PARKS and RECREATION ELEMENT**

**Data, Inventory & Analysis**

**2030 Planning Horizon**



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## **PARKS, ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS & TRAILS**

### **EXISTING FACILITIES**

The following section is a brief summary of existing and planned recreation facilities, trails, blueways and environmental lands. Trails, blueways, and environmental lands are listed in separate sections.

### **PARKS**

Lake County has thirty-eight (38) parks and recreation facilities totaling approximately 926 acres, more than a third of which is contained in the 318-acre P.E.A.R. (Palatlahaha Environmental and Agricultural Reserve) Park. Recently, 196 acres was purchased for the Ferndale Preserve as well as 96 acres for the North Lake Community Park and 49 acres for the East Lake Community Park. The majority of the parks owned and operated by Lake County are resource-based with limited development.

Twenty-six parks provide access to a water body. Twelve of the parks that have access to a water body consist of a boat ramp and range from a few acres in size to less than an acre. Some of the boat ramps are simply easements. There are a total of six (6) parks classified as activity-based, the largest of which is the 96-acre North Lake Community Park. The most heavily used parks are Astor Park, Paisley Park, and McTureous Park, North Lake Community Park, Lake Idamere Park, PEAR Park, Twin Lakes Park, Pine Forest Park, Sorrento Park, and Marsh Park. McTureous Park is a passive park that contains a military memorial, WWII cannon, and a homestead/museum commemorating the life of Medal of Honor recipient Robert McTureous. Lake County parklands have been acquired through a variety of ways including dedication from community groups, developers, and homeowners associations (i.e., Astor Lions, Umatilla Veteran's Hall, Scott Park). The table on the following page is an inventory of Lake County Park lands.

Facilities such as athletic fields, community buildings, and picnic pavilions are scheduled on a first come first served basis through the Lake County Parks and Trails Division

Table 1 – Lake County Parks and Recreation Facilities

PARK NAME	ACRES	PROXIMITY	CLASS	TYPE	AMENITIES
Arnold Brothers Boat Ramp	0.15	Groveland	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp, picnicking, boardwalk
Astatula Boat Ramp	0.25	Astatula	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Astor Lions Park	10.00	Astor	Neighborhood	Active	2 ball fields, basketball courts, football/soccer field, playground, tennis courts, restrooms and picnic shelter
Butler Street Boat Ramp	3.45	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Carlton Village Park	3.09	Lady Lake	Mini	Resource	Undeveloped
East Lake Community Park	48.53	Mt. Plymouth/ Sorrento	Community	Active	In the process of being developed
Ferndale Preserve	196.00	Ferndale	Conservation	Resource	boat ramp, parking, kiosk, pavilion, restroom, restoration
Haines Creek Park	36.09	Leesburg	Conservation	Resource	undeveloped
John's Lake Boat Ramp	1.30	Winter Garden	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp, dock
Lake Dalhousie Boat Ramp	0.70	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake George Boat Ramp	0.70	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Holly Boat Ramp	0.50	Umatilla	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Idamere Park	45.00	Tavares	Community	Passive	fishing, hiking, picnicking, playground, parking, kiosk
Lake Jem Park & Boat Ramp	11.00	Tavares	Neighborhood	Passive	½ basketball court, fishing, boat ramp, trails, playground, restrooms, parking, kiosk
Lake Joanna Park	0.50	Eustis	Mini	Resource	undeveloped
Lake Mack Park	1.65	DeLand	Mini	Passive	½ basketball court, fishing, picnicking, playground, restrooms
Lake Saunders Boat Ramp	0.20	Tavares	Special Use	Resource	Closed
Lake Thomas Cove Park	4.60	Clermont	Neighborhood	Resource	undeveloped
Lake Yale Boat Ramp West	0.70	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Yale Boat Ramp East	0.70	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Marsh Park & Boat Ramp	35.00	Eustis	Community	Passive	½ basketball court, boat ramp, dock, fishing, trails, picnicking, kiosk, playground

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PARK NAME	ACRES	PROXIMITY	CLASS	TYPE	AMENITIES
McTureous Memorial Park	2.56	Altoona	Mini	Passive	Veteran memorial, picnic, playground, shelter, restrooms, volleyball
Mt. Plymouth Park	0.40	Mt. Plymouth	Mini	Passive	playground, picnicking
North Lake Community Park	96.00	Umatilla	Community	Active	Proposed tournament sports complex for sports such as football, baseball and soccer, multi-purpose building, flexible open space, kiosk, parking, dog park
Paisley Community Park	8.10	Paisley	Neighborhood	Active	picnicking, playground, shelters, library, Community Bldg., basketball, ball fields, restrooms, parking
Palatlahaha River Park & BR	23.00	Clermont	Community	Passive	boat ramp, dock, fishing, trail, picnic, playground, restrooms, shelter, Scrub Jay habitat
PEAR Park	318.00	Leesburg	District	Active/Resource	Ball fields, dog park, playground, boardwalk, canoe launch, buildings, pavilions, restoration,
Pearl Street Boat Ramp	0.25	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Pine Forest Park	48.00	Deland	Community	Passive	basketball, playground, basketball, trail,, restroom, parking restoration
Scott Park	0.65	Mt. Plymouth	Mini	Passive	Playground, picnic
Sorrento Park	3.38	Sorrento	Mini	Active,	basketball court, picnic, playground, shelter, tennis, volleyball
Sparks Village Boat Ramp	0.23	Leesburg	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Spring Lake Park	0.38	Fruitland Park	Mini	Resource	fishing
South Umatilla Park	4.00	Umatilla	Mini	Active	picnicking, playground, comm. center
Sylvan Shores Park	4.94	Mount Dora	Neighborhood	Resource	trail
Trout Lake Park	0.31	Eustis	Mini	Resource	undeveloped
Twin Lakes Park	14.50	Leesburg	Neighborhood	Passive	picnicking, playground, basketball, trail, kiosk, parking, pavilion
Umatilla Veterans Hall	0.75	Umatilla	Special Use	Passive	community building., restrooms

**TOTAL ACRES 926**

**TOTAL DEVELOPED ACRES 660**

**TOTAL UNDEVELOPED ACRES 266**

SOURCE: Lake County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, March 2005, prepared by HHI, Orlando, Florida  
Prepared by: Lake County Planning and Community Design, January 2009, Updated January 2010.

Table 2 – Lake County Boat Ramps

BOAT RAMPS	ACRES	LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	AMENITIES
Arnold Brothers Boat Ramp	0.15	Groveland	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp, fishing
Astatula Boat Ramp	0.25	Astatula	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Butler Street Boat Ramp	3.45	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
John's Lake Boat Ramp	1.30	Winter Garden	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp, dock
Lake Dalhousie Boat Ramp	0.70	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake George Boat Ramp	0.70	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Holly Boat Ramp	0.50	Umatilla	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Jem Park & Boat Ramp	11.00	Tavares	Neighborhood	Passive	½ basket ball court, fishing, boat ramp, trails, play-ground, restrooms
Lake Saunders Boat Ramp	0.20	Tavares	Special Use	Resource	closed
Lake Yale Boat Ramp-East	0.70	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Yale Boat Ramp-West	0.70	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Marsh Park & Boat Ramp	35.00	Eustis	Community	Passive	½ basket ball court, boat ramp, dock, fishing, trails, picnicking
Palatlakaha River Park & BR	23.00	Clermont	Community	Passive	boat ramp, dock, fishing, trail, picnic, playground, restrooms, shelter
Pearl Street Boat Ramp	0.25	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Sparks Village Boat Ramp	0.23	Leesburg	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Total Acreage	78.13				
Acres at Boat Ramps Only	9.13				

SOURCE: Lake County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, March 2005, prepared by HHI, Orlando, Florida

Prepared by: Lake cCounty Planning and Community Design, January 2009.

Please note that there are many more boat ramps other than those listed above. Many of the municipalities provide boat ramps within their jurisdictions. The Lake County Water Authority provides boat ramps at several of its properties

Table 3 – Lake County Cemeteries

CEMETERIES	ACRES	LOCATION	OWNER
Evergreen	1.00	Silver Lake	County
Grand Island	2.00	Grand Island	W.A. Milton, Jr
Hinson	8.00	Altoona, Marion Co.	Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan
Lisbon	3.25	Lisbon	United Methodist



CEMETERIES	ACRES	LOCATION	OWNER
Rigdon	1.00	Umatilla	Hawthorne Residents
Richmond	0.50	Okahumpka	R.W. Thiot
Smythmill	1.00	Austin Merritt Rd., Lake County	Lois W. Mize
Woods – Boyd	.50	Groveland	County
Total Acreage of Cemeteries	17.25		

SOURCE: Lake County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, March 2005, prepared by HHI, Orlando, Florida

Prepared by: Lake County Planning and Community Design, January 2009, updated January 2010.

## Park Classifications

Parks can be classified in a number of ways and serve a variety of functions, from providing open space in urban areas to large athletic complexes, and everything in between. The size of the park, the population served, service radii, and the types of programming within the park generally determine park classifications. Programming can be passive or active, organized or ‘drop-in’. Passive programming includes adult learning classes such as art or cooking. Active programming includes open fields for activities like flying a kite or a fitness trail. Organized programming includes league sports, like soccer or baseball and drop-in programming includes pick-up games that are not part of an organized group. At any given time, residents of Lake County may desire to use different park types and participate in different kinds of programming.

Resource-based recreation facilities are those places where recreation is driven by the natural landscape, such as a river, forest or lake or cultural resources such as historical and archeological sites. Resource-based recreation can be passive such as walking along an interpretive trail or active such as mountain biking or scuba diving.

Activity-based parks provide facilities for playing a specific sport or game such as basketball, baseball, and soccer. These facilities are geared toward team sports and are managed for frequent use. Such facilities are frequently located in neighborhood, community, and special use parks and are sometimes located within large resource-based parks as well.

Activity-based and resource-based parks can further be classified by park type. Parks are typically designated as mini parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, district parks and regional parks.

Lake County currently classifies its parks as neighborhood, mini, community, special facilities, district and conservation. In general, counties typically provide the larger parks such as district and regional parks. This is not really the case for Lake County except for P.E.A.R. Park, which is classified as a district park; the majority of the County’s parks are less than 50 acres in size. Most of the County’s parks are classified as neighborhood and mini-parks and are resource-based.

Counties also tend to focus on providing more resource-based parks and large scale specialized facilities. In this area, Lake County is more typical of a county parks department in that nearly all of the County’s parks are resource-based. A key issue facing Lake County today is streamlining its parks system so that resources are used efficiently and provide the most recreation opportunities as possible. This may mean that the County decides to eliminate the smaller more limited parcels it currently has in its parks inventory.

## Mini Parks

The mini park (also described as a ‘pocket park’) serves as the local park within neighborhoods or as small urban green spaces that provide a park-like atmosphere. These small areas are either natural or landscaped areas located within built-up areas. Urban open spaces may fall into this category. These parks can be small areas nestled within common areas of development or perhaps integrated into intersection or roadway designs on the periphery. Facilities may include walks, benches, gardens or memorials. No planned recreational programming occurs here. Most pocket parks are provided through developer agreements and the land development process with very little responsibility on the part of counties or cities. The ideal community would have these scattered across urban/suburban areas within easy walking distance to many people. The following are typical characteristics of mini parks:

- <5 acres in size
- ½ acre per 1000 population
- ¼ mile service area radius
- takes advantage of unique opportunity (locality, resource, a view;
- accessible by low volume streets and trails
- can be located in high-density areas, including downtown areas.

## Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are significantly larger than pocket parks and could include practice areas or green spaces/playing courts for drop-in games of all types. Neighborhood parks could be located adjacent to an elementary school site. They are not designed for extensive programmed activities and are generally used by the immediate community they serve. In more urbanized areas, these parks should ideally be accessible on foot or on bicycle. Within suburban areas, they should be accessible by bicycle or a short drive by car. The following are secondary characteristics of neighborhood parks:

- 5-19 acres
- NRPA Optimum guidelines 10 acres
- 2 acres per 1000 population
- ¼ to ½ mile service area radius
- located within or adjacent to neighborhoods
- takes on character of surrounding areas
- accessible by walking, bike riding or short drive by car
- casual play with very little programming, if any at all
- provides a compatible balance of activities and resource-based recreation
- facilities may include playgrounds, multipurpose courts/fields, tennis courts, landscape areas, benches, recreation buildings, picnic areas, and walkways

## Community Parks

Recreational facilities in community parks should be designed for flexibility along with specific uses allowing the recreation provider to respond to changing programming trends. Community

parks could be located adjacent to schools (elementary, middle or high school). The primary function of such parks is for providing places where typical recreation programming occurs. Community parks serve broader community areas and provide for a wide range of athletic or team sports opportunities as well as cultural and artistic programs and services. The following are secondary characteristics of community parks.

- 20-50 acres
- 5 acres per 1000 population
- up to a 3-mile service area radius for urban areas
- up to a 6-mile service area radius for rural areas
- access by walking, biking, but more often by car
- usually located near major collector streets or arterial roads
- serves needs of several neighborhoods
- more intensely developed than neighborhood parks
- are primarily activity-based recreation sites, but can be resource-based as well
- can include such facilities as athletic fields, swimming pools, multi-purpose fields, and recreation centers
- natural areas should be incorporated to provide biking, fitness, picnicking, and open space activities
- other community services (i.e., libraries, law enforcement substations, or fire/emergency services) may be located within a community park

### **District Parks**

District parks are usually resource-based and located contiguous to or encompassing natural resources. Activities and facilities may include picnicking, boating, swimming, hiking, camping, and play areas. These parks are usually 'drive to' parks and can be a 30-40 minute drive away, although, these parks should be connected to a community's trail system as well. In some cases, district parks can be multi-purpose large-scale activity-based parks that serve several communities. Such parks would be very appropriate in outlying areas of the County or in areas with a high concentration of unincorporated residents adjacent to cities. The service area for a district park is generally countywide, however given the geography and transportation network of Lake County, district parks should serve several communities. The following are secondary characteristics of district parks.

75+ acres (minimum of 50 acres)

5 acres per 1000 population

30-40 minute driving time

access by car, bikeways or trails

### **Regional Parks**

Regional parks are almost always resource-based. Regional parks are usually located in areas of diverse natural resources such as lakes, rivers, flora, fauna or topography. These are usually very large tracts of land and provide camping, equestrian activities, canoeing, boating, fishing, and other resource-based activities. Such parks often serve to protect environmentally sensitive

lands with facilities limited to resource-based activities. Care should be taken not to over use the land or allow activities that tax the stability of the resources contained within or adjacent to the park. The service area of a regional park could be multi-county. The following are secondary characteristics of district parks:

- 250+ acres
- 20 acres per 1000 population
- offers same type of activities as district but on a larger scale
- up to 60 minute driving time
- access by car, bikeways or trails

### **Special Facilities**

Special facilities are parks that often have a particular function, resource or single activity located within them. The activity or natural/cultural resource opportunity found within the site drives these facilities. Special facilities can include a soccer complex, a large natural park with equestrian or hiking opportunities, or an aquatic facility with competition size swimming pools or interactive water play features. Community centers with multipurpose buildings also fit into this category. Additionally, large-scale cultural or natural facilities can be classified as a special facility. Special facilities can include resource-based facilities such as lakes or rivers, or cultural resources such as museums, history centers, or the fair grounds for example.

The following are secondary characteristics of a typical special facility:

- >1 acre
- optimally >20 acres for large scale competition facilities
- acres per 1000 population is not applicable
- county-wide service area
- access by car, bikeways or trails
- may be resource-based; located contiguous to or encompassing natural resources or man-made facilities
- resource oriented facilities may include picnicking, boating, swimming, hiking, camping and play areas;
- activity-based facilities may include a single purpose or activity, such as an equestrian center, golf course, senior center, or museum;
- located based on the center of activity or where the population demands it; and
- size varies depending on facility.

### **Service Areas**

There are three, possibly four, basic service area types present in Lake County today, urban, suburban, emerging, and rural. Urbanized service areas are defined as places and communities with full service recreation departments and facilities. Suburban areas include cities transitioning from a rural character to a more urbanized character and having an established recreation program. Emerging areas are characterized by small towns and places located in more remote parts of the County. Rural areas could either be included in the Emerging category or

categorized separately. For the most part, rural areas in Lake County could be considered as emerging based on growth trends and the changing character of Lake County.

Geographically, Lake County can be divided into several distinct service areas. These areas are the SR 50 corridor, the US 27 corridor, the Golden Triangle area, Citrus Ridge/Four Corners area, and unincorporated Lake County in general.

The US 27 Corridor includes Lady Lake, Fruitland Park, and Leesburg in the north. This area is fairly removed from the Orlando Metro area but is rapidly developing due to its small town character and the rapid development of the Villages, a popular retirement community located in nearby Sumter County.

The Four Corners/Citrus Ridge area is uniquely situated in 4 counties midway between the expanding Orlando and Lakeland urban areas. It has the unique characteristic of being part of four counties, four school districts, seven ZIP codes, three area codes, three water management districts, two regional planning councils and multitudes of service providers. This 90 square mile area is rapidly developing with retirees, seasonal residents and permanent residents. Several major highways converge in the area and provide access to Disney, Osceola and Orange County as well as Lakeland, making it readily accessible to jobs and housing.

The SR 50 Corridor includes the small towns located along SR 50 in south Lake County. This area is becoming a popular bedroom community of the Orlando Metro area. Cities include Mascotte, Groveland, Clermont, Montverde, and Minneola. Clermont is the largest city in the area and is home to The National Training Center, a private sports complex affiliated with South Lake Hospital and the Orlando Regional Health Center. The aim of the Center is to become the standard setter among specialized training facilities for cyclists, runners, sprinters, swimmers, rowers, canoeists, and more. The area is very popular among cyclists and folks seeking an active lifestyle and proximity to jobs in the Orlando Metro area. Because of the rapid growth, many cities are grappling with the demands of providing services at a level and scale they are unaccustomed to. Public meetings held in the area for the Master Plan were well attended and garnered the most consistent and largest turnouts.

The Golden Triangle area includes Mount Dora, Eustis, and Tavares. Leesburg can also be included in this area, which is home to the greatest concentration of urbanized areas in the County and the County Seat. The cities are all well established and have a good mix of older historic neighborhoods and new developments. Demographics are changing slightly as more families move to the area to escape the rapidly growing areas in Metro Orlando. All three (or four, if Leesburg is included) cities have established recreation programs and facilities.

The County has also created several Joint Planning Areas (JPA's) that could be used as a foundation for creating parks service areas or partnerships with the local governments involved since these planning areas already have established a partnership structure. Items that should be addressed are location of regional parks, trail opportunities and sharing of responsibilities as they relate to recreation in terms of funding, land acquisition, development, programming, and operations.

## **TRAILS NETWORK ASSESSMENT**

### **GREENWAYS, BLUEWAYS AND TRAILS**

A “greenway” is described as a linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridge-line, or over land along a railroad right of way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route; any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage; an open space connector linking parks, natural reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and populated areas; or a local strip or linear park designated as a parkway or greenbelt.

A blueway is similar to a hiking trail for canoeists and kayakers. Physical and geo-positioned markers guide trail users through the waterways. An ideal blueway also includes an abundance of scenery and wildlife as well as easy canoe access. Each blueway designation requires the ability to respond to water-borne emergency search and rescue situations.

Trails are defined as linear corridors and any adjacent support parcels on land or water providing public access for recreation or authorized alternative modes of transportation. Trails are a common recreational component of greenways.

The Florida Greenways and Trails System has its roots in the Florida Recreational Trails System, the Florida Canoe Trail System, and the public parks, forests, refuges, wildlife management areas, and water management areas created to protect Florida’s natural heritage. On the local level, Lake County’s trails initiative will mesh nicely with the State’s overall planned greenways and trails system. Several major state greenways and trails intersect and pass through Lake County. From the Van Fleet Trail in the southwest to the West Orange Trail near Clermont and to the Florida Trail in the Ocala National Forest, Lake County is part of nearly 300 miles of existing and planned interconnected greenways and trails.

### **EXISTING AND PLANNED TRAILS**

There are numerous trail programs and projects in various stages of development within Lake County. Numerous organizations and local governments are involved in a variety of ways in developing trails in Lake County. Many trail projects are administered by various local governments and agencies. Lake County established a Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to help with the coordination of trail projects throughout the County. Trail planning and construction is coordinated by the Public Works Engineering Division and the maintenance and operation of trails will be handled by the Parks and Recreation Section. A list of trail projects in Lake County is provided below.

In July of 2008, the County adopted The Lake County Trails Master Plan. The Master Plan was developed with the intent of providing not only a long-term vision, but bringing that vision into short-term focus with a realistic and practical approach to connectivity between schools, parks, neighborhoods, town centers, libraries, and the surrounding counties.

The overall goal of the Master Plan is to facilitate the development and management of a comprehensive network of multi-use trails by providing detailed maps of current and future trail locations, offering an implementation plan to guide prioritization and selection of trail projects, suggesting recommendations for policy changes, and developing an operation and maintenance program for the preservation of existing and proposed trails.

The Master Plan identified 322 miles of shared-use trails, developed design standards, and created an implementation plan for the next 20 years. This plan will serve as a guide to the location, design, prioritization, implementation, and maintenance of a comprehensive trail network within Lake County. It will also provide the information needed by Federal, State, County, municipality, and private stakeholders to preserve right-of-way and focus the funding necessary to implement the trail network.

## **Countywide Trail Network**

Currently, the County's Trails Master Plan describes 29.7 miles of regional shared-use trails, 11.5 miles of local trails, 145.9 miles of blueways, 185 miles of nature park trails (OGT data), and nearly 120 miles of proposed trails. A brief description of the different major trails follows. Many of these trails have smaller connector trails that typically connect the main trail to destinations that are not directly adjacent to the trail. These connectors range from sidewalks to shared-used trails but are important in that they fill the gap between the trail and the destinations. For detailed information including trailhead locations, facilities, maps, and status and implementation for unconstructed trails, please see the Master Plan which is available on the internet at the Parks and Trails Division's website:

[http://www.lakecountyfl.gov/departments/public\\_resources/parks/trails\\_master\\_plan.aspx](http://www.lakecountyfl.gov/departments/public_resources/parks/trails_master_plan.aspx)

South Lake Trail: A 22.6 mile long, planned, and partially constructed shared-use trail, the South Lake Trail will primarily follow a historic railroad grade from the Van Fleet Trail in Sumter County to the West Orange Trail. This 12 to 15-foot wide trail will ultimately provide a connection between the communities of Mascotte, Groveland, Minneola, and Clermont. Additionally, this trail will provide a connection to the neighboring counties of Orange County and Sumter County. Because of these inter-county connections, this trail is considered a top priority by the Lake County Trails Master Plan. As users traverse Lake County on the South Lake Trail they will enjoy shopping, restaurants, the natural beauty of Lake Minneola, historic sites, conservation areas and over a dozen community parks. Currently, almost nine miles of the South Lake Trail is constructed. Ultimately, the South Lake Trail will provide a key connection between 29 miles of the existing Van Fleet Trail and 19 miles of the existing West Orange Trail.

Gardenia Trail: A 10.9 mile long, planned, shared-use trail the Gardenia Trail begins at the Leesburg Wildwood Trail and travels north to Marion County primarily following a historic railroad grade. This trail connects the communities of Leesburg, Fruitland Park, Lady Lake, and the Villages to existing community parks, natural areas, schools and the rural areas of Marion County. An ongoing PD&E study being conducted by the FDOT will determine the preferred alignment for Phase II and Phase III from CR 466A to the Town of Lady Lake. Segments 8, 9 and 10 are potential connections to Marion County and Sumter County

Tav-Lee Trail: The Tav-Lee Trail is a planned and partially constructed, regional shared-use trail. The 10.4 mile long shared use trail will eventually connect the downtowns of Tavares and Leesburg. Along the way, trail users can enjoy restaurants and shopping, visit Sabal Bluff Nature Preserve with a beautiful view of Lake Griffin, visit historic sites, and observe nature along the shores of Lake Griffin, Lake Eustis, and the Dora Canal. Currently, 3.4 miles of this trail are constructed. This link in the Lake County trails network connects the east side of Lake County to the west side and ultimately provides a critical east-west regional route that will be used to connect Volusia, Orange, and Seminole Counties to Sumter and Marion Counties.

Leesburg-Wildwood Trail: A 5.1 mile long planned, shared use trail, the Leesburg-Wildwood Trail begins at the Venetian Trail and travels west to the Sumter County Line. Eventually, this trail

will connect to a Sumter County Trail that will allow users to travel to Wildwood. This trail primarily follows a historic railroad grade and connects the neighborhoods of Leesburg with shopping, schools, restaurants, parks, and natural areas. The Leesburg-Wildwood Trail provides a vital link for the Lake County Trails Network by connecting the Tav-Lee Trail to the Gardenia Trail and Sumter County future trails. The trail will be constructed on the abandoned historic Seaboard Coastline Railroad which, together with the Seaboard Air Line Depot, is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Lake Denham Trail: Lake Denham Trail (Leesburg to Renaissance Trails) The Lake Denham Trail is planned to connect Leesburg to the Lake Denham Nature Park and Flat Island Preserve. This 10.0 mile, shared-use trail will generally follow a historic railroad grade from the Mote Morris Trailhead in Leesburg to Secret Promise and Renaissance Trails, DRIs located near Sumter County. Along the way users will find natural areas, schools, parks, restaurants, and shopping.

West Lake Trail: (Renaissance Trails to South Lake Trail) The West Lake Trail will eventually provide over nine miles of shared-use trails. This trail is early in the concept phase and will rely heavily on property owners in the future setting the final alignment through future developments. It will eventually provide a connection between the Lake Denham Trail and the South Lake Trail. The City of Mascotte will need to provide critical guidance and vision for this trail to be successfully implemented.

Sugar Loaf Mountain Trail: The Sugar Loaf Mountain Trail connects the Tav-Lee Trail with the South Lake Trail across some of the highest vistas in Florida. The views of Lake Apopka from Sugar Loaf Mountain (the highest point in peninsular Florida) will be worth the workout of riding this undulating trail through the Hills of Minneola. Users will enjoy the experience of observing the Lake Apopka Restoration Area operated by the St. Johns River Water Management District, waving at the occasional train traveling toward Orlando, the seeing views of Lake Dora and Lake Apopka, and shopping and dining at the planned downtowns of Sugar loaf Mountain and Hills of Minneola. This planned shared-use trail begins in Minneola at the South Lake Trail and travels 26.0 miles north to Tavares. Tav-Lee Trail will eventually connect neighborhoods to shopping, dining, schools, parks, natural areas, and large communities of the east central corridor of Lake County.

Lake-Wekiva Trail: Almost 15.0 miles in length, the Lake-Wekiva Trail will eventually provide a critical connection between the Lake County Trails Network and the Seminole-Wekiva, West Orange, and Florida Scenic Trails. The Lake-Wekiva trail begins in Mount Dora at the Tremain Street Trailhead and travels east to the Wekiva River. The planned trail utilizes a combination of historic railroad grades, planned abandonment of the existing State Road 46, roadway right-of-way, and other public lands. The implementation of this trail relies heavily on the incorporation of the trail into the future plans of the Wekiva Parkway. Currently, the Florida Department of Transportation is conducting a PD&E study for the Wekiva Parkway.

Trail users can enjoy the abundance of natural areas in East Lake County and then visit historic downtown Mount Dora to dine at restaurants or enjoy shopping. The trail will also connect neighborhoods to schools and parks and provide regional trail connections to Seminole and Orange Counties. Additionally, the trail system, in conjunction with key recreation and eco-tourism, will attract visitors to Lake County and educate the public to the benefits of preserving our natural resources, through public and private managed lands such as the Seminole State Forest, Rock Springs Run State Preserve, and the Lower Wekiva River State Preserve.

Tav-Dora Trail: The Tav-Dora Trail is planned to connect Tavares and Mount Dora. The shared-use trail follows adjacent to the Florida Inland Railroad for most of the 5.4 mile distance. Users



will enjoy the view of Lake Dora as well as the parks, restaurants and shopping along the way. The trail is anticipated to be implemented as part of the improvements to Old US 441 between Dora Avenue and Colliseum Way. A unique aspect of this trail is the Tremain Street Greenway. Tremain Street is an existing low-volume residential street that will be converted to a one-way residential access driveway and a shared-use trail (see inset). The Tremain Street Greenway will require consideration for service vehicle parking and direction of traffic flow during the study phase.

South Lake to Citrus Ridge Trail: The purpose of the South Lake to Citrus Ridge Trail is to connect the neighborhoods, schools, parks, shopping, and natural areas between the South Lake Trail and the Citrus Ridge in South Lake County. This planned shared-use trail will eventually serve as a link to the communities of southeast Lake County. This trail is planned to include over 18 miles of trails and include connections to Lake-Sumter Community College, the National Triathlon Training Center, Orange County via Hartwood Marsh Road Trail, and Lake Louisa State Park. Implementation of this trail is anticipated to include the incorporation of the trail into several roadway widening projects. At the heart of the South Lake to Citrus Ridge Trail is the Lake Louisa State Park.

North Lake Trail, Phase I: The North Lake Trail, Phase I begins at the Tavares Station Trailhead near Wooten Park in Tavares and ends just north of Farran Park in Eustis. The trail connects the communities of Tavares and Eustis. This planned 8.4 miles shared-use trail is the first phase of the North Lake Trail. When completed, the North Lake Trail will provide Lake County access to the Ocala National Forest. This first phase will eventually connect neighborhoods, schools, parks and natural areas to scenic views of Lake Eustis and the Ocala National Forest. Users will enjoy the occasional slow moving train as they travel adjacent to one of the few remaining active railroads in Lake County.

North Lake Trail Phase II and III (Eustis to SR 40): North Lake Trail Phase II begins just north of Ferran Park in Eustis and ends at CR 42 in Umatilla. North Lake Trail Phase III begins at CR 42 in Umatilla and ends at SR 40 in Astor. Together, these trails connect the communities of Eustis, Umatilla, Altoona, and Astor. These trails will eventually provide the gateway to Ocala National Forest. Starting in Eustis, Phase II is planned to occupy the active CSX railroad right-of-way until it reaches the end of the active railroad near CR 450A. At CR 450A, the trail crosses SR 19 to the east side of the road and continues north adjacent to and within the right-of-way of SR 19 until it reaches Bulldog Way. At Bulldog Way, Phase III begins. Phase III is a planning concept that was not studied in great detail. The trail is planned to cross SR 19 at Bulldog Way and continue north on the west side of SR 19 making use of the old railroad right-of-way as much as possible. Most of this old railroad right-of-way is now privately owned but substantial sections are unimproved and could be available for construction of the trail.

Just north of the Ocala National Forest Service Office and Visitor Service, the old railroad veers away from SR 19. This section of old railroad starting near Ravenswood Road and ending at Railroad Grade Road is generally referred to as the Ravenswood Trail. The Ravenswood Trail is an existing unpaved trail. Phase III would continue to follow Railroad Grade Road north until it reaches CR 455A. A future grade separated pedestrian overpass would allow trail users to cross SR 19. The trail would continue north following CR 455A until it reached SR 40 in Astor.

Black Bear Scenic Trail (SR 40): Black Bear Scenic Trail is planned to be a 7.75 mile long shared-use trail connecting Volusia County to Marion County across the northern tip of Lake County, adjacent to SR 40. Users will enjoy the wide expanses of natural areas with ultimate connections to St. Johns River, Ocklawaha River, and Ocala National Forest, home of the largest sand scrub habitat in the world. This planning concept is included in the Black Bear Scenic Highway Concept

and will be further studied, designed, and constructed with any future roadway widening projects for SR 40. Implementation of this project will require the coordination of the FDOT and the United States Forest Service. Potential trailheads include Astor Lions Park and Wildcat Lake Park.

General James A. Van Fleet State Trail (Van Fleet Trail): The Van Fleet Trail is an existing 29 mile, paved shared-use trail through the heart of the Green Swamp. This trail is owned and managed by the FDEP-OGT. The trail includes equestrian facilities. Users will enjoy the abundance of wildlife and tranquility associated with this remote trail. Two trailheads are located within the vicinity of this trail: Mabel Trailhead and Bay Lake Trailhead. Mabel Trailhead provides parking and restroom facilities and is accessed from SR 50. Bay Lake Trailhead provides parking and is accessed from CR 565, south of SR 50 and Groveland.

### **Minor Shared-Use Trails**

Minor shared-use trails are considered the arterials of the Lake County Trails Network. They are characterized by their interconnection to regional shared-use paths within Lake County but do not necessarily link statewide trails directly to each other. These trails are generally 12 feet in width and consist of an asphalt or concrete surface. While these trails will function as local trails to connect destinations, such as schools, parks, downtown areas and natural areas, to communities and neighborhoods, the primary purpose of these trails is to provide countywide interconnectivity between the local trails and destinations. These trails are generally of sufficient length and quality to attract users from other areas of the county or other areas of the state as a stand-alone destination and, therefore, require trailheads to provide parking and restroom facilities.

Lake Apopka Loop Trail: In 2002, Friends of Lake Apopka prepared a Greenways and Trails Master Plan for the Lake Apopka Loop. This document provided planning level detail for a system of trails to circumnavigate Lake Apopka. The trail system would utilize portions of the West Orange Trail, South Lake Trail, Green Mountain Scenic By-way Trail, Ferndale Connector, and Clay Island Trail. This proposed loop is a long term vision but is actively underway through the efforts of a number of active Lake County residents. The Lake Apopka Loop will ultimately connect eight planned destinations, including eco-tourism sites, into a trail system of over 75 miles. The Lake Apopka Loop would not necessarily be entirely paved. Portions, especially across the Clay Island area and the working portions of the SJRWMD - Lake Apopka Restoration Area, would require unpaved trails.

Green Swamp Connector Trail: The purpose of the Green Swamp Connector Trail is to connect Citrus Ridge Trail to Van Fleet Trail. This 8.5 mile planning concept is planned to be designed and constructed as part of any improvements to CR 474.

Lake-Yale Loop Trail: The Lake-Yale Loop is a planning concept to create a trail that would start at the Tav-Lee Trail near Sleepy Hollow Road, travel north to Emerald Marsh, then east to Saw Grass Island, and finally connect to the North Lake Trail near CR 42. This minor trail is estimated to be 24.2 miles in length.

Lake-Volusia Trail: The Lake-Volusia Trail is a planning concept to create a trail that would start at the North Lake Trail in Altoona and follow CR 42 to Volusia County and the Spring-to-Spring Trail. This minor trail is estimated to be nine miles in length. The trail would provide connections to the Florida Scenic Trail, the Paisley Trails, Ocala National Forest, Seminole State Forest, and the communities of Altoona, Paisley, and DeLand. The trail could ultimately be designed to follow adjacent to and within the right-of-way, or meander through appropriate sections, of the Ocala National Forest and Seminole State Forest.

Seminole State Forest Trail: Seminole State Forest Trail is a planning concept to create a trail that would start at the Lake-Wekiva Trail near CR 46A. It would follow adjacent to and within the right-of-way of the proposed reconstructed CR 46A, as shown in the Wekiva Parkway PD&E Study completed by the FDOT in 2008, north to SR 44. From SR 44, the trail would travel northeast along SR 44 until it reached Seminole State Forest property located on the north side of SR 44 just northeast of CR 44A. The trail would then traverse Seminole State Forest in the direction of Lake Norris Conservation Area and then turn north until it reached the Lake-Volusia Trail at CR 42. This minor trail is estimated to be 13.5 miles in length. The trail would provide connections to the Florida Scenic Trail, the Paisley trails, Lake-Wekiva Trail, and the natural areas of Ocala National Forest, Seminole State Forest, and Lake Norris Conservation Area. The alignment of this trail would ultimately be designed to meander across appropriate areas of the publicly owned conservation areas and adjacent to and within the right-of-way of SR 44 and CR 46A.

Green Mountain Scenic Byway Trail: In 2008, the Town of Montverde completed the Green Mountain Scenic Byway Corridor Master Plan. The Master Plan included a Recreation and Open Space Element including multi-use trails. The Green Mountain Scenic By-way Trail was included, which connected the Sugar Loaf Mountain Trail to Montverde, followed the existing trail in Montverde, and then generally followed CR 455 and the old railroad grade north passed the Ferndale Preserve and the Clay Island Trailhead to re-connect to the Sugar Loaf Mountain Trail at the Clay Island Restoration Area.

Central Lakes Trail: The Central Lakes Trail is a planning concept to create a trail that would start in Leesburg at the Lake Denham Trail near CR 33 and travel east utilizing a combination of roadway right-of-way adjacent to CR 48 and new development to traverse central Lake County around the southern shore of Lake Harris. Traveling through Howey-in-the-Hills, the trail could either continue south along the general alignment of SR 19 to CR 455 and then east to the Sugar Loaf Mountain Trail, or it could turn north on SR 19 across Lake Harris and then east on CR 448 passed Lake Idamere Park to the Sugar Loaf Mountain Trail.

Local Trails and Community Walkways: Local trails and community walkways are considered the collector and distributors of the Lake County Trails Network, connecting neighborhoods to local destinations and regional and minor Lake County shared-use trails. Although they are identified on the Lake County Trails Master Plan, these trails are largely the responsibility of the local municipality or community and are included in the prioritization process for the Lake County Trails Master Plan. While community walkways utilize regional shared-use trails for connectivity, the focus for these trails is their connection between the “front door” of residences and local destinations and places of work. The Cities of Leesburg, Mount Dora, and Eustis have developed trails master plans that list local trails and community walkways.

Paved Shoulders: Paved shoulders are often used by AASHTO Class A bicyclists for transportation and long distance recreational travel. An important element of the willingness of Class A riders to use bicycles as transportation is the presence of continuous paved shoulders throughout the length of their planned trip. For these types of trips, gaps in the existing paved shoulders discourage use. The Master Plan includes information from the Lake County Public Works Department and the Lake-Sumter MPO and shows roads with paved shoulders in Lake County. Gaps in the system have been identified.

Lake County is the home of the National Triathlon Training Center and is a destination for roadway cycling due to the rolling terrain and abundance of low volume roads. As traffic has increased in volume on these roads, the County has placed an increased emphasis on providing paved shoulders. Not only has Lake County added a requirement to provide three-foot-wide

minimum, paved shoulders for all new arterial roadways, but it has pursued an active paved shoulder retrofit program which, together with state roads, has resulted in over 270 miles of paved shoulders along county and state roadways.

Other Existing Trails: In addition to the existing and proposed trails described above, there are a number of other trails within the County. Most of the public lands purchased for conservation or recreation have trails associated with them. For example, the Emerald Marsh Trail is located on lands purchased for environmental restoration by the St. John's River Water Management District and extends some 3.6 miles from Lake Griffin to Lake Yale. Emerald Marsh also includes other trails along the old agricultural dikes which are popular bicycling and bird-watching areas. The 14.9-mile Paisley Loop is an unpaved bicycle trail between CR 445 & CR 42 running through Ocala National Forest. Lake Louisa State Park has trails and roads popular with hikers and bicyclists.

The various park and nature trails are often the most scenic trails and are constructed to blend as much as possible into the natural surroundings and to minimize their impact on the surrounding ecosystems. The designs generally avoid wetlands and remove only the vegetation absolutely necessary to provide the clear area for a trail. Curvilinear trails that follow natural contours and lay gently on the land are very popular. Surface types for these trails typically are hardened earth or a boardwalk. Currently, Lake County has over 180 miles of park and nature trails, including a 34-mile section of the Florida Scenic Trail.

## **BLUEWAYS**

Staff from the departments of Environmental Utilities, Public Works and Economic Growth and Redevelopment reviewed the many waterways located in Lake County to determine the premium locations for blueway designations. The initial plan was presented to the Board of County Commissioners Jan. 11, 2005, with the four-month permitting process to begin later in the month. Lake County identified four zones with potential to be designated as blueways. The designation of blueways is highly regarded throughout the nation as it alone attracts visiting paddlers to the area. To market the proposed blueways, maps and pamphlets have been designed. In addition to trail markers, the blueways feature surrounding amenities. Maps outlining each trail include other surrounding amenities, such as launch areas, waterfront restaurants, sites of historic significance, hiking trails, annual events near the water trail and parks.

The County completed the blueways permit application, which was reviewed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC), the U.S. Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Coast Guard. The permit is essential as it gives Lake County water trails credibility. Essentially, the definition of a blueway is a water trail equivalent to a greenway trail that is specifically permitted through the FFWCC. In addition to the state commission, the two federal agencies reviewed the permit to ensure proper safety measures were followed.

Four areas where potential blueways were identified are the St. Johns River, Golden Triangle area, the Ocklawaha, and Palatka river basins. Each zone presents different opportunities for users. Each zone offers different experiences for trail users. A "waterfront lake" blueway will feature shorter trails in populated areas with waterfronts suitable for casual or novice users. A "shoreline lake" trail will offer transitional day trips in mixed density areas offering amenities such as refreshments and restrooms. A "wilderness lake" blueway will generally be located in remote, undeveloped areas and offer paddlers hiking and camping opportunities.

Lake County currently has 149.5 miles of blueways designated. Physical and geo-positioned markers guide trail users through the waterways. An ideal blueway trail also includes an

abundance of scenery and wildlife, as well as easy canoe and kayak access. The Lake County Community Blueways Project identified scenic waterways that feature nearby amenities for paddlers. Each zone offers a different experience for trail users. For example, Golden Triangle Run skirts along the lakefronts of Tavares and Mount Dora and is a shorter trail suitable for casual or novice users. Several of the St. Johns River trails are categorized as “wilderness” blueways because these runs are located in remote, undeveloped areas and offer paddlers hiking and camping opportunities. Blueways involve significant partnerships with the Lake County Water Authority; the cities of Leesburg, Mount Dora, and Tavares; and the Lake County Sheriff’s Office.

The permitting process for Lake County’s Blueways designation includes approvals from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Coast Guard. The Blueways designation also requires the ability to respond to waterborne search and rescue situations, which the Lake County Sheriff’s Office has had the ability to do for some time. In addition to benefiting Lake County residents, the Lake County community blueways attract visiting paddlers to the county.

Table 4 – Lake County Blueways

LOCATION	APROXIMATE LENGTH
Lake Denham/ Helena Run	7 miles
South Lake Area	22 miles
Lake Norris/Blackwater Creek	7 miles
Tavares/Golden Triangle Run	18 miles
Blue Creek	4 miles
Stagger Mud Lake	5 miles
St. Francis/Dead River	8 miles
Lake Griffin	16 miles
Lake Harris	37 miles
Platlakaha Run	25 miles
Total miles	149 miles

## ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS

In 2002 the Lake County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) created an Environmental Land Management and Acquisition Study Committee charged with exploring the feasibility of creating an ongoing program for the acquisition and management of environmental lands in Lake County. The BCC accepted and approved the report of the ELMASC in April of 2003. The report called for the creation of a Public Land Acquisition Advisory Council, which would be charged with the development of rules and guidelines to guide the acquisition of public lands, including environmental and recreational properties, to review the facts concerning possible land acquisitions and to advise the BCC regarding specific acquisitions.

The Public Land Acquisition Advisory Council (PLAAC) was created by Ordinance 2003-48 in May of 2003 for the purpose of recommending to the BCC policies to guide the acquisition and management of public lands, both environmental and recreational, and to advise the BCC in the implementation of the land acquisition tasks prescribed by the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

This Council was asked to report to the BCC by April 27, 2004, its recommendations concerning specific types of lands for purchase, recreational opportunities appropriate for those lands, and general guidelines for appropriate management of acquired lands.

## **PUBLIC LANDS INVENTORY**

This section is an inventory of public lands acquired for the purpose of conserving environmentally sensitive lands for conservation and resource-based recreation. The following table lists the environmental lands located in Lake County. It should be noted that many of the public conservation areas shown in that table are parts of larger acquisition projects and it is expected that these acreages will increase over time as new lands are purchased. Only publicly-owned lands (fee simple) are shown, with the exception of the Trout Lake Nature Center which is owned by a private, non-profit corporation. Mitigation banks and lands where development rights have been purchased through less-than-fee-simple instruments are not shown although such instruments are an important means of protecting environmentally sensitive properties.

Table 5 – Lake County Environmental Lands

<b>PROPERTY</b>	<b>OWNERSHIP</b>	<b>ACREAGE</b>
Ocala National Forest*	US Forest Service	85,000
Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park & Lower Wekiva River Corridor & Seminole Woods (WOG)	State	13,925
Rock springs Run State Reserve (WOG)	State	4,373
Lake Griffin State Recreation Area	State	552
Lake Louisa State Park	State	4,450
Seminole Springs/Seminole State Forest (WOG)	State	15,459
Other environmental land in Wekiva-Ocala Greenway (WOG)	State & SJRWMD	15,879
Hilochee Wildlife Management Area (GS)	State	6,170
Other environmental lands in the Green Swamp (GS)	State, SWFWMD	20,983
Van Fleet State Trail, Green Swamp (GS)	State, Office of Geenways & Trails	360
Hontoon Island State Park (portion)	State	668
Haines Creek Park	Lake County	36
Marsh Park	Lake County	35
PEAR Park	Lake County	318
Chris Ford Environmental Park	Lake County	25
Pine Forest Park	Lake County	48
Lake Jem Park	Lake County	11
Lady Lake Area	Lake County	65
Helena Run	Lake County	20

**Parks and Recreation Element  
Data, Inventory & Analysis**

<b>PROPERTY</b>	<b>OWNERSHIP</b>	<b>ACREAGE</b>
Pasture Reserve	Lake County	809
Dead River Estates Property	Lake County	8.5
Royal Trails Area	Lake County	60
Ellis Acres Reserve (Phase I)	Lake County	94
Pine Lakes Area	Lake County	82.5
Pine Lakes Area	Lake County	46
Ellis Acres Reserve (Phase II (f.k.a. Akron Meadows))	Lake County	323
Lake May Reserve	Lake County	136
Mt. Plymouth Lake	Lake County	184
Neighborhood Lakes (portion)	State, SJRWMD, Orlando Orange Expressway Authority, Lake and Orange Counties	1056 (in Lake Co.)
Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area	SJRWMD	7,089
Lake Norris Conservation Area	SJRWMD	2,352
Lake Apopka Restoration Area	SJRWMD	20,068
Trout Lake Nature Center	Trout Lake Nature Center, Inc.	153
Banana Point	LCWA	11.9
Brightwater Mitigation	LCWA	34.9
Bourlay Historic Nature Park	LCWA	151.1
Bugg Spring	LCWA	7.1
Carson Mitigation	LCWA	193.6
Crooked River Preserve	LCWA	63.6
Dead River	LCWA	34.9
Double Run Preserve	LCWA	566.9

PROPERTY	OWNERSHIP	ACREAGE
Eagle Ridge Preserve	LCWA	341.5
Fern Prairie Preserve	LCWA	595.4
Flat Island Preserve	LCWA	2,361.0
Flowing Waters Preserve	LCWA	205.9
Hidden Waters Preserve	LCWA	90.3
Lake Griffin	LCWA	270.1
Lake Norris	LCWA	629.7
Lake Tracey	LCWA	444.8
Ocklawaha Picnic Ground	LCWA	31.1
Palatlkaha Marsh Island	LCWA	30.6
Sabal Bluff	LCWA	55.7
Sawgrass Island Preserve	LCWA	1,168.1
Scrub Point Preserve	LCWA	93.1
E.C. Tanner Preserve	LCWA	39
Treasure Island Preserve	LCWA	65.7
Wilkin Property	LCWA	33.6
Wolf Branch Sink Preserve	LCWA	154.6
TOTAL		208,513

## **FEDERAL LANDS**

The Ocala National Forest was established in 1908. The Forest Service administers 383,573 acres, 85,000 of which are located in northern Lake County. In addition to the forested lands, which include large stands of longleaf and sand pine, the Forest contains some of Florida's most beautiful and productive springs. An estimated two million people use the Forest each year for outdoor recreation activities at numerous recreation sites located in the forest. Resource-based activities include hunting, fishing, hiking, picnicking, camping, canoeing, birding, and nature study.

## **STATE LANDS**

*Lake Griffin State Recreation Area*, near Fruitland Park, is a 552-acre site, acquired by the State of Florida in 1946 with funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Relatively small by state park standards, the park provides opportunities for camping, fishing, picnicking, boating, canoeing, and nature study. In FY 2007/08, the park accommodated 37,937 visitors.

*Lake Louisa State Park*, on the south shore of Lake Louisa in southeast Lake County, was acquired with LATF funds beginning in 1972. The park consists of 4,450 acres; 187,492 people visited it in FY 2008/09. Recreational uses include equestrian trails, swimming, picnicking, canoeing, and fishing. Camping will be added soon.

*The Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern* is located in southern Lake and northern Polk Counties. It is a critical hydrological resource and the headwaters of four important rivers—the Withlacoochee, the Ocklawaha, the Hillsborough, and the Peace. The last two rivers are the primary tributaries of two of Florida's most important estuaries, Tampa Bay and Charlotte



Harbor. The Green Swamp is also a major recharge area for the Floridan Aquifer. The Green Swamp has been a Florida Forever (Conservation and Recreation Lands, aka CARL) project since 1992, encompassing an area of 147,111 acres. So far, 21,217 acres have been acquired at a cost of \$52,779,344. Significant portions of the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern lie outside the acquisition area. Portions of the Green Swamp will eventually become a state park and a wildlife management area. Other parts will be dedicated to hunting, hiking, and nature appreciation.

The *Wekiva River Protection Area* is located in northeast Lake County and in portions of Seminole and Orange Counties. A major CARL project (a state land acquisition program, since replaced by Florida Forever) since 1995, the *Wekiva-Ocala Greenway* encompasses a project area of 76,700 acres, of which 47,491 have been acquired at a cost of \$148,351,611. These acquisitions include about 45,000 acres located in Lake County. The area is host to numerous outdoor recreation activities, including off road biking, birding, hiking, and swimming.

## **ST. JOHNS RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT LANDS**

The *St. John's River Water Management District* is a very important player in land acquisition and management in Lake County. The District administers the Save Our Rivers program within its jurisdiction and is sometimes designated to manage holdings acquired via other sources. The Water Management District owns and maintains three properties that are open to the public and provide outdoor recreation opportunities.

*Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area* is a 7,089-acre property on an isthmus between Lakes Griffin and Yale, north of Lisbon. *Emeralda Marsh* offers a wide variety of sporting and recreational activities, including seasonal waterfowl hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking, and primitive camping. This site is also a popular birding area.

*Lake Norris Conservation Area* is a 2,352-acre property located on the west shore of Lake Norris, north of CR 44. The Boy Scouts of America own the property to the north of the lake, which they manage as a camp. The Conservation Area includes most of Black Water Swamp.

*Lake Apopka Restoration Area* is a 20,068-acre property on the north shore of Lake Apopka. The property is also a popular birding site. Approximately forty percent of the property lies within Lake County; the remainder is in Orange County to the east. Lake Apopka was targeted for clean-up by the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Act of 1987. Most of the lands acquired were formerly in agricultural use.

## **LAKE COUNTY LANDS**

Lake County owns a number of properties that are classified as Conservation. The *Palatlahaha Environmental and Agricultural Reserve* (PEAR Park) is a 318-acre site on a former agricultural experimental station for grapes and melons near Okahumpka. PEAR Park may eventually be expanded by 150 acres or more with help from a Florida Communities Trust (FCT) grant. This project, which has the potential to be Lake County's first district park, is a venue for hiking, picnicking, and a farmers' market. A 25-acre portion of Chris Ford Industrial Park serves as a Gopher Tortoise relocation habitat. Palatlahaha River Park in Clermont contains protected Scrub Jay habitat. Other Conservation lands managed by the Parks and Recreation Section include the 196-acre Ferndale Preserve, the 36-Acre Haines Creek Park (which is predominately a wetland) near Leesburg; the 35-acre Marsh Park (which is also predominately a wetland) in Eustis; the 11-acre Lake Jem Park, which contains wetlands; and the 48-acre Pine Forest Park, which contains scrub jay habitat.

In addition, the County has purchased ten properties through fee simple acquisitions, has had one property donated and has partnered in a multi-agency acquisition. The county also made two grants available to the City of Clermont to acquire a property. The funds for these acquisitions and grants were made possible by passage of an Environmental Lands Acquisition Bond Referendum in 2004. The referendum allowed for the bonding of \$36,000,000.00 for land acquisition. With the exception of the City of Clermont property, these lands, which total about 2000 acres, are managed by the Public Lands Management Section of the Parks and Trails Division and are briefly described as follows:

### **Fee Simple Acquisitions**

#### Lady Lake Area

- 65(+/-) acres in Lady Lake area - west of Gray's Airport Road
- Comprised of a sizable portion of Lady Lake lake bottom, shoreline and adjacent uplands.

#### Helena Run

- 20(+/-) acres on the north side of Helena Run between U.S Hwy. 27 and Lake Harris
- Comprised mainly of forested wetlands with frontage on both waterbodies.

#### Pasture Reserve

- 800(+/-) acres on Lake Erie Road in the Green Swamp
- A Green Swamp mosaic of uplands (xeric oak, oak hammock, pasture) and wetlands (cypress strand, wet prairie, pond)

#### Dead River Estates Property

- 8.5(+/-) acres on Dead River Road with access to Lake Harris and the Dead River (via canal)
- Acquisition partnership with Stormwater Section of Public Works – stormwater project for Lake Harris Basin

#### Royal Trails Area

- 60(+/-) acres north of Royal Trails
- Mature sand pine scrub community with wetland in southeast
- Adjacent to Seminole State Forest

#### Ellis Acres Reserve (Phase I)

- 94(+/-) acres on Lake Akron in Paisley
- Pasture and upland and wetland forested areas
- Approximately 1000' of frontage on lake

#### Pine Lakes Area

- 82(+/-) acres in the Pine Lakes area adjacent to Seminole State Forest
- Uplands are scrub, scrubby flatwoods and flatwoods; wetlands are flag (herbaceous) marshes

#### Pine Lakes Area

- 46(+/-) acres adjacent to property above
- Scrubby flatwoods, flatwoods and marsh

#### Ellis Acres Reserve (Phase II (f.k.a. Akron Meadows))

- 323(+/-) acres adjacent to Ellis Acres (above), Seminole State Forest and Ocala National Forest
- Former dairy farm
- Mostly pasture with forested wetlands, shrub marsh and lake front

#### Lake May Reserve

- 136(+/-) acres northeast of Eustis on CR 44A
- Remnant and active citrus, xeric oak hammock, 20(+/-) acre Lake May

#### Donation

##### Mt. Plymouth Lake

- 184(+/-) acres in the Plat of Mt. Plymouth
- Lake bottoms and some associated uplands

#### Partnership

##### Neighborhood Lakes

- 1,584(+/-) acres in Lake and Orange Counties (1056 acres in Lake)
- Multi-agency acquisition – FDEP, SJRWMD, OOCEA and Lake and Orange Counties
- County manages 211 acre portion owned jointly by Lake County and SJRWMD

## **LAKE COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY**

The Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) is an elected body independent of the Lake County Board of County Commissioners. The LCWA receives *ad valorem* revenues of approximately \$500,000 annually which may be used for the purchase of lands. (There is a disagreement within the Authority's governing board as to whether land acquisition will continue. This issue has not been resolved yet.) To date, the LCWA has acquired 6,600 acres through purchase or donation. Approximately 71 percent of the LCWA's holdings are wetlands; the remaining 29 percent are uplands. LCWA lands provide a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities including hiking, birding, paddling, camping, biking and horseback riding. Six tracts are currently open to the public and have basic amenities such as parking areas, informational kiosks and hiking trails — Crooked River Preserve, Flat Island Reserve, Hidden Waters Preserve, Sawgrass Island Preserve, Sabal Bluff Preserve and Bourlay Historic Nature Park. The facilities are described as follows:

Crooked River Preserve is a 63.6-acre property located in Clermont, along the north shore of Lake Louisa, and the Palatlahaha River. Activities include hiking, birding, fishing and paddling. Four canoes are located on the property and are available to the public free of charge.

Flat Island Preserve is the largest LCWA property at 2,361 acres. It is located south of Leesburg west of Highway 27. Activities include hiking, birding, fishing, camping and paddling. This property also has four canoes on the property that are available to the public free of charge. Three primitive campsites are located within the preserve. One site is located on Magnolia Island and only accessible by canoe or kayak. There is also a restroom facility located in the parking area at the main trailhead.

Hidden Waters Preserve is located in Eustis, between Country Club Road and Abrams Road. The Preserve encompasses 90.3-acres and has a 90-foot change in elevation from Lake Alfred in the center of the property to the outer rim. One of the most striking features of the Preserve is the ravine ecosystem that flows from the east side of the property to Lake Alfred. Activities include hiking and birding.

Sawgrass Island Preserve is located on the north end of Lake Yale, along the Lake and Marion border. The Preserve encompasses 1,168.1-acres that are dominated by a sawgrass marsh that extends from Lake Yale north through the center of the property. Activities include hiking, birding, camping, and horse back riding.

Sabal Bluff Preserve is a 55.7-acre tract located on the southeast shore of Lake Griffin, off of County Road 44. Based on suggestions from the mobile home communities that surround the Preserve, this is the only property that allows visitors to drive their golf carts through the Preserve. Other activities include hiking, birding, paddling and fishing. Distinctive features of this property are the steep bluffs along the lake shore, and the stunning views of Lake Griffin.

The Bourlay Historic Nature Park is an 83.1-acre property located on the southwest shore of Lake Griffin, north of Highway 441 off of Canal Street. This property along with Sabal Bluff was donated to the LCWA by Arthur "Buddy" Bourlay. The Bourlay family home still stands on the property along with a shotgun style cracker house that was relocated to the property. The property was also the site of an early steamboat landing and was the home to one of Leesburg's first Methodist churches. Activities include hiking, biking, paddling, fishing and the park is a premier birding location. The preserve has ten exercise stations that were donated by the Lake Regional Medical Center. There is also a restroom facility located in the parking area.

Ten additional properties do not have amenities, often due to access, but are accessible by water, and recreational opportunities include fishing and birding: Double Run Preserve, Banana Point Preserve, Eagles Ridge Preserve, Fern Prairie Preserve, Flowing Waters Preserve, Goat Island, Ocklawaha Picnic Grounds, Palatlahaha Island Preserve, Scrub Point Preserve, and Treasure Island Preserve.

## **LAND ACQUISITION AND PROTECTION**

It was recommended by the PLAAC that land acquisition be broken down into four main categories which covered the many types of land that have been discussed for this program. An overarching objective of land protections following any of these categories was the positive effect on Lake County's water resources. The four categories were:

Protection of Water Resources: Lands would be purchased or protected for enhancement of surface water and groundwater quantity as well as quality. Land characteristics of special concern may include those with geologic/hydrologic conditions that would easily enable contamination of vulnerable aquifers that have value as drinking water sources; property that serves as an important groundwater recharge function; property that contains or has direct connections to lakes, creeks, rivers, springs, sinkholes, or wetlands for which conservation of the

property will protect or improve surface water quality; and property that serves an important flood management function other than manmade water retention facilities.

**Protection of Natural Communities and Landscapes:** Lands would be purchased or protected that contain a diversity of natural communities; property containing natural communities that are rare; ecological quality in the communities present on the property; property that is functionally connected to other natural communities; property adjacent to properties that are in public ownership or have other environmental protections such as conservation easements; property that is large enough to contribute substantially to conservation efforts; property that contains important, Florida-specific geologic features such as caves or springs; and property that is relatively free from internal fragmentation from roads, power lines, and other features that create barriers and edge effects.

**Protection of Plant and Animal Species:** Lands would be purchased or protected that serve as documented or potential habitat for rare, threatened, or endangered species or species of special concern; property that serves as documented or potential habitat for species with large home ranges; property that contains plants or animals that are endemic or near-endemic to Florida or Lake County; property that serves as a special wildlife migration or aggregation site for activities such as breeding, roosting, colonial nesting, or over-wintering; property that offers high vegetation quality and species diversity; and property that has low incidence of non-native invasive species.

**Protection of Social/Human Values:** Lands would be purchased or protected that are suitable for parks, sports fields, trails, and recreation lands; property that offers opportunities for compatible user-oriented and/or resource-based outdoor recreation facilities and programs; property suitable for connective trails, greenways, or blueways; land that will protect open space from over-development; property that has historic, archeological, or cultural significance, and property that contributes to urban green space, provides a municipal defining greenbelt, provides scenic vistas, or has other value from an urban and regional planning perspective. Active recreation facilities such as golf courses and associated support facilities should not be developed from these funds.

The PLAAC developed Policy LCC-64, “Public Lands Acquisition Program”, to further define the Program in terms of management funding, acquisition coordination with other agencies and lands and, types of acquisition (e.g. fee simple, less than fee). This Policy was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in March of 2005.

The Council developed Procedure LC-34, “Public Lands Acquisition Process”, which outlined the evaluation criteria for lands referred to the Council. This Procedure lists the thirteen “Primary Site Evaluation Criteria” which support the three (3) main focus areas of: “Water Resources”, “Environmentally Sensitive Lands” and “Provide Recreation Lands”. The Procedure also details an eligibility rating (A, B, or C) for lands under consideration - properties eligible and recommended for further consideration for public acquisition (Group A); properties eligible but currently not recommended for further consideration for public acquisition (Group B); and those properties not currently considered eligible (Group C). This Procedure was approved in March of 2005.

The PLAAC and county staff aided the non-profit organization, Trust for Public Lands (TPL), in the development of a “Greenprint” model as a tool for evaluating lands. The Greenprint model (for “greenprinting”) concept was developed by TPL and is a Geographic Information System (GIS) based evaluation model that can be customized for specific users and uses. The model developed for Lake County used a number of datasets to define the thirteen Primary Site Evaluation Criteria and identified any Criteria applicable to a property under consideration.

Properties under consideration were evaluated in the field by county staff who generated a staff report. The staff report and greenprint model output were reviewed by the PLAAC and members would add their own knowledge and experience to determine a property's eligibility for acquisition. If recommended for acquisition, a property would be presented to the Board of County Commissioners for final action.

## **RECREATIONAL USES OF ACQUIRED LANDS**

In the development of a recommendation for recreational opportunities appropriate for acquired lands the Council used the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan of Florida. This Plan speaks of outdoor recreation as any leisure time activity conducted outdoors. Within the vast range of such a definition lie an almost unlimited number of possible activities. The two primary categories used throughout Florida are user-oriented outdoor recreation and resource-based outdoor recreation.

User-oriented types of outdoor recreation are those, which can be, provided almost anywhere for the convenience of the user. The user-oriented category is much the broader of the two being recommended and covers such activities as tennis, basketball, soccer, baseball, archery, skeet and trap shooting, and playground activities. It may also include such less strenuous activities as listening to a band concert in the park, watching spectator sports, or visiting a zoo.

Resource-based outdoor recreation differs drastically from user-oriented in that it cannot be provided just anywhere, but rather, it is dependent on some particular element or combination of elements in the natural or cultural environments. It also involves both active and passive types of activities, but is generally less formalized and less program oriented. Resource-based activities consist of such things as hunting, fishing, camping, boating, mountain biking, water skiing, surfing, and nature study, all of which require some natural condition that cannot easily be duplicated by man.

Some outdoor recreation activities, of course, can be considered either user-oriented or resource-based, depending on where the opportunity is made available. Good examples are swimming, picnicking, bicycling, and horseback riding.

The Council reviewed recreational opportunities relative to each of the four categories of land use protection objectives. Some recreational uses and land-types are obviously as compatible as others are incompatible. Because of the variability of recreational uses, the Council recommended that recreational opportunity for land acquired is prioritized in the following order:

- Resource-based,
- Multiple-use, and
- User-oriented.

Considering that each property will likely have unique characteristics, each property will require a Site Management Plan that will outline the proposed recreational activities as well as the level or intensity of site management. Site Management Plans will encompass the entire property and will be based on site-specific features and criteria.

## **MANAGEMENT OF ACQUIRED LANDS**

Appropriate management of acquired Public Lands was the final element of the PLAAC recommendation. The Council felt very strongly that the referendum funds should be able to

purchase land for active recreation facilities and programs but that operating funds should be derived from other sources. The Council recommended that the three functions of parks, trails, and environmental (public) lands fall under the same County Department/Division and managed by the same Director. They also recommended that the Public Lands Section be staffed by professionals trained and experienced in the acquisition, development, and management of multi-use environmental/recreational lands. The Public Lands Management Section was created and staffed in September of 2005. Since that time, Section staff has facilitated the acquisition of the lands mentioned previously and, with the help of the PLAAC, have developed and continue to develop Management Plans for these acquired lands.

Primary funding for the management of these lands can come from the allowable holdback of non-bonded funds set aside in a trust fund for this specific use. Included in the Plan will be a recommendation for a percentage holdback that will allow for the development of a long-range management budget program. In providing a recommendation for guidelines for appropriate management of acquired lands the Council reviewed several existing maintenance systems. All are established programs used throughout the country. The Council recommended the National Recreation and Park Association Park Maintenance Standards Mode System. This system establishes six levels of operational maintenance based on issues such as public usage, funding, community standards, site requirements, and others. The modes range from minimum maintenance of low visitation undeveloped lands up to state of the art maintenance for high quality, high usage diverse landscape. It would be normal that certain properties would move up or down the original site mode level established due to the above factors. The mode level would be established originally, and potentially change over time as a result of the specific properties Site Management Plan.

To date (2010) the Board of County Commissioners has approved Management Plans for three (3) environmental (public) lands properties. Management Plans continue to be developed for the other acquired properties.