

MATANZAS STATE FOREST (St. Johns County)

Initial State Acquisition: *April, 2003*

Area: *4, 700 Acres*

Primary Watershed(s): *Lower St. Johns River*

Current Number of DEP *FERI* Database Listings: *1 Project*

Previous Restoration Activities -

Matanzas State Forest (MaSF) was acquired by the state in FY2003-04 as part of the Northeast Florida Blueways Project and is a shared acquisition project under the "Florida Forever" Program. The DOF is lead management agency for the northern 4,700-acre portion of the 8,000-acre acquisition. The DOF-managed property includes a regionally significant 51-acre wood stork (*Mycteria americana*) rookery. Since acquisition, the Matanzas State Forest management team has erected structures, gates, and signage for public access and recreational use of the forest. Although discussions have been held with SJRWMD and St. Johns County about possible wetland restoration work on MaSF, as of this writing, no wetland restoration activities have taken place on the forest.

Current/Planned/Proposed Restoration Activities –

This property was targeted for acquisition by the state to protect the wood stork rookery, water resources, and ecological functions in a rapidly developing part of the state. Because the wood stork rookery is located in the northern portion of the forest which is under DOF management, all attempts to restore forested wetlands on MaSF must give special consideration to any potential impact to the rookery. Consequently, DOF involves SJRWMD in all matters relating to land management activities and hydrological restoration which could directly or indirectly affect the wood stork rookery.

Currently one project opportunity involving exotic plant assessment and control is listed on the *FERI* website for MaSF. However, other project opportunities exist, particularly for wetland enhancement, involving the replacement of damaged or inadequate culverts on several of the primary forest service roads. For example, a single, 36-inch metal culvert on the Smith Grade Road that crosses a basin swamp on the southern boundary of the MaSF is inadequate to convey the volume of water draining from the wetland during storm events. Replacement of this culvert with multiple culverts and a flashboard riser that can be adjusted according to water levels in the wetland would greatly enhance the hydrological function of the wetland.

Additionally, hydrological and plant community restoration opportunities may exist involving a **DOT Drainage Ditch** that has become over-grown with woody tree and shrub species (see **Figure 1**). The ditch traverses over 1.5 miles from US Hwy 1 across the forest to Cedar Creek which ultimately drains into the Inter-coastal Waterway on the east coast. Comparing current aerial photographs with historical aeriels of the site, it appears that the ditch, at least to some extent, interrupts the natural surface drainage from the northern part of the forest where the wood stork rookery is. Consequently, consultation with the FDOT, DEP, SJRWMD, and FFWCC will be necessary before moving forward with any restoration work on the structure or this part of the forest.

Wetland Restoration Needs Assessment –

Restoration needs assessment work had not been completed on Matanzas State Forest as of this writing. Therefore, no findings are available at this time.

