

**WELAKA STATE FOREST (Putnam County)**

**Initial State Acquisition:** *March, 1994 (Lease)*

**Area:** *2,287 Acres*

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

**Current Number of DEP *FERI* Database Listings:** *0 Projects*

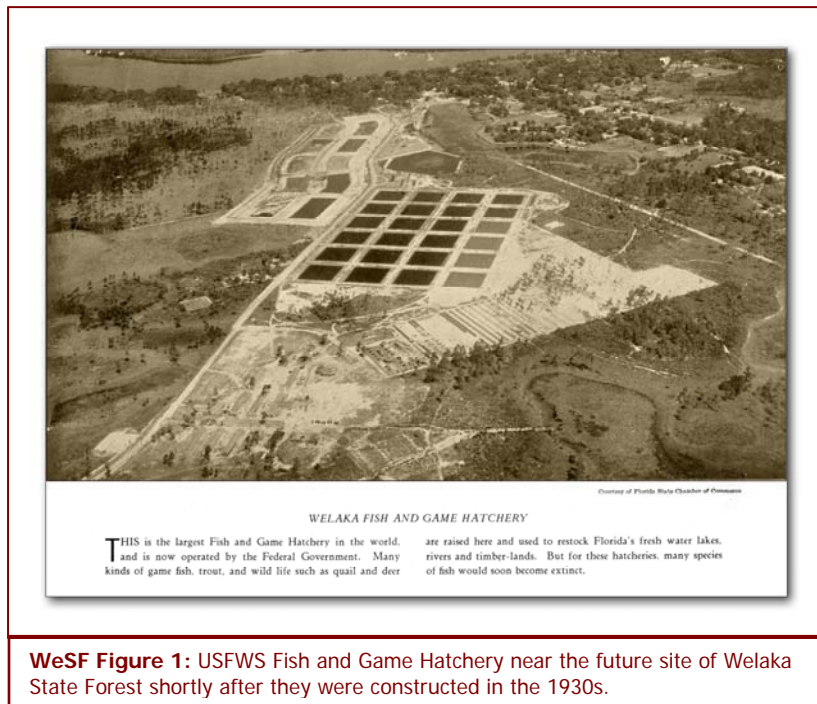
**Previous Restoration Activities -**

Little restoration project work has been conducted on Welaka State Forest (WeSF) in the past. In 2002 work was done at the site of **Mud Spring** to enhance wetland values and protect site integrity. There have been additional direct and indirect benefits to hydrological systems as a result of routine road maintenance activities elsewhere on the Forest. However, to what extent these benefits have occurred, is uncertain.

**Current/Planned/Proposed Restoration Activities -**

Only one project was proposed in 2005 under the management responsibility of the Welaka State Forest, which is the partial restoration and conversion of the former **US Fish & Wildlife Fish Hatchery** on County Road 309 (see **Figure 1**). This project, proposed primarily as a recreation/environmental education endeavor, provides for wetland creation as part of its design.

This project would involve converting a number of shallow fish ponds that were constructed during the late 1930's into a single 10-acre lake to be used for recreational youth fishing and education activities.



**WeSF Figure 1:** USFWS Fish and Game Hatchery near the future site of Welaka State Forest shortly after they were constructed in the 1930s.

After some confusion over ownership of the property, U.S. Department of Education three years ago recommended to the University of Florida, who had rights to the property for research purposes, that the parcel be transferred to the State of Florida under the “Federal Lands to Parks Program”. According to information provided by the National Park Service, the transfer occurred by default in 2003.

The DOF is currently working with the SJRWMD and FFWCC to pursue the project with funding from the Aquatic Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Section Program (AHRES), which is administered through the FFWCC.

**Wetland Restoration Needs Assessment –**

No restoration needs assessment work has been conducted on Welaka State Forest as of this writing.