

Natural and Cultural Resource Management in Florida State Parks



Park staff using a drip torch to ignite a prescribed burn

Management of natural and cultural resources in Florida State Parks is two-fold, encompassing natural resources such as forests, springs, seagrass beds and beach dunes, and cultural treasures such as Native American burial sites and historic forts. Florida law requires the Florida Park Service to acquire lands which represent the “original domain” of the state and to conserve these lands and historic sites for all time. These special places require active management to preserve the natural and cultural values for which they were acquired.

Florida’s ecosystems evolved under dynamic natural processes associated with fire, hydrology, and a delicate ecological balance between native species. The resource management goal of the Florida Park Service is to restore the original landscapes of the state by reestablishing these processes. This “natural systems management” ensures that park visitors have the opportunity to experience *The Real Florida*SM as early Floridians did.

Fire Management



Park staff conducting a prescribed burn.

Before there were roads, canals or big cities, lightning-set fires swept across Florida's landscape. Native Americans also set fires to improve the land for hunting and gathering food. Over thousands of years habitats evolved under the influence of fire. Today, most lightning fires are extinguished to protect lives and property. As a result, many fire-dependent habitats and their associated plant and animal species are in decline.

Today, prescribed fire mimics natural fire and can help prevent devastating wildfires. Park staff, guided by detailed plans called prescriptions, conduct prescribed burns as a regular and important part of their land management activities. Prescribed fire is a safe way to apply a natural process, ensure ecosystem health and reduce wildfire risk.

To learn more about the role of prescribed fire, visit www.goodfires.org.

Exotic Species Management



Park staff removing invasive Brazilian Pepper.

Non-native species, often referred to as “exotic,” can out-compete and displace native species. Just as our ecosystems evolved with fire, Florida’s native plants and animals evolved with one another. Some exotic species are invasive and have few natural controls.

Exotic species can destroy sensitive habitats and compete with native species for food. Wild hogs damage natural areas with their destructive rooting behavior. Plant species such as cogongrass can alter fire behavior, complicating efforts to restore ecosystems.

Park staff are trained to remove exotic species in order to restore ecological balance and preserve the diversity of Florida’s native species.

To learn more about exotic species, visit www.floridainvasives.org.

Historic Preservation



Park staff evaluating a state park historic structure.

As part of the Florida Park Service's mission to preserve cultural resources, park staff protect the structures which were acquired for their historic significance, as well as those which are part of our park heritage. Most historic structures in state parks are used in daily park operations while others are restored and maintained for interpretive purposes.

Park staff monitor the integrity of historic buildings and assist in preparing detailed plans for their rehabilitation or restoration. Staff are trained to preserve park buildings by performing routine but necessary maintenance such as re-roofing, painting, and window repairs in a manner which protects the historic values of the building.

To learn more about preserving historic structures visit www.floridatrust.org.

Archaeological Resources Management



Park staff checking a soil sample for artifacts.

State park archaeological sites are managed to protect them from natural and human threats. Natural processes which can damage archaeological resources include erosion, burrowing animals and aggressive plant growth. Human activities such as construction, trespassing and looting also threaten these sites and often cause damage which is beyond repair.

Park staff are trained to recognize the different types of archaeological sites in their parks and to use best management practices to protect them. This includes monitoring of any ground-disturbing activities such as facility construction or infrastructure improvements to ensure sites are protected.

To learn more about archaeology in Florida, visit www.flpublicarchaeology.org.

Imperiled Species Management



Park staff monitoring a sea turtle nest.

Florida State Parks are home to more than 275 species of plants and animals considered endangered, threatened, or imperiled. Sometimes these species need extra help to ensure their survival. Park staff protect sea turtle nests, reintroduce endangered plant and animal species, and sometimes take steps to limit human access to sensitive nesting and foraging areas.

Park staff follow scientific monitoring protocols to keep an eye on the health and well-being of species like the ghost orchid, Florida scrub-jay, Anastasia Island beach mouse and dozens of other imperiled plant and animal species.

To learn more about Florida's imperiled plant and animal species, visit <http://fnai.org/fieldguides.cfm>.