



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet Florida 2024



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2023 Estimate
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$548,674
Forest Legacy	\$9,180,000
Forest Stewardship	\$159,449
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$14,893
State Fire Assistance	\$1,288,288
Urban and Community Forestry	\$1,427,873
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$460,843
Total	\$13,080,020

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

Program Goals

- Cooperative programs are administered and implemented through a partnership between the Florida Forest Service (FFS), the USDA Forest Service, and many other private and government entities. These programs promote the health and productivity of forestlands and rural economies. Programs emphasize forest sustainability and the production of commodity and amenity values such as wildlife, water quality, and environmental services.
- The overarching goal is to maintain and improve the health of rural and urban forests and related economies and protect the forests and citizens of the state. These programs maximize cost effectiveness through partnerships in program delivery, increase forestland value and sustainability, and do so in a voluntary and non-regulatory manner.

Key Issues

- Florida continues to recover from unprecedented timber damage caused by Hurricane Michael in 2018, Hurricane Ian in 2022 and, Hurricane Idalia in 2023. Due to the severity of the damage, FFS is providing hurricane recovery operations in each of our four regions through increased wildfire mitigation activities. Wildfire suppression in these areas has proven to be very difficult, resulting in longer suppression times due to more difficult ingress and egress in these downed timber areas.
- Several pulp mills across the state have closed or curtailed production in 2023. Outlets for wood impacted by Hurricane Idalia are now further away, increasing costs and further decreasing revenues for landowners in the impact area.
- Supply chain and production issues are affecting the ordering and timely delivery of wildland firefighting and land management equipment, but this issue is starting to wane in late 2023. Equipment replacement appropriations approved by the Florida Legislature are only authorized for one fiscal year, which makes paying for ordered equipment an issue when delivery time is delayed.
- The population of Florida continues to have sustained growth. This influx of an annual estimate of nearly 1,000 new residents and subsequent new developments has continued to increase wildland-urban interface areas in the state. The increased use of the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment and the Community Assessor tool and their data shows how the understanding of wildfire potential and the need for mitigation has become more mainstream.
- Prescribed fire in Florida is still a very robust management tool, with an average of 2.1 million acres burned yearly. Florida has also been providing additional state dollars for prescribed fire enhancements.
- Two items that will affect wildfire activity this upcoming year are the impacted areas of Hurricanes Michael, Ian and Idalia and the forecasted continuation of El Niño conditions through the remainder of

our dry season. Even with a strong El Nino in place, drought conditions continue to exist around the state. The amount of downed vegetation and the areas of the state that were impacted create increased fuel for potential wildfires and difficult conditions for suppression activities.

- Florida's forests are continually threatened by the introduction and spread of invasive insects, pathogens, and non-native plants. The spread of these invasives are exacerbated by recent hurricane incidence. The FFS works closely with partner agencies and organizations to detect new problematic non-native species, monitor their occurrence and impacts, develop and implement management methods, and communicate with the public about these issues.
- Rapid urbanization, increased climatic fluctuations, and powerful storms have led to decreased urban tree canopy and an increased risk of flooding in many communities. Florida's cities can better manage and restore their urban tree canopy by linking trees to existing programs for community resiliency and by developing an urban forest management plan. Urban Forestry Emergency Plans address potential disaster situations to help communities prepare for and recover from these canopy altering events.
- Florida's forests overall are sustainable across species and timber products, with a statewide sustainability index (ratio of net timber growth to removals) of 1.67. However, in some counties, especially for pine pulpwood, the sustainability index is below 1.0 (more pulpwood being removed than produced) due to high levels of industrial timber demand for pine pulpwood, and land conversions, especially in northeast Florida.
- Annual reforestation acres are about one-half of what they were 25 years ago. There is a critical need for increased reforestation, especially incentives for private landowners, as competition from other land uses such as agriculture and urban development continue to impact Florida's forest's continued sustainability.
- Development pressure on Florida's forests and working lands continues to result in the conversion of properties, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020. This prompted an escalation of sellers under new financial strains and buyers focusing on rural areas with open space away from city centers. There is a greater need now for an abundance of conserved and protected lands and therefore, the funding necessary to procure and manage such lands in perpetuity.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2023 Accomplishments	Value
Population	21,538,187	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	9,448
Acres of Forest Land	16,952,518	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	49,808
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	6,544,367	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	17,095
Number of NIPF Landowners	70,436	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	60
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	0	State Fire Communities Assisted	111
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	19,457,253	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	8,000
Number of Rural Fire Departments	525	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	1,487
Cities and Towns	412	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	164
Forest Based Employment	124,104	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	15,911,104
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	65,542
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	120,789,775		

Program Highlights

Cooperative Fire Protection

State Fire Assistance continues to fund and support firefighting resources throughout Florida, including developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans. The Federal Excess Personal Property and Firefighter Property Programs assist Florida in acquiring and placing fire equipment in rural communities throughout

the state. This past year, we acquired \$2.2 million worth of property, including eight cargo trucks that are used as wildland brush engines and high-water rescue vehicles, one bus used for search and rescue, as well as several UTVs. In addition, the FFS administers Volunteer Fire Assistance Program funds to support the fire prevention and protection efforts of rural community fire departments, which this past year assisted 43 volunteer fire departments with purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE) and other equipment valued at over \$511,574.

Through our mitigation and prevention grants, we successfully reduced the hazardous fuel load on over 8,135 acres, adding protection to 13,235 structures, and delivered 523 programs covering Firewise, wildfire prevention, resulting in over 1,111,000 contacts and 350 direct door-to-door contacts on "Ready, Set, Go,".

BIL funding has been utilized to update technical capabilities at Withlacoochee State Forest's 24/7 operations center, purchase 45 fire shelters, purchase an Ironworker fabrication machine for fire equipment modifications, and host a contracted chainsaw training course for 20 students.

Fire Adapted Communities

The FFS embraces the development of fire adapted communities (FACs) throughout the state that can withstand the otherwise devastating effects of wildfire impacts on communities in the wildland/urban interface (WUI). The concepts of FAC align well with existing local efforts, including the Local Mitigation Strategy, Community Wildfire Protection Plans and Action Plans, and Firewise Communities. The FFS held a training session on the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans for our Wildfire Mitigation Specialists. The increased use of data from the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment and the Community Assessor tool is an example of how these concepts are being used to make communities more fire adapted. The FFS also actively partners with our federal cooperators, fire departments, and other local stakeholders to successfully implement wildfire mitigation efforts, such as annual cleanup days, fireline installation and maintenance, and prescribed fire assistance on private, state and federal lands.

Florida Forest Sustainability Report

The State of Florida recognizes the importance of sustainable forest management and the FFS is tracking a statewide sustainability index of Florida's forests. The revised 2020 Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data indicate that Florida's forests, overall, are sustainable across species and timber products with a statewide sustainability index of 1.67. This indicates 67 percent more timber growth compared with timber removals.

Florida's BMPs

Silviculture Best Management Practices (BMPs) are forest land management guidelines designed as the minimum standards necessary for protecting and maintaining water quality and wetland ecosystems during forestry activities. Silviculture BMPs were first established in Florida in the mid 1970's and were adopted into Florida Administrative Code in February 2004 (Chapter 5I-6). Currently, there are nearly 5.6 million acres enrolled in the Silviculture BMP program, just under 2.7 million acres of which are on privately-owned lands and 2.9 million acres on publicly-owned lands.

Forestry Wildlife Best Management Practices for State Imperiled Species (WBMPs) were adopted into Florida Administrative Code in October 2014 (Chapter 5I-8). Applicants who properly implement WBMPs are not required to obtain a permit authorizing the incidental take of their enrolled State Imperiled Species during normal, ongoing forestry operations, nor are they subject to any fines or penalties associated with an incidental take. Currently there are over 3.6 million acres enrolled in the Wildlife BMP program, over 2.3 million acres of which are on privately-owned lands and nearly 1.3 million acres on publicly-owned lands.

Technical assistance for BMPs previously was provided by staff in the Forest Hydrology Section. Beginning in July 2023, Florida's three Regional CFA Coordinators began assisting the BMP Program Manager in providing technical BMP assistance to Florida landowners. During 2023, FFS provided 88 technical assists on 11,670 acres through BMP site assessments, courtesy checks, and implementation surveys. BMP training is another important aspect of Florida's BMP and WBMP programs and is presented via formal educational classes reaching Florida Master Loggers, consulting foresters, private and public land managers forest landowners, and other natural resource professionals. During 2023,

Forest Hydrology Section staff presented 18 classes on forestry BMPs, reaching 755 people.

Forest Health Protection

The FFS Forest Health Section responded to outbreaks of southern pine beetle (SPB) from June to August 2023, primarily affecting state and federal lands in Alachua, Franklin, and Wakulla Counties. A total of 114 confirmed or suspected SPB infestations were recorded in ground and aerial surveys. Suppression activities were initiated promptly on the affected State Forests, and survey information was shared with other affected landowners and land managers. The total area impacted remained below 160 acres, and no new infestations were detected after August. The routine annual trapping and aerial surveys for southern pine beetle (SPB) activity were also conducted as usual across North Florida. A total of 45 aerial surveillance flights have been flown logging over 10,962 miles during 66 hours of flight time. Total area surveyed for bark beetle surveillance flights is estimated at 18,867,414 acres.

The Southern Pine Beetle Assistance and Prevention Program, which is funded by the USFS Forest Health Protection Program, accepted 102 applications from non-industrial private landowners in 2023 to provide cost-share assistance and incentive payments to conduct preventative forest management practices on 8,566 acres. The FFS Forest Health Section staff also recorded 1,892 activities in the form of survey observations, identifications, diagnoses, and management recommendations regarding forest-health-related incidents statewide. This included the documentation of ten new county records, 10 new host records, and one new state record. Three new public outreach and education leaflets were published regarding forest pests and diseases.

BIL funding has been utilized for the production of outreach videos for private forest landowners, collection of and analyzing relampago blight in 18 counties, development of an artificial intelligence tool to rapidly screen bark beetles, and development of a new field guide of common tree diseases in Florida.

Forest Inventory and Analysis

The FFS partners with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program, the only nation-wide forest inventory system. The FFS based FIA crews collect inventory plot and other on-the-ground information, and then FFS works jointly with the USFS on data review and validation before FIA data is posted online. The FIA program is widely recognized by forest products industry and environmental groups alike as "the source" for data driven timber and forest vegetation information. Florida's FIA program dates back to 1934, when the first forest inventory information was collected in the state. In the federal fiscal year 2023, Florida FIA crews collected information on 540 plots in 67 counties. The latest Florida forest inventory data posted on USFS websites is for 2020. Maintaining full federal and state support for the rigorous core FIA program, including forest inventories, analyses and reports, is one of the top priorities for the FFS.

Forest Legacy

The FFS, through the Forest Legacy Program, realized several accomplishments during FY 2023. In June of 2023, FFS closed on Wolfe Creek Forest, Paddle Trail Tract, a 1,487-acre forest located in Santa Rosa County. The property, acquired in fee-simple, is now being managed by FFS as part of Blackwater River State Forest. The acquisition protects working forestlands containing creeks and areas ready for Longleaf pine restoration in lieu of conversion to residential development. The property additionally provides a natural buffer to Naval Air Station Whiting Field. In November of 2023, FFS closed on the first Forest Legacy Program conservation easement in Florida, Keystone Longleaf Preserve, located in Walton County. This 1,955-acre property is also the first joint Forest Legacy Program/ Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFLPP), an acquisition program also administered through the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, less-than-fee acquisition in the state (RFLPP project name known as Natural Bridge Creek). Perpetual conservation of this forestland will protect the rare karst swallet and other associated resource features that render the protection of this site as notable.

FFS worked with partners to resubmit Avalon Woodland Ravines – Phase 1 to the National Panel for FY2025 funding consideration. The proposed conservation easement consists of 5,495 acres and is located in Jefferson County, a county federally considered a disadvantaged community.

Additionally, FFS worked with partners involved with a previous Forest Legacy Program-funded acquisition who would like to realize specific changes to land use onsite. FFS continues to administer the federally required processing of the associated requests, to include meeting with the State Forest

Stewardship Coordinating Committee.

Forest Stewardship

The Florida Forest Stewardship outreach program continued to provide landowner assistance and education activities that took place through in-person visits, workshops, newsletters, emails, and webinars. The FFS and our partners organized events that have reached 1,433 landowners who collectively own over 160,000 acres. These events inform landowners about forest management and assistance programs. Topics included forest & wildlife management practices, restoration practices, storm preparation and recovery, forest carbon sequestration, policy, and Tree Farm Certification. Recorded webinars and web courses will offer landowners and the public the continued opportunity to learn about forest management into the future. The program network consists of over 7000 landowners and professionals.

Utilizing BIL funding, the FFS has entered into agreements with private forestry consultants to prepare Forest Stewardship Plans on 28 properties covering 15,049 acres. Additionally, an agreement with the University of Florida is providing expanded outreach and education through field tours, webinars, and newsletter and electronic updates began during this year. Funding was also used for staffing to increase capacity for processing and delivering agency nursery seedlings to both public and private landowners.

Geospatial Technology

The Florida Forest Service (FFS) leverages geospatial technology to efficiently manage Florida's 1.2 million acres of State Forests and optimize public recreational opportunities.

Inventory and Enhancement of Recreational Resources: A comprehensive review and spatial cataloging of recreational resources across all 38 State Forests and Babcock Ranch was completed. This detailed inventory identified potential upgrades and enhancements for recreational programs, with the information seamlessly integrated into an online map for public access and utilization.

Modernizing GIS Infrastructure: FFS is committed to ongoing advancements in GIS capabilities. The division is actively transitioning personnel from ArcMap to ArcGIS Pro and Collector to Field Maps, prioritizing dynamic mapping functionalities within ArcGIS Online. While voluntary, this transition has already been adopted by most users, demonstrating their commitment to enhanced efficiency and data management.

Supporting Disaster Response: In the wake of Hurricane Idalia, FFS swiftly deployed its GIS expertise to support timber damage assessments. By effectively utilizing resources from multiple agencies, FFS provided accurate and timely spatial data crucial for post-disaster recovery efforts.

Comprehensive Data Management: FFS maintains a robust and ongoing program to update spatial data for the Rural & Family Lands program. As new projects are initiated and existing ones finalized, the associated spatial data is integrated into a central database. This meticulous data management ensures transparency and facilitates informed decision-making regarding land acquisition and conservation efforts.

Continual Innovation: FFS remains dedicated to continuously improving its data management infrastructure. The ongoing migration of the FFS data model to ArcGIS Online further strengthens its commitment to utilizing cutting-edge geospatial technologies for optimal forest management and public service.

Landowner Assistance

The FFS, County Foresters and partners offer landowners assistance through technical guidance and management planning as well as enrolling them in federal and state financial forest management assistance programs. Multiple state-administered and federal administered incentive programs, with unique objectives, were delivered to landowners during 2023.

County Foresters assisted in preparing 676 Management Plans on 40,200 acres. These plans include practice plans, EQIP plans, EFRP plans, and general management plans. Consultants prepared 64 Stewardship plans, and FFS prepared 49 Stewardship plans.

Landowners were provided 367 technical assists over a total of 1,020 work hours for the EQIP, CSP, and

CRP programs. These programs are administered through the USDA, NRCS and FSA offices. FFS assistance includes the preparation of practice plans and inspections after work is completed.

County Foresters assist with the Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program (SPB) and the Forest Health Monitoring Program, a federal program administered by the state. Detailed information is found in the Forest Health section of this report.

FFS County Foresters have been working with NRCS and FSA on EFRP. The Big Bend area of Florida was impacted by Hurricane Idalia in early September 2023. Since the hurricane, there have been 210 assists in helping landowners. Other EFRP projects from previous disasters in the panhandle include 332 assists.

FFS continues servicing a state-funded program to encourage tree planting across the state. In 2023, 238 landowners planted over 17,700 acres. Three hundred fifty-six landowners applied for funding to assist in planting 34,286 acres in the 2024 planting season. In early 2024, approximately 22,366 acres will be planted under the State Program.

Overall, FFS County Foresters provided over 9000 landowner assists including State and Federal Programs such as Forest Stewardship, EQIP, CSP, CRP, EFRP, SPB, and FHM.

RESTORE

During this past year, FFS entered the maintenance phase of the Tate's Hell State Forest Phase I project. FFS staff are also awaiting the agreement to fund a multi-state-awarded RESTORE proposal to enhance private forest lands within important watersheds in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

Shared Stewardship

The FFS signed onto the formal Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding for the State of Florida in August 2020, along with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, USDA Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Farm Service Agency.

Since 2017, the FFS has partnered with Apalachicola National Forest (ANF), under the umbrella of Shared Stewardship, through a Good Neighbor Agreement to assist with forest management activities on ANF. Over the past year, FFS closed the Florida River and GNA Second Thinning timber sales, which were delayed as a result of Hurricane Michael. Currently, the FFS is conducting work under the new Apalachicola National Forest Rock Bluff and Thousand Yard Bay Good Neighbor Agreement, which broadened the scope of work over the entire forest. No common stand exams or archaeology surveys were required to be completed this past year. However, roadwork and a timber sale are planned for the State of Florida's 2023-24 fiscal year.

Urban and Community Forestry

Florida's Urban and Community Forestry Programs offer support to non-profits, individuals, and communities through outreach, instruction, and technical assistance. Technical assistance is provided on a range of topics, including tree planting, tree care, inventories, canopy assessments, staff education and urban forest management planning. Thirty-three CFA foresters help residents and municipalities across Florida by encouraging stewardship, promoting practices for storm resiliency, and educating residents about the value of our urban forests.

The FFS has recently completed a statewide urban tree canopy assessment, providing urban tree canopy information to all incorporated communities (485) within the state at no cost to the community.

BIL funding has supported a grant program for urban forestry education, invasive species removal, riparian planting and tree preservation during construction projects. A total of 56 applications were received for this program statewide and the requests eclipsed available funding.

One hundred sixty-six communities participated in the TREE CITY USA program provided through the Arbor Day Foundation. The FFS continues to partner with the Arbor Day Foundation and local utilities to offer trees to residents through the Energy-Saving Trees program. The trees planted through Energy-Saving Trees have positively impacted our communities, and over 27,400 trees have been planted around Florida homes to date. Energy-Saving Trees is a valuable program that needs continued support.

FFS continued working with the Florida Urban Forestry Council, Florida Project Learning Tree, Community Greening, the University of Florida, and Florida International University to promote urban forestry and proper arboriculture practices around the state.

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