

C-24 Split Oak Mitigation Bank

Sources:

Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Orange County, Osceola County. Split Oak Forest Mitigation Park. Management Plan. No date.

Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Orange County, Osceola County. Split Oak Forest Mitigation Park Fire Management Plan DRAFT. December 1994.

SFWMD Split Oak Forest Wetland Mitigation Staff Report DRAFT. May 1996

Site visit to Split Oak Forest Mitigation Park in August 2005.

Bank Location: S27, 33, 34 and 35/T24S/R31E in the Eastern portion of Orange and Osceola Counties

Bank owner: Public, Orange and Osceola Counties (although mitigation is only for Orange County) Bank is used for mitigation of wetlands as well as a gopher tortoise relocation site. The bank is open to the public for low impact recreation.

Total acres: 1049.26 (639.74 additional acres are part of the property but not available for mitigation credit)

Credit potential: 206.5

Credits released: 88.8

Credits Used: 88.8

(Credit documentation from September 2004)

Bank Summary

The bank is a mosaic of the following community types scrubby flatwoods, pinelands, xeric oak scrub, hardwood hammock, freshwater marsh, cypress swamp, hardwood swamp, shrub swamp, open water and grassland.

Most restoration work on the bank has been done to return a natural fire interval to the landscape. Some hydrologic work has been done such as ditch filling but details are not known.

Burn plans

Split Oak natural communities were fire suppressed for about 20 years prior to becoming a bank. The fire management plan breaks out the natural communities into ten distinct community types and has a brief description of the dominant plant species and the substrate it grows in. The fire plan includes notes on fuel models developed for the different fuel loads and considers the plant community's response to fire and fire return intervals. The reintroduction of fire at Split Oak mitigation bank is described in terms of returning the landscape to a historic fire regime and this will in turn benefit the flora and fauna adapted to these conditions. Mechanical reduction of fuels will not be encouraged because of impacts to soil. Growing season or lightning season prescribed fire is part of the fire plan for the bank. Prescribed fire objectives include the following (1) improve habitat for gopher tortoises (2) increase herbaceous component of flatwoods vegetation (3) reduce populations of invasive native species (4) manage scrub for optimal habitat recommendations for scrub jays. Objectives for fire are tied to habitat structure needs for listed species; the management plan states that vegetative surveys will be used to assess the effectiveness of management activities. The survey will include an evaluation of species composition, cover, and biomass. Photo monitoring will be implemented for immediately before prescribed fire, after prescribed fire and six months later. Other monitoring includes a qualitative follow up to the burn prescription and a report on the success of the burn based on the prescriptions objectives. Included in the fire plan is a letter to neighbors of the bank informing them of the importance of prescribed fire in a Florida landscape. There is considerable consideration given to the creation of smoke in the prescribed fires and how this will affect the people living in the area around the bank.

Native listed species of the bank are mentioned in the fire management plan and management objectives were developed to help the habitat meet the life history requirements of listed fauna.

Hunting is not allowed on the bank.

Reference conditions

Natural communities are given a brief description of dominant flora, soil type and a natural targeted fire regime. Although reference conditions are not explicitly described in the management document most of the natural communities on the bank are intact but were fire suppressed. Habitat enhancement for listed species is mentioned in the context that natural communities will be enhanced to meet the needs of the dependant species but specifics were not available from this document.

Success Criteria

Documentation of specific success criteria has not been acquired for this study but guidelines that might be used to develop success criteria from the management document have been included. Documentation acquired describes general goals for success without specific measures.

These goals are listed in the management plan and include:

- Goal 1 Maintain, increase and ensure the abundance and distribution of state listed wildlife within the project site.
 - Objective 1 Implement appropriate habitat management and restoration activities in order to satisfy the life history requirements of listed species populations.
 - Objective 2 Primary considerations will be directed to the needs of listed wildlife populations, even to the exclusion of the user considerations.
 - Objective 3 Establish techniques to monitor the status of listed species populations in order to evaluate and refine management activities.
- Goal 2 Provide recreational uses which are compatible with the protection and maintenance of listed wildlife populations, the retention of naturally occurring vegetative associations and protection of sensitive natural area resources.
 - Objective 1 Provide recreational uses that feature the area’s uniqueness as a diverse assemblage of high quality natural plant communities.
 - Objective 2 Reduce wildlife disturbances and enhance wildlife visibility by limiting unsupervised access to daylight hours only.
- Goal 3 Manage for the quality and productivity of the site’s xeric plant communities.
 - Objective 1 Promote management activities such as ecological burning which are necessary to the maintenance of the communities.
 - Objective 2 Provide protection to sensitive plant communities and individual plant species by controlling use of motorized vehicles and by directing pedestrian traffic along established hiking trails.
- Goal 4 Increase public awareness of the importance of protecting and managing listed species populations.
 - Objective 1 Provide information regarding the effectiveness of mitigation parks and other habitat protection techniques.
 - Objective 2 Demonstrate the interrelationships between listed wildlife populations and fire-adapted plant communities.
 - Objective 3 Provide self-interpretive hiking trails to listed species habitats and unique environmental features.

Credit Release Schedule

Activity	Percent Release
Demonstration through the submittal of an annual report that successful burning of 580 acres, and 27 months of site management has been accomplished, record conservation easement within three months of permit approval	43 %
Complete tri-part agreement revision within one year of the issuance of this permit	20 %
Successful monitoring* for two years subsequent to permit issuance	9 %
Successful monitoring* for three years subsequent to permit issuance	9 %
Successful monitoring* for four years subsequent to permit issuance	9 %
Successful monitoring* for five years as verified by district staff	10 %

* Successful monitoring consists of district approved progression toward accomplishment of general and burn management goals as established in the general management plan and burn management plan.

Data taken from staff report for application # 950306-3 approved on 6/13/96

Monitoring - The bank is no longer selling credits.