

Improving, Restoring, and Managing Wildlife Habitat in Florida: Sources of Technical Assistance for Rural Landowners¹

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Introduction

In Florida, roughly 50% of the rural land area is held in private ownership and engaged in some form of agriculture or forestry (Florida Statistical Abstract, 1992). Privately owned lands in Florida provide critically important wildlife habitat for many species. Effective management of wildlife habitat on private lands in Florida is essential for maintaining healthy wildlife populations into the future.

Managing for wildlife essentially includes maintaining the natural processes on the land. For example, fire in pine flatwoods and seasonal flooding of wetlands are essential for maintaining plant and wildlife communities that are adapted to these natural processes. However, multiple land uses, invasive non-native species, and other factors may interfere with natural environmental processes. In these cases, active management is needed to maintain or restore healthy and productive wildlife habitat.

Expert advice can be helpful when deciding on specific management actions needed to maintain or restore wildlife habitat. This is especially useful when attempting to benefit wildlife species of special management interest or concern. Landowners are advised to consider the types of habitats that exist on their property and that they are interested in managing, such as wetlands, pine forests, hardwoods, abandoned pasture, and so forth, to assist them when they begin searching for information.

This document summarizes sources of information from federal, state, and non-governmental organizations that provide technical assistance to rural landowners interested in managing or restoring habitat for wildlife (Table 1). Additional information regarding conservation and management of wildlife habitat in Florida is available on the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS). Related documents present information on programs that provide:

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1. Financial assistance to private landowners
 - Improving, Restoring, and Managing Natural Resources on Rural Properties in Florida: Sources of Financial Assistance (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FR156>)
 - Paying Private Landowners to Conserve Wildlife Habitat: A Unique Approach to Conservation (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW138>)
2. Technical assistance for homeowners:
 - Improving, Restoring, and Managing Natural Resources in Florida: Sources of Technical Assistance for Urban Homeowners (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW212>)
3. Conservation options (easements, etc.) for private landowners
 - Conservation Options for Private Landowners in Florida (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW194>)
 - Conservation Easements: Options for Preserving Current Land Uses (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FR149>)
4. Evaluating private lands for conservation
 - Evaluating Private Lands for Conservation of Wildlife (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW195>)
 - What is in a Natural Resource Management Plan? (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FR126>)

Additional information

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Table 1. Organizations and programs that operate throughout Florida (statewide) to provide technical assistance for management of wildlife habitat and natural resources.

Organization	Contact Information	Comments
Federal		
Department of the Interior	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Partners for Fish & Wildlife: http://partners.fws.gov	Assistance to private landowners to restore wetlands and other wildlife habitat.
	Bureau of Reclamation: http://www.usbr.gov/waterconservation/planning.html	Financing, in-kind services, and educational programs for on-farm water management.
U.S. Department of Agriculture	Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs	Multiple programs that provide technical and financial support to assist with managing and restoring wetlands and other wildlife habitat.
	Farm Service Agency: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/	Technical and financial assistance to address soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on farms and ranches.
State		
University of Florida/IFAS	Cooperative Extension Electronic Data Information Source: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/	Searchable database for technical information on many topics related to management of natural resources.
Florida Cooperative Extension Service	Cooperative Extension Service County Offices: http://extension.ifas.ufl.edu	Provide technical assistance and conduct public workshops. Services vary by county.
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	Landowner Incentive Program: http://www.myfwc.com/lip/	Financial and technical assistance for landowners to manage, enhance, or restore habitats to benefit species at risk.
Florida Division of Forestry	Forest Stewardship Program (FSP): http://www.fl-dof.com/forest_management/cfa_steward_index.html UF/IFAS FSP web site: http://www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/ffws/fsp.htm	Technical assistance and educational programs through cooperation with UF/IFAS, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and other organizations.

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Water Management Districts	South Florida Water Management District, Water Savings Initiative Program: http://www.sfwmd.gov/org/wsd/wsconservation/waterconsfungingprogram.html	Technical assistance to implement water-efficiency measures that reduce water use demands and promote water conservation.
	Southwest Florida Water Management District, Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems (FARMS): http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/business/farms/	Incentives to farmers to install and maintain irrigation best management practices (BMPs) to the agricultural community within "water use caution areas" (WUCA).
	Suwannee River Water Management District, Private Landowner Initiative Program: http://www.srwmd.state.fl.us/features/news/private+landowner+initiative.htm	Assistance to private landowners to develop and implement land management plans that enhance, improve, or restore fish and wildlife habitat.
Non-governmental		
National Wildlife Federation	NWF Species Recovery Fund: http://www.nwf.org/wildlife/grants/index.cfm	Funding and technical assistance for habitat restoration, species reintroduction, and other efforts that benefit species listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.
American Forest Foundation	Forests for Watersheds and Wildlife (F ₂ W ₂): http://64.177.25.182/cms/pages/51_5.html	Directs forestland owners to AFF volunteer foresters, conservation groups, land trusts, and natural resource professionals who can provide assistance in developing forest conservation and wildlife management plans to promote wildlife habitat improvement, watershed protection, and forest health.
Stewardship America, Inc.	Farmland Stewardship Program: http://privatelands.org/contents_FSP.htm (scroll down to program information)	Provides agricultural producers access to conservation and profit improvement information.