

SELF-GUIDED TRAIL

SELF-GUIDED INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

Twelve Mile Swamp CONSERVATION AREA



Section 1 Industrial silvicultural Operations
Upon entering the conservation area, you may notice that the conservation area is dominated by thousands of rows of pine trees. At the time of acquisition, Rayonier Forest Resources, L.P., was leasing the surface rights on the property from the former landowner. Rayonier opted to keep a long-term lease on the timber within upland areas of the property; the District purchased wetland timber rights from Rayonier. Rayonier will continue to manage the leased portions of property as an industrial timberland, harvesting and managing the timber until the termination of the lease in 2025.

Twelve Mile Swamp Conservation Area was purchased in 2001 by the St. Johns River Water Management District and the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the state of Florida. The conservation area provides significant water resource protection, buffering a wellhead that supplies drinking water to St. Johns County. The 21,898-acre property is under a long-term timber lease. However, 378 acres of the property have been designated a recreation area. This recreation area is composed mainly of planted pine forest with several small cypress domes scattered within. Hiking, bicycling, equestrian activities, and wildlife viewing are available within the recreation area.

Section 2 Remnant dune lines and dry natural communities
This conservation area is a mosaic of flatwoods, and scrub/scrubby flatwoods with depressional wetlands interspersed throughout. The scrubby flatwoods and scrub areas occur along relic sand dunes. These sand dunes are linear ridges that are oriented in a generally north-south direction, paralleling the coast. These relic sand dunes are easily recognized due to the white sands on which they

Other telltale signs of the site's purpose as an industrial silvicultural site are the beds that the trees are planted in. Bedding is a site preparation method used to increase survival and growth of tree seedlings on wet soils and soils prone to flooding. This technique involves construction of parallel beds and furrows from surrounding soil. Seedlings are planted on top of the beds where they are protected from excess water and where they benefit from a concentration of nutrients and organic matter.

Rayonier typically plants fast-growing species that can be grown, harvested and replanted on a short cycle. The trees are managed similarly to a long-term crop. Once areas are harvested, they are planted again and the cycle repeats itself. In Florida, one of several different species of pine is the optimal choice for growing trees in a plantation. Which species is chosen depends largely on soils type and local conditions on a portion of the property; several different species of pine are planted within Twelve Mile Swamp Conservation Area.

threatened species; and to conserve, protect, manage or restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests, in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect." As DOF assumes the role of lead manager of the property, restoration will begin. In all likelihood, many areas will have been clear-cut. These areas will be examined closely to determine what the proper natural community would have been prior to conversion to industry. The site will then be replanted in appropriate species and managed as a natural area.



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As you travel along the trail, you will notice that the landscape begins to change as you look to the west. Mesic and wet flatwoods are the dominant natural community type at the northernmost portion of the property. These areas have been planted in slash pine. Other common species include saw palmetto, a variety of grasses and small shrubs, and gallberry in wetter areas. The planted pine changes from slash pine to sand pine rather

Section 3 Sand pine scrub and wildlife management area
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Section 4 Swales and associated wetlands between dune lines
Between the remnant dune ridges at the conservation area lie swales. These swales function differently from the dune ridges; they tend to be depressional areas that support varying-sized wetlands. An area crossing this portion of the trail supports a moderate strand swamp, while small, isolated wetlands are peppered throughout the property. In sharp contrast to the soils of the dune ridges, soils in the interdunal swales are dark with moderate amounts of organic material. Species found in the wetlands include sweetgum, maple, cabbage palm and buttonbush. A variety of wetland grasses and ferns are common as well, while pine is noticeably absent.

abruptly. Sand pine is a fast-growing tree that grows readily in the driest of conditions. It occurs on the well-drained sands that typically support scrub, sandhill or scrubby flatwoods communities. Often a mixture of scrub species can be found growing nearby.

While in this area, you may also notice signage designating the majority of the property, approximately 19,696 acres, a wildlife management area (WMA). The WMA is managed cooperatively by Rayonier and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Please exercise caution while near the WMA, and please do not enter the wildlife management area from this trail. Access to the WMA is permitted only via the two designated WMA entrances and only to those possessing a valid permit. Access is permitted only from the Saturday two weeks prior to the archery season through the last day of the spring turkey season.

Section 5 Industrial silviculture and natural areas management — different goals mean different management techniques

In 2025, when the timber lease across the conservation area expires, the Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) will begin to manage the property. With the transfer of management rights, the goals for the property will change. The goal of an industrial silvicultural operation is maximum production of timber products, but DOF's goals are vastly different. The District initially purchased the property "to conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered and



Trail Guide

Twelve Mile Swamp Conservation Area

Legend

- Trail
- P** Parking
- ▭ Conservation area boundary
- Road
- ▨ Swamp or wetland
- Water body

