



Lochloosa Wildlife Conservation Area Self-Guided Auto Drive

Wildlife Caution

Please respect Florida's wildlife and use caution while visiting district lands. These are wild animals. For your safety, do not approach or feed any wild animal.

Legend

- Parking area
- Handicapped access
- Picnic area
- Restrooms
- Observation location
- Fishing location
- Boat launch
- Caretaker residence

Auto drive route

Property boundary

Other public land

Wetland

Longleaf
Flatwoods
Reserve

Plum Creek/
Lochloosa
Conservation
Easement

M.K. Rawlings Park

Orange
Lake

Lochloosa Lake

Alachua County

Lochloosa Park

Burnt
Island

Cross
Creek

Island Grove

LAT 29.494818
LONG -82.129136

LAT 29.477652
LONG -82.159361

LAT 29.477224
LONG -82.150069

LAT 29.474969
LONG -82.107683

0 1 2
Approximate scale in miles

Self-Guided Auto Drive Lochloosa Wildlife Conservation Area

About this property

“Cross Creek is a bend in a country road, by land, and the flowing of Lochloosa Lake into Orange Lake, by water. We are four miles west of the small village of Island Grove, nine miles east of a turpentine still and on the other sides we do not count distance at all, for the two lakes and the broad marshes create an infinite space between us and the horizon.”

So Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings begins her description of this area in her 1942 novel *Cross Creek*. This self-guided drive offers a view of some of the areas that Rawlings wrote about and provides an overview of land management practices used to protect these areas.

This area is part of the Orange Creek Basin. The basin encompasses three major lakes: Newnans, Orange and Lochloosa (5,700 acres — 14th largest lake in the state). Newnans Lake and its tributaries form the headwaters, with the lake outflow going through Prairie Creek into Paynes Prairie. There the flow continues into Camps Canal and through the River Styx into Orange Lake. Lochloosa Lake also flows into Orange Lake through Cross Creek. Orange Lake flows into Orange Creek, which flows to the Ocklawaha River and then into the St. Johns River. Many of these water bodies are designated Outstanding Florida Waters. Surrounding Newnans Lake is a conservation area by the same name and Orange Creek Restoration Area encompasses a portion of Orange Creek.

Nearby public lands include Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, Longleaf Flatwoods Reserve, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, M.K. Rawlings Park, and the Lake Lochloosa Park. The Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail, a nonmotorized recreational multiuse trail, also traverses area, passing through portions of Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, Prairie Creek Conservation Area and Lochloosa Wildlife Conservation Area — a total of more than 50,000 acres.

As you travel the auto drive, you will find the following facilities:

- County Road 325 — M.K. Rawlings Park — Public restrooms and picnic shelters (handicapped-accessible), boat ramp and playground, and a parking area and entrance to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park.
- U.S. 301 — Burnt Island — Handicapped-accessible fishing pier and picnic pavilion.
- U.S. Highway 301 — Lochloosa Park — Public restrooms, boat ramp, fishing/viewing pier (handicapped-accessible) and picnic tables.
- U.S. 301 — Lindsey Phillips Park — Public restrooms and picnic shelters (handicapped-accessible), boat ramp, fishing pier, informational kiosks.

Please use caution while in the area:

- This is a wildlife management area where hunting is allowed. Be especially cautious during hunting season.
- Fish Camp and Burnt Island roads are primarily logging roads and may, at times, be impassable in a two-wheel drive vehicle. Please yield to logging trucks. County Road 2082 may be used as an alternate route should Fish Camp Road be impassable.

- Seemingly dry areas can quickly flood. Please do not drive through areas when roads are under water.
- The eastern side of Lochloosa Lake is adjacent to an active railroad line. In some areas, crossings are without crossing arms or lights.

Self-guided tour

The auto drive traverses many roads within and around public conservation lands, offering a view of a freshwater lake and marsh system and the surrounding forested lands. These lands include the 10,338-acre Lochloosa Wildlife Conservation Area, which includes Lochloosa Wildlife Management Area, and the 16,610-acre Lochloosa Conservation Easement, which is included within the Grove Park Wildlife Management Area. You may see an array of wildlife species in their natural habitats while on your tour.

1. North County Road (CR) 325 — Lochloosa/Grove Park Conservation Easement

North of Cross Creek, on the west side of CR 325 and north of Fish Camp Road, the St. Johns River Water Management District purchased a 16,610-acre conservation easement from Georgia Pacific Corp. in 1995. The property has been transferred and is now owned by Plum Creek Timber Co. The easement protects the land from being developed in perpetuity, contributing to the protection of water resources in the region, while Plum Creek Timber Co. continues to actively manage the land as a productive industrial silvicultural site.

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a private landowner and a government agency or qualified nonprofit group involved in conservation activities. With a conservation easement, a landowner gives up certain rights or uses but retains title to the land. Purchasing an easement is a way for an agency or organization to protect significant amounts of acreage at a reduced cost.

2. Fish Camp Road — Different types of forest management

Though trees are harvested from both the north and south sides of Fish Camp Road, the goals for each area — as well as the management strategies used to attain those goals — are very different. Both areas were once managed as a single industrial silvicultural site. The District purchased the property south of Fish Camp Road. Plum Creek sold an easement to the District in 1994 but retained the right to manage the timberlands north of Fish Camp Road.

Plum Creek Timber Co.'s overriding goal is to maximize productivity, managing the trees as a long-term crop. Prior to planting, various site preparation methods are employed. Often, herbicide applications are utilized to reduce competition for nutrients and space, typically between seven and 10 years. Wetter areas are often “bedded” prior to planting — a site preparation method used to increase survival and growth of tree seedlings on wet soils and soils prone to flooding. This technique involves constructing parallel beds and furrows with seedlings 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.

Timber companies typically plant fast-growing species that can be harvested — often clearcut — and replanted on a short cycle. Once areas are harvested, they are replanted and the cycle repeats itself.

The District's goals on its public lands are to protect the natural resources and to restore the natural communities within the area. In planted timber stands, overstocked areas are thinned to a more natural density. Selectively thinning trees from a forest provides a wide array of benefits. Thinning reduces competition among trees, which, over time, results in larger trees with fuller canopies. Thinning also allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor, stimulating the growth and reproduction of native grasses and forbs.

In areas where all of the trees have been harvested prior to acquisition, the District replants with an appropriate species for the site. Often this is longleaf pine, a species thought to have once been the dominant tree in the southeastern United States. As the trees mature, the District thins the timber as needed and implements regular prescribed burns.

3. East Fish Camp Road — Upland/wetland connections

Though it may appear that much of the terrain within the Lochloosa area could be considered upland habitat, wetlands are peppered throughout. Cypress ponds and domes are frequently found embedded in areas of higher elevation and many creeks and streams traverse the area. Orange Lake, Orange Creek, Lochloosa Lake, Lochloosa Creek (which flows out of Magnesia Spring into the north end of Lochloosa Lake), River Styx and Cross Creek all contribute to the wetlands found in the Lochloosa area. Diversion, ditching and draining have altered many of these wetlands, but conservation efforts have increased over the years and many areas are being actively restored. These wetlands are home to numerous species of wildlife, including bald eagles, wood storks, Florida sandhill cranes, egrets and herons, and reptiles, amphibians, fish and mammals.

4. Burnt Island Road — Prescribed fire

In addition to tree thinning, an important management tool employed by the District in the restoration of forested areas is prescribed fire. Natural fire, often initiated by lightning strikes, was once a prominent factor in the southeastern United States. However, as permanent human settlements were developed, aggressive fire suppression strategies were devised and implemented in order to protect these communities. In an effort to mimic the effects of fire on natural communities, many land management organizations have begun to introduce prescribed fire.

The majority of Florida's natural communities are fire-adapted or even fire-dependent. Fire can be useful in reducing competition among species, and many species rely on fire to promote flowering, seed production or seed germination. With the application of fire, nutrients bound in standing vegetation are converted to ash, making them available for nearly immediate uptake and serving as a fertilizer of sorts. Fire can also reduce the spread of damaging disease and insect activity.

Florida's hot, humid climate produces lush, fast-growing vegetation. Fire-adapted species will burn readily in the appropriate conditions. Implementing prescribed burns on a regular basis can dramatically reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by reducing the amount of fuels available to burn.

5. CR 325 — Cross Creek

The southern and western portion of the auto drive traverses the tiny community of Cross Creek, made famous in the writings of author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings.

St. Johns River Water Management District

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