



Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners
Department of Environmental Resources Management

Natural Areas System Management Statement

The Palm Beach County Natural Areas System is comprised of those environmentally sensitive lands that are owned or leased by the County and managed as natural areas by the County's Department of Environmental Resources Management. These natural areas were selected on the basis of their biological characteristics and were acquired to preserve the rare and diverse native ecosystems present on these sites and the endangered, threatened, and rare species of plants and animals that live there.

Purpose and Goals of the Natural Areas System

- The purpose of the Natural Areas System is to protect historic native ecosystems and their biological diversity throughout Palm Beach County. Examples of each ecosystem shall be acquired and managed to preserve, in perpetuity, the full complement of plants and animals characteristic of that ecosystem. The management of each natural area shall be coordinated with that of the other natural areas in the system to support existing populations and to reflect, in perpetuity, the subtropical biological diversity characteristic of Palm Beach County in pre-development times.
- The wilderness values of each natural area shall be preserved.
- Where a natural area currently is physically or biologically connected to another publicly- or privately-owned natural area, attempts shall be made to maintain that connection through additional land acquisitions, regulatory preserve set-asides, conservation easements, interlocal agreements, and other appropriate actions.

Management Considerations

- The natural areas in the system shall be available to the public for passive, resource-based recreation, environmental education, and scientific research. Public-use shall not take precedence over ecosystem protection. Proposed public-uses shall take into account the specific environmental conditions of each natural area, and may be modified in response to changing environmental conditions.
- Facilities for passive public use shall be provided on each site. These facilities shall be designed to have a minimal impact on native ecosystems and shall be located in previously disturbed areas as much as possible.
- Facilities, structures, or roads other than management or access roads that would cause fragmentation of a natural area shall not be permitted within a natural

area. The establishment of compatible land uses and activities on lands adjacent to a natural area shall be encouraged.

- To the extent possible, fire-maintained native ecosystems shall be burned at the appropriate interval and season, as determined by historical data, to maintain those ecosystems. Burns shall be conducted by trained personnel, using a prescribed burn plan that addresses safety and smoke concerns. The seasonality of prescribed burns may be adjusted for initial fuel reduction burns and site safety constraints.
- Where ecosystems within a natural area have been impacted by invasive, non-native plant infestations, land-clearing activities, drainage, or flooding, attempts shall be made to restore those ecosystems to their previous condition or to a natural ecosystem best suited to the existing conditions on the natural area.
- The special requirements of listed species shall be considered in developing management strategies for each natural area, but management for an individual species shall not take precedence over management of an entire ecosystem or be allowed to have a detrimental impact on that ecosystem's complement of species.

Management Plan Development and Revision

- A specific management plan, based on biological, hydrological, and historical information and interpretation of this information, shall be written for each natural area that takes into account the environmental conditions found on that natural area.
- Each management plan shall address the strategies and techniques that will be used to manage and restore native ecosystems, to protect listed species, to control the occurrence of invasive, non-native plants and animals, to allow for appropriate public access, and to prevent unauthorized access and activities.
- Each plan shall be reviewed by the Palm Beach County Natural Areas Management Advisory Committee (NAMAC), a citizens' advisory board, and the public shall be invited to comment on the plan at a public hearing held by NAMAC in the community in which the site is located. Following NAMAC review of the comments received, the plan shall be sent to the Board of County Commissioners for approval.
- Each approved plan shall be subsequently reviewed after the first ten years and then every ten years thereafter by NAMAC, and approved by the Board of County Commissioners.