



# **FOREST CAPITAL MUSEUM STATE PARK**

Park Chapter

SUWANNEE RIVER REGION

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Forest Capital Museum State Park

### Park Chapter

<b>Introduction</b>	1
Location and Acquisition History	1
Secondary and Incompatible Uses	1
Purpose and Significance of the Park	1
Other Designations	2
Park Accomplishments	2
 <b>Resource Management Component</b>	3
Topography	3
Soils	3
Hydrology	3
Natural Communities	3
Imperiled Species	7
Invasive Species	9
Cultural Resources	10
Special Management Considerations	17
 <b>Land Use Component</b>	18
Visitation	18
Existing Facilities and Infrastructure	18
Conceptual Land Use Plan	19
Optimum Boundary	22

## Forest Capital Museum State Park

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**Planning Region:** Suwannee River

**County:** Taylor County

**Overview:**

Forest Capital Museum State Park's Museum is dedicated to educating visitors about Florida's forests and many forests dependent industries, including the production of timber, turpentine, and other forest derived products.

**Total Acreage:** 13.93

Altered Land Cover	Acres
Canal/Ditch	0.54
Developed	12.41
Successional Hardwood Forest	0.98

**Acquisition:** On January 11, 1967, the Taylor County Development Authority conveyed management authority of the 13.93-acre property to Florida Department of Natural Resources, precursor to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection – Division of Recreation and Parks. According to the lease agreement, the state holds, occupies, and uses Forest Capital Museum State Park for public park purposes. The lease is for fifty years, and it expires on January 10, 2067.

### Resource Management Component

#### Natural Communities

- Conduct natural community restoration activities on three acres of developed altered landcover types.

#### Invasive and Nuisance Species

- Annually treat 13 gross acres which is equivalent to 0.025 infested acres or less of invasive plant species.
- Remove feral cats from the park when encountered.

#### Cultural Resources

- Complete 10 assessments/evaluations of cultural sites.
- Compile reliable documentation for all recorded historic and archaeological resources.
- Bring 2 of 10 recorded cultural resources into good condition.

## Forest Capital Museum State Park

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### Land Use Component

#### **Conceptual Land Use**

##### Day Use / Picnic Area

- Relocate restroom within picnic area.
- Improve accessibility for both playgrounds.
- Improve wayfinding and interpretation.
- Regrade county road in conjunction with Taylor County.

##### Park Office / Museum

- Conduct structural assessment on building.
- Update interpretive panels and displays within the museum.
- Develop nature trail.

##### Historic Cracker Homestead

- Continue maintenance of homestead.
- Remove damaged corn crib.

##### Support Area

- Add one-bay shop.
- Add one volunteer site.

#### **Optimum Boundary**

Along the northern boundary are approximately 17.75 acres of privately owned land containing a dome and cypress swamp. It is recommended that this parcel of land be included in the optimum boundary for neighboring conservation lands. It is suggested that Taylor County acquire this parcel to protect it from future development.





# FOREST CAPITAL MUSEUM STATE PARK

TAYLOR COUNTY, FLORIDA

0 100 200 Feet

TO  
PERRY

19

27

98

ENTRANCE

TO  
CROSS  
CITY

Shop  
Structures

Staff Residence

Carport

Chicken  
Coop

Outhouse

Barn

Corn  
Crib

Smokehouse

Pantry

Kitchen

Cracker  
Cabin

Cane Syrup Cooker

FOREST PARK DR

Walkway

Forest Capital  
Museum

Parking

Restroom

Pavilions

Parking

Parking

INDUSTRIAL PARK DR



## **INTRODUCTION**

### **LOCATION AND ACQUISITION HISTORY**

Forest Capital Museum State Park is located in Taylor County. Access to the park is from U.S. Highway 19/98. The Suwannee River Region Map also reflects significant land and water resources existing near the park.

On Jan. 11, 1967, the Taylor County Development Authority conveyed management authority of the 13.93-acre property to Florida Department of Natural Resources, the precursor to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) – Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP). According to the lease agreement, the state holds, occupies, and uses Forest Capital Museum State Park for public park purposes. The lease is for 50 years and expires on Jan. 10, 2067.

Forest Capital Museum State Park is designated single-use to provide public outdoor recreation and conservation. There are no legislative or executive directives that constrain the use of this property (see appendix). A legal description of the park property can be made available upon request to DEP.

### **SECONDARY AND INCOMPATIBLE USES**

In accordance with 253.034(5) F.S., the potential of the park to accommodate secondary management purposes was analyzed. These secondary purposes were considered within the context of DRP's statutory responsibilities and resource values. This analysis considered the park's natural and cultural resources, management needs, aesthetic values, visitation, and visitor experiences. For this park, it was determined that no secondary management purposes could be accommodated in a manner that would not interfere with the primary purpose of resource-based outdoor recreation and conservation.

DRP has determined that uses such as water resource development projects, water supply projects, stormwater management projects, linear facilities and sustainable agriculture and forestry (other than those management activities specifically identified in this plan) would not be consistent with the management purposes of the park.

In accordance with 253.034(5) F.S., the potential for generating revenue to enhance management was also analyzed. Visitor fees and charges are the principal source of revenue generated by the park. It was determined that no additional revenue generating activities are appropriate during this planning cycle. Generating revenue from consumptive uses or from activities that are not expressly related to resource management and conservation is not under consideration.

### **PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARK**

#### **Park Purpose**

The purpose of Forest Capital Museum State Park is to provide a public park and museum for educational and park-related purposes. The park provides opportunities for resource-based public outdoor recreation, including picnicking and historical interpretation.

### **Park Significance**

- The park's museum is dedicated to educating visitors about Florida's forests and many forest-dependent industries, including the production of timber, turpentine, and other forest-derived products.
- The park presents a complex of authentic and replica pioneer structures characteristic of a Florida cracker homestead in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as a stand of old longleaf pine that provide additional opportunities to interpret Florida's forestry industry.
- The park contained one of Florida's "Moon Trees," a native loblolly pine which was grown from a seed that traveled to the moon during one of the lunar expeditions and tied the history of the area to the future. Unfortunately, Hurricane Idalia destroyed this tree in 2023.

### **Central Park Theme**

Rooted in Florida's forestry industry, Forest Capital Museum educates us about the history and health of Florida's pine forests.

Forest Capital Museum State Park is classified as a state museum in the DRP unit classification system. In the management of a state museum, interpretation which relates to natural, historical, cultural or other such interests important to the general locality but not specifically to the exact sites on which the museums are located is the primary management objective. The interpretive program theme may be derived from any appropriate subject matter within the general area of interest. The state museum site itself usually requires no special resource considerations but should be properly maintained in a manner to support and enhance the recreational experience derived from the museum visit. Through appropriate development, the grounds may be made an extension or an integral part of the museum itself. Ancillary facilities for such compatible recreational activities as picnicking may be provided.

### **OTHER DESIGNATIONS**

The unit is not within an Area of Critical State Concern as defined in section 380.05; Florida Statutes and is not presently under study for such designation. The park is a component of the Florida Greenways and Trails System, administered by the DEP Office of Greenways and Trails.

All waters within the park have been designated as Outstanding Florida Waters, pursuant to Chapter 62-302, Florida Administrative Code. Surface waters in this park are also classified as Class I waters by the Department. The park is not adjacent to an aquatic preserve as designated under the Florida Aquatic Preserve Act of 1975 (Section 258.35, Florida Statutes).

### **PARK ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Met 100% of invasive removal goals since 2013.
- Replaced air conditioning units in the park museum.
- Park staff participated in Taylor County community events and festivals.
- Replaced railings on the porch of the homestead.

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMPONENT

Forest Capital Museum State Park Management Zones			
Management Zone	Acreage	Managed with Prescribed Fire	Contains Known Cultural Resources
FCM-1	2.53	N	N
FCM-2	7.66	N	Y

### **TOPOGRAPHY**

Forest Capital Museum State Park is located in the Perry Karst Plain province within the Ocala Karst District. The Perry Karst Plain is characterized as a low, flat, frequently swampy, seaward sloping plain with surface slope ranging between one and five feet per mile seaward. The terrain at the park is generally level, with elevations ranging from 40 to 45 feet above sea level. A drainage canal that parallels the western half of the north boundary is the only major modification of natural topography in the park.

### **HYDROLOGY**

No natural surface waters are present at Forest Capital Museum State Park. A drainage ditch that runs along part of the northern boundary drains to a basin swamp just outside the park. The swamp also receives runoff from U.S. Highway 19/98. The highest elevations in the park are generally along the southern boundary. As a result, most of the stormwater generated inside the park tends to sheet flow northward toward the ditch on the northern boundary. This flow is augmented by additional stormwater originating from the roof of a large county-owned building, Forest Capital Hall, located across Forest Park Drive from the park, as well as by water from the parking area associated with the hall. The combined runoff has caused some minor soil erosion, has exposed some tree roots in the park, and occasionally has flooded the area around the park bathroom. There are currently no groundwater concerns at Forest Capital. The museum receives potable water from the City of Perry.

### **SOILS**

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) has identified three soil types at Forest Capital Museum State Park (see Soils Map). All three types are associated with nearly level or gently sloping terrain, and they consist predominantly of highly permeable fine sands. Detailed soils descriptions are found in the appendix. Management activities will follow generally accepted best management practices to prevent soil erosion and conserve soil and water resources on site.

### **NATURAL COMMUNITIES**

The park contains no distinct natural communities but does have three altered landcover types: developed, canal/ditch and successional hardwood forest (see Natural Communities Map). A list of plants and animals known to occur in the park is contained in the appendix.

Much of the park is a developed area that contains the museum building, cracker homestead and park residence. In addition to these structures, there is a playground, bathroom, and picnic pavilions. The developed area is kept mowed, but it has an overstory of old longleaf pines that are an important feature of the park and are used by staff in interpreting Florida cracker life and the forest industry. This







FOREST CAPITAL MUSEUM STATE PARK  
Management Zones

Sources: ESRI; Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
This graphical representation is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered authoritative for navigational, engineering, legal, and other uses.



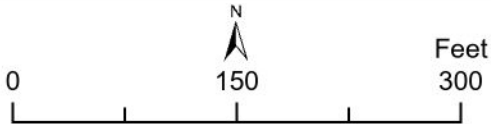


**Soils**

	12 - Ortega fine sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
	15 - Ridgewood fine sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes



FOREST CAPITAL MUSEUM STATE PARK  
Soils



Sources: ESRI; Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
This graphical representation is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered authoritative for navigational, engineering, legal, and other uses.



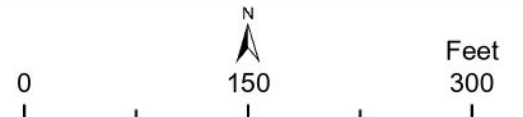


Natural Communities (In acres)

CD	- Canal/ditch - 0.54
DV	- Developed - 8.66
SHF	- Successional Hardwood Forest - 0.98



FOREST CAPITAL MUSEUM STATE PARK  
Natural Communities - Existing Conditions



Sources: ESRI; Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
This graphical representation is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered authoritative for navigational, engineering, legal, and other uses.



area was once sandhill, and a few native groundcover species remain mixed in with the mowed centipede (*Eremochloa ophiuroides*) and St. Augustine (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) grasses.

An east-west oriented stormwater ditch that is located on the northern edge of the park makes up the canal/ditch landcover type. This area is transitional between uplands that were formerly sandhill and a basin swamp that lies to the northeast. No hydrologic restoration is planned for this area.

The successional hardwood forest in the park is located between the cracker homestead complex and the park residence. Historically, this area was sandhill, but the forested strip that grows there now contains a mix of laurel oaks (*Quercus laurifolia*), live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) and other hardwoods, invasive Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*) and remnant longleaf pines (*Pinus palustris*) that form part of the canopy. No restoration is planned for this area.

The developed areas within the park will be managed to minimize the effect of the developed areas on adjacent natural areas. Priority invasive plant species (Florida Invasive Species Council Category I and II species) will be removed from all developed areas. Other management measures include proper stormwater management and development guidelines that are compatible with prescribed fire management in adjacent natural areas.

### **Restoration**

#### **Objective: Conduct natural community restoration activities on 3 acres of developed altered landcover types.**

##### *Actions:*

- Plant longleaf pine seedlings or protect some of the seedlings that naturally regenerate from the adult pines.
- Monitor the planted trees or protected seedlings to ensure that a future generation of adult longleaf is surviving.
- Select areas to reduce or eliminate mowing.

The longleaf pine canopy in the developed portion of the park is an important part of the park's interpretive landscape. The number of these trees is slowly declining as they are killed by lightning, hurricanes, or other causes. By planting or protecting seedlings, these new trees will then be present to replace the longleaf pines that die.

Most of the park area is currently mowed. Areas without mowing will be planted with native species typical of the longleaf pine sandhill native groundcover and used for interpretation.

### **IMPERILED SPECIES**

Imperiled species are those that are 1) tracked by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) as critically imperiled (G1, S1) or imperiled (G2, S2) or 2) listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) or the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) as endangered, threatened or of special concern.

The two imperiled plants known to occur at the park, flame azalea (*Rhododendron austrinum*) and mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), are planted there as ornamentals and are listed below. No special



management actions are required other than to protect them from visitor impacts. No listed animals are known to occur in the park.

The Imperiled Species Inventory Table contains a list of all known imperiled species within the park and identifies their status as defined by various entities. It also identifies the types of management actions that are currently being taken by DRP staff or others and identifies the current level of monitoring effort. The codes used under the column headings for management actions and monitoring level are defined following the table. Explanations for federal and state status as well as FNAI global and state rank are provided in the appendix.

Imperiled Species Inventory						
Common and Scientific Name	Imperiled Species Status				Management Actions	Monitoring Level
	FFWCC	USFWS	FDACS	FNAI		
<b>PLANTS</b>						
Florida flame azalea <i>Rhododendrum austrinum</i>			LE	G3,S3	10	Tier 1
Mountain laurel <i>Kalmia latifolia</i>			LT	G5,S3	10	Tier 1

Management Actions:

1. Prescribed Fire
2. Exotic Plant Removal
3. Population Translocation/Augmentation/Restocking
4. Hydrological Maintenance/Restoration
5. Nest Boxes/Artificial Cavities
6. Hardwood Removal
7. Mechanical Treatment
8. Predator Control
9. Erosion Control
10. Protection from visitor impacts (establish buffers)/law enforcement
11. Decoys (shorebirds)
12. Vegetation planting
13. Outreach and Education

Monitoring Level:

- Tier 1. Non-Targeted Observation/Documentation: includes documentation of species presence through casual/passive observation during routine park activities (i.e. not conducting species specific searches). Documentation may be in the form of Wildlife Observation Forms, or other district specific methods used to communicate observations.
- Tier 2. Targeted Presence/Absence: includes monitoring methods/activities that are specifically intended to document presence/absence of a particular species or suite of species.
- Tier 3. Population Estimate/Index: an approximation of the true population size or population index based on a widely accepted method of sampling.
- Tier 4. Population Census: A complete count of an entire population with demographic analysis, including mortality, reproduction, emigration, and immigration.
- Tier 5. Other: may include habitat assessments for a particular species or suite of species or any other specific methods used as indicators to gather information about a particular species.

## **INVASIVE SPECIES**

Most of the park consists of open grassy or landscaped areas around the museum, cracker homestead or the picnic area. These areas are essentially free of invasive plants and comprise most of the acreage of the park.

Historically, Chinese privet, silverthorn (*Elaeagnus pungens*), Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), and Lantana (*Lantana camara*) were found scattered in the successional hardwood forest that separates the cracker homestead from the staff residence. Japanese honeysuckle and the privet also occurred along the northern property boundary. Mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*) also occurs in the park. This data is documented in the DRP Natural Resource Tracking System (NRTS) database.

Each year, park staff should treat all invasive plants in the entire park. Staff should continue to remove invasive plants from the successional hardwood forest and the wooded edges of the park. The park is small enough that it should be possible to achieve and maintain an invasive plant-free state.

Staff should familiarize themselves with the invasive brown anole (*Anolis sagrei*) and be aware that it could appear in their park.

<b>Invasive Plants Inventory</b>			
<b>Species Name</b> <b>Scientific Name - Common</b> <b>Name</b>	<b>FISC</b> <b>Category</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Zone ID</b>
<i>Albizia julibrissin</i> - Mimosa	I	Single Plant or Clump	FCM-1
<i>Ligustrum sinense</i> - Chinese privet	I	Single Plant or Clump	FCM-1

### **Invasive Plant Treatment**

**Objective: Annually treat 13 gross acres, which is equivalent to 0.025 infested acres, or less of invasive plant species.**

#### **Actions:**

- Annually develop and implement an invasive plant management work plan.
- Continue maintenance and follow-up treatments as needed.

The entire acreage of the park should be scouted, and all invasive plants should be removed annually. The park should focus its invasive removal efforts on the forested area between the cracker homestead and the park residence. The primary invasives in this area have been silverthorn and Chinese privet. Other invasives have been scattered along the northern property boundary. Staff has done a good job with regular in-house treatment of invasive plants and should continue regular surveying and treating.

Park staff should familiarize themselves with some of the invasive plants on adjacent properties so that they can recognize them and immediately eliminate them should they appear in the park. Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*), Chinese tallow (*Sapium sebiferum*) and Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*) are species to be aware of.

Cogongrass is a very aggressive species that is spread by several methods, including mowing. Because so much of the park is mowed regularly, staff should be particularly alert for this species. Any mowing equipment that arrives in the park from offsite should be cleaned before being operated in the park.

### **Invasive and Nuisance Animal Control**

**Objective: Implement control measures on one nuisance species.**

*Actions:*

- Remove feral cats from the park when encountered.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

### **Prehistoric and Historic Archaeological Sites**

The park, which is located on the site of a World War II fighter pilot training base, has one known archaeological site. None of the structures from this period remain today, however a concrete slab from one of the buildings at the base (World War II concrete slab TA00496) still exists. This site is recorded with the Florida Master Site File (FMSF).

The World War II concrete slab (TA00496) has not been evaluated for significance. Although the site is currently limited to an isolated concrete slab, it is likely part of a larger historical/archaeological site centered on the World War II fighter pilot training base. Further research is needed before a determination of significance can be made.

The World War II concrete slab is in good condition. No particular treatments are needed other than protecting it from damage by heavy equipment such as mowers and tractors.

### **Historic Structures**

The FMSF records 10 historic structures for the park. One of the FMSF records is a structure (TA00061) that apparently was moved to the park in the early 1970s. However, this structure is no longer present in the park.

The primary historic structure in the park is the Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497), which was donated to the state of Florida and then to the park from Hampton Springs, Florida, in the early 1970s. The cabin forms the foundation of the cracker homestead complex at the museum. This structure is a new record with the FMSF. Some of its supporting documentation is contained within the TA00061 site file. This information needs to be placed in the Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497) site file.

The Whiddon Cracker Cabin was built in 1864. The construction materials are typical of what Florida settlers used during the mid-1800s. The house has a dogtrot, two chimneys, a front porch and a shingle shake roof. The structure has been documented in a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) report (Library of Congress 1972). The original structure has been somewhat modified. Some material that was salvaged from another cabin was used to repair the Whiddon Cabin after it arrived at the park. The separate log kitchen is actually a new construction erected by park staff to represent the original kitchen.

The Langston Log Cabin (TA00061) is recorded in the park, but apparently is no longer present. The site file states that it was relocated to the park from Wakulla County in the 1970s. The site file discusses the provenance of the structure and its move to the park. It also contains a sketch of the cabin layout. The layout depicted is different from that of the Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497).

A Phase I survey was conducted in 2002 for a proposed cell tower a quarter-mile away from the park (Southeastern Archaeological Research, Inc. 2002). The survey evaluated the potential impact of the tower on historic structures in the area and referenced a photograph of the purported Langston Log Cabin (TA00061). In fact, the photograph referenced is the Whiddon Cracker Cabin. Further research is needed to determine the actual location of the Langston Log Cabin (TA00061) and to update the FMSF.

The Whiddon Cracker Cabin is part of a complex of pioneer structures that would have been found on a Florida cracker homestead in the mid-1800s or early 1900s. The homestead complex includes the Whiddon cabin with a separate kitchen, two outbuildings, smokehouse, cane syrup boiler, cane grinder, corn crib and a barn. Aside from the cracker cabin, the only structures in the complex that are original to this time period are the split rail fence (TA00489) and the Perry outhouse (TA00490). The corn crib, which was original to the time period, was unfortunately destroyed in a storm. The split rail fence (TA489) was moved from Tifton, Georgia, and the outhouse (TA490) was moved from downtown Perry, Florida. The other structures in the cracker homestead complex are reproductions of buildings typical of the era and were built by park staff. A replica of the corn crib has been built.

The other historic structures at the park are from the era of development of the park. These include the Forest Capital Museum (TA560), restroom building 26001 (TA00491), picnic shelter building 26002 (TA00492), picnic shelter building 26003 (TA00493), picnic shelter building 26004 (TA00494) and the shop building 26005 (TA00495).

The park itself is located on a portion of a World War II fighter pilot training base, but no structures remain from this era.

The Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497) is in fair condition. Certain alterations have been made to the house. The structure needs to be evaluated to determine what actions are necessary to bring and maintain it in good condition. The house has been treated for dry rot termites, both outside behind the clapboards and inside. Currently, there is a support under the house which serves as a temporary solution. The porch floor slopes, but it is not known if this was part of the original design or a change in condition due to settling. Both chimneys may need to be rebuilt to a conservator's guidelines.

The corn crib unfortunately was destroyed by a storm and was removed. The shop building (TA00495) needs to have the electrical wiring updated and some siding replaced.

The split rail fence is in good condition. At least some of the top rails have been replaced with newer hand-hewn top rails. The remainder is the original lightered wood.

The restroom building (TA000491), while structurally sound, does not meet existing park needs and has been renovated to a family or unisex bathroom to make it ADA accessible. It needs to be evaluated to see if it should be demolished and replaced.

The other historic structures are in good condition. While the condition of the cracker complex is good to fair, there is no formalized maintenance plan for the cracker homestead complex. All the structures need to be regularly evaluated for termites and maintenance needs.

The three historic structures within the park's cracker homestead have not been evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places significance. The Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497), the split rail fence (TA00489) and the perry outhouse (TA00490) were moved from their original locations to the park, and thus were removed from their historic surroundings and association with historic events and people. However, the structures may have achieved significance as surviving early homestead structures. The Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497) was documented for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) (Library of Congress, HABS FL-276) in 1972 as the "Whiddon Log Cabin," and its significance was noted as follows: "The Whidden [sic] Cabin, built in 1864, replaced an earlier structure destroyed by Confederate troops during the War Between the States. The structure is a good example of double-pen log cabin construction with only minor changes. The Whiddon Cabin was moved in 1972 from its original site to the Forest Capital State Park." The National Register places additional criteria on moved properties in order to determine eligibility. Therefore, future consultation with staff from the Division of Historical Resources (DHR) will be necessary to determine whether the Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497), the split rail fence (TA00489) and the perry outhouse (TA00490) meet the criteria for potential inclusion in the National Register.

The remaining historic structures in the park are not considered potentially eligible for the National Register. The restroom building 26001 (TA00491), picnic shelter building 26002 (TA00492), picnic shelter building 26003 (TA00493), picnic shelter building 26004 (TA00494) and the shop building 26005 (TA00495) are typical utilitarian park structures and are not unique in their design or construction.

The structural integrity of the Whiddon Cracker Cabin (TA00497) needs to be evaluated. This information will guide repairs and management. A plan is needed to prevent the building from settling further. Chimney re-chinking should follow conservator guidelines. Any re-roofing should occur in a historically correct manner. Termites need to be treated regularly.

The electrical wiring system at the shop building (TA00495) should be updated.

Evaluate restroom building (TA00491) and the Whiddon Cracker Homestead to determine how it can be brought to ADA standards. A decision needs to be made if the restroom is to be rehabilitated or demolished and replaced to make it ADA accessible.

### **Collections**

The Forest Capital Museum State Park collection consists of objects that are exhibited in the museum building, in the rooms of the "cracker homestead" and subsidiary structures, and in outdoor contexts.

The theme of the museum collection is the southeastern forest industry prior to 1970, products derived from the forest and the natural history of forests in the southeast, particularly pine forests.

The museum contains about 5,000 items commonly found in households from the 1950s to the 1970s, all of which are derived from pine trees. A model of the park's cracker homestead and outbuildings created by Valmar Lavoie is on display. The collection contains a beautifully detailed diorama of a turpentine camp set in the longleaf pine woods, a variety of turpentine tools, a swamp life and

hammock natural history display, information on forest ecology and pests, a talking sculpture called “Terry Tree” and wood displays. The museum building itself is built with 300 different types of wood and was designed by Tallahassee architect Mays Leroy Gray. The collection needs to be updated and displayed in a more engaging fashion. For example, there is a display called “The coming third forest.” Since the forest industry is currently well past the third forest, this is an example of one of the updates that is needed.

The collection that forms part of the cracker homestead contains diverse items of everyday Florida settler life from the mid-1800s through the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furniture, kitchen items, clothing, quilts and many other items have been donated by local families (Martin, 2001). Most of the items are of the era of the homestead. However, a few items are of a later date.

A few natural history items are displayed outside in the space between the museum and the homestead. These are primarily examples of cat-face pine stumps, lighter pine wood, cypress heartwood and examples of other wood that are used for interpretive purposes.

In general, the park’s collection is in fair to good condition. Some items need attention. The museum collection needs a major update. The information needs to be current and the collection needs to be displayed in a more engaging fashion. Items displayed in the cracker homestead complex should be of the era being interpreted. While many of the collection items used in the homestead are of the era, there are a few that are from more recent times. All the collection in the museum is climate controlled. The collection at the cracker homestead is not in a climate-controlled environment.

The museum structure itself has a domed roof that allows UV light to enter the collection area. The museum may need protection from UV light, such as with a UV light blocking filter or window film, to protect the collection. The roof and skylight of the museum should also be checked for loose shingles and leaks.

The roof covering the display of the turpentine camp diorama is beginning to collapse. This needs to be repaired before the diorama is damaged. This may be one of the more pressing preventative maintenance needs.

There appears to be some deterioration of the taxidermized pileated woodpecker in the museum. This should be assessed and treated as quickly as possible if necessary to prevent insect damage to the collection. This is also a high priority preventative maintenance need.

The collection items in the cracker homestead area of the park require more frequent cleaning due to the dust from the unpaved road that enters the buildings. The dust may damage some of the more delicate items like quilts and period clothing. Since this is a county road it cannot be closed.

The collection at the homestead needs archival cleaning on a regular basis because of exposure to road dust and the open, non-climate-controlled nature of the cracker house and outbuildings. Period clothing, quilts and paper ephemera are particularly vulnerable.

The significance of the collection items varies. Many of the park’s collection items were made for the museum, donated for use in the cracker homestead by local families with deep roots in the area, or are examples of natural history. Some of the latter items such as heart cypress wood and an example of a box-cut longleaf pine trunk are increasingly scarce. Almost all the collection items support the park’s

interpretive themes of cracker life or products from the forest and its natural history. They are, therefore, significant to the interpretive themes of the park and the history of the surrounding community.

The challenge to the park will occur as it updates the museum displays. Staff, with the assistance of the Bureau of Natural and Cultural Resources (BNCR), will need to decide which items are significant and which are not. A few items in the homestead are not of the period interpreted and therefore are not significant.

The park needs to develop a Scope of Collections Statement based on the interpretive themes for the museum and cracker homestead. This document also should state the interpretive themes. The collections statement will help the park decide which items to retain in its collection as the museum display is rejuvenated. It will also provide a guide to help the park determine if donated items should be accepted. Only items that support the park's interpretive themes should be accepted or retained in the collections.

When the park updates the museum collection and the display, it may also need an interpretive master plan to guide the process.

The park has an inventory of collection items in the cracker homestead, but it may not be complete. Any museum collection items not on the inventory should be included. Some of these items are listed on the property inventory but may not specifically be designated as collection items.

The park needs to formalize and implement a cleaning schedule for the collections in the homestead. Archival cleaning is needed annually. Maintenance cleaning needs to occur more regularly. The park also needs to develop and formally adopt a maintenance program for all of the collection items including those items in the museum.

The dust from the county road passing beside the cracker homestead increases the amount of cleaning the homestead collection items need. The park should continue to communicate with Taylor County about possible ways to mitigate the dust from the road.

Cultural Sites Listed in the Florida Master Site File					
Site Name and FMSF #	Culture/Period	Description	Significance	Condition	Treatment
TA00061 Langston Log Cabin	Historic 1863	Historic Structure	NE	NA	P
TA00489 Split Rail Fence	Historic unknown	Historic Structure	NE	G	P
TA00490 Perry Outhouse	Historic unknown	Historic Structure	NE	G	P

Cultural Sites Listed in the Florida Master Site File					
Site Name and FMSF #	Culture/Period	Description	Significance	Condition	Treatment
TA00491 Restroom Bld 26001	1968	Historic Structure	NE	F	RH/R
TA00492 Picnic Shelter Bld 26002	1968	Historic Structure	NE	G	RH
TA00493 Picnic Shelter Bld 26003	1968	Historic Structure	NE	G	RH
TA00494 Picnic Shelter Bld 26004	1968	Historic Structure	NE	G	RH
TA00495 Shop Bld 26005	1970	Historic Structure	NE	G	RH
TA00496 World War II Concrete Slab	Early 1940's	Archaeological Site	NE	G	P
TA00497 Whiddon Cracker Cabin	Mid 19 <sup>th</sup> Century 1864	Historic Structure	NE	F	RS
TA00650 Forest Capital Museum	1967	Historic Structure	NE	G	P

**Significance:**

NRL – National Register Listed  
NRE – National Register Eligible  
LS – Locally Significant  
NE – Not Evaluated  
NS – Not Significant

**Conditions:**

G – Good  
F – Fair  
P – Poor

**Recommended Treatments:**

RS - Restoration  
RH - Rehabilitation  
ST - Stabilization  
P - Preservation  
R - Removal

### Condition Assessment

**Objective: Annually assess/evaluate 10 of 10 recorded cultural resources**

**Actions:**

- Complete 10 assessments/evaluations of cultural sites.
- Determine if one Historic Structures Report (HSR) for historic buildings and cultural landscape is needed. Prioritize stabilization, restoration, and rehabilitation projects.

The park will continue to regularly assess its historic structures. As stabilization and preservation needs become apparent during assessments, the park will identify and prioritize needs. The historic structures



in the park need to be regularly evaluated for termites. If termites are found, the damages should be documented so the effectiveness of control measures can be determined.

The Whiddon Cracker Cabin could also benefit from a Historic Structures Report. The Langston Log Cabin site file (TA00061) needs to be updated to indicate that it is not at the park and its location should be determined.

### **Documentation of Recorded Sites**

**Objective: Compile reliable documentation for all recorded historic and archaeological resources.**

#### *Actions:*

- Ensure all known sites are recorded or updated in the Florida Master Site File.
- Develop and adopt a Scope of Collections Statement.
- Form a prioritized action and maintenance plan for all the park's collection items.

The park has information on the origin of the Whiddon Cracker Cabin but has little information on the split rail fence and the outhouse which also were moved into the park. The other buildings that comprise the homestead were built by park staff. The park should compile information on the construction or previous location of these buildings by consulting with previous park staff. Information on the location of the Langston Log Cabin is needed.

Once a Scope of Collections Statement has been adopted, a prioritized action and maintenance plan should guide annual archival cleaning of the Whiddon Cabin collection, the preservation of the taxidermy items in the museum, and a plan to update the museum displays and a cost estimate to implement the plan.

Information about the World War II concrete slab and the World War II history of the site should be compiled. If other cultural resources are identified within the park, they will be recorded with the FMSF.

A predictive model has been completed for the park. A phase 1 archaeological survey for priority areas planned for development which occurs in high or medium areas will need to be conducted prior to any development approval.

### **Preservation Measures**

**Objective: Bring two of 10 recorded cultural resources into good condition.**

#### *Actions:*

- Formalize the cyclical maintenance program by writing and adopting a clear protocol.

The park currently has a cyclical maintenance program for its historic structures and collection items. The protocol should include actions such as regular evaluations for the presence of termites, cleaning the collection and rotating the displayed collection items.

The most important historic structure in the park is the Whiddon Cracker Cabin. Some maintenance actions are needed to bring this structure into good condition. The ability of the park to improve this structure to a good condition will depend on the availability of funding. The cracker cabin has had some dry-rot termites. The roof is leaking in at least one area. The chimneys need re-chinking and the

fireplace hearths are cracking due to settling. The house has a temporary support underneath. The house needs to be evaluated to determine what is needed to bring it to good condition. A Historic Structures Report will help make that determination.

The shop building (TA00495) needs to have the electrical wiring updated and some siding replaced. The restroom building needs to be upgraded for better ADA access.

## **SPECIAL MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Arthropod Control Plan**

All DRP lands are designated as “environmentally sensitive and biologically highly productive” in accordance with Ch. 388 and Ch. 388.4111 Florida Statutes. If a local mosquito control district proposes a treatment plan, the DRP works with the local mosquito control district to achieve consensus. By policy of DEP since 1987, aerial adulticiding is not allowed, but larviciding and ground adulticiding (truck spraying in public use areas) is typically allowed. The DRP does not authorize new physical alterations of marshes through ditching or water control structures.

Forest Capital Museum State Park does not have an Arthropod Control Plan. Mosquito control plans temporarily may be set aside under declared threats to public or animal health, or during a Governor’s Emergency Declaration.

## LAND USE COMPONENT

### VISITATION

Located along U.S. Highway 19/98 in Perry, Forest Capital Museum State Park was originally created in 1968 after then Congressman Don Fuqua proclaimed Taylor County the “Tree Capital of the South.” The park was developed to highlight the forestry and turpentine industry of north Florida with a museum and a replica of a cracker homestead. In 1983, the museum and property were deeded to the state of Florida.

### **Trends**

The park generally receives modest visitation throughout most of the year except in October when the adjacent county grounds host the Forest Festival. Guided interpretive tours are available upon request from park staff. Visitation is determined from an “iron ranger” located outside the park museum.

### **Economic Impact**

Forest Capital Museum State Park recorded 1,401 visitors in FY 2022/2023. By DRP estimates, the FY 2022/2023 visitors contributed \$250,074 in direct economic impact, the equivalent of adding 4 jobs to the local economy (FDEP 2023).

### EXISTING FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

As a park of only 13 acres, all infrastructure is within close walking distance. One parking lot near the museum allows access to all structures. A dedicated picnic area has three large pavilions and a restroom with two playgrounds. The two main features of the park include the museum building and historic Florida cracker homestead. The park museum houses historical displays and collections related to the turpentine industry. The historic cracker homestead contains a mix of original and replica structures representative of a homestead in the early days of Florida’s territorial and state history. A small support area contains the park shop, a ranger residence and multiple auxiliary buildings for storage.

### **Facilities Inventory**

<i>Park Entrance</i>	
Parking Area	1
<i>Picnic Area</i>	
Large Pavilion	3
Restroom	1
Playground	2
<i>Office / Museum</i>	
Honor Box	1
Restroom	2
Museum	1
Parking Area	1

<i>Historic Cracker Homestead</i>	
Historic Cracker Cabin	1
Farm Kitchen	1
Outhouse	1
Pantry	1
Cane Syrup Cooker	1
Smokehouse	1
Barn	1
Corn Crib	1
Chicken Coop	1
<i>Support Area</i>	
Residence	1
Shop Building	1
Storage Shed	2
Carport	1

## **CONCEPTUAL LAND USE PLAN**

### **Picnic Area**

#### **Objective: Update infrastructure to support park facilities**

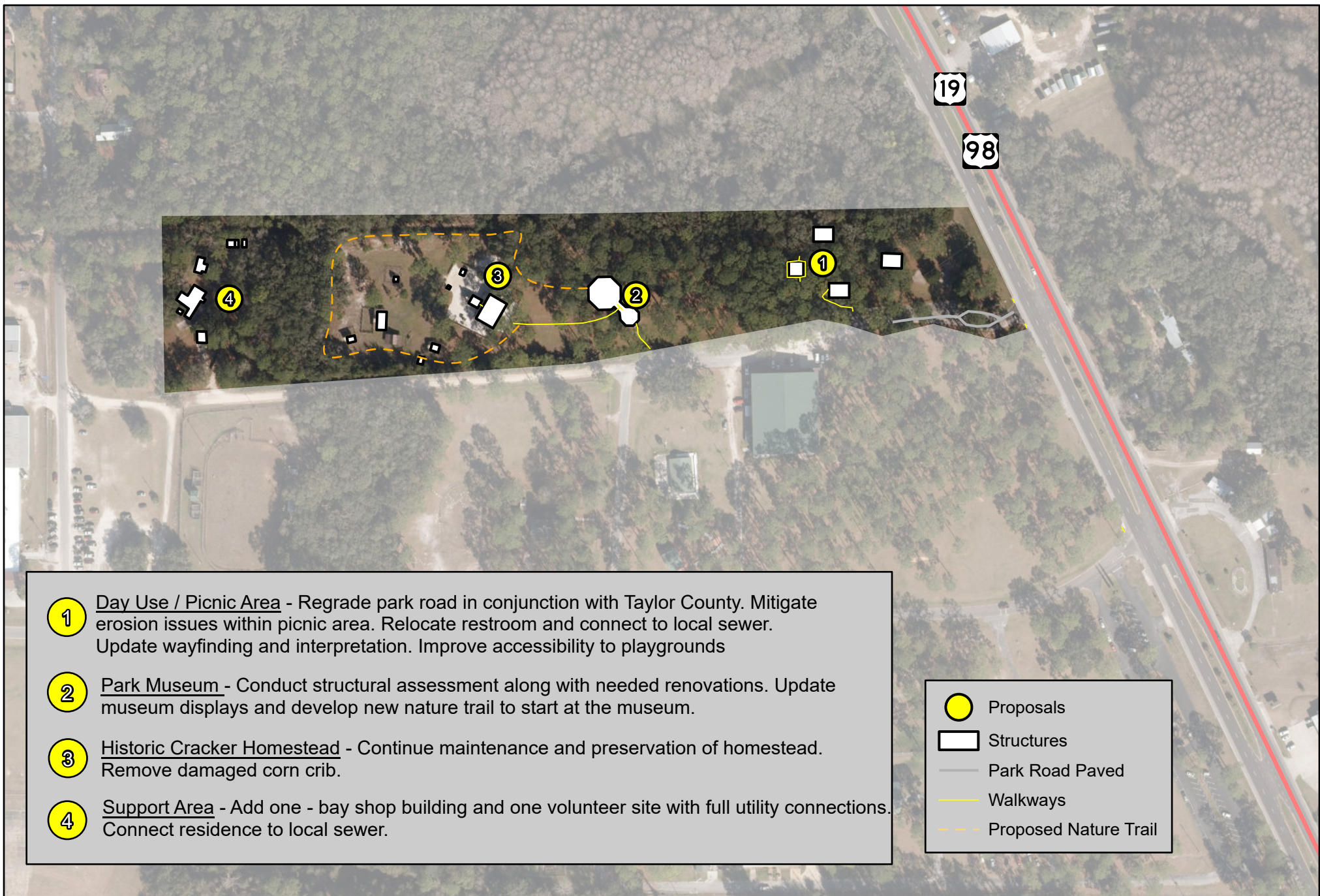
##### *Actions:*

- Relocate restroom.
- Improve accessibility for both playgrounds.
- Improve wayfinding and interpretation.
- Re-grade county road in coordination with Taylor County.

The park's picnic area contains three large picnic pavilions, one restroom and two playgrounds. The restroom is closed due to failing infrastructure and its position blocks the line of sight to the rest of the park. Moving forward, the restroom is to be relocated within the day-use/picnic area in a more suitable location that will not obstruct the line of sight to the museum and homestead. The new facility will be connected to the existing city sewer and water.

There is noted erosion and flooding in this area due to the slope of the county road between the park and adjacent county land. The park should communicate the need for improved stormwater handling features along this segment of county road to the Taylor County Road Department. Improved accessibility should be the focus for both playgrounds by removing the pine straw covering the grounds and replacement with an ADA accessible mat or alternative flooring.

New wayfinding and interpretive panels are needed in the area to inform and direct visitors to the remainder of the park. The interpretive panels should highlight the history of the park and surrounding area.



# Forest Capital Museum State Park

## Conceptual Land Use Plan

0 250 500 Feet



## **Park Office/Museum**

### **Objective: Improve structure and interpretation**

#### *Actions:*

- Conduct structural assessment.
- Create and implement a comprehensive interpretive plan to update the museum.
- Develop nature trail.

The main structure of the park is the museum, which was built in 1967 with original displays. There are two portions to this building. The office portion, with two restrooms, provides space for park administration. The museum portion is connected via a breezeway. An honor box is located on the outside of this building. The building needs a structural assessment and improvements due to its age, including a new roof restroom renovation, and connection to the local sewer. All renovations and improvements to the main building should be consistent with the building's unique architecture.

A comprehensive interpretive plan is recommended to modernize the museum content and provide connections to larger scale topics related to natural areas, while maintaining the local forestry theme and unique elements of select vintage displays. Updates should reflect changes in the forestry industry and forest management, as well as inform, engage, and inspire visitors about the role of forests in our state and community.

To provide a new recreation and interpretive opportunity, a nature trail is proposed. Beginning at the museum, the proposed trail leads around the historic cracker homestead and extends to an area surrounded by dome swamp and cypress swamp before returning to the museum or picnic area. The trail should be constructed on natural grade like other park walkways. Interpretation may focus on the various structures and the role of laborers and homesteaders in the forest economy. Interpretive elements should not disrupt the view and historic nature of the homestead.

## **Historic Cracker Homestead**

### **Objective: Maintain and preserve main park feature**

#### *Action:*

- Continue maintenance of homestead.

The park's main feature, located behind the museum, is the historic cracker homestead surrounded by longleaf pine trees. This area is a replica of what a typical homestead would have looked like in the mid-1800s in Florida. All current structures are either donated originals or replicas. The original Whiddon Cracker Cabin was donated to the park by the Whiddon family of Perry. Replicas include a chicken coop and outhouse. Any needed maintenance and preservation to the original structures of the homestead will be done in coordination with DHR. Continued maintenance and preservation of the homestead is the focus of this planning period, including the removal of the sand within the homestead and replacement with historically accurate dirt.

## Support Area

### **Objective: Build additional park facilities**

#### *Actions:*

- Add a one-bay shop building.
- Add one volunteer site.

The support area includes one ranger residence, a small storage building currently being utilized as the park shop, and several auxiliary storage sheds. To better support park operations, the addition of either a one- or two-bay shop building with air conditioning is needed. Once constructed, all the auxiliary storage buildings are to be removed. One volunteer site will be developed in an existing clearing across from the ranger residence to aid in park operations. The volunteer site is to have full utility connection and the existing ranger residence is to be connected to local sewer. To better secure the storage buildings and residence, a gate or fence will be placed at the entrance of the support area facing the rest of the park.

### **OPTIMUM BOUNDARY**

Along the northern boundary are approximately 17.75 acres of privately owned land containing dome and cypress swamp. It is recommended that this parcel of land be included in the optimum boundary for neighboring conservation lands. It is suggested that Taylor County acquire this parcel to protect it from future development.





FOREST CAPITAL MUSEUM STATE PARK  
Optimum Boundary

