



Ocklawaha River Restoration Natural Systems

KEY REFERENCE: “It is my opinion the restoring of the Ocklawaha River would have a significant habitat connectivity benefit for wide-ranging and landscape dependent focal species in Florida including the Florida panther and Florida black bear.”

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Current Conditions

- One of Florida’s longest undisturbed river systems is altered and impacting historic Silver Springs, the Ocklawaha, the St. Johns River and connected tributaries.
- Over 15,000 acres of forested wetlands have been degraded or destroyed, disrupting the distribution of water through the landscape.
- The once valuable wetland forest, a diminishing habitat, is now a declining water reservoir.
- Wildlife corridors for birds and mammals from the Ocala to the Osceola National Forest is severed.
- The connection between the coastal estuary of the St. Johns River and the free-flowing Ocklawaha and Silver Rivers, important to migratory fish, shrimp, crabs and aquatic species, is not functioning.

Benefits of Partial Restoration

- The river system from Silver Springs to the estuaries of the St. Johns River is thriving and productive.
- Major conservation areas are connected from the Ocala to the Osceola National Forest.
- Corridors are established for roaming black bear, panthers, deer and other wildlife.
- Rare and endangered birds and mammals of the cypress and mixed hardwood swamps return.
- Birds such as warblers, vireos, neotropical migrants, owls, wood storks and others expand.
- Up to 12 listed plant species are reintroduced or revitalized, based on USFS projections.

Benefits of Partial Restoration

- Restore 7,500 acres of floodplain swamp, a diminishing habitat type
- Improve the food web in the Lower St. Johns River by reducing the cyanobacteria in the phytoplankton communities which will assist in meeting the TMDLs established for the freshwater reach
- Link major conservation areas including Rice Creek Conservation Area 15 miles to the north and Ocala National Forest bordering the Ocklawaha River to the south
- Establish corridors for black bear, panthers and other wildlife



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- Provide habitat for up to 12 of Florida's 37 rare and endangered birds and mammals, those found in cypress and mixed hardwood swamps (Ewel 1986)
- Increase in forest bird species such as warblers, vireos, and owls and mammals that frequent floodplain forests
- Increase habitat for 12 listed plant species that were identified in the USFS study
- Improve alligator habitat with the conversion of deeper water to shallow water and marsh

References

<https://www.fnai.org/webmaps/ConLandsMap/>

https://myfwc.com/media/5718/chapter3_sgcn.pdf