

Split Oak Forest

History

Split Oak Forest WEA was acquired by Orange and Osceola County in 1994 with funds from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Mitigation Park Program, Gopher Tortoise Incidental Take Permits, the Florida Communities Trust's Preservation 2000 program, and the two counties. The now-defunct Mitigation Park Program was established as an off-site alternative to on-site protection for rare species impacted by development. When developers eliminated habitat for an endangered or threatened species, they paid fees that were used to buy and manage high quality habitat elsewhere. Additionally, almost the entire Split Oak property is mitigation under federal and state law.

Split Oak Forest's value for conservation was recognized by both Orange and Osceola Counties when they created, approved, and submitted a partnership application with FWC to protect and restore Split Oak Forest in 1991.

Split Oak Forest is named after a large live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) tree that split in half hundreds of years ago and survived. A total of 1049.26 acres of Split Oak Forest are in Orange County and 639.74 are in Osceola County. Split Oak Forest has a rich variety of habitats that support a diversity of plant and animal species. It is a designated Orange County Green PLACE and is part of the Priority 1 Kissimmee-St Johns-Ocala Critical Greenway Linkage as identified by the University of Florida GeoPlan Center and the Florida Wildlife Corridor. It is connected to four other Orange County parks: Eagle's Roost, Moss Park, Crosby Island Marsh Preserve, and Isle of Pine Preserve.

Split Oak Forest is managed specifically for the benefit of listed Threatened and Endangered species, primarily using growing-season prescribed fire, carefully applied by FWC. FWC has put a great deal of effort and public money into properly managing Split Oak Forest's fire-dependent ecosystems and nearly eradicating invasive species on the site.

Any development of Split Oak Forest, including, but not limited to, paved roads, structures, and linear facilities of any type would permanently alter and degrade the entirety of Split Oak Forest and would set a precedent for future development of similarly-situated conservation land throughout the state. The original acquisition agreement is vulnerable to alteration by consent of the Orange County Commission.

Section

The residents of Orange County, in order to protect Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area from any future destruction, and in order to maintain the quality of their air and water, hereby bar the Orange County Board of County Commissioners from approving or applying for any construction permits, development permits, release or modification of conservation easements, or modification of the Florida Communities Trust Grant Award Agreement.