

# Multiple Aquatic Preserve Management Plans Approved by Florida Board of Trustees

Three aquatic preserve management plans approved for the continued protection of Florida's natural resources

Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Cabinet, sitting as the Board of Trustees, approved the 10-year management plans for the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve, the Wekiva River Aquatic Preserve and the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve. These plans act as historical and cultural overviews, natural resource assessments, set education and outreach goals, address public use and access needs, and contain strategies and performance measures that are specific to each managed area. The ongoing effort to update the management plans for Florida's aquatic preserves was made possible by Coastal Zone Management Act Section 309 funding. The funds were used to support staff in developing the plans and for holding public meetings.

"Some of Florida's best coastal and aquatic landscapes have been set aside for protection as aquatic preserves," said Kevin Claridge, director of the Florida Coastal Office. "The creation and implementation of these management plans are great examples of partnering at the local, state and federal levels across multiple programs and agencies."

The **Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve** encompasses almost a million acres of sovereign submerged lands across five counties (Wakulla, Jefferson, Dixie, Taylor and Levy counties). This aquatic preserve is best known for its pristine seagrass beds and its scalloping, aquaculture, kayaking, wildlife viewing and karst geology with a constant interplay between surface and groundwater systems.

The **Wekiva River Aquatic Preserve** is a freshwater aquatic preserve containing

around 5,600 acres in Lake, Orange, Seminole and Volusia counties. In addition to the aquatic preserve designation, the Wekiva and its tributaries have been designated as a Wild and Scenic River and State Canoe Trail. This aquatic preserve also contains dozens of archeological and historical sites, provides habitat for 19 listed animal and plant species, and offers a wide variety of recreational activities.

The **Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve** is Florida's oldest aquatic preserve. Established in 1966, it encompasses more than 13,800 acres of exceptionally beautiful sovereign submerged lands in Lee County. Estero Bay is an important mangrove fishery nursery, providing habitat for many threatened and endangered species, as well as protecting six imperiled natural communities. This aquatic preserve is also a popular birding, boating and photography location.

DEP's Florida Coastal Office manages these aquatic preserves, along with 38 other aquatic preserves, three National Estuarine Research Reserves, the Coral Reef Conservation Program, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the Florida Coastal Management Program and the Outer Continental Shelf Program. The Florida Coastal Office's programs and activities are designed to help Floridians better understand and conserve the state's resources through research, education and conservation.

*For more information about the aquatic preserves and DEP's Florida Coastal Office, please visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/fco.htm>.*