

Alabama Forever Wild Land Trust



MANAGEMENT PLAN

THE WALLS OF JERICO TRACT COMPLEX

Nature Preserve, Recreation Area, and Wildlife Management Area
Jackson County

Prepared By:
State Lands Division
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division

Approved: February 10, 2005

Amended: August 6, 2020

TRACTS INCLUDED IN MANAGEMENT PLAN:

- Walls of Jericho (FW#36) – February 5, 2004
- Post Oak Flat (FW#52) – December 7, 2006
- Henshaw Cove (FW#60) – September 11, 2010
- Sims Swaim,Johnson Addition (FW#76) – September 16, 2010
- Post Oak Flat – Patrick Addition (FW#97) – June 20, 2013
- Jacobs Mountain Addition (FW#98) – February 6, 2014
- Hurricane Creek Addition (FW#110) – June 25, 2015
- Post Oak Flat – Shiflett Addition (FW#133) – May 11, 2017
- Skyline Threwer Point Addition (FW#146) – May 11, 2017
- Estill Fork Addition (FW#129) – August 10, 2017
- Henshaw Cove Addition (FW#131) – August 10, 2017
- Skyline WMA Pole Branch Addition (FW#151) – May 10, 2018
- McQuinn Land Swap (FW#161) – February 7, 2019
- Crow Mountain Addition (FW#186) – January 27, 2020

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Amendment 543 of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901 established the Forever Wild Land Trust to help meet the State's outdoor recreation needs and protect the natural heritage of the state. The State's objectives are to:

- (1) Protect, manage, and enhance certain lands and waters of Alabama with full recognition that this generation is a trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; and
- (2) Protect, to the fullest extent practicable, recreational lands and areas of unique ecological, biological and geological importance; and
- (3) Promote a proper balance among population growth, economic development, environmental protection, and ecological diversity.

The Forever Wild Law specifies that the Board shall develop management and allowable use guidelines which shall be followed by the Department in the administration and stewardship of acquired properties. The State Lands Division has the responsibility of coordinating management. All lands must be managed under the multiple-use management principle to insure that all resource values including recreation, hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, aesthetics, soil, water, forest management and minerals are protected and enhanced. All uses of the tracts must be compatible with the primary purpose for acquiring the land. The right of the public to hunt and fish on the land may not be abridged or restricted, subject to such rules, regulations, seasons and limits as are established by the Department.

In accordance with statutory requirements, the State Lands Division has coordinated preparation of this plan. The plan and all revisions shall be submitted to the Forever Wild Board of Trustees of the Forever Wild Land Trust for approval prior to implementation.

II. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

A. The Walls of Jericho Tract Complex is in Jackson County, adjacent the Skyline Wildlife Management Area. The closest communities are Hytop, Skyline, and Princeton. Given the magnitude of the tract, and the mountainous nature of the forests, the majority of this tract is accessible by foot travel. The complex is essentially divided by AL Highway 79, on a northern bearing. This public road provides approximately four miles of public access to the tract, and numerous opportunities for trail-heads and side roads. Post Oak Flat and Henshaw Cove are similarly sited. The tract's northern boundary borders with the state of Tennessee.

B. A legal description of the property is included in the plan as Exhibit A. Maps of the property are included in the plan as Exhibit B.

C. One minor improvement is known to be present on the tract, in the form of a small block building.

D. The tract is located in the Jackson County Mountains District of the Cumberland Plateau Physiographic Section.

E. The Forever Wild Walls of Jericho Complex lies west of and adjacent to lands owned by Alabama Power Company and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Walls of Jericho Tract adjoins these lands on their western and northern borders.

III. TRACT MANAGEMENT GOALS

This tract management plan is intended to provide immediate protection of and access to the tract, as well as guidance in the formation of a long term plan which can be amended as conditions dictate. The long-term plan will be reviewed and updated within six months of any major catastrophic event which impacts the tract, such as a devastating hurricane, wildfire, etc.

The goals of management are:

(1) To provide such immediate consumptive and non-consumptive recreational opportunities to the public as the tract will accommodate, consistent with protection of the resource;

(2) To inventory, manage and protect the biodiversity of the natural communities now on the property and those which may naturally succeed the existing communities by managing for existing communities, particularly sensitive populations, which exist within the Walls of Jericho Tract;

(3) To provide opportunities for academic research, field studies and ecological education on the property;

(4) To acquire and utilize information on the public recreation demand for use of the tract and formulate measures to accommodate the demand while providing full protection of the resource;

(5) To continue to solicit, review and evaluate comments, and recommend long-term management strategies for the above goals.

Management of the tract, consistent with the Nature Preserve, Recreation Area, and Wildlife Management Area Forever Wild categories, includes immediate tract security (protection of boundaries, marked property lines, security gates, evaluation of road use and maintenance); immediate protection and maintenance of sensitive species and community types; future provision of educational opportunities (e.g., evaluation of seasonal field studies or ecological tours); and, future provision of recreational opportunities (evaluation of recreational trails, possible public camp sites, etc.).

IV. AGENCY DESIGNATION

Consistent with the Forever Wild Law the State Lands Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources shall be the primary management agency responsible for management activities on the Walls of Jericho Tract Complex. The Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division shall provide primary enforcement authority of Game Laws and Regulations.

V. AGENCY MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

1. Tract Protection

The Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and State Lands Divisions shall have primary responsibility for tract security.

2. Tract Access

The majority of the tract's acreage is extremely rocky and mountainous, making overland travel arduous. Primary public access shall be through the four miles of existing frontage along AL Highway 79, and other public roads.

Public vehicular access shall be limited primarily to the hunting seasons. No off-road vehicular travel by the public, either motorized or non-motorized, shall be allowed.

3. Hunting

The Tract is open to public hunting as an addition to Skyline Wildlife Management Area and the Physically Disabled Hunting Area, consistent with Departmental

regulations. Detailed descriptions of permitted hunting related activities are described in the annual production of the Skyline Wildlife Management Area Permit.

One separate tract consisting of 39 acres is not open to hunting or public use due to lack of public access to the tract. Opportunities to gain access will be pursued. When access is gained, public use will be permitted. No portion of the tract shall be made available for exclusive or private hunting.

4. Fishing

Fishing will be allowed in all public waters except those areas specifically identified as being closed to such activities.

5. Camping

No private campsites shall be permitted on the property. Public over-night camping shall be allowed at designated campsites only. Suggested areas to be designated for public overnight camping will be evaluated with the intent of providing such areas in the future.

6. Boating

There are no areas suitable for any type of motorized boating activities on the tract.

7. Additional Non-consumptive Recreation

Interim opportunities for additional non-consumptive recreational activities (e.g., birding tours, wildflower tours, backpacking, hiking, horseback riding, etc.) will be seasonally available on a limited basis.

Interpretive Information will also be incorporated in this trail system, with the intent of describing the dynamics of the Walls of Jericho's unique ecological system.

A) Backpacking and Hiking System- A formal system of foot-trails is proposed as a partnership project with local organizations supportive of such activities. The tract offers an area which could potentially support over 100 miles of such trails

B) Birding Trail System- A formal Birding Trail System is proposed as a partnership Project with local birding organizations, and possibly the ADCNR sponsored North Alabama Birding Trail. This proposed system would incorporate trails/sites that would be accessible by the roads and trails (existing and proposed) located on the Walls of Jericho Complex. SEE ATTACHED MAP (Exhibit B).

C) Educational Nature Trail- A formal Nature Trail is proposed at the Walls of Jericho Complex, which would be incorporated into the proposed Birding Trail System. This trail would be relatively short, and would lead from the same areas of primary access, and could possibly incorporate viewing platforms similar to those utilized on National Wildlife Refuges. SEE ATTACHED MAP (Exhibit B).

8. Inventory of Flora, Fauna, Communities

An inventory of the flora, fauna and biological communities on the property shall be conducted by the State Lands Division's Natural Heritage Section. Additional survey information may be incorporated as a part of the Alabama A&M, University of North Alabama, Athens State and the University of Alabama at Huntsville biology and ecology class projects (or other schools requesting permission to conduct field studies on the tract). As information becomes available it shall be made available to the public through documents prepared for such purpose. Assistance from other state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will be solicited and incorporated into the biological database as appropriate.

Floral, Mammal, Herpetological and Avian Studies will receive primary focus during the next five years. These four groups are significantly influenced by past and future management of the tract's forested habitats. Studies will focus on species richness of native taxa, and the influences of future management regimes for their respective habitats. Assistance from other agency personnel is welcomed.

9. Natural Area Protection

The tract concurrently shall be managed as a Nature Preserve. The Walls of Jericho Complex shall serve as a refuge for species endemic to the tract's associated natural communities. The State Lands Division's Natural Heritage Section shall coordinate with federal and state agencies, conservation organizations and the general public to formulate and evaluate long-term management strategies, subject to Board approval, which insure protection of these forest habitats.

Several cave entrances may be designated, marked and enforced as Restricted Resource Areas limiting public access. Necessary measures will be assessed and implemented by the State Lands Division, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, and local law enforcement. These areas will be designated and managed specifically to address public safety, access impact and associated activities which would jeopardize the integrity and continued existence of cultural and biological trust resources.

In the course of finalizing grants to acquire additional tracts, grants necessitate long-term stewardship of acquired and match tracts through conservation easements or deed restrictions. Hence, these measures may be placed on the respective tract as necessitated through the grant agreements.

A forest management plan will be prepared over the next five years, describing forest/stand resources and the appropriate management strategies necessary in managing these resources in a manner consistent with other objectives described within this document. Preparation of the plan will be a collaborative effort performed by the State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division personnel.

10. Interpretive Program

Interpretive material for the tract will be developed and made available to the public. A location map for the tract will be prepared and distributed. Public educational presentations will be developed and presented during seasonal periods, allowing the public to access information on recreational resources and gain an appreciation for the wetland communities. Information about these presentations will be made available through local conservation officials, conservation organizations, as well as resource professionals at local schools.

The WMA permit map will serve as a location map for the tract and will be prepared and distributed.

11. Signage

Several large highway signs will be produced and to direct the public to the area. Two signs have been placed on US 72.

Multiple signs will be erected on the property to provide information to the public. The information shall include a map of the property, and rules for use of the property. Contents of these maps and signs will be reviewed and approved by the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and State Lands Division.

Signs will be posted along property lines to identify the property and its boundaries.

12. Trash

The public will be encouraged and directed to take home all trash that they may generate while on the property and to remove other trash that they may encounter. If a public use camping area is designated appropriate trash cans will be provided.

13. Vandalism, Nuisances, Illegal Activities

Law enforcement will be provided by the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and State Lands Division enforcement officers as needed, as well as by local law enforcement agencies. The public will be encouraged to report any vandalism, game violations, nuisances or other illegal activities to the appropriate authorities. Public awareness and involvement for the property will be promoted through the local media.

14. Mowing, Gating, Bridge and Road Construction/Maintenance

Occasional mowing will be performed along roads within the Walls of Jericho tract.

Existing gates have been evaluated for integrity and life expectancy, and closure necessary for the security of the area and protection of existing roads. Access to the area has been identified and recommended for seasonal gating and side roads have been identified within the tract and recommended permanent gating for those roads. A common lock will be acquired and placed by the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, and keys provided to all appropriate management and law enforcement personnel.

Roads will be maintained as necessary by the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Additional roads will be evaluated, and a schedule devised for future up-keep.

15. Site Restoration

Numerous stands of timber were recently harvested and the land will be assessed for restoration options of the regenerating stands of timber. Some areas may be maintained as early successional habitat through the use of chemical and/or mechanical treatments, timber sales, and prescribed fire.

A State Wildlife Grant application has been prepared by the State Lands Division's Natural Heritage Section. Additional funds for habitat restoration will be pursued through future grants.

16. Research Requests

Requests for access to the tract for scientific research shall be evaluated individually and cumulatively by the State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division to minimize disturbance to the integrity of the tract as a nature preserve. Alternative sites will be reviewed with the agency or individuals requesting access and follow-up investigations directed at the impacts of the research studies may be required when warranted. Any individuals conducting research on the Walls of Jericho or Walls of Jericho Tract shall be required to submit periodic reports of their observations and findings for addition to the Lands Division's database.

The Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division will also review research requests, to insure that researchers are compliant with their scientific collecting permits and guidelines.

17. Leases and Licenses

All existing leases and licenses have been allowed to expire, and will not be renewed to insure maximum public access to these trust resources.

18. Future Land Acquisitions

Several Forest Legacy Program grant applications have been submitted by the Alabama Forestry Commission and the State Lands Division. These grants would provide the ADCNR the opportunity to negotiate the purchase of several additional tracts which adjoin state lands in the various portions of this area. Other grant opportunities will be pursued over the coming years, allowing Forever Wild to maximize its opportunities for financial leveraging.

VI. TASK STATEMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The State Lands Division shall coordinate management plan review and develop task statements as needed. The State Lands Division will report to the Board on property management activities as applicable and at such additional times and/or specific intervals as may be requested by the Board.

Tasks: The following tasks are numbered in relation to the agency management objective identified in Section V of this plan.

Task 1-a. Property lines will be marked. Property line maintenance will be performed on a routine basis by the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division and State Lands Division.

External property line markings shall be refreshed as needed by the State Lands Division. In the event of an unforeseen disruptive event such as wild fire or extensive wind throw of timber, the lines shall be refreshed within six months of the event. Property corners shall also be maintained on an as-needed basis by the State Lands Division.

Task 1-b. County ad valorem tax assessments shall be monitored annually by the Lands Division to insure that there are no double or conflicting claims to the property.

Task 1-c. The State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division shall conduct routine inspection of the tract weekly through the day to day activities of the respective division's local field personnel.

Task 1-d. Boundary line signs have been acquired from an appropriate vendor . The signs are posted by the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division and State Lands Division along all boundary lines at an appropriate interval, and at other points deemed appropriate by the Division such as right-of-way crossings and along public roads.

The signs are on a metal blanks and identify the property as "Forever Wild" and as a "Wildlife Management Area".

Task 2-b. Gates and roads within the Walls of Jericho Tract will be maintained cooperatively by the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division and the State Lands Division.

Task 3 & 4. Regulations will be drafted and prepared by Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division with coordination through the State Lands Division. Enforcement of Department of Conservation and Natural Resource regulations related to fish and wildlife management will be the responsibility of the Department's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, with assistance from the State Lands Division.

Task 7-a. The State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division will coordinate the implementation of non-consumptive recreational activities on the tract, which will incorporate public comments.

Task 8-a. Inventory procedures will be initiated immediately. To facilitate the long term monitoring of the tract's flora and fauna, the Natural Heritage Section will proceed with regular quantitative sampling during the first year of this process. Sampling stations will be established in each of the property's distinct habitats. Following the first year of sampling, quantitative data will be assessed to evaluate the appropriate periodicity of long term sampling necessary to capture the trends in distribution and abundance of the tract's flora and fauna.

Task 8-b. Any biological specimens retained during the inventory of the tract's flora and fauna will be deposited in an appropriate natural history museum within the state. Procedures will follow those outlined by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division personnel collection permit guidelines.

Task 9-a. The tract will be managed concurrently as a Nature Preserve, and all considerations will be made to afford native plants and animals the appropriate management necessary for their prosperity. Such measures will be coordinated by the State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division with assistance from other governmental entities.

Task 10-a. The State Lands Division has initiated the development of a location map for the Walls of Jericho Complex. Maps will be available for public dissemination at no cost to the public.

Task 10-b. As interpretive materials regarding the flora, fauna and communities of the tract become available they will be furnished to the public on request. All Interpretive Programs will incorporate the comments and personnel available within the Department's five divisions, as well as other state and federal agencies and NGO's, thereby incorporating the program material for all the natural resource managers who have projects within the Walls of Jericho.

Task 11-a. Two signs will be erected along Hwy. 79, at either end of the frontage along the Walls of Jericho Complex. The design and placement will be

coordinated by the State Lands Division, through a request to the State Department of Transportation.

Task 11-b. Signs shall be erected at the road entrances to the tract. Signs will document the necessary information about the tract:

Task 11-c. Boundary line signs will be provided in accordance with task 1-d.

Task 12. Signs will encourage visitors to be responsible with their trash, and to encourage them to remove trash left by others. Illegally dumped trash will be addressed as necessary by the State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division.

Task 13a. Law Enforcement Officers from the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division and the State Lands Division will have principal responsibility for the management of vandalism, nuisances, and illegal activities.

Task 13b. Law Enforcement Officers from the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division and the State Lands Division will work with local community and county law enforcement officers, to make them aware of Departmental Management policies regarding the tract, and to request their assistance as necessary.

Task 14a. Gate security will be coordinated among personnel, respective of the management activities which they are overseeing.

Task 14b. Mowing and additional road maintenance will be performed by State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries personnel as necessary and will incorporate the appropriate assistance from the utility companies currently using these roadbeds.

Task 15a. Timber stands previously harvested will be evaluated for restoration objectives consistent with the management goals of this plan.

Task 15b. During the course of the Natural Heritage Section's biological inventory, native resident species absent from the tract but noted as being a component of the present natural communities, will be identified and evaluated for reintroduction to the tract.

Should re-introduction be deemed feasible, source populations will be assessed to secure genetic stock appropriate to the tract, as well as compatible to other nearby populations should immigration or emigration take place. All proposed re-introduction projects of wildlife will include review by the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, which must concur with any introduction of wildlife species prior to any implementation of said projects. All re-introduction projects involving any federally listed threatened and/or endangered species shall undergo the review of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and follow any procedures appropriate under the Endangered Species Act.

Task 16. All research requests will be made in writing and submitted to the Director of the State Lands Division. Such requests will be reviewed by all appropriate parties within the Department, insuring that no conflicts exist with ongoing management objectives as pertain to use of the Tract as a Nature Preserve, Recreation Area, and Wildlife Management Area.

Task 18. The State Lands Division will continue to prepare and submit grant proposals as appropriate.

VII. BUDGET

Personnel expenditures included herein will be from the State Lands Division and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, with the exception of other Departmental personnel. Material improvements and other expenditures for management purposes shall be supported from the Stewardship Fund.

EXHIBIT A. LEGAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE WALLS OF JERICHO FOREVER WILD COMPLEX

Due to the length of the legal descriptions for the additions to the Walls of Jericho Forever Wild Complex, they have not been included in this document. However, full legal descriptions for the additions are available upon request.

**EXHIBIT B. MAPS OF THE WALLS OF JERICHO
FOREVER WILD COMPLEX**

Exhibit B. Maps of Walls of Jericho Forever Wild Tract



