

The Quarterly Journal of the Florida Native Plant Society

# Palmetto



# Point Washington State Forest

by Tom Greene

## Point Washington State Forest Overview

**Total Acreage:** 15,399

**Location:** Walton County, Florida

**Description:** 10 natural communities can be found throughout the forest. The majority of the area consists of sandhill, basin swamps and titi drains, wet flatwoods, wet prairie and cypress swamps.

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Forestry has lead management responsibility, and uses an ecosystem management approach that provides for multiple uses of forest resources including timber management, wildlife management, outdoor recreation and ecological restoration.

Source:  
[www.fl-dof.com/state\\_forests/point\\_washington.html](http://www.fl-dof.com/state_forests/point_washington.html)



## Field Review

In August of 2010, the FNPS Land Management Review Team participated in a land review at Point Washington State Forest, in southern Walton County.

The forest features a variety of natural communities including sandhill, wet flatwoods and cypress swamps, and has several areas of old-growth longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*). Populations of gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*), Curtiss' sandgrass (*Calamovilfa curtissii*), whitetop pitcher plant (*Sarracenia leucophylla*), Gulf coast lupine (*Lupinus westianus*) and 6 additional listed plants live in Point Washington's longleaf pine habitat.

The forest's whitetop pitcher plants occur in nitrogen poor, acidic soils that are seasonally flooded. Typical habitats include bogs, savannas, seepage slopes and hydric pine flatwoods. Interestingly, the pitcher plant's hollow leaves are modified to serve as passive traps, allowing the plant to supplement its intake of nutrients with an insect diet.

The forest contains the largest population of Curtiss' sandgrass in the State. Listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this rare grass species is restricted to two disjunct regions – populations in Florida's Panhandle occur in wet flatwoods and adjacent to wet cypress forests, while populations on the Atlantic coast occur in interdunal swales.

Some surveys for *Calamovilfa curtissii* have been made at Point Washington State Forest, but it is not certain whether complete rare plant surveys have been done for any of the plants on the tract. The forest supervisor invited us to provide volunteer surveys – these would be helpful in assisting staff responsible for managing sites containing rare plants.

Uplands in Point Washington State Forest consist largely of sandhill and flatwood pineland in moderate to good condition. Extensive areas of floodplain, basin and dome swamps in the forest are also in good condition, although their upland boundaries are dominated by shrubs due to past fire suppression.

The number of acres treated with prescribed fire have been significantly increased in the past two

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Left: Old-growth longleaf pine flatwoods; Curtiss' sandgrass, *Calamovilfa curtissii*. Photos by Tom Greene



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**Official definition of native plant:** For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

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## Point Washington State Forest

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years. Although management at Point Washington State Forest seems to be on the right track, the forest's management plan was revised in 2002 and season of burn was eliminated from its goals and measurements. As a result, no prescribed burns have been done during the growing season in the last five years and none are expected by staff for the next five years.

Other deterrents include extensive development on the beach along the southern boundary of the tract, increasing development along its northern boundary, and the presence of a four-lane highway (U.S. 98). Additional factors include unpredictable winds, unfamiliarity with growing season fire, and the need for staff to respond to wildfires elsewhere in Florida.

The land management review team recommended increased burning during the growing season. In addition, we will continue our conversation with forest staff about the importance of season of burn and managing listed species.

**Tom Greene** is a member of the Magnolia Chapter (Leon County) and an FNPS Land Management Review volunteer.



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