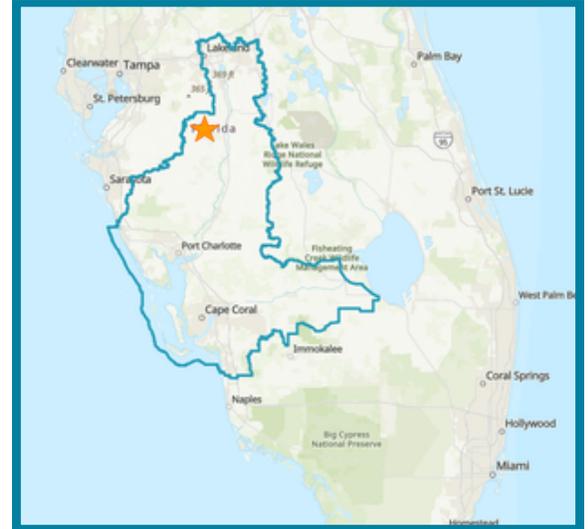


Hardee Lakes Habitat Enhancement Conservation Initiative

FISH, WILDLIFE, & HABITAT PROTECTION



Summary

Hardee Lakes Park, located west of Bowling Green, Florida, is approximately 1,200 acres with four lakes in total. The park offers extensive recreational opportunities, from horse, biking, and hiking trails to a winding boardwalk with an observation tower for wildlife viewing. To enhance the ecological health, habitat quality, and public engagement within the park, a habitat management plan that identifies nuisance/exotic plant species, treatment methodology, and creates planting lists for the habitat types found on site is being created. The plan will also identify the most ecologically sensitive areas and break the park up into management blocks.

This project will entail nuisance and exotic plant treatments, as well as replanting with appropriate native vegetation to restore ecological function and improve habitat quality. It will also entail a public education component in designing, fabricating, and installing interpretative signs in the park. The signs will focus on habitat types, native plant species, local wildlife, and the importance of prescribed fire and ecological conservation and maintenance. Having this signage will significantly enhance public awareness and understanding of the exceptional natural resources on-site.

Location: Hardee County

Partners: Hardee County

Implemented: 2026

Status: Ongoing

CHNEP Cost: \$240,000

Funding Source: EPA 320

2025 CHNEP Plan Activity:  

Fish, Wildlife, & Habitat Protection 2: Protect, monitor, and restore environmentally sensitive lands and waterways including critical habitat areas.

Public Engagement 1: Promote environmental literacy, awareness, and stewardship through expanded education and engagement opportunities for the general public

COASTAL & HEARTLAND NATIONAL ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP



Anticipated Benefits

Improved Wildlife Habitat

Invasive and exotic vegetation outcompete native plants, disrupt the ecosystem balance, and reduce biodiversity, overall bringing harm and decreased habitat quality. By removing the invasive plants, it not only allows for native plants to succeed in their place but helps restore the habitat to its natural ecological and hydrologic function.

Native plants will be planted as well, adding to the ecological integrity of the habitat by increasing water filtration, stabilizing the soils, and increasing biodiversity, all of which enhance ecosystem resilience. Additionally, developing a habitat management plan will allow for the park to maintain consistency of this project long-term to ensure the habitat remains optimal for native plants and wildlife to persist.

Enhanced Public Engagement

Currently, Hardee Lakes Park does not have educational signage. The habitat restoration described in the project above will provide the perfect opportunity to design and install high-quality informational signs catered to explaining the importance of this type of restoration and what it means for improving the habitat. The signs will discuss habitat types, native plant species, local wildlife, and the role of prescribed fire as an ecological conservation and maintenance tool. As people continue to recreate in the area, they will have the added benefit of access to these educational signs, which will significantly enhance public engagement and environmental literacy.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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