

# A Visitor Assessment of Florida National Scenic Trail Visitors on South Florida Water Management District Lands



Compiled at  
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## Introduction to the Project

From the summer of 2003 through the summer of 2008, researchers from the University of Florida studied visitors on the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST). The Trail traverses almost the whole state from Pensacola to Big Cypress National Preserve. Researchers studied visitors to the Trail on public lands throughout the state with the cooperation of every type of public land agency. This includes the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Defense, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida State Parks, and Florida's water management districts (Northwest Florida, Suwannee River, St. Johns River, Southwest Florida, and South Florida).

The project consisted of two main parts: to count visitors and to understand who they are and why they use the Trail. In order to count visitors, mechanical counters (either infrared or pressure sensitive pads) were placed along the FNST near trailheads. This gave researchers 24 hour monitoring capabilities. Each site had a counter installed for one or more years, so seasonal fluctuations could be studied.

The data were analyzed monthly and cleaned to correct for counts triggered by wildlife or meteorological events. This produced fairly reliable counts for each section of the Trail that was monitored. In some instances, counters were not installed. Instead, different sampling strategies were used that included visual monitoring, permits, and other strategies.

A questionnaire was also administered to better understand the recreation habits and motivations of visitors to the FNST. Trained surveyors questioned visitors about their demographics, desired experiences, satisfaction, and other recreation activities involved in while on the Trail. This portion of the study was also completed in areas all over the State and on lands representing all the different types of land management agencies in Florida. However, no questionnaires were administered on lands managed specifically by the SFWMD.

The following report is a summary of the results of the visitor counts for both of the SFWMD properties where the study was conducted. Hopefully, this report will help the SFWMD personnel better understand the recreation habits of visitors to their lands.



## Highlands

### 2006-2007 Use

#### Counter Type:

- Bluff Hammock: Diamond Traffics infrared eye.
- Hickory Hammock: Diamond Traffics infrared eye.
- Yates Marsh and Platts Bluff were visually monitored and appropriate access point averages were applied.

#### Counter-related problems and solutions:

- Bluff Hammock: Counter worked well throughout the study period except for battery dying prematurely in May. Changed battery.
- Hickory Hammock: Counter worked well throughout the study period except for July, the alignment was only 60%. It was corrected by putting a shim under the reflector.

#### Trail condition throughout the year:

- Bluff Hammock: Trail was completely overgrown from July-October and

May-June and slightly overgrown in March and April otherwise it was in good condition.

- Hickory Hammock: Trail was in good condition throughout the year.

### Trail Use Estimates

Highlands was a high use site that received an estimated 1,735 visits in 2006-2007. Two access points were monitored using infrared eyes and two access points were visually monitored. The highest use month for Highlands was January, with an estimated 232 visits. The lowest use month was October, with an estimated 81 visits. The Bluff Hammock site showed an unusual pattern of highest use in the months of July, August, and September, usually the hottest months and therefore the times when visitation is lowest. Since counters worked correctly throughout this time there is no immediate explanation for the derivation.

Table 1. Use of the Florida National Scenic Trail at Highlands: June 2006- May 2007

	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	TOTAL
Bluff Hammock	48	99	108	109	28	40	71	70	88	84	36	29	810
Hickory Hammock	17	29	12	11	10	48	20	80	42	47	11	27	354
*Yates Marsh	12	6	9	4	22	31	30	41	45	43	26	18	285
*Platts Bluff	12	6	9	4	22	31	30	41	45	43	26	18	285
<b>TOTAL</b>	89	140	138	128	81	150	150	232	219	216	98	92	1735

\* Access point that was not monitored, therefore an access point average was applied

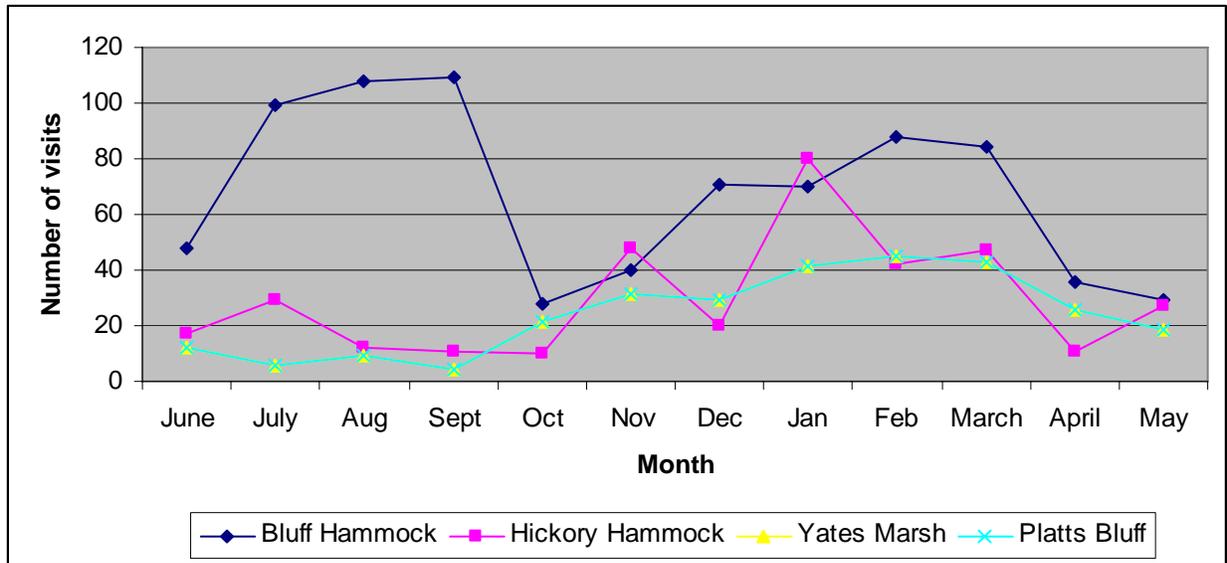


Figure 1. Use of the Florida National Scenic Trail at Highlands: 2006-2007

## Kissimmee River Public Use Area/ Avon Park Air Force Range

### 2006-2007 Use

#### Counter Type:

- Kicco WMA: Diamond Traffics infrared eye.
- Ft. Kissimmee in Avon Park was visually monitored and an appropriate access point average was applied.

#### Counter-related problems and solutions:

- Kicco WMA: Counter had had a problem with alignment. This was solved by moving the reflector closer to the counter. Another problem was two cow paths crossed in front of the beam path and the cows were causing counts to register so brush was piled up to divert the cows away from the counter. There was also a problem in

February with a battery going dead prematurely. A new battery was installed.

#### Trail condition throughout the year:

- Kicco WMA: Trail was in good condition throughout the year.

### Trail Use Estimates

Initial research conducted in 2003 indicated that Kicco WMA was a low use site. Research conducted in 2006-2007 concluded that Kicco WMA was a medium use site with an estimated 526 users. The highest use month was December with 72 hikers and the lowest use months were May and February with 25 hikers.

Table 2. Use of the Florida National Scenic Trail at Kissimmee River Public Use Area/ Avon Park June 2006- May 2007

Access Pt.	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	TOTAL
Kicco WMA	15	47	46	44	23	28	67	42	20	43	32	20	427
<i>*Ft Kissimmee in</i>													
Avon Park	12	6	9	4	11	9	5	11	5	13	9	5	99
<b>TOTAL</b>	27	53	55	48	34	37	72	53	25	56	41	25	526

\*Access point that was not monitored, therefore an access point average was applied

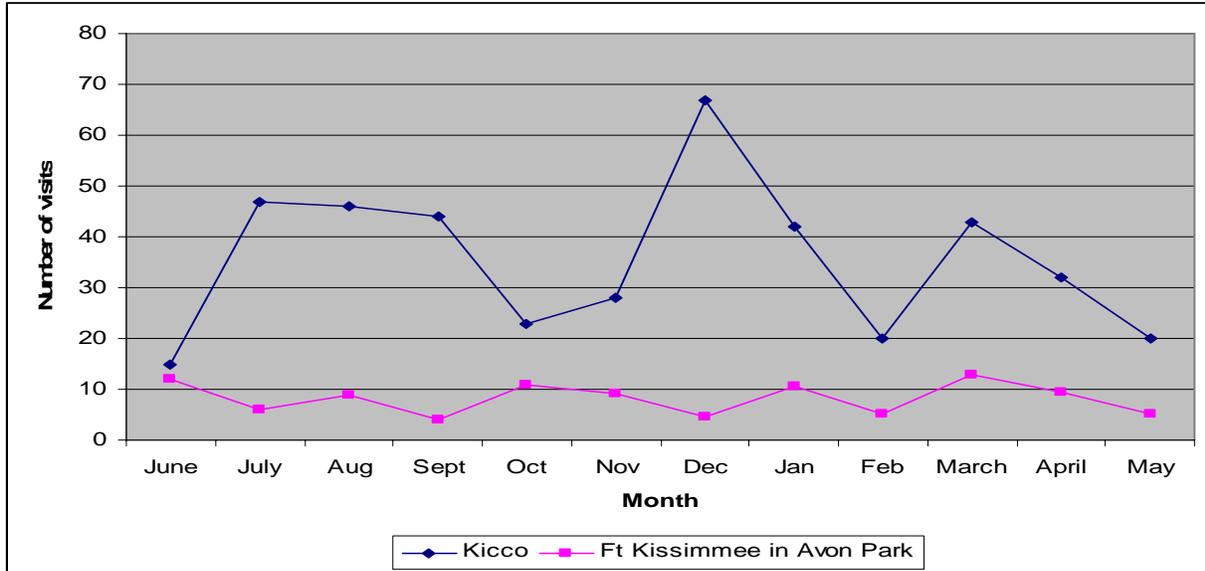


Figure 2. Use of the Florida Trail at Kissimmee PUA: June 2006-May 2007

## Acknowledgements

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