

A NONTRADITIONAL COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

TIMBER HARVEST WILL LEAD TO AREA RESTORATION AT TIMUCUAN ECOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVE

By DANIEL R. TARDONA

THE TIMUCUAN ECOLOGICAL AND Historic Preserve is a 46,000 acre unit of the national park system that was established in 1988 to protect wetlands and uplands in Duval County, Florida. Unlike many traditional units, the Timucuan Preserve consists of publicly and privately owned lands. Approximately 8,000 acres are owned by the National Park Service with the remainder owned by many different private and governmental parties.

The Castleton Beverage Corporation, a subsidiary of the Bacardi Corporation, owned approximately 927 acres of ecologically and culturally significant land in the preserve. Known as the Thomas Creek Area, the Castleton property contained open fields, numerous small ponds, a 27-acre lake (a borrow pit), 262 acres of fresh water wetlands, and approximately 145 acres of brackish marshlands. A few dirt roads provide access within the property. The upland portions of the site have been used for silviculture by Castleton. Loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and slash pine (*Pinus elliotii*), originally planted in rows on raised beds, were to be harvested by the corporation when the trees attained their maximum value as timber (fig. 1). Castleton had planned to cut nearly all the stands of trees on the site including natural stands of slash pine and pond pine (*Pinus serotina*). After harvesting, Castleton planned to explore options offering the most economic benefit including sale of the land for development.

LAND ACQUISITION

The Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve is mandated to ensure that current and future uses of uplands inside and adjacent to its boundaries do not impair significant natural habitats, water quality, or healthy salt marsh and estuarine systems. The planted forest in the Thomas Creek Area was not in keeping with the mandates of the preserve, and acquisition

Figure 1. Planted stands of slash pine and loblolly pine are scheduled for harvest in 2002 at Timucuan. The vegetation restoration plan, developed to guide the transfer of land ownership to the National Park Service, allows for commercial harvest of the trees by the property owner, who will fund subsequent restoration of the site to a more natural condition.

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and subsequent restoration of the vegetative cover could have been too costly. Consequently, the administration of the preserve pursued a nontraditional approach in the acquisition of the land from the Castleton Beverage Corporation beginning in 1990. Ultimately, the land was acquired through a combination of a land donation and public and private funding to purchase the remaining portion. The land acquisition contract required the development of a vegetation management plan for a transition of the vegetative cover from a pine plantation to natural vegetation of the area.

VEGETATION PLAN

Staff from the preserve and Great Smoky Mountains National Park along with a forester from the Castleton Corporation and various professionals from other state and local resource management agencies produced the vegetative resource management plan. According to the plan, all loblolly pine and slash pines will be harvested in 2002. Natural slash pine stands that provide buffer zones around the lake and along wetland margins will not be removed. Selected stands of natural slash pines will be thinned in order to improve species reproduction and to create a mixed two-aged stand of slash pine and longleaf pine. All pond pine stands will be left in place. After harvesting, the Castleton Beverage Corporation will fund restoration of the site. This will

include planting longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) in designated harvested areas at different times in order to achieve a multiple age effect and mimic natural regeneration over several years. The plan is expected to return the area to a more natural vegetative state as observed by presettlement visitors to the area.

The Castleton Beverage Corporation will realize the economic value of the timber that under traditional NPS land acquisition methods would have been lost. If the property had been acquired by the National Park Service without the removal of the loblolly pine, long and costly removal of the trees and transition of the site to a natural state probably would have taken years and may possibly have been cost prohibitive. The nontraditional cooperative approach to the acquisition and management of natural resources demonstrates that tangible benefits for conservation and for the corporate world can be accomplished without compromising the NPS vision of resource protection.



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