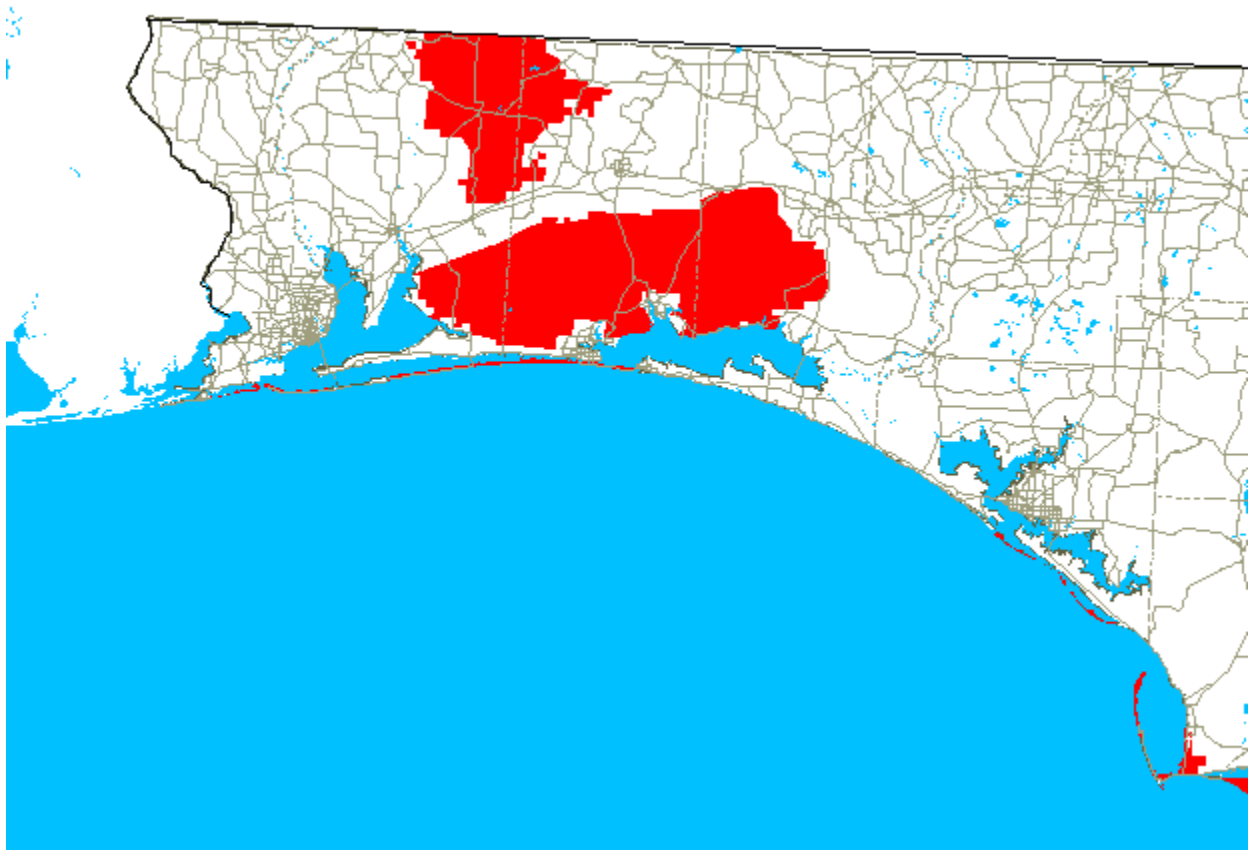


WESTERN PANHANDLE



BAY COUNTY BEACHES

Crooked “Island” (1906 acres; 762 ha) and **Shell “Island”** (1162 acres; 464 ha), including parts of **St. Andrews State Recreation Area** and **Tyndall Air Force Base**

Bay County
3068 acres (1234 ha)

LOCATION: in the Gulf of Mexico in southeastern Bay County south of Panama City, extending from St. Andrews State Recreation Area southeast to Mexico Beach.

DESCRIPTION: two long peninsulae connected to the mainland. **Crooked “Island”** [length?] is a highly dynamic beach that consists of two separate peninsulae known as East Crooked “Island” and West Crooked “Island.” The eastern end of East Crooked “Island” now is attached to the mainland, as is the western end of West Crooked “Island.” Only a small part of what formerly was East Crooked “Island” remains an island. Crooked “Island” has been designated as a Critical Wildlife Area by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and has been proposed as Critical Habitat for the Piping Plover by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. **Shell “Island”** became an island when a pass was dredged along its western edge; its eastern portion now is connected to the mainland via West Crooked “Island.” It is about 6 miles (9.6 km) long, and may be accessed through Tyndall Air Force Base, or by boat shuttle from St. Andrews State Recreation Area. Crooked “Island” and Shell “Island” receive ___ and ___ recreationists annually, respectively.

OWNERSHIP: **Crooked “Island:”** U.S. Air Force (Tyndall Air Force Base). **Shell “Island:”** U.S. Air Force (eastern portion; **Tyndall Air Force Base**), Florida Division of Recreation and Parks (western portion; **St. Andrews State Recreation Area**), and private owners (middle portion)

HABITATS: **Crooked “Island:”** *coastal strand. **Shell “Island:”** *coastal strand, tidal marsh.

LAND USE (same for each): *conservation, recreation.

IBA CATEGORIES (same for each): significant populations of Threatened species; and significant natural habitats

AVIAN DATA: Both “islands” support large numbers of shorebirds, especially Piping and Snowy plovers. [Are bird lists available for the “islands”?].

Crooked “Island:”

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Piping Plover | winter 1993–1994 | 8 birds | 1% (W) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 0 birds | |
| Snowy Plover | 1989 | 5 pairs | 2% (R) |
| | winter 1993–1994 | 28 birds | 7% (R) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 15 birds | 3% (R) |

Data from +Gore and Chase (1989), +Sprandel et al. (1997), and provided by Gary Sprandel (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

Shell “Island:”

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Piping Plover | winter 1993–1994 | 47 birds | 8% (W) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 16 birds | 3% (W) |
| Snowy Plover | 1989 | 4 pairs | 2% (R) |
| | winter 1993–1994 | 19 birds | 4% (R) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 45 birds | 11% (R) |

Data from +Gore and Chase (1989), +Sprandel et al. (1997), and provided by Gary Sprandel (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

OTHER RESOURCES: West Crooked “Island” and Shell “Island” both contain ♦ “Choctawhatchee” beach mice (*Peromyscus polionotus allophrys*) and East Crooked “Island” has ♦ “St. Andrews” beach mice (*P. p. peninsularis*), both Federally- and State-listed Endangered subspecies. Sea turtles nest along the beaches.

THREATS: Crooked “Island:” *human disturbance, *habitat succession. **Shell “Island:”** *human disturbance, *habitat succession, feral cats, feral dogs

CONSERVATION ISSUES: Much of the “islands” are owned by Tyndall Air Force Base but are not used for military activities. The far eastern end of East Crooked “Island” is private property. Parts of West Crooked “Island” are used for recreation by military personnel, and other parts are accessible to the public. • Dogs are prohibited on the Air Force Base portion of the “island.” [what is being done about the feral cats and dogs?]

NOMINATED BY: Gary Sprandel (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

REVIEWED BY: Nadine Craft (Florida Division of _____), George Wallace (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), Patty Kelley (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and Ron Houser (Bay County Audubon Society)

REFERENCES: +Gore, J.A., and C.A. Chase, III. 1989. Snowy Plover breeding distribution. Final performance report, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee, FL. • +Sprandel, G.L., J.A. Gore, and D.T. Cobb. 1997. Winter shorebird survey. Final performance report, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee, FL.

WEBSITE: <<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/district1/standrews>>

BLACKWATER RIVER STATE FOREST

Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties

189,594 acres (75,837 ha)

LOCATION: in northeastern Santa Rosa County and northwestern Okaloosa County, extending from the Alabama state line south to U.S. Highway 90. Nearly contiguous with the Eglin Air Force Base IBA to the south.

DESCRIPTION: The Forest is a dominant land feature of Florida's western Panhandle. [[more information preferred](#)]. The Forest receives ____ recreationists and ____ hunters annually.

OWNERSHIP: Florida Division of Forest; co-managed by the Florida Division of Wildlife as "Blackwater Wildlife Management Area"

HABITATS: *sandhills, longleaf pine flatwoods, pine plantation, fields, agricultural fields, cypress swamp, hardwood swamp, bayhead, freshwater marsh, riverine, lacustrine, seepage slope (pitcher plant bog), artificial

LAND USE: *conservation, *hunting, *timber production, recreation

IBA CATEGORIES: significant populations of Endangered, Threatened, FCREPA, and Watch List species; significant numbers of wintering sparrows; complete diversity of longleaf pine flatwoods; and significant natural habitats

AVIAN DATA: Blackwater River State Forest supports a significant population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and all other species of longleaf pine flatwoods and sandhills. [[Is a bird list available?](#)]

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|---------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| Swallow-tailed Kite | 2001 | >6 pairs | 1% (B) |
| "Southeastern" American Kestrel | 2001 | "significant" numbers | (R) |
| Red-cockaded Woodpecker | Jul 2001 | 26 clusters | 2% (R) |
| Brown-headed Nuthatch | 2001 | 5.9 birds/BBS route | 1% (R) |
| Bachman's Sparrow | 2000 | 46.8 birds/BBS route | (R) |
| Henslow's Sparrow | 2000 | "significant population" | (W) |

Sparrow data from +Robinson and Tucker (2000), all other data provided by Mike Wilson (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission).

OTHER RESOURCES: the combined land area of Blackwater River State Forest, Eglin Air Force Base, and Conecuh National Forest (in Alabama) contains the greatest coverage of old-growth longleaf pine remaining in the world. Significant floral species include ♦whitewitch pitcherplant (*Sarracenia leucophylla*), ♦Panhandle lily (*Lilium iridollae*), and ♦dwarf witchhazel (*Fothergilla gardenii*). Significant faunal species include the ♦pine barrens treefrog (*Hyla andersonii*), ♦gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), ♦"Sherman's" fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger shermani*), and two undescribed amphibians (!) found in seepage bogs: a dwarf salamander and a siren (Paul Moler *vide* Mike Wilson). The Forest contains the largest expanse of sandhills, longleaf pine upland forests, and seepage slopes in state ownership. • The Blackwater River flows through the Forest for approximately 30 miles (48 km). It is a relatively unique sand bottom stream that has been protected in its natural state since the mid-1930s. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has classified portions of the river bounded by State lands as an Outstanding Florida Waterway to acknowledge its high water quality and populations of fish and other wildlife.

THREAT: exotic plants

CONSERVATION ISSUES: Priority is given to management, promotion, and enhancement of the longleaf pine-threawn ecosystem. Management activities include prescribed fire at 2–5 year intervals, and conversion of slash pine plantations back into longleaf pine forests. In addition, priority is given to

protection of embedded natural communities (e.g., seepage slopes, baygall) and wetlands. [what about exotic plants?]

NOMINATED BY: Mike Wilson (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

REFERENCE: +Robinson, W.G., and J.W. Tucker, Jr. 2000. Influence of season and frequency of fire on Bachman's Sparrows and Henslow's Sparrows in longleaf pine forests of the Gulf coastal plain. Auburn University, Alabama.

WEBSITE: <http://www.fl-dof.com/state_forests/blackwater.htm>

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE

Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties

463,448 acres (185,379 ha)

LOCATION: in southeastern Santa Rosa County, southern Okaloosa County, and southwestern Walton County, bordered by the Yellow River, Shoal River, and Titi Creek to the north, Highway 331 and private land to the east and northeast, Choctawhatchee Bay and the Gulf of Mexico to the south, and Escambia Bay to the west. Eglin is approximately 52 miles (83 km) east to west and 18 miles (28 km) north to south, and is nearly contiguous with the Blackwater River State Forest IBA to the north.

DESCRIPTION: Eglin Air Force Base formerly was Choctawhatchee National Forest, but was converted to military use at the beginning of World War II. The U.S. Air Force uses the Base to test and develop conventional munitions on 60,000 acres (24,000 ha) of test ranges. The Base receives _____ recreationists and _____ hunters annually.

OWNERSHIP: U.S. Air Force

HABITATS: *sandhills, *riverine, *coastal strand, longleaf pine flatwoods, pine plantation, sand pine scrub, fields, hardwood swamp, bayhead, lacustrine

LAND USE: *conservation, *military training, recreation, hunting, timber production

IBA CATEGORIES: significant populations of Endangered and Threatened species; complete diversity of longleaf pine flatwoods and sandhills species; significant overall diversity; and significant natural habitats [long-term research for RCWs?]

AVIAN DATA: This vast IBA supports the fourth-largest population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers remaining in the world, as well as all other species of longleaf pine flatwoods and sandhills. [what about diversity of coastal strand? – overall shorebirds?]

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| “Southeastern” American Kestrel | 2000 | 74 nests | only a “small sample” (R) |
| Snowy Plover | 1989 | at least 53 nests | at least 26% (R) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 20 birds | 5% (R) |
| Red-cockaded Woodpecker | 2000 | 301 active clusters | 23% (R) |
| Overall diversity | Undated list | 324 natives | second most diverse IBA in |
| | | 3 exotics | Florida |

Kestrel data provided by researchers from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, plover data from +Gore and Chase (1989) and provided by Jeff Gore (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), other data provided by Bruce Hagedorn (U.S. Air Force)

OTHER RESOURCES: Eglin Air Force Base is the largest forested military installation in the United States. It is recognized by The Nature Conservancy as an area of global significance for biodiversity, with 34 natural communities identified, and 118 rare or imperiled species present, including numerous endemics. • It encompasses nearly the entire range of two state-endemic vertebrates: the ♦ bog frog (*Rana okaloosae*) and ♦ Okaloosa darter (a fish; *Etheostoma okaloosae*), and supports 5% of Florida’s ♦ black bears (*Ursus americanus*). • A low density of sea turtles nest at Santa Rosa Island and Okaloosa Island. From 1992 to 1997, numbers of nests along 17 miles (27 km) of beach ranged from 0–16 ♦ green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) nests and 17–32 ♦ loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nests. • Perhaps only 5000 acres (2000 ha) of old-growth longleaf pine remain in the world, and 1712 acres (684 ha) of these are found in four tracts at Eglin, the largest contiguous acreage of old-growth longleaf pine surviving. The largest tract—the Patterson Natural Area—is 928 acres (371 ha) and contains trees that on average are 130 years old and 16 inches (40 cm) in diameter at breast height. Patterson Natural Area recently has been enlarged to nearly 4500 acres (1800 ha). • Barrier islands occur in three separate areas at Eglin Air Force Base: 13 miles (20 km) of Santa Rosa Island, 4 miles

(6.4 km) of “Okaloosa Island” (which seems to be the easternmost portion of Santa Rosa Island), and 3 miles (4.8 km) at the Eglin Air Force Base Test Site (part of the St. Joseph Bay IBA, pages 57–59). The Nature Conservancy has rated Santa Rosa and Okaloosa islands as the highest quality barrier islands in western Florida and Alabama because of the absence of human disturbance and exotic plants, and the presence of rare floral and faunal species. • Eglin supports the following listed species: 73 plants, 10 fishes, 10 terrestrial reptiles and amphibians, 5 marine reptiles (sea turtles), 14 birds, 3 terrestrial mammals, and 6 marine mammals (5 whales). • Cultural resources also are present.

THREATS: *habitat succession, *feral hogs, exotic plants

CONSERVATION ISSUES: Management issues at Eglin balance military use, recreational use, forest use, and ecosystem protection. Forest management practices are moving toward uneven-aged stands of longleaf pine. Most timbering is for removal of sand pines and pine plantations. Prescribed fire was applied to over 202,000 acres (80,800 ha) between 1993 and 1997. • Sandhills restoration activities involve mechanically removing sand pines and hardwoods, replanting longleaf pine (8 million seedlings since 1993), and annually burning over 40,000 acres (16,000 ha), mostly during the growing season. • Exotic plants include several species, with ♦Chinese tallowtree (*Sapium sebiferum*) and ♦cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) posing the most severe threats. Control measures are underway. • Collisions between birds and aircraft (bird air strike hazard; BASH) are the focus of the Bird Hazard Working Group. BASH events at Eglin are considered “sporadic” and have required lethal control for only short periods. Most of the collisions involve Cattle Egrets and Ring-billed Gulls. [what about feral hogs?]

NOMINATED BY: Bruce Hagedorn (U.S. Air Force)

REFERENCES: +Eglin Air Force Base. 2001. Integrated natural resources transitional plan. Natural Resources Management. Eglin Air Force Base, FL. • +Gore, J.A., and C.A. Chase, III. 1989. Snowy Plover breeding distribution. Final performance report, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee, FL.

WEBSITE: <<http://www.eglin.af.mil/newcomers/leisure.htm>>

Eglin Air Force Base Test Site at Cape San Blas, a non-contiguous part of Eglin Air Force Base, is included in the St. Joseph Bay IBA, on pages 57–59.

GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE and ADJACENT AREAS

Big Lagoon State Park (730 acres; 292 ha), **Big Sabine Point** (___ acres; ___ ha), **Gulf Islands National Seashore** (66,549 acres; 26,619 ha)

Escambia, Okaloosa, and Santa Rosa counties
67,279 acres (26,911 ha) [+Big Sabine Point]

[This IBA needs additional information]

LOCATION: in southern Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa counties, representing most of the barrier islands and offshore waters between Johnson Beach (on Perdido Key) to the eastern end of Santa Rosa Island just west of Destin. Much of eastern Santa Rosa Island is part of Eglin Air Force Base, but the National Seashore includes the inshore and offshore waters surrounding the island. A small portion of the mainland immediately east of Gulf Breeze is also part of the National Seashore. [Mention the other sites]

DESCRIPTION: ___ Gulf Islands National Seashore is composed of two separate sections of coastline, one in Mississippi and the other in the western Panhandle of Florida (the anticipated link between these two sites never materialized when the State of Alabama refused to participate in the creation of the park). The Florida section ____. The National Seashore receives ___ recreationists annually, while the State Park receives ___.

OWNERSHIP: U.S. National Park Service (Gulf Islands National Seashore), Florida Division of Recreation and Parks (Big Lagoon State Park), and [?] (Big Sabine Point)

HABITATS: ___

LAND USE: ___

IBA CATEGORIES: significant populations of Threatened species; significant overall diversity; and significant natural habitats

AVIAN DATA: Gulf Islands National Seashore supports an extremely high diversity of species, and contains one of Florida’s largest remaining breeding populations of Snowy Plovers. The bird list for Gulf Islands National Seashore includes the entire property (i.e., includes the portion in Mississippi). [Need more information]

Big Lagoon State Park:

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|--------------|--------------|---------|----------|
| Snowy Plover | Jan–Feb 2001 | 7 birds | 1% (R) |

Data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Big Sabine Point:

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|---------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| Piping Plover | Jan–Feb 2001 | 4 birds | <1% (W) |
| Snowy Plover | Jan–Feb 2001 | 19 birds | 3% (R) |

Data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Gulf Islands National Seashore:

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------|---|
| Piping Plover | Jan–Feb 2001 | 1 bird | <1% (W) |
| Snowy Plover | 1989 | 18 pairs | 9% (R) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 22 birds | 4% (R) |
| Least Tern | 8 Jun 1999 | 20 pairs | <1% (B) |
| Black Skimmer | 8 Jun 1999 | 11 pairs | <1% (B) |
| Overall diversity | ____ list | 310 natives 4 exotics | Includes the Mississippi portion of the Seashore; presuming that all birds on the list have been seen in the Florida portion, this IBA rank as the fifth most diverse in Florida. |

Plover data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), larid data from Hovis and Sprandel (1999).

OTHER RESOURCES: ____

THREATS: *human disturbance

CONSERVATION ISSUES: ____

NOMINATED BY: Bill Pranty (Audubon of Florida) and ____

WEBSITE: <<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/chekbird/r4/gulfisle.htm>>,

<<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/district1/biglagoon>>

<<http://www.nps.gov/guis>>

ST. JOSEPH BAY

Black's Island (7 acres; 2.8 ha), **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site** (500 acres; 200 ha), **Palm Point** (100 acres; 40 ha), **St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project** (5378 acres [2151 ha], with 2115 acres [846 ha] acquired as **St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve**), and **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park** (2516 acres; 1006 ha)

Gulf County

8500 acres (3400 ha), with 4468 acres (1787 ha) acquired

LOCATION: at the “elbow” of the Florida Panhandle in southwestern Gulf County, surrounding the town of Port St. Joe.

DESCRIPTION: This IBA surrounds and forms St. Joseph Bay, which is a State-designated Aquatic Preserve. It consists of several public land ownerships, as well as other sites sought for public acquisition. **Black's Island** is a small privately-owned island in southern St. Joseph Bay. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site**, at the southern end of the St. Joseph Peninsula—and known as Cape San Blas—is used by the military for [what type of use?]. It has been proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Critical Habitat for the Piping Plover. **Palm Point** is private land along the northern shore of St. Joseph Sound, just north of the community of Highland View, extending northwest 2 miles (3.1 km). **St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve** is a State acquisition project designed to protect the entire eastern shore of St. Joseph Bay south of Port St. Joe, as well as a few miles (km) of Gulf coast between Cape San Blas and Indian Peninsula. No other data were provided for the Buffer Preserve. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park** occupies most of a long, narrow peninsula jutting north from Cape San Blas for more than 15 miles (24 km). It is bounded on the east by St. Joseph Sound and on the west and north by the Gulf of Mexico. At its northernmost point, it is only about 2 miles (3.2 km) from the mainland at St. Joe Beach. Annual visitation is ____ recreationists for the Eglin Air Force Base Test Site, and 142,500 recreationists for T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park.

OWNERSHIP: U.S. Air Force (Eglin Air Force Base Test Site), Florida Division of Marine Resources (St. Joseph Bay State Buffer Preserve), Florida Division of Recreation and Parks (T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park), and private owners (Black's Island, other remaining acreage of the St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project, and Palm Point)

HABITATS: **Black's Island:** *temperate hammock, coastal strand, artificial. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** *coastal strand. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** *slash pine flatwoods, *sand pine scrub, *coastal strand, temperate hammock, sawgrass marsh, tidal marsh, estuarine, coastal grasslands, artificial

LAND USE: **Black's Island:** *private (planned development). **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** *conservation, *low-impact military use, recreation. **Palm Point:** private. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** *conservation, *recreation

IBA CATEGORIES: **Black's Island:** significant populations of Special Concern species. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** significant populations of Threatened species; and significant natural habitats. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** significant populations of Threatened and FCREPA species; significant numbers of raptors; and significant natural habitats

AVIAN DATA: These five sites that surround and form St. Joseph Bay are regionally important for breeding Brown Pelicans (Black's Island), breeding Snowy Plovers (Palm Point), wintering shorebirds, migrant raptors (state park), Neotropical migrants (state park), and other species. Bird diversity of all sites combined is ____ native species.

Black's Island:

| SPECIES | DATE | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Brown Pelican | May 2000 | 100 pairs | 1% (B) |
| Snowy Egret | May 2000 | 50 pairs | (B) |
| Tricolored Herons | May 2000 | 50 pairs | (B) |

Data provided by Tammy Summers (Apalachicola Bay Aquatic Preserve)

Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:

| SPECIES | DATE | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|---------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| Piping Plover | 1 Feb 1994 | 26 birds | 4% (W) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 0 birds | |
| Snowy Plover | 31 Dec 1993 | 3 birds | <1% (R) |
| | 31 Aug 1999 | 3 birds | <1% (R) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 0 birds | |
| Least Tern | 16 Jul 1999 | 23 pairs | <1% (B) |

2001 plover data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), all other data provided by (____)

Palm Point:

| SPECIES | DATE | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|--------------|------|---------|----------|
| Snowy Plover | 1989 | 6 pairs | 3% (R) |

Data from +Gore and Chase (1989)

T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:

| SPECIES | DATE | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Raptors | fall ____ | >3000 birds | |
| Piping Plover | Jan–Feb 2001 | 2 birds | <1% (W) |
| Snowy Plover | 1989 | 6 pairs | 3% (R) |
| | 26 Jul 2000 | 39 birds | 9% (R) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 19 birds | 3% (R) |
| Overall diversity | Oct 1982 list | 179 natives 1 exotics | |

Raptor data from +Steadman (1984); 1989 Snowy Plover data from +Gore and Chase (1989); Piping Plover data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); other data are observations of Jimmy Butler (____).

OTHER RESOURCES: Black's Island: Pottery shards and shell tools dating from the Fort Walton and Weedon Island cultural periods have been found. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** From 1994 to 1997, between 25 and 53 loggerhead sea turtle nested on the beach. **T.H. Stone St. Joseph Peninsula State Park** is the only park in the Florida system that has a “Wilderness Zone” designation, and contains some of the best remaining beach dune habitat in the state. • “Vast numbers” of sea turtles nest along the beach, mostly loggerhead sea turtles with occasional nesting by green turtles and ♦ leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*; +DEP 2000). • The “Wilderness Zone” contains a population of the “St. Andrew” beach mice, a Federally- and State-listed Endangered subspecies. • Gopher tortoises were extirpated from the Park since before acquisition began in 1964; the potential for reintroduction is being explored. • Six cultural sites are known from the State Park, but most are

in fair to poor condition because of erosion and looting +(DEP 2000). • The park is an excellent site to observe migrating dragonflies and butterflies +Sprandel (2001).

THREATS: **Black's Island:** *development, *human disturbance. **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site:** *human disturbance. **Palm Point:** *development, *human disturbance. **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** *human disturbance, *erosion, exotic plants, feral cats, cowbird brood parasitism

CONSERVATION ISSUES: **Black's Island** is privately owned and a proposed development includes 14 hosing units and a restaurant. The bird nesting area is proposed as a posted conservation area, but preparation for development already has disturbed the colony. • The island is sought for public acquisition as part of the St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project, and is surrounded by the St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve. The beach at **Eglin Air Force Base Test Site** is open to public recreation. The site contains 3 miles (4.8 km) of Gulf frontage, but parts are suffering from severe erosion; 30 feet (9 m) were lost in 1993 alone. The main concern at the Test Site is from 4-wheel drive trucks and ATVs that have damaged the dunes, and affected nesting birds and sea turtles. Efforts are underway to manage off-road use, and critical shorebird nesting areas will be posted. • **T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park:** A Draft Unit Management Plan was prepared in March 2000 +(DEP 2000); most of the information in this section comes from the management plan. • Unauthorized access into the “Wilderness Zone” from boaters disturbs beach-nesting and -roosting species. Other sensitive areas are posted to control or prevent human access. • The northern half of the State Park has been proposed as Critical Habitat for the Piping Plover. • The southern portion of the park has been identified as one of the most critically eroding areas in Florida, due mostly to tropical storm activity. • A large area of sand pine scrub is found in the “Wilderness Zone.” The fire management plan is to allow the area to burn naturally when a fire occurs there, but the site will not be prescribed-burned. Other habitats are burned at varying intervals between 3–25 years. • Coyotes and feral cats are removed when encountered. • Exotic plants are not a serious problem, and are removed as needed.

Palm Point was identified by +Gore and Chase (1989) as important habitat for Snowy Plovers. No other data are known for the site, and it is not included within the St. Joseph Bay Buffer CARL–FF Project boundaries. If the site continues to support Snowy Plovers, then perhaps it should be considered for public acquisition.

NOMINATED BY: Gary Sprandel (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission) and Tammy Summers (Apalachicola Bay Aquatic Preserve)

REVIEWED BY: Jeff Gore, Karen Lamonte, and George Wallace (all of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

REFERENCES: +DEP 2000. T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park unit management plan. DEP Advisory Group review draft. Department of Environmental Protection. [Tallahassee, FL]. • +Sprandel, G.L. 2001. Fall dragonfly (Odonata) and butterfly (Lepidoptera) migration at St. Joseph Peninsula, Gulf County, Florida. *Florida Entomologist* 84: 234–248. • +Gore, J.A., and C.A. Chase, III. 1989. Snowy Plover breeding distribution. Final performance report, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee, FL. • +Stedman, S.J. 1984. St. Joseph Peninsula hawk migration. Florida Department of Natural Resources. Tallahassee, FL.

WEBSITE: <<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/district1/stjoseph>>

WALTON COUNTY BEACHES

Camp Creek Inlet (___ acres; ___ ha), **Deer Lake State Park** (1994 acres; 797 ha), and **Topsail Hill Preserve State Park** (1642 acres; 656 ha)
3636 acres (1454 ha) [+Camp Creek]

LOCATION: two separate areas between U.S. Highway 98 and the Gulf of Mexico in southern Walton County. **Topsail Hill Preserve State Park** is between Four Mile Village and Beach Highlands, **Deer Lake State Park** is about 11.5 miles (18.4 km) farther east, and **Camp Creek Inlet** is just east of Deer Lake State Park.

DESCRIPTION: three parcels (two adjacent) along the Gulf of Mexico that preserve significant portions of some of the most scenic and diverse coastal habitats in the region, including several freshwater lakes just inland of the coastal dunes. Topsail Hill Preserve State Park and Deer Lake State Park are part of a much larger South Walton County Ecosystem CARL–FF Project, which also includes **Point Washington State Forest** (15,101 acres; 6040 ha) that is not contained within this IBA. The State Parks were acquired by the State through eminent domain, which explains the high cost of acquisition (\$223 million). Annual visitation for the state parks is ___ for Deer Lake and ___ for Topsail Hill.

OWNERSHIP: Florida Division of Recreation and Parks (Deer Lake State Park and Topsail Hill Preserve State Park), private (Camp Creek Inlet)

HABITATS: *coastal strand, *coastal lakes, pine flatwoods, sand pine scrub, sandhills, basin swamp, tidal marsh, and freshwater marsh.

LAND USE: *conservation, recreation

IBA CATEGORIES: significant populations of Threatened species; and significant natural habitats

AVIAN DATA: Two of the three sites within this IBA supports significant populations of Snowy Plovers, and Topsail Hill reportedly also contains Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Deer Lake State Park supports no Snowy Plovers currently, but the habitat is suitable, and the site is adjacent to Camp Creek Inlet, which is used by plovers. [Are bird lists available for the state parks?]

Camp Creek Inlet:

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|--------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| Snowy Plover | Jan–Feb 2001 | 14 birds | 3% (R) |

Data provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Topsail Hill Preserve State Park:

| SPECIES | DATES | NUMBERS | COMMENTS |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------|----------|
| Snowy Plover | 1989 | 8 pairs | 4% (R) |
| | Jan–Feb 2001 | 9 birds | 2% (R) |
| Red-cockaded Woodpecker | ? | ? | <1%? (R) |

Plover data from +Gore and Chase (1989) and provided by Patty Kelly (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); presence of woodpeckers mentioned in DEP (2001) but not in USFWS (2000)

OTHER RESOURCES: The sites support “Choctawhatchee” beach mice and sea turtles. The coastal dune lakes are unique to Florida, and are a critically imperiled habitat. The CARL–FF Project contains 13 rare plants, 6 rare animals, 14 natural communities, and 7 archaeological sites, and many of these occur within the two state parks. **Topsail Hill Preserve State Park** preserves about 3 miles (4.8 km) of coastline and two coastal dune lakes.

THREATS: *development, *_human disturbance.

CONSERVATION ISSUES: Deer Lake State Park contains no designated trails, which causes people to walk all over the dunes. Boardwalks over, or specific paths through, the dunes should be developed, to protect the fragile dune ecosystem. The park contains no breeding Snowy Plovers even though the habitat is suitable; human disturbance may be a factor.

+Gore and Chase (1989) found 4 pairs of Snowy Plovers at Philips Inlet, just east of the Walton/Bay county line; preservation of this area should be investigated.

NOMINATED BY: Bill Pranty (Audubon of Florida) and George Wallace (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

REFERENCES: +DEP. 2001. Florida Forever five-year plan, 2001. Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Tallahassee, FL. • +Gore, J.A., and C.A. Chase, III. 1989. Snowy Plover breeding distribution. Final performance report, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee, FL. • +USFWS 2000. Technical/agency draft revised recovery plan for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Atlanta, GA.

WEBSITE: <<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/district1/topsailhill>>