

FSC US CONTROLLED WOOD REGIONAL MEETINGS FLORIDA PANHANDLE CBA



FSC REGION Southeast

HCVS IN FSC A High Conservation Value (HCV) is a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance. FSC is working to ensure that our system helps to maintain and enhance the special places that support these values. For more information on HCVs, see the Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values.¹

WHY IS FLORIDA PANHANDLE CRITICAL BIODIVERSITY AREA (CBA) CONSIDERED AN HCV? This CBA is considered an HCV because it contains a high overall species richness, diversity, or uniqueness within a defined area compared to other sites within the same biogeographic area. The CBA was identified using a species richness index originally published by NatureServe and The Nature Conservancy that identifies areas with high concentrations of rare species. This index preferences species that have limited ranges by applying additional weighting. The results identify areas with concentrations of high biological diversity and spaces with an increased conservation significance.

SUMMARY OF FLORIDA PANHANDLE CBA The Florida Panhandle is reported to be one of the 5 richest biodiversity hotspots in North America. Of particular importance is the richness of frogs, snakes, turtles, and mussels. This concentration of biodiversity is driven by the river systems (particularly the Apalachicola River), longleaf pine savanna habitat and unique steephead ravines. Biodiversity richness is centered on the area where the Chattahoochee River meets the Flint River and form the Apalachicola River. Species of particular interest include the Okaloosa darter (*Etheostoma okaloosae*) which is endemic to the Florida Panhandle, and the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) which is associated with the longleaf pine.

Historically longleaf pine savanna supported incredibly high species richness and were historically maintained by fire. The biodiversity values are driven in part by the resulting understory plant community. Eglin Air Force Base within this CBA includes one of the largest remaining longleaf pine forests under single ownership.

Steephead Ravines along the Apalachicola River system contain a wide diversity of species including rare, threatened, and endangered species, due largely to the variety of site conditions and microclimates. They also harbor the southernmost range of many northern species.



¹Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values (<https://ic.fsc.org/en/what-is-fsc-certification/consultations/archive/hcv-common-guidance>)

IDENTIFIED THREATS TO THE FLORIDA PANHANDLE CBA HABITATS

<u>Apalachicola Bay/River System</u>	<u>Longleaf Pine Savanna</u>	<u>Steephead Ravines</u>
<p>Threats to this aquatic system are varied and include persistent drought resulting in reduced flow level, loss of floodplain and wetland habitat due to reduced flow levels, point and non-point source pollution (including sediments from forestry operations due to insufficient ground cover and inadequate buffers), unrestrained growth and development. The Apalachicola River and Bay Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan identifies implementation of silvicultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) as a significant component of one of its priority projects.</p>	<p>Biodiversity values can be adversely affected by forest management activities via conversion of longleaf to other pine types, and the use management techniques, including herbicide application that have the potential to inhibit native understory communities. As the bulk of the biodiversity exists in the understory of a longleaf pine system, restoration or maintenance of understory species composition is an essential component of longleaf pine conservation. Other threats include fire-suppression, urban development, fragmentation, non-native species, and climate change. It is possible to harvest in and sustainably manage longleaf pine systems and therefore timber management by itself is not considered a threat. Both Sandhill and Natural pineland habitats are documented within the CBA.</p>	<p>Reported threats include altered hydrologic regimes, conversion to other land uses, fire suppression. Forestry practices were identified as a low source of stress to the habitat in the Florida Wildlife Action Plan.</p>

WHAT ARE MITIGATION ACTIONS AND WHAT WOULD WE LIKE TO

ACHIEVE?

Companies that mix FSC-certified forest materials and non-certified materials to make products with an 'FSC Mix' claim/logo are required to address certain risks before using the non-certified forest materials. One of these is the risk that their forest materials come from areas where HCVs are threatened by forest management activities. FSC has completed a US National Risk Assessment to identify where this risk is greater than 'low' and the Florida Panhandle CBA is one of these places. Companies that wish to use non-certified materials from the identified places (like this CBA) are required to either avoid sourcing from specific sites where the threats are occurring, or to implement mitigation actions that reduce the risk of sourcing from those sites. For this CBA, any mitigation actions will need to address the threats identified above in **bold**.

The FSC US National Risk Assessment also introduces the concept of holding regional meetings to bring stakeholders together to collaboratively identify effective and practical mitigation actions. We are asking participants to consider landscape-scale mitigation actions, that will help to reduce risks across the landscape in which the companies source forest materials. An effective way to do this may be to build on existing programs and projects that are already tackling these issues. The companies implementing mitigation actions are required to select one or more from the options identified at the regional meetings.

Please help us to determine what these mitigation actions should be, by visiting engage.fsc.us.org and joining the virtual discussion, or attending a regional meeting.

INFORMATION SOURCES THAT MAY HELP GENERATE MITIGATION IDEAS

- [The Nature Conservancy](#)
- [America's Longleaf Alliance](#)
- [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)
- [Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#)
- [Florida Wildlife Legacy Initiative](#)

