

FOREST COMMUNITY TYPES

The composition of ***forest communities*** depend on soil, climate, and successional stage. When left untouched, forest communities are comprised of multiple species. Sometimes, man's influence can create forest communities dominated by a single species. These communities are called ***monocultures***.

Regional forest communities are identified in Figure 5.1. Keep in mind that these communities contain thousands of microcommunities too small to be shown. Despite differences, these microcommunities all have similarities that fit into a few broad, generalized communities.

COMMUNITY TYPES IN OUR FOUR-COUNTY AREA

Sand Hill Communities

These areas commonly occur in Indian River, St. Lucie, and Martin Counties along the coast. There are patches of sandhill communities near Fort Drum in Okeechobee County. They have extremely dry, sandy soils. Common tree species include sand pine, turkey oak, bluejack oak, longleaf pine, and sand live oak. Sand pine grows extremely fast in these areas and is the best-suited tree for these sites. Sandhill communities also provide habitat for endangered and threatened species such as the scrub jay, gopher tortoise, gopher frog, and the Florida mouse.

Mixed Hardwood-Pine Communities

These communities are located in north and west Florida on the southern coastal plain. As the name suggests, they are a mixture of pine and hardwood trees. Species include longleaf, loblolly, and slash pine, water and laurel oak, mockernut hickory, sweetgum, magnolia, and black cherry. Mixed hardwood-pine communities in west Florida are often converted to southern pines, producing excellent stands of longleaf, slash, and loblolly pine.

Flatwood Communities

The typical species in flatwoods are slash pine with an understory of gallberry and palmetto. Other species include wax myrtle and cabbage palm. This forest community is the most common in our four county area. Longleaf pine exists in drier areas of flatwoods in northern Okeechobee and Indian River counties. Red cockaded woodpecker, indigo snake, and gopher tortoise frequent this habitat. Melaleuca, Australian pine, and Brazilian

pepper have invaded many of these areas in South Florida and out-compete native trees.

Hammocks

A ***hammock*** is a slight elevation arising from wetter soil and covered with hardwood trees which may be frequently associated with one or more palm species. Hammocks are usually associated with limestone outcrops. They are most noticeable in the flatwoods or in treeless areas, but are found in swamps. The hammocks are extremely dense and have great diversity in tree species. South Florida hammocks in our area may be dominated by one or more temperate zone species such as live oak, red maple, mulberry, and hackberry.

Cypress Swamps

Cypress swamps may consist of either bald or pond cypress, with few other species present. The cypress community often assumes a dome-shaped appearance when the swamp is in an isolated depression. Cypress swamps not only produce valuable timber, but also are considered water recharge areas.

Cypress may take on a dwarfed or "hatrack" appearance and stand only a few feet high despite many years of age. Such stunting is due to rock formations just below the soil surface which limit growth.

Hardwood Swamps

Hardwood swamps are found on moist to flooded soils near or adjacent to a river or creek. These communities are dependent on periodic flooding. A great diversity of species is found in these areas. Among the species found are baldcypress, loblolly bay, redbay, red maple, sweetbay magnolia, Dahoon holly and Carolina ash. These areas are generally attractive to wildlife.

Mangrove Swamps

Three types of mangroves are prominent in mangrove swamps: red, black, and white. Red mangroves can be identified by prop roots that grow down from larger branches. Black mangroves can be identified by ***pneumatophores*** extending above the soil surface. Pneumatophores are roots, resembling pencils, that project above the soil surface. White mangroves can be found growing upland of red and black mangroves. These areas are common along estuarine shorelines that are sheltered from wave action.

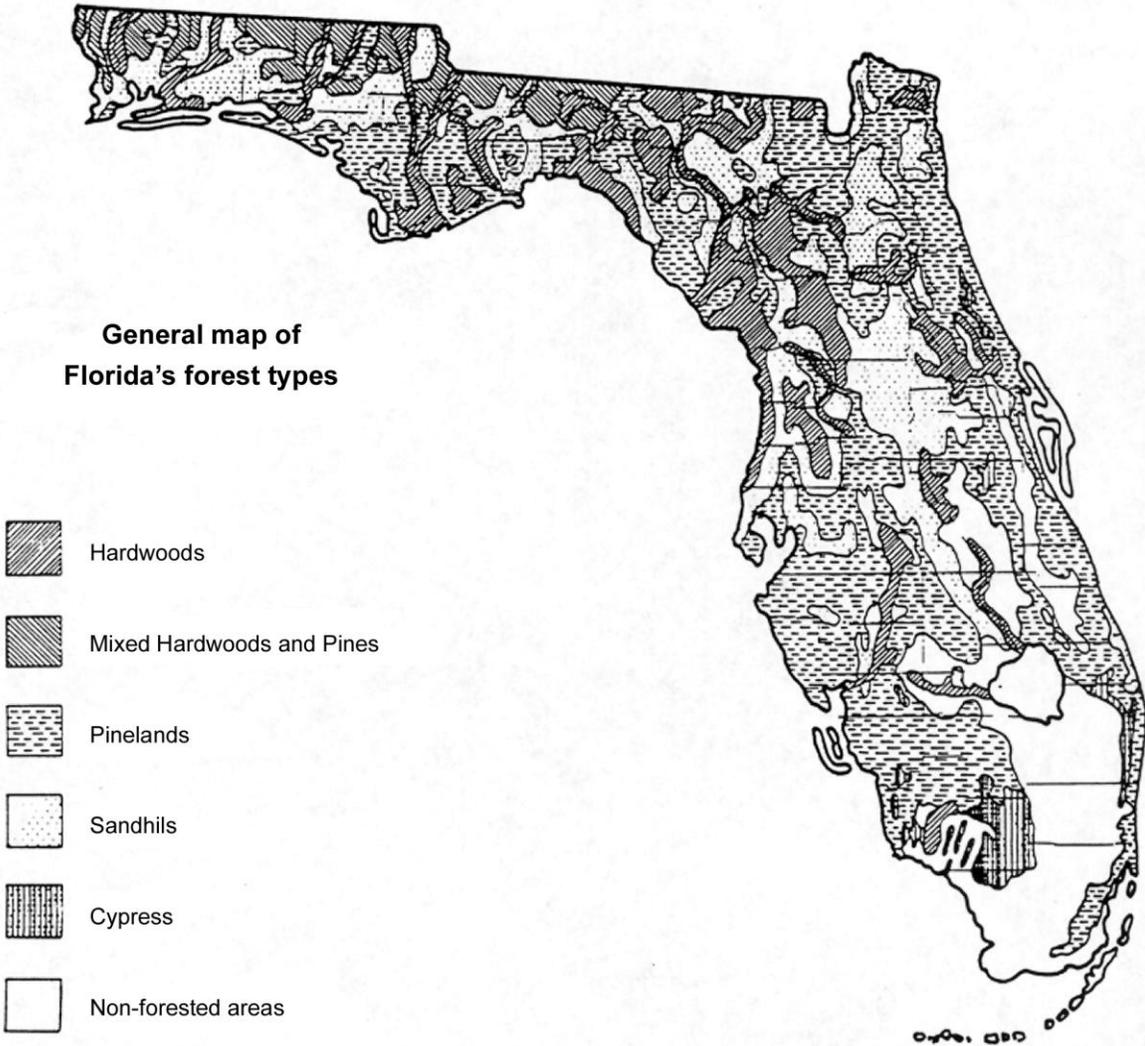


Figure 5.1. Forest types vary with soil features and topography.