

Fort Matanzas National Monument
Monthly Resource Management Update
November 30, 2011

Great Horned Owls

In what is fast becoming a welcome tradition at Fort Matanzas, early November brought the return of the park's resident pair of great horned owls. They were heard courtship hooting and seen flying around the visitor center area the first week of the month. In the last several days they seem to be evaluating potential nest sites in trees between the visitor center and park offices and the entrance road. Park staff have been extra happy to see the owls hanging out in this area which is easily accessible to the visiting public. With both park boats currently out of commission due to technical difficulties, quality owl viewing has salvaged many a person's visit over the past few days! (Spotting scopes have been set up again this year to give people an unparalleled view of these impressive birds.) If the last two years are any guide, the owl pair will choose and settle into a nest by the end of December. Next month's update will hopefully be able to confirm that.

Inventory and Monitoring Products

Fort Matanzas and Castillo de San Marcos, like all the other parks within the National Park System that contain natural resources, are included in an Inventory & Monitoring Network. I&M Networks were created in 2000 in order to leverage funding and natural resource expertise throughout the NPS. Specifically, the networks' mission is to document all the vascular plant and vertebrate animal species within the parks; and to track a suite of physical and biological parameters that inform managers about trends in the natural environments of the parks.

Theoretically, if downward trends are detected, managers will then have information available to hopefully mitigate identified negative environmental impacts. All this is easier said than done, but the networks have done a commendable job of drafting and implementing environmental monitoring protocols over the past ten years; and peer-reviewed, defensible products are now being produced. Usually, these products come in the form of very long and informational reports. However, a new effort is underway to condense some of the information into "resource briefs" that can be used not just by resource management staff, but by other divisions as well (particularly interpretation).