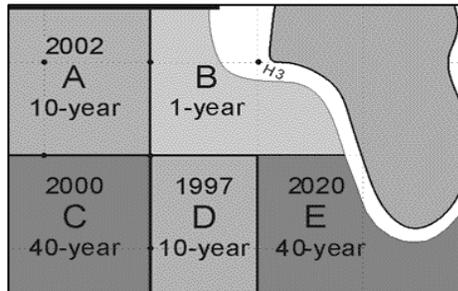


**Points of interest:** Each station is marked with a white plastic stake with a **RED** band near the top and a letter keyed to the explanations that follow in this guide. All other stakes are either for the **Advanced Trail Guide** (available online & at the Old Field Trail Kiosk), or for research purposes.

## What is old-field succession?

When a cultivated field is abandoned a series of biotic communities take over the site, each representing a stage of ecological *succession*. In north Florida, an abandoned field is likely to be first colonized by herbaceous weeds, then loblolly pines & pioneer hardwoods. If fire is suppressed, a hardwood hammock will likely develop. Invasive species, soil degradation and surrounding land use also influence the succession process.



To permanently display representative stages of old field succession, NATL has five 1-acre plots that are cleared and tilled (“re-started”) at intervals of 1, 10 and 40 years. This trail passes through four of these plots.

## A Abandoned field

Plot A is a 10-year-rotation plot started in 2002. The large pines were left but otherwise the land was cleared of trees and tilled. Notice that broad-leaved (hardwood) trees have returned, and that some are already over 10 feet tall. Succession happens quickly!

## B Black cherry

One of the first hardwood trees to appear in old fields is the fast-growing black cherry (*Prunus serotina*). This native tree is related to the cultivated cherry – you can eat the fruits if you like! Many birds and small mammals also eat the sweet fruits, and leave the bitter cyanide-containing seeds behind. Black cherry wood is used for furniture.

## C Briar patch

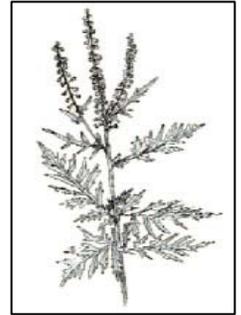
If you strayed off the path here, you would quickly encounter a patch of blackberries (*Rubus spp.*) Blackberries colonize old fields and remain an important part of the vegetation until trees shade them out. Like cherries, their seeds are dispersed by animals.



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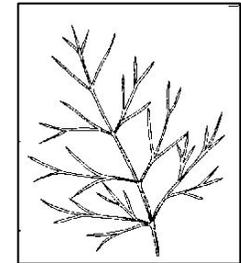
## D Ragweed

This plot was tilled in the fall of 2008. One of the first plants you can expect to see here is ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*), a common native weed of agricultural fields. Ragweed must grow from seed each year, making it an *annual* plant. Pollen from ragweed causes hay fever in some people.



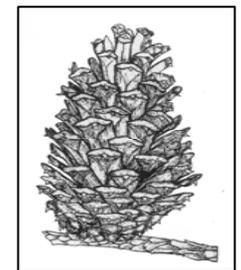
## E Dogfennel

This plot was last cultivated in late December 2007. The first plants to cover the plot were ragweed and white sweet clover (*Melilotus alba*) and dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*). Unlike ragweed, dogfennel is a *perennial*, and does not need to grow from new seeds each year.



## F Loblolly pine

Loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*) produce many small wind-blown seeds, and are usually the first trees to form a continuous canopy in old fields. The young trees grow so thick that they shade out most seedlings, including those of loblolly pine itself! Eventually



more shade tolerant hardwood trees will replace loblolly pine stands.

## G Saltbush

Saltbush (*Baccharis halimifolia*) is a common tree of coastal and interior wetlands. It is NOT a usual tree to dominate old upland fields. When the SEEP wetland was created (see map), the muck excavated from the retention pond was spread on portions of this plot, resulting in the dense stand of saltbush you see today.



## H Clovers

Along this section of the trail, several species of clover are present. They were introduced as livestock forage, nitrogen fixers and nectar sources. White sweet clover (*Melilotus officinalis*) is waist-high with white flowers, field clover (*Trifolium campestre*) has yellow flowers, and red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) has red flowers. Low-growing white clover (*Trifolium repens*) is the shamrock clover of 4-leaf clover fame (pictured).



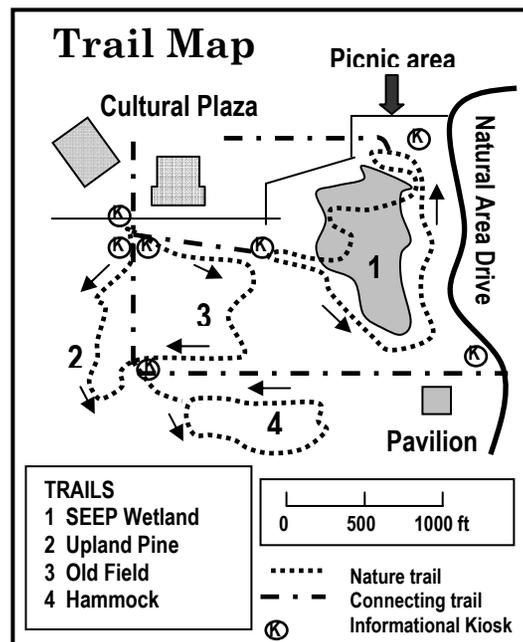
Natural Area Teaching Lab

The University of Florida Natural Area Teaching Laboratory (NATL) is a 60-acre tract of land dedicated to teaching students and the public about ecology and biotic diversity.

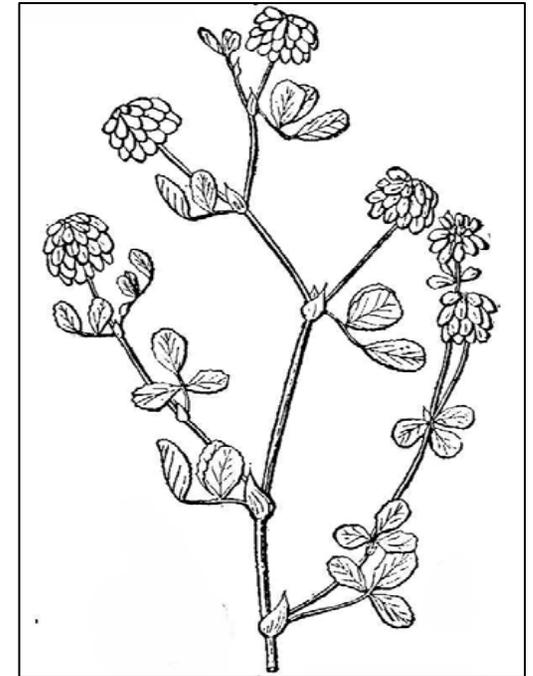
Basic and advanced trail guides to **Hammock**, **Upland Pine**, and **Old Field** trails are available at entrance kiosks to each ecosystem (see map). A trail with interpretive signs circles the 3-acre **SEEP Wetlands**, an ecologically engineered stormwater retention basin.

For more information about NATL, including species lists, historical photos, soil maps and student projects, visit <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Basic trail guide to the



# Old Field Nature Trail



Field Clover (*Trifolium campestre*)

Natural Area Teaching Lab

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